



Honouring 215 Indigenous Children

Statement from the Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health on Residential Schools, and their Impact on Indigenous Health and Well-Being

May 31, 2021

There are not enough words to express the profound sorrow and shame being felt over the recent discovery of the bodies of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. Our thoughts are with every member of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, and all Indigenous communities across Canada, as they mourn this heartbreaking loss.

There were over 130 residential schools in Canada dating back to the 1870s, with the last school closing in 1996. These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural and spiritual development of Indigenous children. The number of children who died in residential schools could be as high as 6000. Countless others were subjected to horrendous emotional, physical and sexual abuse, all while under the care of those who were responsible for these schools.

This horrific period in Canada's history affected not only the lives of innocent children who never saw their families again and those who survived the residential school system, but also their families, communities and all Indigenous peoples. The effects of these atrocities continue, and will do so for generations to come.

The Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health recognizes that historical beliefs about, and attitudes towards, Indigenous peoples have resulted in inequities faced by them today, many related to health and well-being. We know we have much to do to overcome the harms and traumas of the past, and much to learn from Indigenous leaders, Elders, organizations and communities to ensure a very different future.

May the memory of these children never be forgotten.

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