



# Statement for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

September 30, 2023

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Today, the Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health (PCMCH) remembers, honours and grieves the 150,000+ First Nations, Inuit and Métis children who were forcibly taken from their families and sent to residential schools. The stories of cultural genocide, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and death, all perpetuated by those in power, are countless and unfathomable. The impact on the families and communities that were torn apart, and on those who directly survived the atrocities, is unmistakable. These stories must be kept alive, this history must be acknowledged, and the far-reaching repercussions of the residential school system and the depths of its intergenerational impacts must never be minimized.

The attitudes and actions of those responsible for and involved with the running of residential schools were based on superiority. Such views continue to be present today, not only held by individuals but also within larger systems, including the healthcare system. Some examples include, but are not limited to, the forced and coerced sterilization of Indigenous women, the disproportionate number of Indigenous babies and children in the child welfare system, higher rates of suicide among Indigenous peoples, and the discriminatory treatment of Indigenous people in the healthcare system that has too often led to death.

The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) states that reconciliation must be viewed as an “ongoing individual and collective process that will require participation from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis former students, their families, communities, religious groups, former Indian Residential School employees, government, and the people of Canada.” PCMCH recognizes that efforts to address the Calls to Action and move forward with reconciliation can be overwhelming, and leave people and organizations wondering where to begin. It is, however, essential to start somewhere, and to do so with humility and in a spirit of collaboration.

PCMCH has been learning more about the deeply embedded and damaging discrimination faced by Indigenous people when they seek healthcare from a system that is based on Western traditions, approaches and attitudes. We recognize that historic harms and ongoing incidents of racism directed at Indigenous people when seeking healthcare have led to a deep mistrust and, in many cases, avoidance of the healthcare system altogether. Feeling unsafe and at risk within a healthcare setting is a major barrier to equitable healthcare access and must be resolved.

In order to ensure healthcare is delivered in a culturally safe, sensitive and respectful manner, the voice of Indigenous people in decision-making around healthcare policies, procedures and systems is essential. For example, incorporating distinct traditions and practices around pregnancy, birthing, raising children and maintaining health will help support better healthcare outcomes.

Through our journey, PCMCH has come to recognize how important it is that Indigenous perspectives be included in the co-development of our recommendations, guidelines and policies. We also recognize that, as an organization mandated to provide strategic leadership for perinatal, newborn, child and youth health services, we are in a position, and therefore have a responsibility, to encourage healthcare providers to consider how they can learn about and provide culturally safe care for Indigenous people. We also recognize that forming partnerships with Indigenous organizations will result in more effective and relevant recommendations and resources that aim to address the specific healthcare concerns and needs of Indigenous peoples. To this end, PCMCH looks forward to pursuing initiatives around Indigenous perinatal, newborn, child and youth health in collaboration with the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council (IPHCC) in the coming months. By working together, PCMCH and IPHCC aim to foster high-quality perinatal, newborn and child healthcare for Indigenous peoples in Ontario.

Although the past cannot be changed, we can work together to develop a healthcare system that serves current and future generations of Indigenous people in ways that are equitable, safe and culturally affirming.