

  
MARCH 3RD, 2018

# SCIA

STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

## BACKGROUND GUIDE

CHAIR: NATALIE ASHGRIZ  
DIRECTOR: LAURA DAVID

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to HCMUN IV! Laura and I are very excited to be your chair and director for the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We look forward to meeting you all on Saturday, March 3rd.

My name is Natalie Ashgriz and I am so excited to be your chair for this committee. I have been involved in Model UN since grade 9 and directed the UNFPA committee at HCMUN last year. I have loved politics for as long as I can remember, mostly because of my Middle-Eastern heritage and the effect of world politics on that region of the world. I am hoping to enter a computer science program at university next year and later enter the tech industry, but I know I will always find a way to be involved in politics.

My name is Laura David, and I will be helping Natalie as the committee director! I'm extremely passionate about Model UN and am so excited to be staffing HCMUN this year. I'm in grade 10 and this is my second year of MUN, but my first year on the dias of a committee. I've always had a love for politics and foreign affairs, mainly due to my highly political family. Talking politics around the dinner table is a daily ritual and undoubtedly helped spark my interest in MUN. I also love to play volleyball and am interested in computer science as well.

Please note that position papers are due on March 1st, 2018 and are mandatory in order to be considered for an award. Note that position papers are not required, but highly recommended. You may submit your position papers to [nashgriz@havergal.on.ca](mailto:nashgriz@havergal.on.ca). If you have any questions or concerns regarding the committee or conference, please feel free to email me or Laura at [nashgriz@havergal.on.ca](mailto:nashgriz@havergal.on.ca) and [ldavid@havergal.on.ca](mailto:ldavid@havergal.on.ca).

We look forward to a great day of debate and insightful resolutions!

Best regards and sincerest welcomes,

Natalie Ashgriz and Laura David  
Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
HCMUN IV

## Committee Overview

The Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAN) was established in 1968.<sup>1</sup> INAN analyses the actions of the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and relevant legislation, policies, or programs to ensure the needs of Indigenous Canadians are being met.<sup>2</sup> It primarily focuses on the needs of registered, on-reserve First Nations and Inuit people, but also examines issues, programs, and policies relating to off-reserve and unregistered FNMI people.<sup>3</sup> In this INAN meeting, committee members will work to address current issues related to mental health and provide recommendations to the government as to how to ameliorate current programs and effectively address mental health issues which disproportionately affect Indigenous people.

### Topic 1: Mental Health Infrastructure

#### Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is defined as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”<sup>4</sup> As the stigma around mental health begins to decrease, the prevalence of this issue is being seen more clearly, especially in Indigenous communities, which have reached a state of crisis. Indigenous Canadians disproportionately experience more mental health issues. For example, 16% of adult First Nations experience depression compared to 8% of the general population.<sup>5</sup> Further, some First Nations communities have reported an opioid addiction rate of 85%.<sup>6</sup> One of the main reasons for such poor mental health in Indigenous communities is due to the lack of mental health infrastructure in these communities which has arisen as a result of a lack of funding for Indigenous health services.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "INAN - About." House of Commons Canada. Accessed January 12, 2018. <http://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/INAN/About>.

<sup>2</sup> "Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs." Wikipedia. January 01, 2018. Accessed January 12, 2018.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian\\_House\\_of\\_Commons\\_Standing\\_Committee\\_on\\_Indigenous\\_and\\_Northern\\_Affairs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_House_of_Commons_Standing_Committee_on_Indigenous_and_Northern_Affairs).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Mental health: a state of well-being," WHO, August 2014, , accessed December 30, 2017, [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/).

<sup>5</sup> Saman Khan, "Aboriginal Mental Health: The statistical reality," HeretoHelp, 2008, , accessed December 30, 2017, <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/visions/aboriginal-people-vol5/aboriginal-mental-health-the-statistical-reality>.

<sup>6</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*, PDF, Assembly of First Nations, February 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Fontaine, "First Nations welcome lifting of despised 2% funding cap," CBC news, December 12, 2015, , accessed December 30, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-funding-cap-lifted-1.3359137>.

## Government Funding & Programs

Prior to 2015, funding for Indigenous communities was limited to 2% of the federal budget.<sup>8</sup> This prevented Indigenous communities from gaining adequate infrastructure, a project that is estimated to require billions of dollars. In 2016, the Liberal government lifted the cap placed by the previous Harper government and allocated \$270 million over 5 years to reserves, with \$69 million over three years to be specifically devoted to mental health and wellness needs.<sup>9</sup> So far, a portion of this money has been used to build the first health centre in Eel River Bar First Nation in New Brunswick.<sup>10</sup> In 2017, the government allocated a total of \$438.2 million for Indigenous health programs, including \$15 million in drug strategy- harm reduction and \$204.2 million to be used to address mental wellness.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this funding, there are currently many programs in place or being put in place to aid Indigenous communities. However, the effectiveness of Indigenous health programs can be limited due to a lack of accessibility and a lack of consideration for Indigenous traditional knowledge and treatment methods.<sup>12</sup>

The Brighter Futures Program was created by Health Canada in cooperation with Indigenous communities in 1992 as a community-based program for First Nations and Inuit communities.<sup>13</sup> The program maintains that linking its five fundamental components (mental health, child development, parenting, healthy babies, and injury prevention), and working together with community individuals is the key to providing unique and effective programs to individual communities.<sup>14</sup> The mental health component has three goals: to provide community-based mental health programs and services, to provide information and raise awareness on topics such as depression, family violence, and stress management, and to provide counselling services and wellness activities.<sup>15</sup> All programs and activities are culturally sensitive and carried out by trained specialists. As well, mental health and suicide prevention are a key part of the Building Healthy Communities' (created in 1994) Mental Health Crisis Management (BHC/MH) and Solvent Abuse (BHC/SAP) programs<sup>16</sup>. The Mental Health Crisis program's goal is to provide Indigenous communities the resources needed to tackle mental health crises, such as depression and suicide, address gaps in mental health services and programs, and provide support in order to reduce the

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<sup>8</sup>Tim Fontaine, "First Nations welcome lifting of despised 2% funding cap,"

<sup>9</sup> "Chapter 3 – A Strong Canada at Home and in the World," Government of Canada, March 22, 2017, , accessed December 30, 2017, <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2017/docs/plan/chap-03-en.html#Toc477707436>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "The Health of Indigenous Peoples in Canada." Indigenous health. Accessed January 19, 2018. [http://www.med.uottawa.ca/SIM/data/Vul\\_Indigenous\\_e.htm](http://www.med.uottawa.ca/SIM/data/Vul_Indigenous_e.htm).

<sup>13</sup> "Brighter Futures and Building Healthy Communities," Health Canada, October 02, 2013, , accessed December 30, 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/health-promotion/mental-health-wellness/brighter-futures-building-healthy-communities.html>.

<sup>14</sup> "Brighter Futures and Building Healthy Communities"

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Health Canada - First Nations and Inuit Health Programs - 2016-2017," Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, December 22, 2015, , accessed December 30, 2017, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1448306812550/1448306892779#Toc343855349>

high occurrence of suicide attempts and other mentally harmful situations.<sup>17</sup> Part of this program includes training community members to tackle such crises, informing communities about mental health, and providing rehabilitation and treatment services.<sup>18</sup> The Solvent Abuse program's goal is to reduce solvent addiction (drugs that are taken by inhalation), increase addiction awareness, and provide treatment options both within and outside of Indigenous communities.<sup>19</sup> Program initiatives include identifying high-risk situations in order to prevent addictions from reaching dangerous levels, working with local programs, supporting communities and families, and providing care and treatment resources.<sup>20</sup> Although the Brighter Futures Program and Building Healthy Communities programs are funded as separate initiatives, most communities combine the two when developing their mental health programs.<sup>21</sup> The last evaluation of this program in 2003 showed that most communities have a focus on culture and provide cultural learning opportunities for youth.<sup>22</sup> However, the evaluation also showed that 55% of participating communities do not have professionals or paraprofessionals dedicated to mental health services and refer individuals to external clinics.<sup>23</sup> As well, the majority of communities do not have services in place to prevent mental health crises, such as suicide, instead tackling crises after they occur.<sup>24</sup>

Further, in 2015 the government invested \$3 million over 10 years to the Victims of Family Violence program.<sup>25</sup> This investment is to ensure that health care providers are trained to help First Nations and Inuit communities, to improve access to mental health counselling for victims of violence, and to support and improve existing organizations that provide such services.<sup>26</sup> There are two streams in this initiative: Stream One provides short-term crisis intervention and mental health counselling and Stream Two aims to improve access to health care services for victims of family violence.<sup>27</sup> As well, the initiative will work across multiple disciplines, educating communities and families about violence and violence prevention activities and providing "culturally competent" health services.<sup>28</sup>

Another initiative that is currently in place is the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program.<sup>29</sup> This initiative, which began in 2010, is open to all residential school survivors, their partners, their children, people raised in their household, and anyone else who may

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<sup>17</sup>"Health Canada - First Nations and Inuit Health Programs - 2016-2017," Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, December 22, 2015, , accessed December 30, 2017, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1448306812550/1448306892779#Toc343855349>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Brighter Futures and Building Healthy Communities Initiatives: Evaluation Summary, September 2006," Health Canada, July 19, 2007, , accessed January 28, 2018,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/reports-publications/health-promotion/brighter-futures-building-healthy-communities-initiatives-evaluation-summary.html#mental>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>"Brighter Futures and Building Healthy Communities Initiatives: Evaluation Summary, September 2006,"

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Health Canada - First Nations and Inuit Health Programs - 2016-2017"

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

have been affected by their trauma from residential schools.<sup>30</sup> The initiative provides mental and emotional support through programs and partnerships with organizations, such as Common Experience Payments, the Independent Assessment Process, Truth and Reconciliation Commission events, and hosting commemorative activities.<sup>31</sup> This initiative provides cultural support to Indigenous peoples who may have lost their identity due to the schools by connecting them to Indigenous Elders and traditional healers.<sup>32</sup> Individuals can choose the programs they want to participate in, including traditional healing, ceremonies, teachings, and dialogues.<sup>33</sup> Through a Resolution Health Support Worker, individuals have the emotional support to talk about their experiences of abuse and discuss any other negative impacts from the Residential Schools.<sup>34</sup> As well, individuals have the option to receive professional counselling from trained psychologists and social workers who listen to, talk to, and help individuals heal from their residential school experience and live a healthy life.<sup>35</sup>

## The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, written in 2007, aims to recognize Indigenous rights.<sup>36</sup> The Declaration includes both basic human rights, such as the right to live without fear of discrimination and harm to their person, and more complex rights such as the upholding of treaties and compensation for land that was taken by colonialists.<sup>37</sup> One hundred and forty four countries voted in favour of the Declaration, with four countries - one of which was Canada - voting against it.<sup>38</sup> Canada's claim was that Article 19, on gaining Indigenous permission on legislature affecting them, and Article 26, on development on ancestral land, could be seen as giving veto power to Indigenous groups.<sup>39</sup> However, in 2016, the government decided to fully adopt and implement the Declaration as part of its attempts at reconciliation.<sup>40</sup> The Declaration includes several articles on mental health. For example, Article 7 states that "Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person".<sup>41</sup> As well, clause 1 of Article 24 states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to

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<sup>30</sup>"Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Resolution Health Support Program (formerly Mental Health Support Program);" Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, accessed January 8, 2018, <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/hidb-bdih/initiative-eng.aspx?Hi=48>.

"Health Canada - First Nations and Inuit Health Programs - 2016-2017,"

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, PDF, United Nations, September 13, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Brandi Morin, "Where does Canada sit 10 years after the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," CBCnews, September 13, 2017, accessed December 30, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/where-does-canada-sit-10-years-after-undrip-1.4288480>.

<sup>39</sup> "Canada votes no as UN native rights declaration passes." CBC News. September 13, 2007. Accessed December 30, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-votes-no-as-un-native-rights-declaration-passes-1.632160>.

<sup>40</sup> Morin, "Where does Canada sit..."

<sup>41</sup> *United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals, and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services”.<sup>42</sup> This article has been an issue, as many Indigenous groups in Canada have difficulty accessing health services due to their isolated communities. In addition, discrimination and racism, especially with respect to funding, prevent Indigenous people from accessing proper treatment and health services.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Article 24(2) states that “Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right”.<sup>44</sup> Although improvements are being made in this respect, Indigenous communities are far from receiving equitable health care services.

### **The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda**

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is a council of First Nations chiefs who advocate for the interests of Canada’s First Nations to the Federal government. In February of 2017, the AFN released the First Nations Health Transformation Agenda, which outlines beneficial health practices for First Nations communities, suggests policy options, and encourages the building of a relationship between First Nations communities and the government in order to effectively improve health care.<sup>45</sup> The Agenda states that “[u]ltimately, First Nations want to move beyond the narratives that amplify the deficits and move towards narratives that highlight First Nations’ strengths in the area of health and wellness.”<sup>46</sup> There are many First Nations communities with positive health infrastructure, however their effectiveness is overshadowed by a lack of cultural understanding and funding.<sup>47</sup> The Health Transformation Agenda has four main calls to action:

- That governments at all levels work with First Nations to “develop culturally appropriate policy and programming responses to substance use” which includes prevention, intervention, treatment, aftercare, and supports, including by traditional healers and Elders.<sup>48</sup>
- That governments at all levels work with First Nations to ensure that there are no jurisdictional gaps in services.<sup>49</sup>
- That the government provides adequate funding for operational costs and wages for workers within the mental wellness programs (estimated \$232.29 million/year).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>43</sup> Gloria Galloway, "Ottawa discriminated against aboriginal children by underfunding services, tribunal to rule," *The Globe and Mail*, March 25, 2017, accessed January 8, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-discriminated-against-aboriginal-children-by-underfunding-services-tribunal-to-rule/article28389918/>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

- That “Health Canada -FNIHB fully fund the implementation of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework”.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, continued research and data collection is necessary to understand the scope of needed services and improve current health services for Indigenous people. It can be difficult to gain accurate data due to the isolated nature of Indigenous communities.

The Agenda outlines the importance of “culture as the foundation for mental wellness programming across the lifespan”.<sup>52</sup> It is imperative that Indigenous culture and beliefs be included in all mental health services in order to most effectively support individuals while recognizing their Indigenous heritage.<sup>53</sup> The Agenda outlines how culture can be implemented into mental health services through the 10 stages of life.<sup>54</sup> For example, some of these initiatives include helping adolescents develop patience and find their sense of self through their community’s unique cultural practices and helping youth create a vision for their lives.<sup>55</sup>

Indigenous peoples strongly believe in the interconnectedness of people and nature, the idea of being one with the land. To Indigenous people, the land is a part of their identity and “informs both [their] individual and [their] collective identity”.<sup>56</sup> Currently, land-based services, such as spending time in nature, are being used as mental health services, such as programs in the National Native Drug Abuse Program, to help treat substance abuse.<sup>57</sup> Other programs include culturally-sensitive youth leadership weekend camps and week-long cultural camps for suicide prevention.<sup>58</sup> Recent studies have shown that spending time outside is excellent for mental health and can improve mood, cognition, and memory, further supporting the Indigenous belief that being on the land is essential for good mental health.<sup>59</sup> The Agenda puts forward several recommendations regarding mental health and the land, including to amend the definitions of mental health to include the land, to recognize that the removal of Indigenous peoples from their land led to severe health problems and therefore helping them return to the land will help them to reconnect with their culture and greatly improve their health, and to recognize that exposing Indigenous youth to the land early on will help them to develop their culture identity and a healthy lifestyle and diet in order to prevent future health issues.<sup>60</sup>

Further, opioid abuse is a large issue which contributes to mental instability in Indigenous communities.<sup>61</sup> A recent survey found that northern Ontario communities have opioid abuse rates of 35% to 50% and 28% of First Nations adults between 20-50 are using buprenorphine-naloxone, a

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<sup>51</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*

<sup>57</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

drug used to fight opioid addiction.<sup>62</sup> According to the Agenda, the creation of Community-Based Treatment is essential to fighting this addiction because current treatment centres are too far away from communities to provide effective help.<sup>63</sup> Such programs should also be culturally-relevant and provide strategies for drug abuse prevention and post-addiction support, in addition to treatment.<sup>64</sup> An example of an effective program is the Buffalo Riders Program, which is a five-day program for at-risk 11-13 year olds.<sup>65</sup> The program uses modern research and “culturally specific teachings” to prevent youth from drug addictions.<sup>66</sup>

Accessible and culturally specific programs developed and run by certified professionals/Indigenous leaders are essential to improving the lives of Indigenous individuals and communities. According to a survey cited in the Agenda, at least 65% of Indigenous people who underwent treatment for an addiction terminated the use of their addiction after their treatment and 90% of individuals report that they have more control over their lives, positive relationships, and have a sense of purpose after treatments.<sup>67</sup> Below is a summary of new investments by the Assembly of First Nations into mental health, which includes \$121 million in 2017 for Mental Wellness.<sup>68</sup>

Fig. 1: Breakdown of Mental Wellness Funding by the Assembly of First Nations in 2017<sup>69</sup>

Mental Wellness		\$121M in 2017
Supports for Comprehensive Community Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for the planning of services across the mental wellness continuum and across jurisdictional barriers</li> </ul>	\$10M/year
Mental Wellness Teams (MWT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fund 37 additional teams</li> </ul>	\$19M/year
National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (NAYSPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the number of First Nations communities with access to youth suicide prevention projects</li> </ul>	\$15M/year
National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) treatment centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure investments in existing NNADAP treatment centres</li> <li>NNADAP capacity building and wage parity</li> <li>Create 5 additional NNADAP treatment centres, including in the North, as per the TRC Calls to Action</li> </ul>	\$232.29M in 2017

## Conclusion

Despite many successful programs, a lack of funding and continuity between services in different communities continues to pose challenges in providing Indigenous groups with accessible

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*

and effective mental health services. Further, the general population doesn't understand and often overlooks, Indigenous culture, making traditional Indigenous care inaccessible and creating barriers to accessible healthcare for Indigenous peoples. The Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs must work to close such gaps by considering the recommendations of advisory bodies, such as the Assembly of First Nations, and working to find solutions to existing issues while considering that issues related to mental health infrastructure may vary slightly in different FNMI groups. By using recommendations from Indigenous groups, the Committee can ensure that improvements are appropriate for Indigenous communities, are culturally sensitive, and use traditional Indigenous knowledge. In doing so, the Committee will work towards providing equitable health services to Canada's Indigenous people and improving Indigenous mental health.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. To what extent can we discuss improving the situation of Indigenous mental health when we do not have first-hand experience as Indigenous people? (What are our biases and how can we acknowledge them)
2. How can we effectively implement both traditional Indigenous knowledge and modern treatment methods into Indigenous mental health infrastructure?
3. What can we learn from other governments, in terms of treatment of Indigenous peoples and mental health infrastructure?
4. How can we effectively address the lack of mental health infrastructure with the current budget constraints?

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## Topic 2: Indigenous Youth Suicide Rates

### Introduction

As Canada advances on the international stage, issues such as high Indigenous youth suicide rates can become lost, resulting in a lack of public and government attention. Indigenous suicide rates in Canada are 11 times the national average, one of the highest suicide rates in the world.<sup>70</sup> Although suicide is not just an Indigenous issue, it is undeniably more pronounced in Indigenous communities than in non-Indigenous communities. In Indigenous communities, 125 men out of every 100,000 men commit suicide, whereas the suicide rate for non-Indigenous men is comparatively lower at 35 men out of every 100,000 men.<sup>71</sup> Further, suicide is the leading cause of death for Indigenous people under the age of 44.<sup>72</sup> Statistics like these would greatly impact any community, but in Indigenous communities, whose populations tend to be significantly smaller than non-Indigenous communities, the effect is devastating. For example, in some Indigenous communities, such as Attawapiskat, a state of emergency was declared due to high instances of suicide when 100 people died by suicide over the span of nine months, with eleven suicides once occurring in one day. With a population of only 1,500 people, the loss of these youth, some as young as 13, has had a ripple effect on all the residents.<sup>73</sup> However, this problem is not just regionally based, it plagues half of Canada's Indigenous community. 50.7% of Indigenous people feel mental distress in their lifetime, while only 33.5% of non-Indigenous people have reported the same symptoms.<sup>74</sup> Mental distress refers to a poor state of mind, such as feelings of anxiety, fear, depression, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, almost a quarter of the Indigenous population have had suicidal thoughts in their lifetime.<sup>76</sup> This topic will focus on comprehensive solutions to the Indigenous youth suicide crisis and will address the contributing factors noted in this background guide, such as intergenerational trauma and the varied needs of Indigenous youth on and off reserve.

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<sup>70</sup> "Indigenous Suicide Prevention." Centre for Suicide Prevention. Accessed November 27, 2017. <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/indigenous-suicide-prevention/>.

<sup>71</sup> "Attawapiskat: Four things to help understand the suicide crisis." The Globe and Mail. November 12, 2017. Accessed November 24, 2017. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/attawapiskat-four-things-to-help-understand-the-suicidecrisis/article29583059/>.

<sup>72</sup> *Supra* 1

<sup>73</sup> Mark, Michelle. "More than 100 people have attempted suicide in this tiny Canadian community since September." Business Insider. April 13, 2016. Accessed November 26, 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/causes-of-canada-aboriginal-suicide-crisis-2016-4>.

<sup>74</sup> Tahirali, Michael Shulman and Jesse. "Suicide among Canada's First Nations: Key numbers." CTVNews. April 11, 2016. Accessed November 24, 2017. <http://www.ctvnews.ca/health/suicide-among-canada-s-first-nations-key-numbers-1.2854899>.

<sup>75</sup> Altham.com. Mental Distress Mental Health Changes Staffordshire. Accessed January 28, 2018. [http://www.changes.org.uk/html/mental\\_distress.html](http://www.changes.org.uk/html/mental_distress.html).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

## Underlying Causes of the Indigenous Youth Suicide Epidemic

The Indigenous youth suicide crisis is a multifaceted issue. The mental health problems that Indigenous people face are seeded in many societal inequalities such as inadequate infrastructure, low self-esteem, and the lasting effects of colonization, such as intergenerational trauma from residential schools.

One of the primary contributors to this crisis is the lack of adequate infrastructure on Indigenous reserves. The living conditions on reserves have been compared to those in developing nations by UN officials.<sup>77</sup> A study conducted in Sweden found that socio-economic conditions, such as infrastructure, impact a person's mental health.<sup>78</sup> The inadequate infrastructure on Indigenous reserves points to the lack of government attention given to the challenges Indigenous people face. In communities such as Attawapiskat, people have to deal with housing shortages, drinking water problems, and high unemployment rates.<sup>79</sup> Challenges such as these do not plague non-Indigenous communities to the same extent they do their Indigenous counterparts. These inequalities contribute to feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of motivation, which in turn can contribute to mental health issues for Indigenous youth. Another contributor to the mental health crisis is the inadequate educational facilities and resources in Indigenous communities. StatsCan showed that in 2011, 28.9% of Indigenous youth did not have a high school diploma, certificate, or degree. This is only the case for 12% of non-Indigenous youth.<sup>80</sup> The problem partly stems from lack of government funding, poor infrastructure for schools, the inability to acquire and maintain good teachers, and personal issues such as low self-esteem. In a report conducted by CBC, it was reported that many Indigenous youths feel that there is no cultural connection for them in the classroom. The lack of awareness of Indigenous culture was found to often manifest in bullying. In a harsh environment with no cultural connections of their own, many Indigenous students felt they had no other option than to drop out of school.<sup>81</sup> This problem only grows for post-secondary education as when Indigenous students have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education, it is often in an off-reserve, predominately non-Indigenous environment and as a result, this is a large culture shock. As of 2012, only 8% of all Indigenous people held a university degree, compared to 23% of non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>82</sup> At many universities, there is a lack of support for their mental health issues, especially support which considers their Indigenous heritage. Consequently, the lack of

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<sup>77</sup>"Attawapiskat: Four things to help understand the suicide crisis." *The Globe and Mail*. November 12, 2017. Accessed November 24, 2017.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/attawapiskat-four-things-to-help-understand-the-suicidecrisis/article29583059/>.

<sup>78</sup>Molarius, A., Berglund, K., Eriksson, C., Eriksson, H. G., Lindén-Boström, M., Nordström, E., . . . Ydreborg, B. (2009, August 20). Mental health symptoms in relation to socio-economic conditions and lifestyle factors – a population-based study in Sweden. Retrieved December 30, 2017, from <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-9-302>

<sup>79</sup>Ibid

<sup>80</sup>Xing, Lisa. "Ignoring Indigenous culture leads to classroom disconnect." *CBCnews*. September 16, 2016. Accessed January 04, 2018. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/indigenous-students-graduating-1.3761858>.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>*A portrait of First Nations and Education*. PDF. Gatineau: Chiefs Assembly on Education, October 3, 2012.

culturally relevant opportunities and the lack of accessible, quality schooling further contributes to self-esteem and mental health issues for Indigenous peoples.

In addition to the barriers faced by Indigenous youth on reserves, about 54% of the Canadian Indigenous population lives in a city, however, they are often labelled as “not proper” Indigenous people by those who live on reserve.<sup>83</sup> Though living in cities exposes Indigenous people to a plethora of opportunities, it also exposes them to cultural isolation which has been linked to suicidal thoughts. This governmental body should put forward recommendations to address problems that Indigenous people, both on- and off-reserve, face, keeping in mind that the geographical location and cultural nuances of the Indigenous culture of Indigenous youth has an impact on the nature of the help that they need or can access.

## Historical Causes of the Suicide Epidemic

Although there are many current issues that contribute to the current Indigenous mental health crisis, the most profound is the lasting effect of residential schools and other colonization and assimilation efforts. The oppression of Canadian Indigenous people traces back over 100 years to when European settlers colonized the Indigenous land that would become Canada. As time went on, European settlers and other non-Indigenous Canadians implemented many discriminatory policies. *The 1876 Indian Act* exerted government control over many Indigenous rights and forcing them on to reserves.<sup>84</sup> The Act made it very difficult for people to identify as Indigenous, forcing them to give up their status if they so much as wanted to vote.<sup>85</sup> The act also marked the introduction of residential schools. Indigenous children were taken from their parents by the authorities and sent to boarding schools designed to assimilate First Nations children into Western culture.<sup>86</sup> These schools often subjected children to poor living conditions as well as emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. It has been reported that over 6,000 children died in these schools during the 150 years the schools operated.<sup>87</sup> Although the last residential school closed its doors over half a century ago, the trauma still lives on today. Often times, the survivors of residential schools were unable to address their trauma and developed destructive behaviours that manifest in their families and communities.<sup>88</sup> This

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<sup>83</sup>“Attawapiskat: Four things to help understand the suicide crisis.” *The Globe and Mail*. November 12, 2017. Accessed November 24, 2017.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/attawapiskat-four-things-to-help-understand-the-suicidecrisis/article29583059/>.

<sup>84</sup> Mark, Michelle. “More than 100 people have attempted suicide in this tiny Canadian community since September.” *Business Insider*. April 13, 2016. Accessed November 26, 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/causes-of-canada-aboriginal-suicide-crisis-2016-4>.

<sup>85</sup>Henderson, William B. “Indian Act.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act/>.

<sup>86</sup>Miller, J.R. “Residential Schools.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/>.

<sup>87</sup>Schwartz, Daniel. “Truth and Reconciliation Committee: By the numbers.” *CBC News*, CBC/Radio Canada, 3 June 2015, [www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-by-the-numbers-1.3096185](http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-by-the-numbers-1.3096185).

<sup>88</sup>“The intergenerational trauma of First Nations still runs deep.” *The Globe and Mail*, 25 Mar. 2017, [www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health-advisor/the-intergenerational-trauma-of-first-nations-still-runs-deep/article23013789/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health-advisor/the-intergenerational-trauma-of-first-nations-still-runs-deep/article23013789/).

cycle was often due to the lack of awareness around intergenerational trauma and mental health issues. At the time of residential schools, no mental health support existed for survivors and they were rarely able to recognize any issues they may have had, thus letting them develop into dangerous behavioural patterns. These behaviours show up in numerous ways such as anxiety, depression, family violence, and suicidal and homicidal thoughts.<sup>89</sup> The passing of destructive behaviours from one generation to the next, intergenerational trauma, is one of the most prominent root causes of the Indigenous youth suicide crisis. Though colonization and intergenerational trauma have proven to be a clear factor in Indigenous suicides, many who seek treatment from non-Indigenous people are faced with discrimination from health service providers, educators, and social workers who neglect the effects of colonization on today's Indigenous youth.<sup>90</sup> It is also important to note that there is a current lack of easily accessible traditional Indigenous healing practices, mainly due to the "West is best" mindset, which ignores traditional Indigenous knowledge and healing. This governmental organization should discuss the possible benefits of integrating traditional Indigenous healing practices as a response to the Indigenous youth suicide crisis.

## Past Actions

Actions have been taken to combat the Indigenous youth suicide crisis but managing the situation has proved to be a difficult task. Justin Trudeau's liberal government pledged \$8.37 billion dollars in their 2017 budget for Indigenous youth health programs, a promising declaration of the government's commitment to Indigenous affairs.<sup>91</sup> That said, the budget falls short on putting forward programs focused on Indigenous youth suicide. Provincial governments have also pledged monetary support to strengthen their mental health infrastructure. The government of Ontario has, upon request, given the Wanekeka First Nation \$400,000 to send mental health counsellors and emergency supplies to the community.<sup>92</sup> The community has said that it will be using this money to develop their programs. The funding request came after the deaths of two girls this summer.<sup>93</sup> Some Indigenous communities have opted for traditional healing methods such as pow-wows and healers to address community health problems over western doctors.<sup>94</sup> These traditional Indigenous

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<sup>89</sup>"The intergenerational trauma of First Nations still runs deep."

<sup>90</sup>"INAN Committee Report." Committee Report No. 9 - INAN (42-1) - House of Commons of Canada. Accessed November 27, 2017. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/INAN/report-9/page-18>.

<sup>91</sup>Ansloos, Jeffrey. "The Federal Budget Forgets Indigenous Youth Suicide Prevention." HuffPost Canada. March 27, 2017. Accessed November 27, 2017.

<sup>92</sup>"Ontario Ministers Outline Actions to Address First Nations Youth Health and Safety Crisis." News.ontario.ca. Accessed November 28, 2017. <https://news.ontario.ca/mohlrc/en/2017/07/ontario-ministers-outline-actions-to-address-first-nations-youth-health-and-safety-crisis.html>.

<sup>93</sup>Porter, Jody. "2 girls died after attempt to stop 'suicide pact' halted by lack of funds, First Nation says." CBCnews. January 19, 2017. Accessed January 05, 2018. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/wapekeka-suicides-health-canada-1.3941439>.

<sup>94</sup>"Indigenous Suicide Prevention." Centre for Suicide Prevention. Accessed November 27, 2017. <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/indigenous-suicide-prevention/>.

healthcare methods were used to address alcoholism in Alkali Lake, British Columbia. Through dance, pow-wows, and healing sessions, the alcoholism rate went from 95% to 5% in ten years.<sup>95</sup> Finally, the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAN) has made many recommendations to the Canadian government regarding the youth suicide crisis. Some examples of past INAN recommendations include calling for more funding for community infrastructure and for training mental health professionals on Indigenous values.<sup>96</sup>

### **Possible Future Actions**

This committee must discuss a variety of potential solutions for the youth suicide crisis that touch on both the short- and long-term needs of Indigenous communities. Short term solutions may include implementing proper mental health response infrastructure and increasing accessibility to healthcare. Long-term solutions must deal with prevention, addressing the lack of Indigenous medicine in healthcare, addressing the effects of colonization, and including programs focused on educating and empowering Indigenous youth. The recommendations presented should consider both on-reserve and off-reserve Indigenous Canadians and address funding for the initiatives.

### **Guiding Questions**

How can this committee address the mental health needs of Indigenous youth both on and off of reserves?

What can be done to combat the impacts of intergenerational trauma on today's youth and help reconcile the effects of residential schools have on Indigenous mental health?

What short term and long term solutions can be put in place to resolve the Indigenous youth suicide crisis?

### **Delegate Resources**

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada:

<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010002/1100100010021>

INAN: <http://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/INAN>

National Aboriginal Health Organization: <http://www.naho.ca>

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<sup>95</sup>"Indigenous Suicide Prevention."

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council: <http://www.tassc.ca>

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<https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/INAN/report-9/page-18>.
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<http://www.ctvnews.ca/health/suicide-among-canada-s-first-nations-key-numbers-1.2854899>.
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[www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health-advisor/the-intergenerational-trauma-of-first-nations-still-runs-deep/article23013789/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health-advisor/the-intergenerational-trauma-of-first-nations-still-runs-deep/article23013789/)

## Topic 3: Truth and Reconciliation Initiatives

### Introduction

It is no secret that Canada's Indigenous people face gross discrimination, both presently and historically. To name just a few examples, the Indigenous people of Canada have been the victims of oppression and systemic discrimination as a result of colonization, the Indian Act, the White Paper, the 60's Scoop, and residential schooling, which have undermined Indigenous rights and cultures.<sup>97</sup> For many years, Canadians have failed to acknowledge the ramifications their actions have had, and continue to have, on the Indigenous people of Canada. One especially prevalent example of this is the residential school system and the effects of the system on the residential school survivors. In 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an apology to the former students of residential schools.<sup>98</sup> In his speech, he acknowledged the harsh conditions that students lived in, as well as the deep social problems the schools have left behind, such as intergenerational trauma and mental health issues and the loss of many aspects of traditional Indigenous culture.<sup>99</sup> Although the speech was a milestone for federal recognition of past governmental actions, many Indigenous peoples felt that it was a hollow apology delivered with the intention of gaining political support.<sup>100</sup> The speech marked the introduction of the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*, which included the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).<sup>101</sup> The TRC aims to inform all Canadians of the Indigenous residential school experience and works to renew relationships between Indigenous people and other Canadians.<sup>102</sup> Though the TRC's mandate ended with its 94 recommendations in 2014, its mission still rings true today and Justin Trudeau's liberal government plans to put these recommendations into action.<sup>103</sup> Some plans to address the recommendations have already been enacted, such as the construction of six new schools and the implementation of drinking water advisories in 14 communities.<sup>104</sup>

Recently, Canada's 150th birthday ignited new conversation surrounding the Canadian Indigenous experience and Canadian Indigenous affairs. While most of the nation celebrated, many Indigenous people mourned 150 years of adversity. This committee must work to create concrete solutions and raise awareness for the TRC's recommendations, and to take action on grievances raised by the Indigenous community.

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<sup>97</sup>Henderson, William B. "Indian Act." The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act/>.

<sup>98</sup> News, CBC. "Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement of apology." *CBC News*, CBC/Radio Canada, 11 June 2008, [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prime-minister-stephen-harper-s-statement-of-apology-1.734250](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prime-minister-stephen-harper-s-statement-of-apology-1.734250).

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup>"Harper's 2008 residential school apology was 'attempt to kill the story,' says ex-PMO speechwriter." *APTN News*, 10 Sept. 2015, [aptnnews.ca/2015/09/10/harpers-2008-residential-school-apology-was-attempt-to-kill-the-story-says-ex-pmo-speechwriter/](http://aptnnews.ca/2015/09/10/harpers-2008-residential-school-apology-was-attempt-to-kill-the-story-says-ex-pmo-speechwriter/).

<sup>101</sup>*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)*, [www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=10](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=10).

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>Mas, Susana. "94 ways to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation." *CBCnews*. December 15, 2015. Accessed December 04, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-94-calls-to-action-1.3362258>.

<sup>104</sup>Tasker, John Paul. "Justin Trudeau announces 3 steps to help enact Truth and Reconciliation calls to action." *CBCnews*. December 15, 2016. Accessed January 06, 2018. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-indigenous-leaders-trc-1.3897902>.

## Historical Background

In order to understand why truth and reconciliation is so important to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians alike, we must also examine the historical hardships experienced by Indigenous people in Canada. Indigenous issues in what is now Canada began over 150 years ago, when European settlers first began to encroach on Indigenous land, signing treaties and proclamations to divide the land. However, few of these treaties have been honoured.<sup>105</sup>

*The Indian Act*, adopted in 1876, implemented discriminatory policies and granted the government extreme control over Indigenous life in order to assimilate the Indigenous population. This was done by threatening to take away Indigenous peoples' "Indian Status" if Indigenous people wished to vote or if an Indigenous woman wished to marry a non-Indigenous man.<sup>106</sup> *The Indian Act* made it very difficult to legally identify as an Indigenous person and disproportionately affected women. Further, certain Indigenous people/groups, such as the Métis, remained ineligible for Indian Status until recently.<sup>107</sup> The goal of the act was to assimilate Indigenous people to European culture, no matter what measures had to be taken. This act also introduced residential schools, a collaboration between the federal government and the Christian church. Residential schools were created to "kill the Indian in a child" in order to assimilate them in European Canadian society.<sup>108</sup> Young Indigenous children were taken from their homes and communities and brought to boarding schools where they lived in poor conditions, experienced verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, and were deprived of sleep, food, and water.<sup>109</sup> These schools proved to be highly damaging to Indigenous culture, Indigenous communities, and the mental health of the Indigenous people. The effects of residential schools are still felt today, most notably in the form of various mental health issues and substances abuse issues which have been passed down through generations.<sup>110</sup> The TRC has legally declared the residential school system to be a 'cultural genocide'.<sup>111</sup> For more information on the residential school system and its effect on Indigenous mental health, please see Topic #2 of this background guide. The information on residential schools in Topic #2 is applicable to TRC discussions. It is important that the committee understands the historical reasons behind the need for truth and reconciliation so that it may move forward with progressive and culturally sensitive solutions in the future.

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<sup>105</sup>Hall, Anthony J. "Treaties with Indigenous Peoples in Canada." The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-treaties/>.

<sup>106</sup>Henderson, William B. "Indian Act." The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed December 04, 2017. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act/>.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>"The Residential School System." Indigenous foundations. Accessed January 06, 2018. [http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_residential\\_school\\_system/](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/).

<sup>109</sup>Miller, J.R. "Residential Schools." The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/>.

<sup>110</sup>"The intergenerational trauma of First Nations still runs deep." *The Globe and Mail*, 25 Mar. 2017, [www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health-advisor/the-intergenerational-trauma-of-first-nations-still-runs-deep/article23013789/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health-advisor/the-intergenerational-trauma-of-first-nations-still-runs-deep/article23013789/).

<sup>111</sup>Robins-Early, Nick. "Report Says Canada's Residential Schools Committed 'Cultural Genocide' Against Aboriginals." The Huffington Post. June 04, 2015. Accessed January 06, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/04/canada-residential-schools\\_n\\_7504016.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/04/canada-residential-schools_n_7504016.html).

## The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action

Over 6 years, the TRC carried out seven 4-day long events across the country where they heard residential school survivors speak about their experiences, met with Indigenous people in over 70 communities, and collected documents from churches and government entities.<sup>112</sup> By 2014, the TRC had collected almost 7,000 statements and 5 million documents.<sup>113</sup> Using this information, the TRC released a document in 2015 containing 94 calls to action to direct the government's efforts to improve both the status of Canada's Indigenous peoples and the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the government.<sup>114</sup> These recommendations called for the government to undertake specific initiatives to rebuild the relationship between the government and Canada's Indigenous peoples, a relationship which has been damaged by colonization, assimilation, and the horrors of residential schools.<sup>115</sup> These all-encompassing calls to action are divided into 2 categories, legacy and reconciliation, which address numerous sectors, such as health, education, and apologies. The TRC's report gave most Indigenous people hope, however some are skeptical to see if the government will truly carry out its promises.<sup>116</sup>

The Calls to Action are targeted at different jurisdictions, including churches, NGOs, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.<sup>117</sup> Forty-five of the calls to action are targeted at the federal government.<sup>118</sup> Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in 2016 that the government had begun work on forty-one of them and that he would hold annual town hall-style meetings with Indigenous leaders from the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council to work on policies.<sup>119</sup> According to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, there has been action on twenty-three of the calls, however not all of them are by the jurisdiction that was called upon.<sup>120</sup> Twelve of the calls have been implemented and completed thus far.

## Legacy, Reconciliation, and Education

The education section of the TRC's Calls to Action calls on the government to close the education gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. A major contributor to this gap is a lack of accessible education, especially to those on reserves, as many may have to move to larger cities or commute long

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<sup>112</sup> Ry Moran, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission," The Canadian Encyclopedia, September 21, 2015, , accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/truth-and-reconciliation-commission/>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, PDF, Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, June 3, 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Connie Walker, "A lot of open wounds: Aboriginal people conflicted on truth and reconciliation," CBCnews, June 01, 2015, , accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation-aboriginal-people-conflicted-as-commission-wraps-up-after-6-years-1.3094753>.

<sup>117</sup> "Monitoring TRC Calls to Action," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, , accessed December 31, 2017, <http://nctr.ca/research-pages.php>.

<sup>118</sup> John Paul Tasker, "Justin Trudeau announces 3 steps to help enact Truth and Reconciliation calls to action," CBCnews, December 15, 2016, , accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-indigenous-leaders-trc-1.3897902>.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> "Monitoring TRC Calls to Action"

distances to complete their high school diploma.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, the section calls on the federal government to work *with* Indigenous groups to draft new education legislation for Indigenous communities. The TRC recommends that this legislation include increased funding, culturally appropriate curricula (including Indigenous languages), and an ability for parents to “participate in the education of their children.”<sup>122</sup> Education is essential to improving Indigenous mental health. According to a study by the University of Warwick, people who have completed higher levels of education have better mental health later in life, likely because they have more opportunities - something Indigenous people severely lack.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, increasing access to education will help combat the epidemic of hopelessness that is sweeping Indigenous communities.

The reconciliation section of the document calls for the implementation of Indigenous history and knowledge in schools of all levels. For example, Clause 62(i) calls for the federal and provincial/territorial governments to “[m]ake age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.”<sup>124</sup> Clause 62 further calls on funding to be provided to post-secondary institutions in order to “educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms,” provide funding to Indigenous schools so that they may use traditional Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods, and create high positions in the government for the oversight of Indigenous subject matter in education.<sup>125</sup> There has already been progress with regards to this clause. In 2016, the government of Alberta created the Joint Commitment to Action.<sup>126</sup> Over the course of two to three years, teachers in Alberta will receive professional development training on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit history and culture so that they may implement it into their courses.<sup>127</sup> As well, the Government of Northwest Territories has made a residential school and reconciliation course mandatory for students in grade 10 and provided all teachers with education regarding the history and legacy of residential schools.<sup>128</sup>

Clause 63 calls on the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) to “maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues.”<sup>129</sup> The clause mainly includes oversight regarding the implementation of Clause 62 into provincial education systems and how best to achieve this. It also recognizes that the CMEC had been involved in this issue prior to the release of the TRC’s report and urges the organization to continue its work. Clause 64 calls on public religious schools (i.e. public Catholic schools) to teach “comparative religious studies,” which include Indigenous beliefs.<sup>130</sup> The Calgary Catholic School District has created a TRC Committee which has gathered resources for teachers and will work to implement Indigenous spiritual beliefs into its schools.<sup>131</sup> These two clauses are very important to mental health, as well. As stated in the First Nations Health Transformation Agenda, Indigenous culture and health are strongly interconnected and according to Health Canada “knowing and taking pride in who you are” is a sign of good

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<sup>121</sup> Jody Porter, "First Nations education: Are we still getting it wrong?" CBCnews, October 08, 2016, , accessed January 8, 2018, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/first-nations-education-getting-it-wrong-1.3795927>.

<sup>122</sup> *Calls to Action*

<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Gardner and Andrew Oswald, *How Does Education Affect Mental Well-Being and Job Satisfaction?* PDF, Coventry: Warwick University, June 2002.

<sup>124</sup> *Calls to Action*

<sup>125</sup> *Calls to Action*

<sup>126</sup> "Monitoring TRC Calls to Action"

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Calls to Action*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> "Monitoring TRC Calls to Action"

mental health.<sup>132</sup> One of the reasons mental health is so low in Indigenous communities is that many Indigenous adults have “lost” their culture due to the residential school system and have not been able to pass it down to the next generation, causing some youth to feel like they do not fit into Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities.<sup>133</sup>

## Reconciliation and Mental Health

As noted earlier in the background guide, the effects of residential schooling continue to impact the mental health of Indigenous people today. Therefore, reconciliation efforts are vital to positively addressing Indigenous mental health. Research shows that supporting cultural identities and community self-determination are important factors in helping to improve mental health resilience for Indigenous people.<sup>134</sup> These factors are also tightly entwined with reconciliation efforts. Reconciliation efforts support the mental health of Indigenous peoples by supporting cultural growth, increasing opportunities for Indigenous people, educating non-Indigenous Canadians regarding Canada’s past genocide of the Indigenous people, providing services which account for traditional Indigenous practices, and encouraging future collaboration between Indigenous people and the government.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, it is imperative that the Canadian government effectively implements the TRC’s recommendations in order to address the relationship between reconciliation and Indigenous mental health.

## Conclusion

Despite it being almost three years since the Truth and Reconciliation Committee released its final report, only a fraction of the TRC’s Calls to Action have been successfully completed. Until such a time that all of the recommendations are implemented, the relationship between Canada’s Indigenous peoples and the government/non-Indigenous groups cannot begin to be reconciled. It is our duty as the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to ensure that the recommendations are implemented quickly and effectively so that Canada may be united.

## Guiding Questions

1. What obstacles (political, economic, etc…) does the government face in addressing all 94 Calls to Action?
2. Will addressing all Calls to Action truly improve the relationship between the government and Canada’s Indigenous people, and improve the situation of Canada’s Indigenous peoples? What else do we need to do?

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<sup>132</sup> *The First Nations Health Transformation Agenda*, PDF, Assembly of First Nations, February 2017.

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<sup>133</sup> “Impacts and Effects,” *Through An Aboriginal Lens*, 2015, , accessed January 8, 2018, <http://throughanaboriginallens.ca/ie.php>.

<sup>134</sup> Boksa, Patricia, Ridha Joober, and Laurence J. Kirmayer. “Mental wellness in Canada’s Aboriginal communities: striving toward reconciliation.” *Journal of Psychiatry & Neuroscience* : JPN. November 2015. Accessed January 19, 2018.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*

3. How do we remove the division between Canada's Indigenous people and other Canadians?
4. How can we effectively address the Calls to Action with short- and long-term plans in a respectful manner which considers further Indigenous input?

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