
Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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Special Chiefs Assembly
December 7, 8, 9, 2021, Ottawa (Ontario)

Resolution no. 24/2021

TITLE: Call for the Permanency of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program

SUBJECT: Health, Indian Residential Schools

MOVED BY: Chief Scott McLeod, Nipissing First Nation, ON

SECONDED BY: Chief Peter Collins, Fort William First Nation, ON

DECISION Carried; 3 objections; 4 abstentions

WHEREAS:

- A. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) states:
- i. Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions.
 - ii. Article 21(1): Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
 - iii. Article 24 (2): 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 of achieving progressively the full realization of this right.
- B. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action states that,
- i. #18: We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

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ROSEANNE ARCHIBALD, NATIONAL CHIEF

24 – 2021
Page 1 of 4

- ii. #21: We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.
 - iii. #23: We call upon all levels of government to:
 - i. Increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field.
 - ii. Ensure the retention of Aboriginal health-care providers in Aboriginal communities.
 - iii. Provide cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals.
- C. The Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also speak to healing from trauma including:
- i. 7.2 We call upon governments and health service providers to ensure that health and wellness services for Indigenous Peoples include supports for healing from all forms of unresolved trauma, including intergenerational, multi-generational and complex trauma. Health and wellness programs addressing trauma should be Indigenous-led or in partnership with Indigenous communities and should not be limited in time of approaches.
- D. In 2015, the federal government promised a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples – one that would help deliver a better quality of life for their families and communities. In the *Walking the Road of Reconciliation* section of the Prime Minister's 2019 Speech from the Throne and the Minister of Indigenous Services subsequent Mandate Letter states:
- i. co-develop new legislation to ensure that Indigenous people have access to high-quality, culturally relevant health care and mental health services.
- E. The 2021 Supplementary Mandate Letter from the Minister of Indigenous Services states:
- i. expedite work to co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation with First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation, as well as a distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategy, and work with partners to address systemic racism in the healthcare system.
- F. Budget 2021 states that, "*The strategy will renew funding for the Indian Residential Schools Health Supports Program and Crisis Line, which provide healing supports for survivors of childhood trauma and residential*

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ROSEANNE ARCHIBALD, NATIONAL CHIEF

24 – 2021
Page 2 of 4

schools. It will also stabilize and expand community-based supports and capacity, increase substance use treatment and prevention, and support workforce development."

- G. The Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP), under the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) is mandated to provide mental health and emotional support services to eligible former IRS Survivors and their families throughout all phases of the IRSSA.
- H. A growing number of Survivors with more complex cases and stories are accessing the IRS RHSP, which indicates confidence in receiving support from the program.
- I. Continuous and indefinite commitment from the federal government to the IRS RHSP is still not clear.
- J. The Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 29/2013, *Continuation of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program Beyond 2016*, which mandated the AFN to advocate for the reinvestment and continuation of funds for the IRS RSHP beyond 2016. It also mandated the AFN to work with the federal government to document the role that cultural supports have played in the healing outcomes of IRS Survivors and their families.
- K. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Report, *The Indian Residential Schools Resolutions Health Support Program Continuation*, was released on September 30, 2020 and reports that:
 - i. Indian Residential School Survivors and AFN Mental Wellness Committee (MWC) members want the program to continue to address the ongoing impacts of trauma. The program should exist, always and forever.
 - ii. Due to the painful legacy of residential schools, the MWC believes strongly that the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP) must continue to be an independent, stand-alone program that bears the Indian Residential School name. Survivors are adamant that it maintains its identity
 - iii. Elders in their seventies and eighties have time to reflect on the past and to relive their experiences, reawakening previous traumas and painful memories of lack of control and helplessness, sadness and loneliness. Anxiety has also been triggered by uncertainty about the continuation of this vital program.
 - iv. The IRS RHSP allows for the collection of meaningful and relevant data, which supports prevention and services for Survivors and track successes.

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 9th day of December 2021 in Ottawa, Ontario



ROSEANNE ARCHIBALD, NATIONAL CHIEF

24 – 2021
Page 3 of 4

- v. Vicarious trauma can be inherent in working with and supporting those who have been traumatized and are working through multiple traumas.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Chiefs-in-Assembly:

1. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to call on the federal government to affirm its commitment to reconciliation by establishing a permanent and enhanced version of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP). The permanent IRS RHSP program would focus on enhanced capacity, sustainable funding and resources, ensuring its ability to meet the complex needs of Indian Residential School Survivors and their families, including the provision of appropriate healing supports to address the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma.
2. Direct the AFN to call on the federal government to continually assess and document the roles of the IRS RHSP Cultural Support workers to ensure they are supported through the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Survivors healing journeys to prevent burnout, compassion fatigue, and high turnover rates.
3. Direct the AFN to call upon the federal government to ensure that work towards a permanent version of the IRS RHSP retains its distinct focus in serving IRS-related needs and that the newly enhanced program maintains its mandate to support Indian Residential School Survivors and their families.

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 9th day of December 2021 in Ottawa, Ontario



ROSEANNE ARCHIBALD, NATIONAL CHIEF

24 – 2021
Page 4 of 4