



To: Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Hon. Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General

Cc: Hon. Greg Rickford, Minister, Indigenous Affairs
Matthew Anderson, CEO, Ontario Health
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health

Re: Need for Indigenous Cultural Safety Training and Education for all public servants

August 3, 2021

Dear Deputy Premier Elliott and Minister Jones,

The leaders representing the Ontario Primary Care Collaborative across the province write to you today urgently about the ongoing crisis facing Indigenous people and communities due to systemic racism and trauma rooted in colonization. Throughout the pandemic, the challenges of COVID-19 have intersected with other public health challenges and emergencies and we've seen that racism can create and maintain barriers – to vaccinations, to people getting the services and care they need, and to healing. The impacts of racism, intolerance and lack of understanding contribute to ongoing trauma experienced by Indigenous people and communities.

Deputy Premier and Minister, we all know systemic racism is itself an emergency that impacts health. It's why we've seen governments at all levels talking the talk on addressing anti-Indigenous racism in the last several months, particularly as Canada has started to reckon with the full truth and ongoing trauma of residential schools. Walking the walk of addressing anti-Indigenous racism requires bold leadership and courage, however, and taking practical steps with foundational policy shifts that can truly change the systems, organizational structures, cultures and actions that perpetuate and sustain systemic racism against Indigenous people and communities.

We need to work together to create truly safe spaces (physical and virtual), environments, and the ability for Indigenous people to interact with Ontario's systems with a reduced risk of racism and violence, and to increase access to health and social care and services across the board. To do it, **Ontario needs to mandate and fund Indigenous cultural safety training for all decision-makers and all branches of government whose services and programs interact with and serve Indigenous communities.** We need meaningful training opportunities that are created and led by Indigenous people and communities, and which broker the conversations and connections needed to create conditions for healing, safe spaces and active reconciliation. It is also essential – while we support behavioural changes for individuals through Indigenous cultural safety training opportunities – that we also simultaneously work to create change at organizational levels, so the health system not only supports, but encourages and fosters change of practices and policies.

The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council (IPHCC) is in the process of modernizing a made in Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety approach to health care that will aim for individual behavioural change through Foundational ICS, but which will also work to support organizations within the health system on their journey towards creating culturally safe spaces through implementation of culturally appropriate policies, procedures and practices. The IPHCC Indigenous Cultural Safety approach is focused on supporting Indigenous Health transformation as part of the overall health and social service systems transformation underway in Ontario. We are strongly recommending that you learn more about this program and make this available to your staff.

By now, we are all acquainted with the stories of Joyce Echaquan, Brian Sinclair, and many others, which speak to the worst-case scenario of racism seen in Canada's health systems. At that higher level, we also see through occurrences with the recent evacuation efforts in Northern Ontario and reported living conditions that the need for Indigenous cultural safety is as great as ever. Ontario has the capacity to improve how all of the province engages with Indigenous leaders, organizations and populations when action and coordination are needed to help people. We can and must do better, and we know you agree we can.

Changing minds, hearts and attitudes long term is what many governments have professed to in the wake of the discovery of mass and unmarked graves across Canada. We believe the Ontario government has an opportunity to lead with concrete actions that will truly change behaviours and make an impact with safer, fairer and more just spaces, services and organizations serving Indigenous peoples. Together, we can make a tangible impact in addressing systemic anti-Indigenous racism and showing others the path forward, but we need your support to do it.

We look forward to hearing from you very soon, and we're available to meet or answer any questions you might have on next steps.

Sincerely,

Leanne Clarke, CEO, Ontario College of Family Physicians
Katie Hogue, Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic Association
Sarah Hobbs, CEO, Alliance for Healthier Communities
Caroline Lidstone-Jones, CEO, Indigenous Primary Health Care Council
Kavita Mehta, CEO, Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario
Allie Kinnaird, Executive Director, Ontario Medical Association, Section on General & Family Practice