

Ontario Supporting the Identification and Commemoration of Indian Residential School Burial Sites

Province partnering with Indian Residential School survivors, families and Indigenous leaders on a community-led approach

NEWS

June 15, 2021

KENORA —The Ontario government is providing \$10 million to help support the identification, investigation, protection and commemoration of Indian Residential School burial sites across the province. The funding will also ensure that culturally appropriate, trauma-informed mental health supports are available for Indian Residential School survivors, their families and Indigenous communities.

“Like all Ontarians, I was heartbroken by the news of a burial site containing the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the former Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia,” said Premier Doug Ford. “That is why our government is partnering with Indigenous communities to address the loss of generations who are no longer with us, and the continued loss experienced by residential school survivors and their families. As we advance meaningful reconciliation, it is important that all of us continue to deepen our collective understanding of the legacy of the Indian Residential School system.”

Across Canada, over 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and sent to Indian Residential Schools between 1870 and 1996. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, there were 18 Indian Residential Schools in Ontario; the last of these closed in 1991, with some sites since repurposed, abandoned or destroyed.

“We know that the tragic findings at a former Indian Residential School site in British Columbia are sadly not an anomaly,” said Greg Rickford, Minister of Indigenous Affairs. “Indigenous leaders and Ontarians are looking to governments to commit to the work of investigating Indigenous Residential School burial sites on a priority basis and our government is taking action to support this process through to completion.”

Ontario is working in collaboration with Indigenous leaders to establish processes that will guide the work related to Indian Residential School site identification, investigation, protection and commemoration. Initial site identification will be the first step in a much more extensive process, pending the wishes of the affected families and communities.

The province will identify technical experts, including archaeologists, forensic specialists and historians, available to lead the related research, analysis and technical field work required and ensure it is conducted to the highest standard. Indigenous communities will have the option to work in conjunction with Ontario specialists, such as those provided by the province’s Centre of Forensic Sciences and the Office of the Chief Coroner/Ontario Forensic Pathology Service.

As Ontario continues to advance meaningful reconciliation, the province will also work with Indigenous partners to explore opportunities to deepen Ontarians' collective awareness and understanding of the legacy of the Indian Residential School system.

QUOTES

"I'm grateful that the Ontario government is answering my call and the call of all Chiefs in Ontario to provide funding and work in a respectful manner with local leadership and Knowledge Keepers to search the grounds of all former Residential School sites in Ontario. Our little ones need to be found, named, and where possible, returned to their families and communities. Memorial sites must go up across Ontario to remind us that we can never let this happen to our children again, ever. Thank you Premier Ford and Minister Rickford for joining us and supporting us in this healing journey."

- Ontario Regional Chief Roseanne Archibald

"Our Nations are in mourning. Survivors have long shared the truths about the missing children. The province is now listening. Our Nations must lead this important and sacred work with the support from the province. We require access to funding, technical expertise, mental health supports and justice. We want to find our children and bring them home. If a family or community suspects where their lost loved one are, they should have access to whatever is required to find them – with the appropriate Indigenous health support in place and meaningful justice sector responses. Ontario is taking important steps to make this happen."

- Alvin Fiddler, Former Grand Chief, Nishnawbe Aski Nation/candidate for National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations

"The news of the 215 children found in Kamloops has affected our people in deeply emotional, spiritual, and physical ways. Our survivors and their families in Treaty #3 have long known that not everyone came home from residential school. The reminder that many have yet to be found has impacted our Nation in ways I cannot express. Over the past several weeks many people have told me of their experiences of seeing children disappear and have asked that we begin searching for them. Today's announcement is a step towards bringing our children home."

- Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh, Grand Council Treaty #3

"Our children were taken from us by government diktat in an effort to eliminate our language, culture, values, and identity, and some of them were never seen again. No parent or child should ever have to experience that, and we must ensure it never happens again. With the Government of Ontario committing to a full investigation of burial sites, Six Nations is encouraged in the hope that we will find all of our missing children and bring to light what happened to them. This is a step towards justice."

- Chief Mark B. Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River

"I want to thank Minister Rickford and the Ontario government for bringing this commitment of funding so swiftly. We cannot have true reconciliation in this province without closure for the victims of these institutions, their families and their communities. Many in the Métis community attended residential and day school institutions, creating pain that rests with us to this day. This funding will help our communities address the intentional harms of those institutions and their legacy, and more importantly, help our communities move towards true closure."

- Margaret Froh, President, Métis Nation of Ontario

On behalf of the Métis people and communities of the Lake of the Woods, Lac Seul and Rainy Lake/Rainy River, I want to thank Minister Rickford and his government for this announcement. With this funding, Ontario is taking another step along the path to reconciliation. This announcement acknowledges the negative impact these schools had, and continue to have, within our communities. Most importantly, it charts a course of action to begin to address them. We appreciate this tangible action and will continue to work with Ontario and Canada to bring the closure that our communities deserve.”

- Theresa Stenlund, Regional Councillor, Métis Nation of Ontario

QUICK FACTS

- Roughly 8,000 of Canada’s estimated 80,000 Indian Residential School Survivors lived in Ontario at the time of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) estimated that at least 426 children who attended Indian Residential Schools in Ontario are known to have died, while an unknown number are still missing.
- The TRC research identified 12 locations of unmarked burial sites in Ontario; there are likely more.
- The Seven Generations Education Institute is an Indigenous-led educational organization providing high school and post-secondary education, training for employment opportunities and cultural programming to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Treaty Three area and beyond.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action](#)
- [Pathways to Safety: Ontario's Strategy in Response to the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
- [Indigenous Youth Leading Youth Anti-Racism Program](#)
- [Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program](#)
- [Hope for Wellness Help Line for Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Talk4Healing - a culturally grounded helpline for Indigenous women](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

Curtis Lindsay
Minister’s Office
437-240-7317
Curtis.Lindsay@ontario.ca

Flavia Mussio
Communications Branch
416-314-9455
Flavia.Mussio@ontario.ca

ontario.ca/Indigenous
Disponible en français