

June 14th, 2021

Cree Nation Response to Indian Residential Schools

Speaking Notes

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Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

The legacy of damage caused by Indian Residential Schools has left our families in pain and our communities in pain which need help far beyond the capacity of any one administration or organization. Since 1975 the promise of the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement through Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay was a health care service with the necessary adaptations reflective of the particular needs of our people and our communities. It is not lost on us that not every First Nation has a Treaty they can rely on to get the Federal and Provincial governments to the table to address health care needs and instead find themselves falling through the cracks of jurisdictional denial of both governments.

We must not take for granted that it is not only between levels of Government where we can find excuses as to why communities lack the resources they need to deal with the collective inter generation traumas associated with Indian Residential School. Health care, justice, public security and youth protection agencies will need to work together to address the repercussions of violence that comes from years of neglect of deep emotional wounds. My administration will be open when called upon to collaborate and I will not accept being told to stay in my lane should my organization feel the need to call on a partner agency for assistance.

It has taken many years to get where we are today and yet still, we have so far to go. We have a special specific program and staff to deal with the traumas of Indian Residential School but is not in every community and although they work tirelessly, they are too few. Unfortunately, substance abuse is unsurprisingly too common in our communities where we have not been proactive enough to develop and promote therapies and programs to help people manage their pains and traumas in healthier ways. Yet still to this day we do not have a treatment center on our territory, and we follow the dangerous practice of sending people away in the name of helping them. Our land is a healing land, it does not make sense that in 2021 we still do not have the land-based treatment facilities or programs needed to help our people manage old wounds.

October 7th, 2019 we signed a new Agreement to develop new resources, new programs with an emphasis on mental health. Today we have renewed promises of support from Federal and Provincial Governments for support in dealing with the aftermath of Indian Residential Schools. There is no reason why we cannot have a tomorrow with significant improvements, and I am expecting the Cree leadership of today to demand that we deliver and hold us accountable.

Although we will be forever appreciative of the specialists and professionals that come to our communities, we are not producing our own professionals at a pace to meet the growing needs in our communities. The long-term solution for our communities is the investment in infrastructure and training programs that will allow us to produce our own specialists that will meet the health care needs of our wounded communities and community members, in our homes, at our camps and most importantly in our language. I will be needing the help of not only my counterpart at the Ministry of Health but also the Cree School Board with the Ministry of Education to ensure that bureaucratic divisions and unapplicable accreditation standards are not barriers to restoring the wholeness of our communities which broke with the arrival of planes and buses that took our children away.

The coming weeks and months will unearth more bodies, more wounds and more pain it will take the strength and commitment of all of us to get through this.