



113-2018-24

August 13, 2018

Dr. Dirk Huyer  
Chief Coroner for Ontario  
25 Morton Shulman Avenue  
Toronto ON M3M 0B1

Dear Dr. Huyer:

I am writing to provide a response to the jury's recommendations from the Seven First Nations Youth Inquest that were directed towards Ontario. The province is pleased to provide you with a detailed response (attached) in alignment with recommendation 143. Ontario recognizes the importance of the Inquest and the jury recommendations aimed at preventing the loss of life of Indigenous children and youth.

Ministries have been working with government and Indigenous partners to implement all of the recommendations directed to the province, either completely or in part. Ontario is now in the process of implementing all 61 recommendations, including recommendations that were previously deemed by the province to be better directed to a different party. Ontario has completed 30% of the recommendations. Implementation of the remaining 70% of recommendations are partially completed or on track to be fully implemented. An overview of progress, as of May 2018, is provided below.

## Education

The Ministry of Education has been working with Inquest partners to address numerous recommendations through the Inquest Education Table, led by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and through the Inquest Task Teams. As well, the Ministry of Education is providing funding to Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Keewaytinook Okimakanak, the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council and the Matawa Learning Centre to support implementation of education-related recommendations directed to Ontario.

In response to the student safety crisis identified by Nishnawbe Aski Nation in summer 2017, Ontario provided funding for the 2017-2018 school year to address the immediate education needs of Nishnawbe Aski Nation students. This consisted of an immediate flow of one-time emergency funding for programs required in the crisis, which included tuition funding for First Nation operated schools to provide students with access to the programs of their choice. For the 2018-2019 school year, the Ministry of Education provided additional funding to Nishnawbe Aski Nation and its partner organizations to support programs that were previously funded, in order to work towards stabilizing the student safety crisis.

In October 2017, a Working Group was established with representatives from First Nations across Ontario, Trustee and School Board associations, and Ministry of Education staff to advise on issues related to Education Services Agreements (ESAs) and Reverse Education Services Agreements (RESAs) (ESA/RESA Working Group). In January 2018, the ESA/RESA Working Group supported the Reciprocal Education Approach (REA) for First Nation students who wish to attend First Nation schools or provincially funded schools, and for students transitioning between school systems in the province.

Amendments to the *Education Act* setting out the legislative framework for the REA received Royal Assent on May 8, 2018, and will come into force on September 1, 2019 or a date to be proclaimed by the Lieutenant Governor, whichever occurs first. These amendments provide authority to create regulations to support the implementation of the REA approach. The Working Group has started working on implementation considerations for the REA.

The Ministry of Education has also continued to fund Indigenous Education Leads in each District School Board, to foster greater collaboration between First Nation schools and provincially-funded schools. These positions have been in place since fall 2016 and are intended to facilitate relationship building and increased communication between First Nation schools and publically-funded schools.

The Ontario curriculum has undergone revisions to ensure that all students learn about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including the history of the residential school system. The curriculum requires that students from kindergarten to high school learn about the negative impacts of racism and discrimination and the importance of tolerance and inclusivity. As of September 2018, the curricula revisions in social studies, grades 4 – 6 and history, and grades 7, 8 and 10 will be mandatory.

The Ministry of Education directed provincially-funded school boards to work closely with Indigenous partners to review school team names, logos and mascots, to raise awareness about the negative impact of stereotypes on individuals, schools and communities. Additionally, the Ministry of Education has established a strategy on equity and inclusive education that aims to help the education community identify and address biases and systemic barriers.

As part of Ontario's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report and Calls to Action, the Ministry of Education is investing up to \$93.5 million over 2017-18 and 2018-19, to support expanded access to early years programming in urban and rural settings off reserve, as well as for First Nations communities on-reserve. In urban and rural communities off reserve, up to \$70 million over two years (including capital investments) has been provided for culturally relevant child care and child and family programs delivered by Indigenous-led organizations through 61 projects, including several in the Thunder Bay region. Through an investment of up to \$23.5M over two years (including ongoing operating funding), Ontario is also expanding child and family programs in over 40 First Nation communities, including five existing programs on reserve.

## **Other Wrap Around Supports for Youth Attending School Off-Reserve**

Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation are leading discussions with all relevant partners to support a coordinated suite of housing, income, recreation, and health services for students who are attending secondary school off-reserve in Thunder Bay. To support these discussions, the Ministry of Community and Social Services is reviewing social assistance policy changes that could increase supports for First Nations youth who leave their community. As well, recreational programming during the after school time period in the Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School has now been fully implemented and funding is confirmed through the 2018-19 school year.

## **Commemoration**

The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs funded memorials for Kyle Morrisseau and Robyn Harper, held in their home community of Keewaywin First Nation in the fall of 2017 and the winter of 2018, respectively. A memorial for Jordan Wabasse will be held in three years, to honour the ten year anniversary of his death. The memorial award in Jordan Wabasse's name created in response to recommendation #6 will be distributed in the meantime. The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is now collaborating with Northern Nishnawbe Education Council on the four remaining memorials planned for Curran Strang, Jethro Anderson, Reggie Bushie and Paul Pannacheese in the fall of 2018.

## **Health and Wellness**

Through additional investments in culturally appropriate mental health and addictions initiatives, Ontario is working with Indigenous partners to help end the cycle of intergenerational trauma by:

- Funding Indigenous-led mental health and wellness programs across the province that include traditional healing, to provide enhanced, culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous youth, adults, families and communities; and
- Funding to establish or expand ten Indigenous-led Healing and Treatment Centres across Ontario, which will offer new culturally safe treatment beds for Indigenous people.

Ontario continues to work in partnership with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the federal government to address the unique health needs of Indigenous people and communities on- and off-reserve. The province is investing nearly \$222 million over three years (2016/17 to 2018/19) for Indigenous peoples to have access to more culturally appropriate care and improved outcomes, focusing on the North where there are significant gaps in health services. Investments recently announced include:

- Creating 16 new or expanded Indigenous-governed and community-driven interprofessional primary care teams across Ontario. These will provide culturally safe primary health care services and programs to over 70,000 Indigenous people, including individuals and families living in remote and fly-in communities;

- Providing funding directly to each of the 133 First Nations communities in Ontario to strengthen access to culturally appropriate home and community care services, including at-home nursing visits, help with bathing and preparing meals, or transportation for people with mobility challenges; and,
  - Funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for youth life promotion initiatives in high-need Indigenous communities across the province.
- Implemented initiatives include:
- Mental health and addictions workers and supports for students in 105 First Nations schools;
  - Land-based/cultural programming and prevention supports that combine clinical services and cultural, land-based programming;
  - Additions to the Tele-Mental Health Service to reach more Indigenous communities; and
  - A partnership with the federal government to roll-out 19 Mental Wellness Teams, including seven teams to serve Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities.

The North West Local Health Integration Network is working with various partners on access and coordination of mental health services for Indigenous people and communities, through ongoing collaboration in new investments in service, providing in-school mental health supports, and coordinating amongst health service providers.

### **Supporting Improved Outcomes for Indigenous Children and Youth**

Ontario has worked closely with Indigenous partners on options for improving outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth. Examples of action to date include:

- Indigenous child protection services;
- Community-based prevention supports;
- Mental health supports for Indigenous children and youth; and,
- Youth justice services.

Through engagement with Indigenous partners, Ontario is working to support the healthy development of Indigenous children, youth, families and communities.

As part of this, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is working bilaterally with Nishnawbe Aski Nation towards a shared goal of developing a more responsive and holistic approach to Nishnawbe Aski Nation child, youth and family well-being; this relationship was confirmed in the signing of an agreement in April 2018. In addition, Ontario is working with Canada and First Nations partners, including Nishnawbe Aski Nation, to develop new policy and funding approaches for First Nations child and family services in Ontario. Ontario, Canada and First Nations leadership publicly announced a joint-commitment to this work in April 2018.

## **Anti-Racism**

The province will launch the Indigenous Youth Leading Youth Anti-Racism Program in 2018, which will be delivered by Indigenous youth organizations across Ontario to youth in schools and community settings. The main objectives of the Indigenous Youth Leading Youth Anti-Racism Program will be to enable Indigenous youth to educate non-Indigenous youth about the impacts that historical and contemporary racism have had on Indigenous peoples as well as to support young Indigenous people by strengthening their skills and knowledge of anti-racism strategies.

The NORDIK Institute at Algoma University was selected to design the Indigenous Youth Leading Youth Anti-Racism Program and administer the training for youth leaders. Working with Indigenous youth councils in Ontario, NORDIK established an Indigenous Youth Advisory Circle, which includes membership from northern communities including those from Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Grand Council Treaty #3, to inform the design and the delivery of the Indigenous Youth Leading Youth Anti-Racism Program. The province sought input from Indigenous youth attending high school in urban centres, including students at First Nations schools Keewaytinook Internet High School, Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC), and Pelican Falls High School. The design work has been led by the Indigenous Youth Advisory Circle, focusing on gathering feedback on what to teach non-Indigenous youth about Indigenous racism and the needs of Indigenous youth when talking about racism.

The Anti-Racism Directorate held meetings with Indigenous communities and organizations and a coalition of community partners in Thunder Bay, including Nishnawbe Aski Nation, to better understand experiences of systemic racism, and determine ways to address racism through public education and awareness initiatives and campaigns. To support the development of a provincial Indigenous-Focused Anti-Racism Strategy, the Anti-Racism Directorate partnered with Indigenous communities and service providers to hold community engagement sessions in Kenora and Sioux Lookout.

The Anti-Racism Directorate also invested in the provision of in-person Indigenous cultural competency training for public servants and community-based staff who work in the justice sector, and funded short-term community-based public awareness initiatives in Thunder Bay, including the development of a youth social media campaign by Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and a project led by Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants to gather community feedback on addressing anti-Indigenous racism priorities through public awareness in Thunder Bay.

## **Cultural Competency**

The province has begun to implement mandatory Indigenous cultural competency training for all Ontario Public Service employees. In April 2018, OPS employees began registration for the online San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Program (San'yas Program). To date, 5,420 employees have been registered in the training.

Ontario is also developing a performance measurement framework, to research the impact of this training on participants and the Ontario public service.

To complement the foundational training, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is also developing a vendor of record to offer in-person Indigenous training programs developed by Indigenous communities, businesses and organizations. Ontario will continue to work with Indigenous partners to ensure this training is credible, culturally sensitive, and reflective of histories, perspectives, and cultures of Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit populations.

## **Justice**

The Missing Persons Act, 2018 has been passed. If proclaimed into force, it will provide tools for police when investigating missing persons occurrences where a crime has not been committed. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services engaged with Indigenous partners in the development of this legislation.

The Police Services Act, 2018 (PSA) has been passed, and if proclaimed into force, will create new options for First Nations policing. To address some of the challenges facing First Nation communities, the PSA will enable First Nation band councils to request that the minister constitute either: a First Nation police service board that would be responsible for providing policing on a First Nation reserve or other area, or, a First Nation OPP board to oversee policing services provided by the OPP. First Nation communities opting into the PSA will be required to meet legislated standards for adequate and effective service delivery, governance and oversight. The legislation will also enable First Nations to continue with their existing policing models (governed by a policing agreement), if they choose.

The province is also working with the City of Thunder Bay to ensure that Indigenous representation on the Thunder Bay Police Services Board reflects the needs of the Indigenous peoples within the City of Thunder Bay. This is supported by the new PSA, which is part of a suite of legislative policing amendments and includes requirements for municipal councils to adopt and implement community safety and well-being plans.

In preparing a community safety and well-being plan, municipal councils will be required to consult with the members of the public, including members of First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities and, in the case of a joint plan with a First Nation, in the First Nation reserve.

The legislation also provides for measures to increase diversity on police service boards so that they are representative of the diversity of the communities they serve. This includes new measures requiring municipal councils to promote the availability of board appointments to members of demographic groups that have been historically underrepresented on police service boards, including racialized groups and First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities.

## Broadband Expansion

On October 6, 2017 in Thunder Bay, the provincial and federal governments jointly announced that Canada will invest up to \$37.1 million, through the federal "Connect to Innovate" program, with Ontario investing up to \$30 million, to expand broadband into five remote Matawa communities in the Ring of Fire Region. The Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines will continue to work with Industry, Science and Economic Development Canada and Matawa First Nations on refining the program and developing a comprehensive work plan with a target to commence construction in the summer of 2019.

Ontario will continue to collaborate and engage with Indigenous and other Inquest partners as it undertakes the work detailed above in line with the recommendations to ensure that Indigenous youth are safe and well-supported no matter where they live or go to school in the province.

In Friendship,



Deborah Richardson  
Deputy Minister

Enclosure - Ontario's Formal Response to Jury Recommendations  
Seven First Nations Youth Inquest

- c: Bruce Rodrigues, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education  
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