



113-2019-84

June 28, 2019

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

Dear Dr. Huyer,

I am writing to provide Ontario's 2019 response to the jury's recommendations from the Seven First Nations Youth Inquest that were directed toward the province. Ontario is committed to continuing this important work to honour the lives of Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Paul Panacheese, Robyn Harper, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau and Jordan Wabasse, and is pleased to provide you with a detailed response (attached), as guided by Recommendation 143.

Ontario wishes to recognize Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC), Matawa Learning Centre (MLC) and Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO) for their roles in working on behalf of their communities, students and families to ensure their priorities are considered and responded to in a meaningful way throughout this process. Ontario continues to participate in the post-Inquest process, to work towards implementation and completion of, as appropriate, the 61 recommendations directed to the province. As of June 2019, Ontario is pleased to report that 27 recommendations are completed and 34 are in progress.

Ontario's participation in the post-Inquest process is guided by its commitment to strengthening the province's relationships with Indigenous Peoples by respectfully engaging with and focusing on the priorities of Indigenous communities in the province. These priorities include supporting the health and safety of Indigenous youth who leave their communities to attend school away from their homes, and how the unique needs of these youth can be most effectively and appropriately supported by the province. Ontario will also work to ensure that broader provincial initiatives and investments consider the needs of Thunder Bay and other communities where Indigenous students board to attend school, and the role of Indigenous organizations and local agencies that are integral to the design, planning and delivery of health, education and social services and programs.

Ontario cannot meet these goals alone; all levels of government have a role in responding to these important recommendations.

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Since the last update submitted to the Office of the Chief Coroner, Ontario has made progress toward the achievement of complex, longer-term recommendations made by the jury. Ontario remains committed to working together across government and with Inquest parties in Thunder Bay to effectively respond to these recommendations. Highlights of Ontario's progress, as of June 2019, are provided below.

Education and Employment Programs and Supports

The Ministry of Education has learned from Inquest parties the need for all students to be safe, and to have flexibility and options available to them as they access education. Both the provincial and federal governments have important roles to play in supporting education for First Nation students, including those travelling to or living in Thunder Bay to attend school. Ontario must work with First Nation partners in seeking the federal government's support in this area. This includes the jury's recommendation pertaining to adequately funding schools on reserves to provincial standards.

The Ministry of Education continues to work with Inquest parties to support the implementation of education-related Inquest recommendations in a sustainable way to ensure long-term supports for First Nation student safety and well-being. To support this work, the Ministry of Education is providing funding to First Nation Inquest partners for targeted, partner-led initiatives focused on successful transitions between First Nation-operated or federally-operated and provincially-funded schools. Some key initiatives include:

- Education System Navigator/Reengagement Program Coordinators, Teacher Coaches and Transition Coordinators to provide support for students and families, advocate on students behalf, and act as a liaison between students, their home community, and their receiving school.
- Peer mentorship program to assist First Nation students in decision-making, communication, goal setting, building leadership skills, and making new friends, and orientation resources to provide opportunities for new students and families to familiarize themselves with services available in Thunder Bay.
- Memorial scholarships, established with communities and families, to honour the lives of the seven youth. The Ministry of Education anticipates that ministry funding will support 19 scholarship awards to First Nations youth in 2019.

The Ministry of Education is also working to improve access, reduce barriers, and strengthen parental choice for First Nation students who wish to attend First Nation-operated schools or provincially-funded schools, and for students transitioning between school systems through the implementation of the Reciprocal Education Approach (REA).

On May 21, 2019, the revised First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, Grade 9-12, curriculum was released. The curriculum is comprised of a suite of ten secondary courses that focus on Indigenous content and offers multiple pathways to post-secondary education. The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies curriculum was developed with Indigenous partners, as well as other education partners.

Building on this important work, the Ministry of Education will continue to work with Indigenous partners to strengthen Indigenous content and learning across subjects, courses and grades, including Indigenous Languages. The Ministry of Education is working with Indigenous partners to co-design an approach to additional curriculum revisions beginning with a meeting on June 19, 2019.

These achievements are the result of collaborative processes across Inquest parties, and mark important progress in the work to support First Nations to make decisions that are best for First Nation students, families, and communities.

First Nation Youth Safety, Mental Health and Well-Being

Ontario has looked closely this year at how it can continue to make meaningful progress, informed by the jury's recommendations, with respect to Indigenous mental health and well-being. Important elements to Ontario's overall approach include culturally appropriate youth life promotion, and mental health and addictions initiatives, such as:

- Working with Indigenous partners to establish or expand ten Indigenous-led Mental Health and Addictions Treatment and Healing Centres, both on- and off-reserve jointly led by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). The Centres will provide culturally safe residential treatment for adults, youth and families using a combination of traditional healing and clinical care.
 - Ontario is working with NAN and other Indigenous partners to establish three new youth-specific Indigenous Mental Health and Addictions Treatment and Healing Centres, including two in NAN territory.
- Funding 34 Indigenous-led mental health and wellness programs and services across the province to help stop the cycle of intergenerational trauma. These programs include traditional healing elements to provide enhanced, culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous youth, adults, families and communities.
- Three new safe sobering sites have been established in Thunder Bay for First Nation youth to safely detoxify from substance and alcohol misuse. The sites – developed with Keewaytinook Okimakanak, Matawa Education and Care Centre, and Northern Nishnawbe Education Council – are supported by funding over three years from MOH (2018/19 to 2020/21) through the North West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

- In 2018/19, Ontario invested just over \$7 million to support youth life promotion activities in NAN communities, including;
 - Engagement with NAN communities to roll-out funding for mental health and addictions workers and other mental health and wellness supports for students in NAN First Nation schools;
 - A centralized mental health and wellness program in Thunder Bay, with a focus on students that have relocated to attend school; and
 - Seven Mental Wellness Teams that provide crisis intervention, land-based healing and treatment, and build community capacity to support children, youth, families and adults with mental health needs.

In addition, the Ontario government has committed to build a comprehensive and connected provincial mental health and addictions service system, supported by \$3.8 billion in new investments over the next ten years for mental health, addictions and supportive housing for all people in Ontario. This includes investments of \$174 million in 2019/20 to support mental health and addictions services, mental health and justice services, supportive housing, and acute mental health inpatient beds. Funding includes \$5 million from MCCSS to provide culturally appropriate mental health services and supports to Indigenous communities, including adults, families, children and youth; and \$7 million from MOH to fund treatment centres, mental wellness programs, as well as mental health and addiction workers and coordinators for Indigenous communities.

As these investments in health services are being implemented, Ontario, the federal government and NAN are exploring options to transform First Nations' health. In undertaking these long-range reforms, Ontario recognizes the importance of services that are available, accessible, and appropriate to the complex needs of Indigenous people, including First Nation students in Thunder Bay.

Commemoration

In November 2018, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs supported the memorial of one of the youth in their home community. As requested by one family, a memorial will be held in two years, to honour the ten-year anniversary of the youth's death. This year, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is committed to supporting the remaining youth memorials, as requested by their families.

Service Coordination and Accessibility in Thunder Bay

As the work of implementing the recommendations continues into 2019, Ontario wishes to highlight that the work ahead will require coordination and cooperation among various parties, including those not specifically named in the jury recommendations. While many of the recommendations specific to program and service coordination/delivery in

Thunder Bay are directed to Ontario ministries, often many of the planning, funding and other service coordination considerations and decisions are led by local agencies or service providers.

The identified parties, through the various technical processes already established, should continue to consider how opportunities can be created to better include all organizations essential to implementation, such as the North West LHIN, District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB), and Indigenous service providers.

Ontario also requires increased commitments from Canada to ensure that First Nations education institutes both in and outside of Thunder Bay have the supports they need to help navigate provincial and local services and systems for their students.

To advance meaningful change, Ontario's approach going into 2019/20 will build on previous progress related to education and employment programs and supports, investing in First Nation youth mental health and well-being, and supporting or facilitating service coordination and accessibility in Thunder Bay. Ontario is working toward enhancing service delivery and coordination with local service providers, building on the continuum of services already available in Thunder Bay. Ontario's efforts to examine and more effectively deliver provincial programs and services will consider the unique education, health and well-being needs and supports of students and their families living in or travelling to Thunder Bay.

Post-Inquest Process and All Parties Collaboration

Ontario is working with NAN, Canada, and NNEC, MLC, and KO to honour the lives of the seven youth that were lost and build a better path forward for all students in all communities. Ontario was pleased to participate in both All Parties Political Table Meetings in February and May 2019, to discuss with the Inquest parties the current or potential barriers and issues experienced by both education providers and students that could hinder progress or outcomes both in implementing the jury's recommendations as well in their day-to-day efforts to support student safety and well-being.

Ontario is also pleased to offer continued support (alongside Canada) to NAN for capacity to coordinate amongst parties and deliver on recommendations. This may support other processes, such as NAN working internally or with other parties (e.g., the City of Thunder Bay), in implementing recommendations. Based on parties' feedback, and to ensure meaningful progress can be made, Ontario is seeking opportunities to reduce the reporting burdens for this funding by streamlining its requirements both internally across ministries as well as with Canada.

Moving forward, Ontario will continue to look to collaborative processes with Inquest parties that are responsive to the complex realities for First Nation students attending school away from home, and to work towards practical solutions that can help support Indigenous youth education and well-being, regardless of where they live in the province.

In Friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Deborah Richardson
Deputy Minister

Enclosure – Ontario's 2019 Response to Jury Recommendations Seven First Nations
Youth Inquest