



July 30, 2021

Dr. Dirk Huyer  
25 Morton Shulman Ave  
TORONTO ON M3M 0B1

Dear Dr. Huyer:

We write to report on progress made with regard to the recommendations of the Seven Youth Inquest as we mark the fifth anniversary of the release of the Jury's recommendations. Aboriginal Legal Services has acknowledged our advice from June 2020 that: "the time to move to a new post-Inquest phase is now - a phase where the best practices and strong relationships established following the release of the recommendations are integrated into all Parties' regular operations," but there has been no discussion of how that could happen over the past year.

The Government of Canada and specifically Indigenous Services Canada, continues to be committed to work with First Nations partners to improve student safety and the security of Indigenous students. The purpose of the recommendations were and are to avoid the tragic loss of youth and to improve student success in their personal lives and education pathways. Work has been led by First Nations who have determined what desired outcomes are for service delivery, improvements on student safety and quality of life for students. The Government of Canada has made significant progress with First Nation partners as we support implementation of the recommendations.

That progress has been documented on the implementation of 77 of the 81 recommendations, with four recommendations that require long-term implementation - our First Nations partners have put them aside for the time being.

The Department has invested \$22 million to support the upgrades and retrofits to the Matawa Education and Care Centre. As a result of the work undertaken, over 100 students will be able to both study and live in the Centre as soon as February 2022. The Department is working closely with Nishnawbe Aski Nation through the Choose Life Initiative to address the need for mental health supports and mental wellness programs for their members. The Interim Funding Formula, which provides funding that *exceeds* the provincial average in all cases for First Nation/Secondary Education, has been applied to First Nations for the last three years, and has been a key component to supporting flexibility and stability in responses to the needs of children.

.../4

To support the Youth Inquest recommendations, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch is targeting increased access by educational parties to funding from Choose Life, where \$3.4 million was invested in 2017–2018, \$9.9 million in 2018–2019, \$12.8 million in 2019-2020, and \$14.2 million in 2020-2021 for direct supports to address Inquest recommendations. Applications for 2021-2022 intake are currently underway. Choose Life supported activities include: land-based activities, mental health and addiction workers, youth safe sobering sites, and safety pilots such as the successful cellphone project undertaken by Windigo Tribal Council.

The Department is aware of the increased demand for mental health services over the past year and provided \$2,657,560 to support the Nishnawbe Aki Nation Mental Health and Addictions Pandemic Response Program. This program has increased access to virtual mental health services (telephone, chat, video etc.) and strengthened the coordination of services across existing mental health service providers within communities served by Nishnawbe Aki Nation, including Matawa communities. Virtual and in-person individual mental health counselling resources are available through the Non-Insured Health Benefits program; Indian Residential School Health Support Program; Indian Day School Health Supports Program; Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Health Supports Program; the Hope for Wellness Line; Kids Help Phone, and LGBTQ2S+ Youth Line.

COVID-19 has presented a number of challenges this year, and we have continued to work with partners to identify strategies to address public health measures and community safety with a total investment of \$2 billion to Ontario First Nations. We have attached a funding table for your review.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the Region has also adopted innovative approaches to supporting First Nation broadband projects, including funding opportunities through the Indigenous Community Business Fund. The Government of Canada launched the Universal Broadband Fund in November 2020 to reduce the connectivity gap for Indigenous and remote communities. Regional officials continue to advocate for First Nations including drafting several letters supporting communities' applications to the program in 2020. As part of the larger COVID School Start-up Fund, additional support is available for summer learning for students attending secondary education off-reserve. This funding can be used for virtual programs.

Over the past three years, through the Ontario Technical Table, we have worked closely with partners including Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, Keewaytinook Okimakanak Board of Education and Matawa Tribal Council on the Interim Funding Approach. This model has introduced a \$96 million increase in the Ontario Region over 2017-2018 levels, including \$50 million more in Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities and \$5 million more for off-reserve Nishnawbe Aski Nation education organizations, including those named in the Inquest, to support student safety and well-being. The Department continues to work with First Nations across Ontario to develop Regional Education Agreements, which will inform First Nation-led policy and procedures.

Based on 2019-2020 student enrollment, overall funding will increase for Northern Nishnawbe Education Council and Matawa Tribal Council schools by over \$2 million annually, to support activities that correspond directly to Inquest recommendations. This change recognizes these schools located off reserve as First Nations owned, operated, and culturally-appropriate alternatives to on-reserve facilities.

Indigenous Services Canada has made significant investments to support First Nations education on-reserve so that students who remain in their home communities have access to high-quality, culturally appropriate, safe education. Since 2016, four new school facilities have been opened in NAN First Nations and a further four school facilities are under construction and will start welcoming students as early as April 2022. ISC has invested over \$250 million for these new school projects. Policy reform is also underway with interim revisions to the School Space Accommodation Standards nearing completion. Revisions will include an increase in fundable space to support language and culture, traditional services, health and wellness, outdoor learning, and minimum classroom sizes that better reflect education standards in Canada.

The Department is committed to maintaining the safety of students who attend school off-reserve by increasing the funding to allow students to take up to four trips home, increasing funding to boarding parents to \$1200 per month, and providing funding to Nishnawbe Aski Nation for a region-wide Private Home Placement review. The findings from this review, completed in May 2021, are being evaluated by the Technical Table on the Interim Funding Approach to consider implementing modifications to the formula.

Indigenous Services Canada Jordan's Principle program officials at Headquarters have commissioned an external consultant to explore options for an Ombudsperson/accountability function for Jordan's Principle.

To support the emotional and physical health and wellbeing of First Nations students attending school in Thunder Bay and the Sioux Lookout area, Indigenous Services Canada has invested over \$52.9 million to-date in education organizations and Tribal Councils, including specific funds through Jordan's Principle Group Requests and Choose Life initiatives.

The Government of Canada recognizes the scope and seriousness of the health and mental health challenges facing First Nations, including the tragic loss of life through suicide. We are working in collaboration with First Nations and provinces and territories to advance Indigenous-led approaches to mental wellness. While the issues of mental wellness and suicide are complex, we know that part of improving mental wellness in First Nations communities means providing better access to effective, sustainable and culturally appropriate services. Since 2018, Indigenous Services Canada has invested \$5.19 million to support the 19 mental wellness teams that provide additional access to mental health supports for all First Nations communities in Ontario. Each team supports 5-10 communities, and provides mental wellness services, counselling and crisis response and intervention.

Since the time of the Inquest the Government of Canada has deepened our relationships and worked collaboratively with First Nation partners to develop meaningful and concrete supports for Indigenous youth that address not only the Coroner's recommendations in response to the Seven Youth Inquest, but also identify broader policy objectives in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice. Recent work with communities and with leadership has underscored the importance of acknowledging the legacy of distress and sorrow that finding the remains and unmarked burial places of young Residential School students represents.

We have no doubt that good work will continue with partners for the safety and wellbeing of First Nations students.

Respectfully,



Anne Scotton  
Regional Director General  
Indigenous Services Canada  
Ontario Region



Gary Best  
Regional Executive – First Nations and  
Inuit Health Branch  
Indigenous Services Canada  
Ontario Region

ENCL.

c.c.: Families of Paul Panacheese, Robyn Harper, Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang,  
Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau, and Jordan Wabasse, c/o Jonathan Rudin,  
Aboriginal Legal Services  
Nishnawbe Aski Nation member First Nations  
Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
Northern Nishnawbe Education Council  
Keewaytonook Okimakanak  
Mushkegowuk Tribal Council  
The Honourable Stephen Lecce, M.P.P., Minister, Ontario Ministry of Education  
His Worship , Mayor Bill Mauro of Thunder Bay  
Ms. Sylvie Hauth, Thunder Bay Police Services