

September 30, 2021

As members of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) and its Indigenous Committee, we are profoundly saddened by the discovery of the many unmarked graves containing the remains of Indigenous children at the sites of numerous residential schools across the country. We are reminded that we must all listen and acknowledge the truths of our colonial past and present. The SRPC strongly condemns the systemic racism in policy and decision-making that continues today as a direct result of our country's colonial history. These policies have caused unquantifiable damage to Indigenous Peoples and continues to reverberate in our day-to-day work as rural and remote physicians. The SRPC believes our duty as healthcare providers is to identify legislation and health policies that lead to racially inequitable outcomes and challenge our current and future governments to move ahead on a path to truth and reconciliation.

As rural physicians who provide services across many Indigenous communities, we now know that not only was death a regular part of these “schools”, but physical, psychological, sexual, cultural, and racial abuse were daily realities for children who were forced to attend them. More than 150,000 lives were radically changed, with the historical trauma having an exponential impact on each subsequent generation. Residential schools have had negative impacts on every Indigenous person in Canada, and as health providers, we see the cultural, spiritual, medical, and emotional effects every day.

In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the SRPC and our Indigenous Committee calls upon the federal, provincial, and municipal governments to invest in Indigenous Peoples individually and collectively, to listen to the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples, and to collaborate on the solutions they propose to the many inequities that persist. This includes active participation in reconciliation efforts such as returning unceded lands, repealing racist legislation and policies, and restoring cultural practices and autonomy to Indigenous Peoples.

We ask SRPC members to learn from and listen to their Indigenous patients and community members, identify injustices and inequities, and advocate for change in policies and laws negatively impacting our Indigenous patients. As the country sets sights on restarting economic and social activities after the first waves of the pandemic, we cannot begin anew without addressing the structures of colonialism on which our lives are built. The SRPC calls for partnership with the Government of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, the provincial governments, Indigenous community leaders, and municipal governments to use this time to rebuild and renew Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples to address the injustices that cause so much harm. We hope to work with the members of our organization to best serve Indigenous People's vision of their present and future health and wellbeing.