

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister of Canada
Member of Parliament University-Rosedale

July 8, 2021

Dear Ms. Freeland,

We are writing today to ask for your urgent attention to the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action**. As our representative in Ottawa, we respectfully request that you advocate for and support the immediate enactment of the recommendations from this crucial document.

Surrey Place is a developmental service agency with our main clinical site in your riding of University-Rosedale. We provide a broad range of clinical services to individuals and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and Blind-Low vision in the Toronto area and 25 Indigenous communities in Northwestern Ontario through partnerships with the Sioux-Lookout First Nations Health Authority and the Lac Seul First Nation Education Authority.

In our work, we have witnessed first-hand the disproportional burden of both physical and mental illness and disability experienced by our Indigenous families and communities. In our Northwestern Ontario communities, we have seen families with no clean drinking water, inadequate housing, and facing extremely high rates of suicide, addictions, and serious mental health challenges. In our urban Indigenous communities in Toronto, we have seen how the enduring effects of social policies (such as residential schools) have led to intergenerational substance abuse, the dissolution of families, and resulting mental health issues being treated through our FASD diagnostic clinics.

The confirmation which came on May 27, 2021, that the remains of 215 children were found on the site of Kamloops Indian Residential School is a national tragedy. The subsequent announcements of an additional 751 unmarked graves found at the Marieval Indian Residential school and another 182 unmarked graves found near the former St. Eugene's Mission School, with the potential of additional discoveries, further underscores the need for immediate action. This news has filled us with grief and has had a profound effect on our country as a whole. It reminds us that there is much work to be done.



As our work at Surrey Place involves delivering healthcare and related services, we would like to advocate especially for the adoption of The Truth and Reconciliation Committee Calls to Action in the area of **Health** including **Calls to Action 18-24** which, among other things, recommend the following:

- measurable healthcare goals be set for Aboriginal communities to close the gap around infant mortality, suicide, mental health and addictions, life expectancy, chronic diseases, and injury;
- sustainable funding for Aboriginal healing centres and recognition of traditional healing practices;
- increasing the number of Aboriginal healthcare professionals and improve retention of these individuals in communities;
- mandate education of healthcare professionals to include the topics of Aboriginal healthcare, Indigenous history and teachings.

At Surrey Place, we will continue to support Indigenous individuals and families in our daily work. However, we must rely on our government to move forward with the vital Calls to Action listed above. By sending this letter, we declare our support for the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's Calls to Action and ask that you use your voice to join us in this important work.

Sincerely,



Terri Hewitt, Ph.D., C. Psych.
Chief Executive Officer

CC: Helen Wojcinski, Board President – Surrey Place
Brigitte Forbes, Program Supervisor –Community Services Division, North Region
Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
Hon. Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs
Yvonne Jones, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs
Gary Anandasangaree, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations