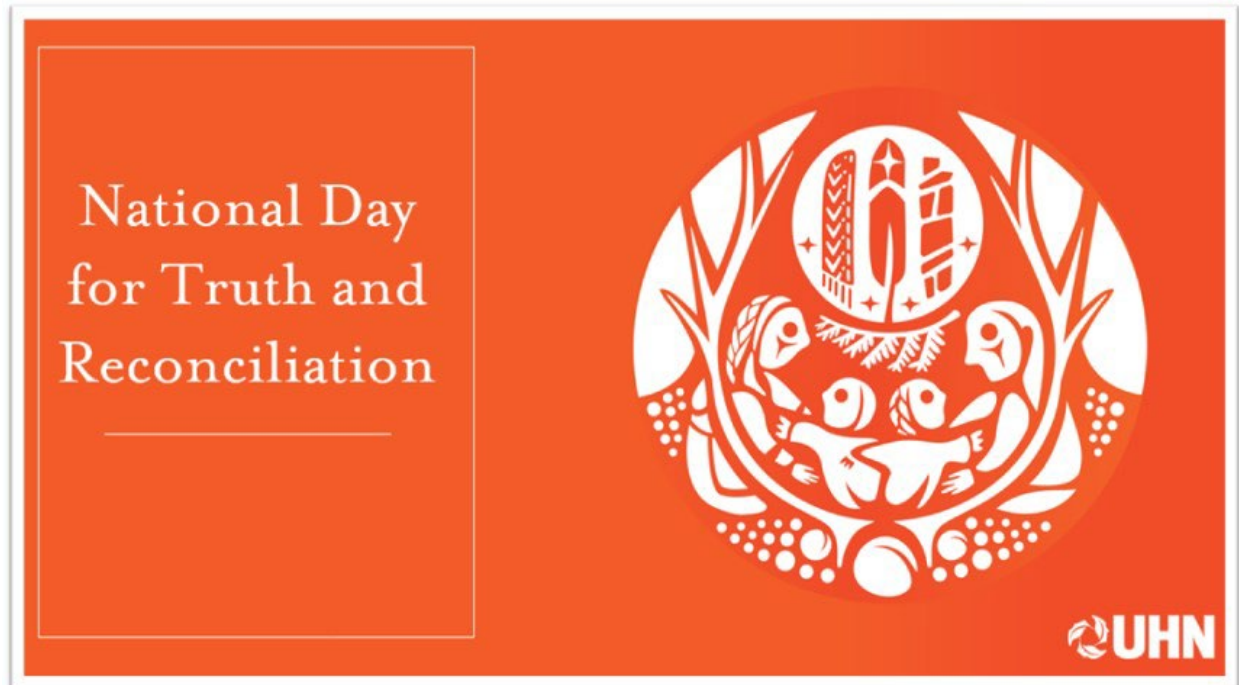


National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Statement



The [Survivors' Flag](#) pictured above honours Indigenous survivors of residential schools. Each of the nine elements depicted were carefully selected by survivors, including the seeds meant to symbolize the spirits of children who never returned home. Learn more from the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#).

Dear Colleagues,

Today we commemorate the [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#), a solemn moment to honour Indigenous survivors of residential schools and reflect on the lasting trauma of that dark chapter of Canada's history.

On this emotional day, we acknowledge the pain and grief of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of this land and express our gratitude for all those who will courageously share their stories at events across the country today. Let us pledge that the ongoing legacy of residential schools will never be forgotten as we walk together on the path to reconciliation.

The Indigenous Health Program and Indigenous Cancer program are co-hosting a commemorative event at the Gitigan (garden) at the Michener Institute of Education at UHN, from 9:30 a.m. to 11 am., at the corner of Elm and McCaul St. There will be a sacred fire, survivors' stories and a [Survivors' Flag](#), drumming and singing, personal commitment cards, remarks from UHN leaders, as well as discussion of UHN's progress on [Call to Action 22](#) from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and plans to address Call to Action 23.

[From 1831 to the mid 1990s](#), at least 150,000 Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities to attend these church-run and government-funded institutions, where so many suffered profound abuse, neglect, and indignity. [The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) (NCTR) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) estimate that more than 6,000 children died in this system, which had the expressed goal to “kill the Indian in the child” and force Indigenous children to assimilate into the dominant Western Christian society by stripping away their identities.

That overarching goal – to assimilate Indigenous children at all costs by falsely teaching them that there was something wrong with their beautiful ways of life – is also why we observe Orange Shirt Day today, the brainchild of survivor [Phyllis Webstad](#) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation. Phyllis was just six years old when she was taken to St. Joseph's Mission Residential School near Williams Lake, B.C. An orange shirt she wanted to wear on her first day, a gift from her grandmother, was stripped from her right away. “The colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing,” she said of the experience. “All of us little children were crying and no one cared.”

Many will wear orange today and seek to live up to the powerful message that “Every Child Matters.” The gutting discoveries of hundreds of unmarked graves near residential schools – [with many more expected to be found](#) – remind us all how Canada failed to live up to that basic principle. But we also know that words are not enough and that concrete action is essential to truly honour survivors of residential schools and Indigenous peoples who have inherited intergenerational trauma.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released [94 Calls to Action](#) for governments, organizations, and ordinary citizens to advance the cause of reconciliation. Murray Sinclair, the former TRC chair, has said the commission was not just about uncovering the truth of what happened in residential schools but about making it “part of our national memory.” That is our collective work.

Each September, UHN will formally commit to action on a specific call to action pertaining to healthcare – Calls to Action 18 through 24. Last year, UHN committed to addressing Call to Action No. 22, which states:

“We call upon those who can effect change with the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.”

Under the leadership of the Indigenous Health Program, we have seen progress by:

- Drafting a policy on UHN Indigenous ceremonial practices that is near completion
- Increasing requests for Indigenous Patient Navigator, cultural supports, and the use of Indigenous ceremonies and healing practices at UHN sites

- Hosting the first summer solstice sunrise ceremony and sacred fire at the Michener Gitigan (garden) to mark National Indigenous History Month in June
- Using the plants grown in the Gitigan for traditional medicine and healing practices that support patients and program initiatives
- Striking community partnerships with those interested in learning more about the Gitigan
- Incorporating more teachings from Indigenous community members
- Using a Ceremonial Bundle (hand drum, rattle, copper vessel) gifted by the Indigenous Cancer Program for patient care
- Advancing work on a financial equity project to recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge
- Integrating Indigenous knowledge to inform practice (e.g., patient relations tool, non-physical harm)
- Working to develop an Indigenous health, wellness, and gathering space at UHN by 2024
- Partnering with the Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto on a quilt program for patients
- Actively recruiting for the UHN Indigenous Community Advisory Council

This year, we commit to address **Call to Action 23**, which states:

“We call upon all levels of government to:

- i. Increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field.*
- ii. Ensure the retention of Aboriginal health-care providers in Aboriginal communities.*
- iii. Provide cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals.”*

The IHP is already:

- Expanding Indigenous Health roles at UHN, including Emergency Navigators at the Toronto General and Toronto Western hospitals, and Elders and Knowledge Keepers within the organization to provide broad support
- Developing an undergraduate student mentorship program over the long term
- Creating two post-doctoral fellowships in partnership with Waakebiness Institute for Indigenous Health, UHN Research, and Peter Munk Cardiac Centre, dedicated to data governance and digital health, respectively
- Welcoming practicum placements from the Masters of Public Health – Indigenous Health stream
- Advancing training partnerships between Indigenous communities and UHN, including at the Michener Institute

- Developing cultural safety training programs with both targeted and UHN-wide approaches

The Indigenous Health Program shares this statement to mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:

“The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity for Canadians to learn about the experiences of Indigenous peoples within the Indian Residential and Day School systems. Healthcare institutions have been complicit in the harms experienced by Indigenous people. While at times this may be uncomfortable, truth is a necessary precursor to reconciliation. The TRC offered a roadmap to reconciliation in the 94 Calls to Action. Reconciliation occurs through actions on the part of individuals, organizations, and institutions. The Indigenous Health Program at UHN uses the Calls to Action as a framework to guide our efforts to effect positive change for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. We encourage TeamUHN members to commit to learning about the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, systemic efforts to eradicate us, and how to work in allyship to make healthcare equitable for all people.”

As I said in my message marking National Indigenous History Month in June, it is incumbent upon us to think about how many Indigenous peoples do not trust the Canadian healthcare system because of institutional harms – a situation that drives further disparities. I acknowledge that UHN is also a place where First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have experienced racism.

We must continue to learn the truth of residential schools in Canada, and how those experiences echo through generations. I encourage everyone to make their own commitment to advancing reconciliation.

On behalf of UHN’s Board of Trustees and Senior Management Forum, we thank the Indigenous Health Program for leading these conversations and guiding us to sustainable change at UHN.

Kevin

National Truth and Reconciliation Day Resources

- **For more information about the Indigenous Health Program at UHN**, please contact: Indigenoushealth@uhn.ca. The IHP website will be launching soon.
- **The Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line is available 24-hours a day for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of a residential school experience. Support is available at 1-866-925-4419.**

- **Live ceremonies to attend today:**
 - [Truth and Reconciliation Week event hosted by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)
 - [The University of Toronto's Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Commemoration](#)
- Additional resources to learn more about Indigenous issues and what you can do to advance Indigenous health equity at UHN and beyond: [2022 NDTR Events Resources](#), [NCTR Reports](#), ['More Than Words' Resource site](#), [TRC Calls to Action](#), [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), [Indigenous Health Primer](#), [In Plain Sight](#), [Tkaronto Land Acknowledgement](#), [On Canada Project](#)