



A SPECIAL REPORT

Calls to Action Accountability: A 2020 Status Update on Reconciliation

by EVA JEWELL and IAN MOSBY

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Abstract

December 15, 2020, marks a full five years since the release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. It was a momentous day that saw residential school Survivors, their families, and representatives of the institutions responsible for overseeing the horrors of Canada's Indian residential school system gather in Ottawa to chart a new path for the future guided by the Commission's 94 Calls to Action. Governments committed to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal counterparts to, "fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." But five years later, that commitment has not materialized. In 2020, a tumultuous year for many reasons, our analysis reveals that just 8 Calls to Action have been implemented, this is down from 9 in 2019. There are five explanations for this lack of action: 1) policy makers excluding Indigenous peoples from the "public interest", 2) deep rooted paternalistic attitudes of politicians, bureaucrats, and other policy makers, 3) the ongoing legacy and reality of structural anti-Indigenous racism, 4) predatory non-Indigenous organizations that exploit reconciliation, and finally, 5) insufficient resources. Ultimately, we find that Canada is failing residential school Survivors and their families.



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"Canada's actions need to match their words."

– EVELYN KORKMAZ, ST. ANNE'S RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVOR

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INTRODUCTION

DECEMBER 15, 2020, marks a full five years since the release of the [Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#). It was a momentous day that saw residential school Survivors, their families, and representatives of the institutions responsible for overseeing the horrors of Canada's Indian residential school system gather in Ottawa to chart a new path for the future guided by the Commission's [94 Calls to Action](#).

As a tearful Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [told the audience that day](#),

Moving forward, one of our goals is to help lift this burden from your shoulders, from those of your families, and from your communities. It is to accept fully our responsibilities—and our failings—as a government and as a nation.

At the heart of this commitment was a promise to work with his provincial, territorial, and municipal counterparts to “fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.”

Five years, we believe, is more than enough time to test the strength and meaningfulness of that commitment.

And, unfortunately, Canada has fallen far short of these commitments and has, by any reasonable metric, received a failing grade when it comes to the 94 Calls to Action.

It is also worth noting the context of this research: the COVID-19 global pandemic and its impacts, national political and social action through Wet'suwet'en resistance to illegal pipelines in their territories, Indigenous solidarity actions with Black Lives Matter, 1492 Land Back Lane, white supremacist violence against Mi'kmaq fisheries, and the Algonquin moose moratoriums, to name just a few. It has been a long year.

There is also draft federal legislation to implement the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and new commentary on some of the Calls to Action by leading Indigenous scholars that will add to our analysis.

All of this frames our findings for this year, namely, that 2020 is the first year since the release of the Final Report of the TRC that **Canada completed no additional Calls to Action**. In fact, we conclude that, as of December 2020, Canada has only completed 8 of the 94 Calls to Action—a decrease from our findings last year (which found that only 9 had been completed). Moreover, despite the [often repeated statement](#) by Prime Minister Trudeau that, “no relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples”, the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) website “[Delivering on Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#)” has not been updated since September 5, 2019 as of this writing.

There is no excuse for this lack of progress or transparency. Canada is failing residential school Survivors and their families. Canada is failing Indigenous peoples. Five years later, these failures leave us wondering if, as Indigenous youth have put it, [reconciliation is dead](#).

METHODOLOGY: TRACKING INACTION

THIS YEAR, we followed the same methodological principles outlined in our December 2019 [Yellowhead Report, *Calls To Action Accountability: A Status Update On Reconciliation*](#).

This means, for instance, that unlike the CBC's [Beyond 94 Project](#) we chose not to assign Calls to Action as “in progress” or by some other measure of partial completeness. As we wrote in 2019, we “maintain that analyzing the full completion of a Call to Action is a better metric than measuring ‘progress’ or ‘steps taken’ on an item.” The wisdom of this approach, we think, is evidenced by the fact that none of the Calls to Action marked by the CBC as being “In Progress—Projects proposed” or “In Progress—Projects underway” were completed this year.

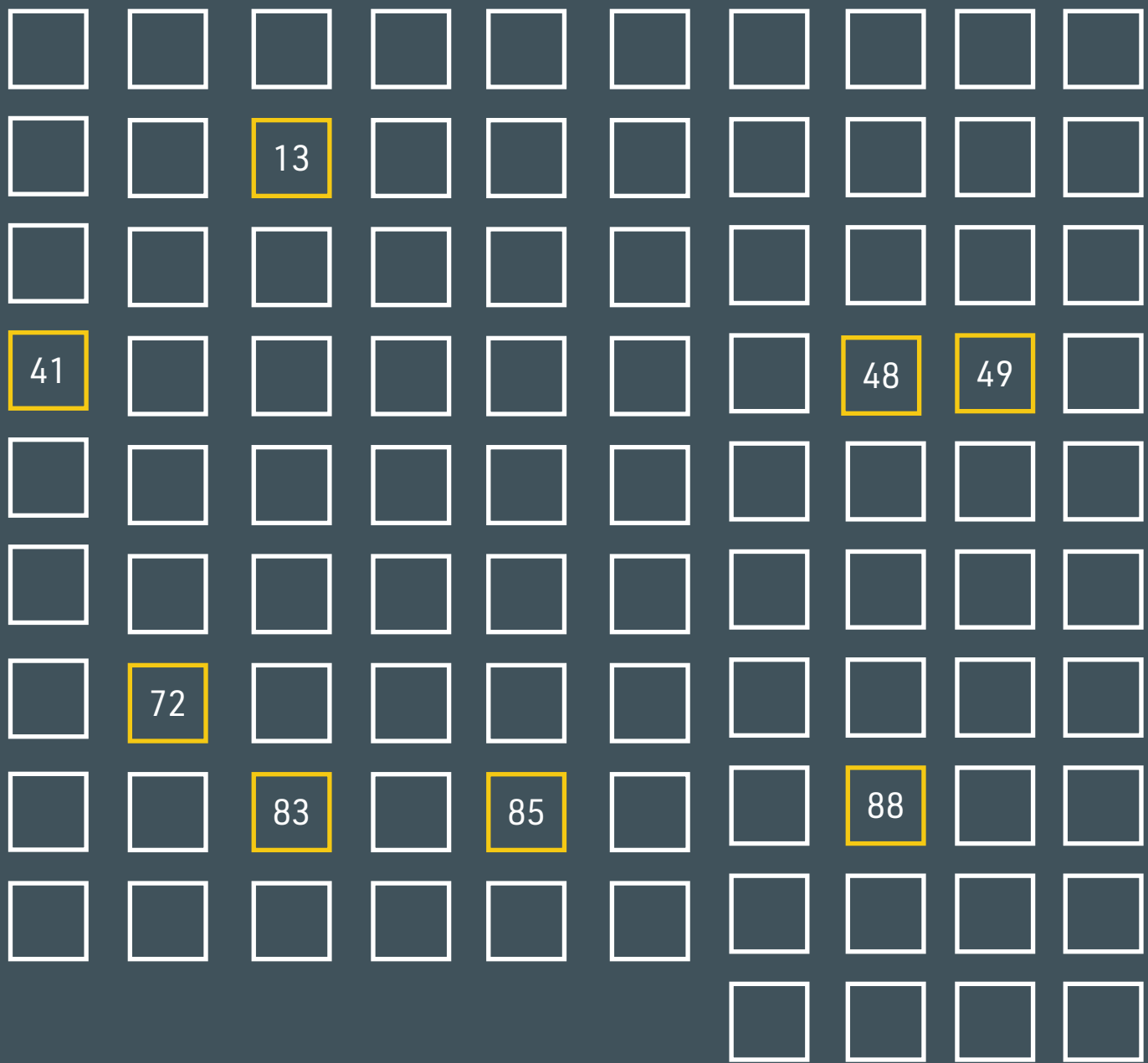
As it turns out, ‘In Progress,’ tends to give a false sense of advancement without meaningful structural or policy changes in the areas of reconciliation.

The fact that even the Calls to Action that we, ourselves, identified as being likely to be completed in 2020 in our last report remain incomplete a year later only highlights the danger of designations like “In Progress” or “Steps Taken.”

We expected, for instance, there would be an Indigenous Language Commissioner by now (#15) or that the National Council for Reconciliation (#53 and #54) would already be in place. That they are not speaks to the limits of measuring progress by promises and exploratory committees struck rather than by real, meaningful action.

It is for this reason that we continue to determine a Call to Action as being complete when, “all steps were taken to fully address the content of the Call and by the specific parties to whom the Call to Action refers”.

Half measures, in other words, remain just that: unfulfilled promises.



***In 2020, no additional Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action were completed.**

- 2020 Complete Calls to Action*
- 2015-2019 Completed Calls to Action
- Incomplete Calls to Action

ANALYSIS: FIVE YEARS OF PROMISES UNFULFILLED

THE CALLS TO ACTION are defined by two distinct categories: **Legacy** and **Reconciliation**.

Legacy Calls to Action are those that seek to address the ongoing structural inequalities that marginalize Indigenous peoples—intentionally or not—in contemporary Canadian society. The TRC looked at these inequities in the areas of Child Welfare (#1-5), Education (#6-12), Language & Culture (#13-17), Health (#18-24), and Justice (#25-42).

Reconciliation Calls to Action (#43-94) deal with 17 subcategories of measures that are meant to a) advance inclusion of Indigenous peoples in various sectors of society; b) educate Canadian society at large about Indigenous peoples, residential schools, and reconciliation; and c) establish practices, policies, and actions that affirm Indigenous Rights.

We will examine both of the Legacy and Reconciliation categories separately so as to look at some of the ways that Canada responded (or failed to respond) to the specific, material demands set out in the Calls to Action based on our own research as well as conversations with leading experts.

As we argued last year, three main barriers to the completion of the Calls to Action remain:

- 1) a vision among policy makers of the “public interest” as generally excluding Indigenous peoples;
- 2) the deep rooted paternalistic attitudes of politicians, bureaucrats, and other policy makers, and;
- 3) the ongoing legacy and reality of structural anti-Indigenous racism.

This year, we are attentive to the new challenge of the global pandemic, but argue that this actually presents a greater urgency to address the Calls to Action rather than an excuse for leaving them incomplete.

It is not lost on us that if the Calls to Action had been properly addressed from their inception, the unique crises that Indigenous peoples face arising from the pandemic could have been mitigated.

As an example, Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller recently announced that a key target to providing the basic necessity of **clean drinking water to First Nations by March 2021 will go unfulfilled**, pointing to the failure due in part to the pandemic but also stating that “ultimately, I bear the responsibility for this and I have the ... duty to get this done.” At the time of writing, members of the Neskantaga First Nation (which has been under the longest boil-water advisories in Canada) have been **evacuated from their community** due to a contaminated water source that could not be remedied by boiling. 260 members of this First Nation have been living in Thunder Bay (430 kilometers south of Neskantaga) for over seven weeks in the midst of the pandemic.

While the ongoing barriers of “public interest”, paternalism, and structural anti-Indigenous racism remain the most compelling explanations for lack of action this past year (with the added complication of a pandemic), our goal in this report is to provide some additional detail and examples of what inaction on individual Calls to Action means within their broader categories.

PART 1

LEGACY

**"Reconciliation is not what you say;
it is what you do."**

– DR. CINDY BLACKSTOCK

The Legacy Calls to Action address major structural issues that Indigenous peoples currently face. To date, this category has seen the least amount of action with only two calls completed:

- ▶ #13: Federal acknowledgment of Indigenous Language Rights
- ▶ #41: Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Where do we stand on the rest?

LEGACY CALLS TO ACTION

Legacy Calls to Action are those that seek to address the ongoing structural inequalities that marginalize Indigenous peoples—intentionally or not—in contemporary Canadian society. Here is a breakdown of how the calls in this section are categorized, with examples from each category.*

CHILD WELFARE #1-5

2 We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, to prepare and publish annual reports on the number of Aboriginal children (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) who are in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, as well as the reasons for apprehension, the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies, and the effectiveness of various interventions.

3 We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

4 We call upon the federal government to enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody cases and includes principles that:

- Affirm the right of Aboriginal governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies.
- Require all child-welfare agencies and courts to take the residential school legacy into account in their decision making.
- Establish, as an important priority, a requirement that placements of Aboriginal children into temporary and permanent care be culturally appropriate.

EDUCATION #6-12

8 We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

9 We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people

LANGUAGE & CULTURE #13-17

13 We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights. *(COMPLETED)*

15 We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.

HEALTH #18-24

18 We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

21 We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

23 We call upon all levels of government to:

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

JUSTICE #25-42

25 We call upon the federal government to establish a written policy that reaffirms the independence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to investigate crimes in which the government has its own interest as a potential or real party in civil litigation.

28 We call upon law schools in Canada to require all law students to take a course in Aboriginal people and the law, which includes the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.

30 We call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress in doing so.

38 We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in custody over the next decade.

39 We call upon the federal government to develop a national plan to collect and publish data on the criminal victimization of Aboriginal people, including data related to homicide and family violence victimization.

41 We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, to appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls. The inquiry's mandate would include:

- Investigation into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.
- Links to the intergenerational legacy of residential schools.

(COMPLETED)

*See the complete list of Calls to Action at trc.ca

PART 1 LEGACY

Child Welfare (#1-5)

ON THE SURFACE, it seems as though Canada has made significant progress towards meeting a number of the requirements set out in the Calls to Action concerning Child Welfare. Surface appearances, though, can often be misleading.

June 2019, for instance, saw the passage of what the government itself described as, “a new chapter in the history of Canada”—Bill C-92, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. While ostensibly “co-developed with Indigenous, provincial, and territorial partners” Bill C-92 ultimately falls far short of the kinds of fundamental changes laid out by the TRC in Calls to Action #1-5.

As the [Yellowhead Institute Special Report on Bill C-92](#) ultimately concluded, “while there are some strong elements of the legislation that will empower First Nations, there are limitations as well, which if left unaddressed, will perpetuate the status quo.”

One of the key shortcomings is a lack of any mechanism to oblige the funding of services for First Nations kids in a substantively equitable way that meets the needs of children and families.

This is particularly problematic given Canada’s repeated failures to fully implement the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal’s 2016 order (and subsequent orders) to cease discriminatory funding of First Nations child and family services. Since our analysis was published in March of 2019, there has been insufficient progress towards addressing these limitations meaning that, a year later, Call to Action #4 remains incomplete.

The same story has, in many ways, been repeated when it comes to Call to Action #3, which calls upon “all levels of government to fully implement Jordan’s Principle.” Although the Federal government has made a number of funding announcements which it argues will “ensure that First Nations children continue to have access to the services that they need,” the reality on the ground for Indigenous kids has looked much different, as was recently argued in this [Yellowhead Brief by Creezon Jamsees](#).

When we spoke to Dr. Cindy Blackstock (Gitksan First Nation), Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and Professor at McGill University, she had a blunt assessment of the reality versus rhetoric of government policies related to Jordan’s Principle.

The federal government has fought against Jordan’s Principle for over 15 years. Multiple legal orders have been required to force Canada to begin implementing Jordan’s Principle. While tens of thousands of children now benefit from Jordan’s Principle, it is important to understand that approximately 65% of the approved services are to achieve basic equality with other children. Moreover, Jordan’s Principle can only be accessed if you apply for it, meaning that First Nations families are only treated fairly by Canada if they apply for it and, even then, serious shortcomings remain in Canada’s processing of Jordan’s Principle requests. Overall there is no convincing evidence that Canada would have implemented Jordan’s Principle voluntarily. Any credit for this Call to Action falls to Jordan’s family and everyone who advocates strongly for the full implementation of Jordan’s Principle.

In the end, then—even with these signature policies and legislation—Canada is continuing to fail Indigenous kids. And, as Blackstock made clear to us, these issues are compounded by the lack of timely and accurate data.

The lack of a national child welfare data system erodes the ability to describe the situation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and families and to show their trajectories after contact with the child welfare system. Countries with similar jurisdictional child welfare models have national child welfare systems, including the United States, which has to manage data from Native American Tribes and 50 states. The lack of Canadian data means we have to rely on 2008 data from the Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) showing that First Nations children are 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care owing to poor housing, poverty, and caregiver substance misuse related to multi-generational trauma. The situation is aggravated by the federal government’s chronic inequitable funding for public services on reserve and data on Métis and Inuk children will hopefully be available once the CIS completes analysis of the 2018 data cycle.

This is the very deficit that Call to Action #2—which demands that Canada and the provinces publish annual reports on the number of Indigenous children in care compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts—was designed to address.

The fact that even this low hurdle has not been cleared after five years gives us dim hope that Canada is serious about meeting its commitments to completing these Calls to Action in a meaningful and lasting way.

As Blackstock aptly wrote in the [Globe and Mail in 2019](#), “Government proclamations of good intentions—and statements of reconciliation—must not shield them from a serious review of their actions. **Reconciliation is not what you say; it is what you do.**” [*Emphasis added*]

Education (#6-12)

WHEN THE TRC first published its Final Report in 2015, there were few areas where the systemic racism at the heart of Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples was more apparent than in the funding gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids. With funding growth having been capped at 2% since 1996 while the average funding for provincial and territorial schools increased by an average of 3.8% over those same years, it's no wonder that in 2016 First Nations kids were receiving **30% less education funding on average** than their Canadian counterparts. And it's no wonder that on-reserve schools were facing massive infrastructure deficits compared to non-Indigenous schools just down the road.

There has clearly been some progress since 2015. In 2016, the federal government announced an increase in \$2.6 billion over five years to close the funding gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids, in response specifically to Call to Action #8, which demands that the federal government, "eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves." At the time, however, they were widely criticized for **backloading more than \$800 million** to 2020-21 despite earlier promises to bridge the funding gap by 2019.

Since then, other significant changes have included the 2019 announcement of a so-called "new" funding model called the Interim Funding Approach (IFA) which **they described** as being "co-developed" with Indigenous stakeholders to provide, "sufficient, predictable, and sustainable funding and support strong student outcomes." But as Leslee White-Eye wrote in an **April 2019 Yellowhead Brief**, the model of "provincial comparability" being used as the basis for the IFA is a deeply flawed one that attempts to, "co-opt a formula meant for a mature system and transplant [it to] a First Nation context" without addressing a whole range of deep, structural issues unique to First Nations schools.

Perhaps one of the most serious problems with assessing Canada's progress towards completing these Calls to Action is the almost total absence of meaningful data on whether or not Canada has, indeed, closed the funding gap.

And this relates to Canada's failure to complete Call to Action #9, which calls upon the federal government to "prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people."

So far, Canada has refused to collect and publish this data.

A quick visit to Indigenous Services Canada's web page titled, "**Progress on investments in Kindergarten to Grade 12 education**," which was last updated in January 2019, contains mostly references to the 2016 Federal Budget. The fact that Canada has failed to provide the basic data necessary to assess the current status of the funding gap between provincially funded schools and First Nations schools brings into question the value of their promises in this area.

In the post-pandemic context, these inequities become starker. In a world where access to reliable Internet means access to education, Indigenous communities that lack infrastructure or capacity to deliver educational opportunities on-line must make do with far less than mainstream Canadian schools. As an example, in Eva's own community of Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, the community's school has reported **greater challenges** to addressing emergency remote teaching in a pandemic situation.

And Eva's community is not alone. As Maggie Wentz (Serpent River First Nation), prominent Indigenous lawyer and Partner at OKT LLP, **forcefully argued in September 2020**,

At a minimum, a safe return to school in person depends on classroom space, adequate teachers, and classrooms with good ventilation. For many First Nations, that kind of infrastructure has long been a distant dream. An Assembly of First Nations analysis released in June 2020 found a \$627 million capital deficit in the "immediate" category, for additions to existing schools alone (not new construction or teachers' residences), with a 15-year projected capital need of just over \$5 billion for schools, and even more for teachers' residences. Often, First Nations have mouldy portables and crowded classrooms, falling far from the ideal of spacious, well ventilated classrooms. The Shannen's Dream campaign has been advocating for 'safe and comfy' schools for First Nations children since 2008, and the campaign marches forward because of persistently poor school conditions. And even the most basic preventative measure against contracting COVID-19 — handwashing — remains unattainable or unsafe for those who lack clean tap water in their communities.

These ongoing inequities leave many Indigenous students with little to no promise for a quality education in an emergency remote learning situation. And the fact that the federal government waited until a week before the start of school in September before announcing pandemic funding for First Nations schools—and because that **funding was woefully inadequate**—First Nations children were left particularly vulnerable. The situation forced many parents and communities to make impossible decisions about whether it was safe to send their kids to school. And, once again, First Nations kids are paying the price for Canada's failure to act.

Language and Culture (#13-17)

AS WE'VE PREVIOUSLY STATED in last year's report, Call to Action #13 (Federal acknowledgment of Indigenous Language Rights) was completed with the 2019 passing of the *Indigenous Languages Act* which, itself, recognizes the right that Indigenous peoples have to their respective languages. And, to a certain extent, the legislation itself provides the structural foundation to implement Call to Action #14—which calls for Indigenous Languages Act based on the principles of preservation, treaty rights, sufficient funding that reflects the diversity of Indigenous languages, and Indigenous leadership in reclaiming them.

Despite the *Indigenous Languages Act* being passed, however, Call to Action #14 remains largely incomplete due to the fact that sufficient funding reflecting the diversity of Indigenous languages has not been addressed to date.

We spoke to Dr. Brandon Tehanyatari:ya'ks Martin, an Assistant Professor of Languages, Literatures, and Culture, Ryerson University who has over 10 years of experience working in Kanien'kéha adult immersion programs and is currently a Board Member of the Six Nations Language Commission. Martin described the continuing struggles of Indigenous language reclamation work and the lack of funding that language practitioners are dealing with,

Every year the people involved with Indigenous language programming have to wonder whether or not their programs will be funded... I know that at Six Nations specifically, the level of funding has stagnated... even though the demand on the funds through program development and number of people involved has increased exponentially.

Without funding to match the promises, many Indigenous language reclamation efforts can not be populated by language practitioners whose careers are made precarious by insufficient resources for pensions, benefits, and adequate pay. In this way, the Language and Culture Calls to Action continue to be largely performative.

Furthermore, and by comparison, there are significant discrepancies between funding Indigenous languages and French, evidenced by the recent funding announcement of \$10M to a Francophone school in Nunavut (a territory where Inuit represent 85% of the population and Francophones 2%). In a Tweet from Mélanie Joly, the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, celebrations of this investment into, "**the most northern francophone school in the world**" drew sharp criticism from Inuit and Indigenous peoples more broadly.

This criticism arose from the fact that there are currently no Inuktitut language immersion schools in the territory. More, in 2015 the breakdown in language funding in the territory was approximately, "\$4,000 per French-speaking person in Nunavut, and only \$40 per Inuit-language speaker." In 2020? **It's now \$8,200 per francophone speaker versus \$186 per Inuktitut speaker.** This is a measure of the progress on the TRC's language Calls to Action.

The **most recent estimate** for achieving even a bilingual educational system in Nunavut is 2039.

The same is true elsewhere, as well. Compare, for instance, the Government's **March announcement** that they had invested \$150,000 in funding, "for the development of an Inuvialuktun Language Immersion Program in Inuvik" in the Northwest Territories. While this funding is clearly welcome, what does it say when an Indigenous language immersion program in the North receives a tiny fraction—just 1.5%—of the funding that a Northern Francophone school is receiving in the same year?

Particularly when Indigenous language practitioners have to develop efficient, effective techniques of Indigenous language education to make due with meagre budgets, the severe underfunding of Indigenous languages continues to create barriers to meaningful reconciliation. As Martin made clear to us, "We are having to do more with less, and this certainly should not be the case when you have federal legislation in place that pledges support... to language preservation and funding."

Health (#18-24)

LIKE EDUCATION, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed Canada's lack of movement on the Health-related Calls to Action. During the first wave of the pandemic, precautions in Indigenous communities succeeded in keeping the virus at bay. But the second wave is hitting First Nations particularly hard. For example, at the time of this writing, one-third of the approximately 1,300 people in the fly-in Shamattawa First Nation in Northern Manitoba **have already tested positive for COVID-19**, and the military has been sent in to assist the community with the outbreak.

Overall, Manitoba provides a painful example of the higher risks COVID-19 presents to Indigenous communities. As of December 11, the CBC reported the five-day test positivity rate for First Nations was 25% compared to 13.8% for the province as a whole. The average age of First Nations deaths is approximately 66 compared to 83 for the rest of the province.

When we spoke with Dr. Renée Monchalain, an Anishinaabe/Métis Assistant Professor in the School of Public Health and Social Policy at the University of Victoria and Yellowhead Research Fellow, she was quick to point out the ways in which Canada's lack of action on Call to Action #20 means that we always had a skewed picture of the effects of COVID-19 on the majority of Indigenous peoples who live off-reserve and mostly in cities.

Even though over half of the Indigenous population in Canada lives within cities, the federal government does not collect data surrounding the prevalence of COVID-19 in our urban homelands. If Indigenous Peoples in urban settings were to contract COVID-19, where are we supposed to go? If anything is certain, it is that health services in Canada are racist, and are not safe for our community members.

As Monchalain made clear in our conversation, all of this points to the reality that we likely won't know the true impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous peoples until well after the pandemic is over. And by then, it will be too late to make a difference.

The dire need for Canada to comply with Calls to Action #22-24 have also been made clear in recent months by the tragic and horrific case of Joyce Echaquan, who livestreamed nurses taunting her with insults and racial slurs while she warned them that she had been administered a drug that she was allergic to. She died soon after the livestream was recorded.

While Indigenous people around the country responded with horror to Echaquan's death, few expressed surprise. As Nakuset, the executive director of the Montreal Native Women's Shelter, **told CTV**, these kinds of experiences are "heartbreakingly normal" for Indigenous people navigating the healthcare system. And the reality is that, since the TRC first released the Calls to Action in 2015, there have been no, "measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities"—as called for in Call to Action #19—let alone any meaningful structural changes that would challenge the systemic racism that Indigenous peoples experience when accessing health care services.

When we asked Monchalain to reflect on Canada's overall progress towards meeting the Calls to Action, her conclusions reflected our own.

Canada has barely scratched the surface of the TRC Health Calls to Action. Many health service providers have been treating cultural safety training as just a checkbox on their to-do list. But hanging up a painting by an Indigenous artist in your clinic is far from being enough. Health services and programs need to be Indigenous-led and Indigenous informed if we want to see any real change.

Until these changes happen, though, the reality is that Canada's ongoing failures to adequately respond to Calls to Action #18-24 will continue to cost the lives, health and well-being of Indigenous people across the country.

Justice (#25-42)

IN JANUARY, Public Safety Canada put out **a damning news release** outlining its almost total failure to address the issue of Indigenous overrepresentation in federal prisons. The release cites a recent investigation by Correctional Investigator of Canada, Dr. Ivan Zinger, which found that, "the proportion of Indigenous people behind bars has now surpassed 30%." This marks a significant increase since January 2016—just a month after the release of the TRC's Final Report—when the figure was a still shocking 25% of the federal prison population.

"At that time," Zinger writes, "my Office indicated that efforts to curb over-representation were not working." If they weren't working five years ago, it's clear they aren't working today.

Zinger even goes so far in his report to describe this increase in the population of Indigenous prisoners since 2016 as, "a deepening 'Indigenization' of Canada's correctional system." (We challenge readers to find a more disturbing use of the term Indigenization.)

It should be obvious, then, that Canada has made little to no progress towards completing the Calls to Action aimed at reforming the Justice system, with the notable exception Call to Action #41, which called upon Canada to launch a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls—an inquiry **whose own findings** have only reconfirmed the need for the kinds of fundamental, structural changes outlined by the TRC.

There are many areas of inaction that we could highlight here, but one of the most disturbing and disappointing failures is represented by the ongoing legal fight against the survivors of the notorious St. Anne's Indian Residential School. In Call to Action #29, the TRC urged Canada to "work collaboratively with plaintiffs not included in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to have disputed legal issues determined expeditiously on an agreed set of facts."

But as survivors of St. Anne's eventually learned, Canada had even been **withholding key information** from survivors of Federally recognized residential schools, even while these survivors sought compensation through the Independent Assessment Process. These materials included documents from an Ontario Provincial Police investigation into claims of abuse at the school.

According to a recent CBC report, Canada has spent **\$3.2 million fighting St. Anne's residential school survivors in court** since 2013. What's worse is that a recent British Columbia Supreme Court Decision **may see this key evidence destroyed** before St. Anne's survivors even have their day in court—a move which NDP MP Charlie Angus accurately described as being tantamount to the government, "knowingly participating in an obstruction of justice."

As St. Anne's survivor Evelyn Korkmaz **told reporters**, "This is not the definition of a reconciliation. Canada's actions need to match their words." We couldn't agree more.

PART 2

RECONCILIATION

“Education is what got us into this mess...but education is the key to reconciliation.”

– SENATOR MURRAY SINCLAIR

The Reconciliation Calls to Action comprise the majority of the completed calls, with a total of six Calls to Action completed—down from seven last year. These include:

- ▶ #48: Adoption of UNDRIP by Churches and faith groups
- ▶ #49: Rejection of the Doctrine of Discovery by churches and faith groups
- ▶ #72: Federal support for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation’s National Residential School Student Death Register
- ▶ #83: Reconciliation agenda for the Canada Council for the Arts
- ▶ #85: Reconciliation agenda for APTN
- ▶ #88: Long-term support from all levels of government for North American Indigenous Games

The following discussion will focus on six of the 17 subcategories, with check-ins and discussions of completed or soon-to-be completed Calls to Action.

RECONCILIATION CALLS TO ACTION

Reconciliation Calls to Action deal with 17 subcategories of measures that are meant to a) advance inclusion of Indigenous peoples in various sectors of society; b) educate Canadian society at large about Indigenous peoples, residential schools, and reconciliation; and c) establish practices, policies, and actions that affirm Indigenous Rights. Here, we share an overview of the categories and select examples of calls from this category.*

CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS AND THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE #43-44

43 We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation.

ROYAL PROCLAMATION AND COVENANT OF RECONCILIATION #45-47

SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT PARTIES AND UNDRIP #48-49

49 We call upon all religious denominations and faith groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*. (COMPLETE)

EQUITY FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM #50-52

51 We call upon the Government of Canada, as an obligation of its fiduciary responsibility, to develop a policy of transparency by publishing legal opinions it develops and upon which it acts or intends to act, in regard to the scope and extent of Aboriginal and Treaty rights.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RECONCILIATION #53-56

54 We call upon the Government of Canada to provide multi-year funding for the National Council for Reconciliation to ensure that it has the financial, human, and technical resources required to conduct its work, including the endowment of a National Reconciliation Trust to advance the cause of reconciliation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS #57

CHURCH APOLOGIES AND RECONCILIATION #58-61

58 We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada.

EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION #62-65

63 We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

YOUTH PROGRAMS #66

MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES #67-70

MISSING CHILDREN AND BURIAL INFORMATION #71-76

72 We call upon the federal government to allocate sufficient resources to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to allow it to develop and maintain the National Residential School Student Death Register established by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (COMPLETE)

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION #77-78

77 We call upon provincial, territorial, municipal, and community archives to work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and to provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. (COMPLETE)

COMMEMORATION #79-83

MEDIA AND RECONCILIATION #84-86

85 We call upon the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, as an independent non-profit broadcaster with programming by, for, and about Aboriginal peoples, to support reconciliation, including but not limited to:

- Continuing to provide leadership in programming and organizational culture that reflects the diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples.
- Continuing to develop media initiatives that inform and educate the Canadian public, and connect Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. (COMPLETE)

SPORTS AND RECONCILIATION #87-91

88 We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel. (COMPLETE)

BUSINESS AND RECONCILIATION #92

NEWCOMERS TO CANADA #93-94

*See the complete list of Calls to Action at trc.ca

PART 2

RECONCILIATION

Canadian Governments and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (#43-44)

AS WE WERE drafting this report, Justin Trudeau's government tabled Bill C-15, the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) Act on December 3, 2020. Given that the TRC itself described UNDRIP as, "the appropriate framework for reconciliation in twenty-first-century Canada" and argued that "it is essential that all levels of government endorse and implement the *Declaration*" this clearly marks an important shift in Federal policy. Without UNDRIP, after all, implementing most of the Calls to Action in a meaningful way would likely prove to be impossible.

Although we are cautiously optimistic about this attempt to enshrine key elements of UNDRIP into Canadian law, we are also fully aware that there is no guarantee that this bill will pass—as it is preceded by the notable [rejection of Romeo Saganash's Bill C-262 by the Senate](#).

We are also fully aware of the current Bill C-15's many potential flaws and limitations, particularly in light of the recent one year anniversary of British Columbia's similarly flawed *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA). After all, BC is the province where—even after the DRIPA was in place including free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)—the RCMP violently evicted Wet'suwet'en from the path of a natural gas pipeline that they did not consent to.

As the recent Yellowhead [Special Report](#) makes clear, with reference to this example, it seems unlikely that this model of implementation will offer the substantial and substantive changes necessary to bring Canadian law into line with the UN Declaration. And, as Hayden King argues in the report, perhaps the most important lesson of BC's DRIPA has been "the glacial speed of implementation." King cautions, "considering that Canada modeled their legislation on BC...we can expect more of the same at the national level."

As the actions of 1492 Land Back Lane in Haudenosaunee territory and the violence of white settler lobster fishers against Mi'kmaq fishermen exercising their constitutional right to a "moderate livelihood" fishery have shown: the current status quo of inaction and "glacial implementation" of UNDRIP is not going to cut it. Indigenous people have been patient for long enough and will, as recent cases demonstrate, enforce their own versions of consent.

Education for Reconciliation (#62-65)

AS SENATOR MURRAY SINCLAIR noted in 2015, "Education is what got us into this mess...but education is the key to reconciliation." The Calls to Action on education mentioned above in "Legacy" are one aspect of this, another is the concept of education for reconciliation. To that end, we spoke with Dr. Jennifer Brant (Kanien'kehá:ka, Assistant Professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto), who outlined the continued challenges with education for reconciliation. In her work teaching the next generations of educators, she shared insights on some of the challenges in equipping teachers with the skills to address education,

In my experience teaching Indigenous Requirement Courses in teacher education, reactions range from willingness to resistance to learn and this is also associated with feelings of unpreparedness. Teacher candidates will complete a 12 session course and then be expected to teach curricula related to treaties, residential schools, and Indigenous histories in their own classrooms. One course is not enough; especially when we consider the instructional time required to establish assurances for avoiding the harm of superficial reconciliation and safeguarding against cultural appropriation. We also need a structured and effective network that seamlessly connects Education for Reconciliation in teacher education programs, with ministries of education and school boards. This connection is missing.

The inaction on, and in many cases, resistance to education for reconciliation in a broader Canadian context is indicative of the ongoing systemic racism and anti-Indigenous sentiment that is deep within the roots of this country.

Perhaps the most disturbing example of this was the recent leak of the draft school curriculum developed by Jason Kenney's United Conservative Party government in Alberta. [According to reports](#) this curriculum would leave out lessons about residential schools in kindergarten to Grade 4 because the topic is "too sad" for young children and would be better left until Grade 9 where it could be taught alongside other examples of what they describe as "harsh schooling."

It's no wonder, then, that Canada has failed to make much progress on—let alone complete—Call to Action #62, which directs all levels of government to develop and fund Indigenous content across all levels of education. As Brant stated, "Given the integral role education holds in reconciliation—a role that will shape public knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes and filter into the other Calls to Action, you would think education would be among the first Calls to Action to be addressed. Unfortunately, what we have seen is a lot of inaction."

Reconciliation, after all, is a two-way street. Without a systematic commitment to ensuring that all sectors of government, all parts of society, and all Canadians at large have access to the ability to learn about the history of residential schools, this will be a continued exercise in repeating the failures of Canada to right their wrongs.

As we have found, the negligence and lack of political will to take responsibility for most of the Calls to Action (but particularly in the area of education for reconciliation) has led a situation where reconciliation is merely used as a sort of window dressing to justify Canada's self-image as a just and multicultural society as well as a champion of human rights.

Museums and Archives (#67-70)

THE THEFT OF Indigenous knowledges and objects under colonial plunder has long been an area of Indigenous resistance and activism. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been just a more recent demand for accountability to Museums and Archives. 25 years ago a joint task force by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) released **several recommendations** to address the "historical problems" in representation of Indigenous peoples, as well as guidelines for the repatriation of human remains and cultural patrimony to Indigenous peoples.

Those demands for accountability continue today. In the Yellowhead Institute's Special Report published earlier this year, "**A Culture of Exploitation: 'Reconciliation' and Institutions of Canadian Art**" Lindsay Nixon (Cree-Métis-Saulteaux writer, curator, and Assistant Professor at Ryerson University's Department of English) provides an in-depth expert discussion of the ongoing structural barriers to meaningful Indigenous-led change that remain in the fields of museology, archives, and the arts at large.

As Nixon states in their report, "To date, no museums encompassed under the CMA have released reports or statements regarding how their institutions have ensured compliance with the recommendations." Reconciliation, when it comes to Canadian Museums and Archives, appears synonymous with inaction.

Missing Children & Burial Information (#73-76)

WITH SUFFICIENT INVESTMENT and prioritization on the part of the federal government, churches, and other parties to the settlement agreement, these Calls to Action could actually be completed in the very near future.

While we were glad to see the completion of Call to Action #72 last year with the unveiling of the **National Residential School Memorial Register** by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, there is still much to be done. After all, many communities (including Eva's own community of Chippewas of the Thames First Nation where Mt. Elgin Indian Industrial School once stood) still deal with the ongoing uncertainty of what to do with children's unmarked graves of former residential schools.

When we spoke with Dr. Kisha Supernant, a Métis archaeologist and Director of the Institute of Prairie and Indigenous Archaeology at the University of Alberta, we were relieved to hear that while none of these Calls to Action yet have been met, there has been some progress in this area. She stated that, "not only has the recent designation of residential schools as a National Historic Event created new options for communities to preserve and manage the sites of former residential schools, there has been some behind the scenes movement towards completing Calls to Action #73-76."

Supernant noted the significance of the work to identify possible burial locations, emphasizing the role communities must play in deciding the appropriate way to meet these Calls to Action, with careful attention to trauma and ceremony. She acknowledged the need for national coordination on techniques employed by expert researchers who have already done individual projects with communities and schools in different parts of the country.

Completion of these Calls to Action means moving forward to provide communities with the resources and capacity to both identify and manage sites where there are still unmarked children's graves, and to (where appropriate and desired by community) return these children home.

Commemoration (#79-83)

OF THE CALLS TO ACTION surrounding Commemoration of residential school Survivors, only one has been completed: #83 - Reconciliation agenda for the Canada Council for the Arts. Lindsay Nixon notes that in the Liberal Government's 2017 Federal Budget, a commitment of \$8.4 billion over five years was allocated to CBC and Canada Council for the Arts to, "invigorate Indigenous culture."

Subsequently, Canada Council for the Arts established a funding stream called "**Creating, Knowing, and Sharing**." Yet, several concerns have since arisen from the actions of non-Indigenous arts administrators. When we spoke with Lindsay Nixon on this topic, they remarked,

[T]he directive that this funding could be used by non-Indigenous arts administrators to undertake reconciliation resulted in established, non-Indigenous led and composed institutions 'collaborating' with Indigenous contract workers to attain 'Reconciliation' funding. What resulted was a lot of representation on gallery walls, and the same toxic, white-coded cultures within art itself.

We share similar concerns to Nixon; in the few cases where reconciliation purportedly occurs on a national scale, the non-Indigenous administrators and institutions enacting these Calls to Action end up marginalizing, tokenizing, and exploiting Indigenous peoples in their process. It is a maddening irony that reconciliation efforts ultimately harm Indigenous peoples.

Sports and Reconciliation (#87-91)

AFTER LISTENING TO criticisms of our (and CBC Beyond 94's) decision to mark Call to Action #90 as "complete," we have decided that it needs to be moved back to the "incomplete" column.

Call to Action #90, for instance, demands that Canada to implements a number of specific policies:

We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing:

1. In collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples.
2. An elite athlete development program for Aboriginal athletes.
3. Programs for coaches, trainers, and sports officials that are culturally relevant for Aboriginal peoples.
4. Anti-racism awareness and training programs.

Our original rationale for marking it complete was based on Canada's 2018 budget announcement of \$47.5 million in funding for Indigenous Sport-for-development programming over five years on a renewable basis as well as its ongoing funding for the Aboriginal Sports Circle, who has led the way nationally on many of these issues since 1995.

But as Dr. Janice Forsyth—member of the Fisher River Cree Nation, and Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Indigenous Studies at Western University in London, Ontario—made clear to us in a recent conversation, significant stumbling blocks for Indigenous sport in Canada remain unaddressed,

One critical missing piece right now is the absence of a national policy for Indigenous sport. Seventeen years [after the 2003 passage of the Physical Activity and Sport Act] there remains no national policy specific to Indigenous people, especially youth. This means mainstream governments and sport organizations at every level in Canada can move ahead with their own plans for 'reconciliation' without having to be accountable to a larger vision, led by Indigenous people.

While the funding announcement was initially promising (or, at least, so we thought), Forsyth notes that the government actually chose to, "channel this money to an international, non-Indigenous, non-profit organization with already considerable resources to enhance its development model, rather than funding Indigenous sport organizations directly." That organization is the well-known global charity Right To Play. They were initially granted the bulk of these funds, leaving Indigenous organizations in the cold. Under fierce criticism from Indigenous sport organizations, Forsyth told us, the federal government made some key changes to the program.

By the time the program rolled out the following summer, under the name "Sport for Social Development in Indigenous Communities," it had undergone a significant shift: no longer was Right to Play the sole intended beneficiary of the multi-million-dollar announcement. Instead, the program had been split into two streams, with one funding stream supporting existing regional Indigenous sport organizations in Canada, and the other stream supporting "Indigenous governments, communities, and organizations" as well as "delivery organizations working in collaboration with Indigenous communities."

Forsyth made clear that while this was a major improvement, significant problems remain.

It creates fierce competition for limited dollars from non-Indigenous entities that, in many cases, have demonstrated their inability to collaborate meaningfully with Indigenous groups. There is also the fact that projects in either stream still need to address Right to Play's development model; not only does this eclipse Indigenous ideas about development, it circumscribes what they can imagine for sport.

This model has meant that many of the organizations that manage to get these funds are, like Right to Play, not required to maintain meaningful, long-term relationships with Indigenous communities. They instead provide "parachute" services where programs are offered on a short-term basis, but no reliable infrastructure or renewable resources are offered to sustain these programs in community on a long-term basis.

This a prime example of what we see as a growing and disturbing phenomenon in the area of reconciliation programs, with huge amounts of funding going to these kinds of predatory, settler-run non-profits where Indigenous communities often have to, "redirect their time and energy to 'fix' what has been developed" as Forsyth tells us. What's more, budget allocations make it so that Indigenous organizations are in direct competition with non-Indigenous non-profit organizations for reconciliation monies. As Forsyth argues, "This goes against the spirit of reconciliation. This is merely one example of why a national policy to guide government and organizational interests in Indigenous sport is desperately needed, and why Call to Action #90 has yet to begin."

Forsyth also made it clear to us that there were ongoing challenges with the way Canada is addressing Call to Action #88, which calls upon "all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games [NAIG], including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel."

The Federal Government did provide funding for the 2017 and 2020 games (the latter of which have been postponed due to COVID-19) while also promising long term funding going forward. But Forsyth points out the funding for the games has always been inadequate to meet the needs of Indigenous communities, particularly those in rural, remote, and isolated areas.

Athletes, parents, coaches, and organizers must find ways to raise additional monies to participate, which is a significant expectation coming from a portion of the population that, because of ongoing colonialism, already struggles to meet basic needs. Some provincial and territorial governments are not supportive at all and provide little to no funding for youth to access the games. It means some kids go without lunches, without team uniforms, without proper equipment, etc. This is the side of the NAIG you won't find in media because it detracts from the feel-good story the NAIG is meant to provide Canadians. So, to say government supported the NAIG and therefore Call to Action #88 is complete, obscures the truth and prevents Indigenous sport leaders from providing the kinds of supports and opportunities Indigenous youth need and want.

While we have decided to tentatively keep Call to Action #88 as “complete” in the short term, we believe it will need to be moved back into the “incomplete” column unless significant changes are made at the federal and provincial levels to ensure that NAIG begins to receive the levels of funding necessary to ensure that the games are successful, safe, and accessible to all Indigenous peoples.

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Survivors of residential
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**What we need is
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hold Canada to account
for these failures."**

- EVA JEWELL & IAN MOSBY

2020 FINDINGS

LAST YEAR, we concluded that there were three main barriers to the completion of the Calls to Action:

- 1) a vision among policy makers of the “public interest” as generally excluding Indigenous peoples;
- 2) the deep rooted paternalistic attitudes of politicians, bureaucrats, and other policy makers; and
- 3) the ongoing legacy and reality of structural anti-Indigenous racism.

While all of these barriers remain and continue to hinder progress this year, we have also identified a number of notable patterns based on our research and our discussion with experts in a range of fields this year.

Predatory Non-Profits & Exploitative Settler Institutions

As Forsyth and Nixon have noted, not-for-profit organizations and Canadian institutions are advancing predatory and exploitative practices in their reconciliation agendas. Since “reconciliation” is taking place in environments that have not addressed colonial, paternalistic attitudes, the result is exploitation of Indigenous practitioners and communities as evidenced in Nixon’s extensive report that describes reconciliation as a “*culture of exploitation*,” and as harm by Forsyth when it comes to reconciliation in the realm of sport. The use of reconciliation as just yet another funding source by non-Indigenous peoples and organizations at the expense of their Indigenous counterparts needs to stop.

Insufficient Resources

There are no shortage of promises made by Federal and Provincial governments. Yet, with ongoing and rampant funding inequities, there can never be meaningful reconciliation. As we found last year, Indigenous peoples wronged by the federal government are in conflict with “the public interest,” *owing in part to the fact that these wrongs require billions to be paid out in compensation*. These billions are perceived to be taken from Canadians’ programs and services (or the public interest).

Reconciliation in 2074?

In 2019, we noted that at the rate of 2.25 calls completed each year, we could only hope to see substantial change over nearly four decades (we projected the completion of Calls to Action to be in 2057). Unfortunately, with the regression of this year’s reconciliation update, it could take much longer, at least another generation.

That said, although we’ve provided extensive critiques and ample evidence to think otherwise, we point to these Calls to Action that could, based on our research, be realistically completed in the next year if there’s sufficient political will:

- ▶ **#15: Indigenous Language Commissioner:** Canada began a *consultation process* on the appointment in March 2020 and a hiring committee was recently formed
- ▶ **#53: National Council for Reconciliation:** The Interim Board of Directors submitted their Final Report in June 2018
- ▶ **#54: Multi-year funding for the National Council for Reconciliation** (to accompany the creation of National Council for Reconciliation)
- ▶ **#80: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:** *Bill C-5* was introduced in September 2020
- ▶ **#94: Amend the Citizenship Act:** *Bill C-8* has passed first reading as of December 10, 2020

CONCLUSION

THE 5TH ANNIVERSARY of the Final Report of the TRC is a significant milestone. But as we have experienced time and again in the past (*with 1000s of recommendations over the past 30 years unfulfilled*), it is unsurprising and decidedly on brand for Canada that the “*most important relationship*” with Indigenous peoples has been abandoned during the pandemic (and arguably, has never been tended to in a meaningful way).

Where “reconciliation” is attempted, we have found in our discussions with Indigenous experts and practitioners that it is non-Indigenous organizations who take advantage of Federal Government budget lines and they are often exploitative. Reconciliation as a budget line item pads these institutions who enact temporary project-based initiatives that skirt the institutional change that reconciliation demands. In this way, money earmarked for *reconciliation* often results in little more than *recolonization*. As one of the Indigenous experts we spoke with put it rather succinctly: “We’re not just failing. We are regressing, back to before the TRC.”

Is reconciliation dead, then? Perhaps, as Jesse Wente has stated, it was never truly alive.

But that doesn’t mean we should stop fighting for Canada to live up to its promises to complete the 94 Calls to Action. They are, after all, the bare minimum that Canada needs to do in order to atone for what the TRC itself concluded was an attempted cultural genocide lasting for the majority of the country’s history.

Canada owes it to Survivors of residential schools to do better. And we’ve had enough of the crocodile tears and empty promises of the past five years. What we need is meaningful action and we’ll continue trying to hold Canada to account for these failures.



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