



BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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BCAFN SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
March 4 & 5, 2026
In person & online via Zoom

Resolution 10/2026

SUBJECT: CALL FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES DESIGNATION FOR HEALTH AND CULTURAL SERVICES FOR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS AND INTERGENERATIONAL SURVIVORS

MOVED BY: KUKPI7 HELEN HENDERSON, TSQÉSCENĀ FIRST NATION

SECONDED BY: CHIEF MARIAH CHARLESON, HESQUIAHT FIRST NATION

DECISION: CARRIED

WHEREAS:

- A. Residential School Survivors' support organizations support First Nations that have been directly or indirectly impacted by Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and colonial systems to attain spiritual, emotional, cultural and physical healing that sustains their wellness and that of future generations;
- B. the emphasis on culture and culturally specific methods of dealing with complex trauma from the residential school system embodies traditional, holistic and First Nations responses which come from First Nations themselves. These services have paved the way for the expansion of First Nations-led health and cultural services, assisting First Nations for a variety of purposes;
- C. the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), implemented in 2007, stands as one of the largest class-action settlements in Canadian history. Its primary purpose has been to address the harms caused by the residential school system, which operated for over a century and affected generations of First Nations across Canada. The IRSSA established a range of health and cultural support services for Survivors and their families, including the Indian Residential

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Schools Resolution Health Program. These supports aimed to facilitate healing, promote cultural revitalization, and address intergenerational impacts;

- D. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) funds a network of supports primarily delivered through contribution agreements. In British Columbia, there are 10 projects which have been funded to date, the largest and highest profile are the Tsow-Tun Le Lum and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS). However, this program is now facing elimination since there is no formal commitment to extend funding beyond March 31, 2026, as the IRSSA did not establish funding for these programs on a permanent basis;
- E. essential service designation is outlined in the *Public Service Labour Relations Act*, and identifies services necessary to protect public health, safety and security. Essential service designation confirms stable, long-term funding to ensure reliable service delivery. In recent years, First Nations and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) have called for expanding essential service designation to areas such as First Nations Police Services on reserve due to informal and unpredictable funding agreements that risk the disruption of service for First Nations organizations;
- F. the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration), which the government of Canada has adopted without qualification, and, has alongside the government of BC committed to implementing, affirms:
Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions
Article 21 (1): Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
Article 24 (2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view of achieving progressively the full realization of this right;
- G. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action states that,
#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 centers to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual

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harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centers in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

#23: 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;

#22: We call upon those who can effect change within 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;

- H. the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' (National Inquiry) Calls for Justice 3.1, 3.2 and 3.6 call upon all levels of government to prioritize the unique needs of First Nations health and wellness that are accessible and culturally appropriate, while ensuring substantive equality of permanent funding for First Nations-led health services;
- I. the Final Report on the Missing and Disappeared Indigenous Children and Unmarked Burials in Canada, released by the Independent Special Interlocutor, Kimberly Murray, underscores the critical need for First Nations-led healing and health care for Survivors and their descendants, and calls for equitable-reform and long-term investment to ensure the permanent access of these services;
- J. AFN Resolution 24/2021, Call for the Permanency of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program, calls on Canada to affirm its commitment to reconciliation by establishing a permanent and enhanced version of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program, to meet the complex needs of IRS Survivors and their families, including the provision of appropriate healing support to address the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma;
- K. these health and cultural services have recently become subject to cycles of short-term extensions, frequently realized at or near the end of the fiscal year. This uncertainty has negatively impacted support organizations to provide these services due to the inability for long-term assurance of funding;
- L. the current fiscal approach for Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) focuses on essential services as the basis for priority funding. Currently, organizations such as the Tsawtun Lelum Treatment Centre and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS) are not recognized as an essential service;
- M. the IRSSS reported a substantial cut in funding for the next fiscal year, which risks a disruption of critical, lifesaving services for First Nations in BC; and

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- N. IRS Survivors, Intergenerational Survivors and all First Nations continue to navigate the legacy of the residential school system, orchestrated as a colonial genocide to displace and disarm First Nations of their language, culture and inherent title and rights. First Nations today continue to face marginalization as a result of these colonial policies.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call on all levels of government to declare all health and cultural services for IRS Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors to be classified an essential service;
2. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call on Canada to fulfill the legislative and international obligation to address the critical and unique needs of First Nations by ensuring the permanent availability of health and cultural supports to uphold First Nations wellness holistically;
3. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call on ISC and CIRNAC to conduct a review of their obligations from recent class action settlements related to residential schools, day schools and Indian hospitals, and assure that health and cultural supports remain available for claimants on a permanent basis; and
4. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly direct the Regional Chief and BCAFN staff to advocate in favour of equitable, sustainable and permanent funding to First Nations organizations who administer health and cultural services for IRS Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors and capital infrastructure funding.

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