

June 21, 2017

Hello all,

It is becoming increasingly evident that Canadians are adept at dismissing history they don't want to acknowledge or reconcile. The 150 years of Canada celebration is being showcased as a commemoration of Canada's history and all of its glory by the federal government spending half a billion dollars on festivities and advertising. The truth is, 2017 also marks 150 years of the continued colonization of the first peoples' of this great land. This is a history of social injustice that has led to long-term health and social impacts for the Indigenous communities across our nation, including higher rates of poverty and incarceration, and lower health outcomes. Far too many Canadians know little or nothing about this dark colonial history. This stark lack of historical knowledge has serious consequences for our country and its citizens. The intergenerational trauma and pain that persists today for many members of our community needs to be meaningfully addressed and healing needs to be supported, in order for the word 'reconciliation' to hold any value beyond hollow promises. Without full reconciliation, we will not be able to say we have ever walked the good path with Indigenous people. We have a long road to walk. A road to deepened respect for, and understanding of, Indigenous communities, cultures, and their needs for health and wellbeing.



Murray Sinclair - a Canadian Senator, former judge, First Nations lawyer, and chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission - recently reminded Canadians that the first step in reconciliation is the acknowledgement of, and atonement for the truth. We must actively work to unlearn the history many of us have been taught in school, a history where the Canadian government "saved" the Indigenous communities through their residential schools and harmful policies. Our true history includes genocide, the creation of reserves, restricting First Nations from leaving reserves without explicit permission from Indian agents, punishing children in residential schools for speaking their own languages and making it difficult for them to maintain relationships with their families and cultures, forbidding First Nations from forming political organizations, and many other brutal and long-lasting truths. We must each understand and address our collective history, starting first with the stories of the land you live, work, and learn on.

The dismantling of the systems of colonial oppression is the second step in meaningful reconciliation. Rather than taking a benevolent, passive approach, we must adopt structural changes that decolonize systems. Systems that are here to serve *all* of our population, and not benefitting only those who do not feel the effects



of racism because of the privilege they hold. Indigenous people are in a position of inferior power, inferior economic status, and problematic social conditions due to the government's actions over last 150 years. We must honour the contrast and dualities in their needs due to this unjust disadvantage, and work to dismantle systems working against them.

The Guelph CHC recognizes that intergenerational mistrust exists between Indigenous peoples and the health care system, influenced by the structural failures that the Indigenous community members and their ancestors have experienced. We will seek to understand how to reconcile this history, by endeavoring to build stronger and healthier, trusting relationships. We will build on our solidarity and allyship, and work together towards nurturing a place of healing and belonging for the local Metis, Inuit and First Nations community. We will continue to strive to be humble in our learning, and collectively work towards reversing the hollowness of the word 'reconciliation'. In late 2016, the Guelph CHC received new funding for an Indigenous Healing and Wellness coordinator. We are incredibly grateful that Jennifer Antler is in this role and, along with an advisory committee, is self-determining what is needed, where the health and wellbeing priorities lie, and how we will get there together.

We urge you, when 'celebrating' this year's 150, to be mindful of what this really marks. Be courageous in your actions of reconciliation and walk in solidarity with the Indigenous members of our community. Some places to start include reviewing the National Centre's Truth and Reconciliation website and resources, including the 94 Calls to Action, following Indigenous news and becoming informed, learning the true history of Canada, having discussions with your families, friends, co-workers, and community members about what role each of us can play in reconciliation, and researching and understanding how to be a responsible, respectful ally.

Respectfully,

On behalf of the Leadership Team of at the Guelph CHC