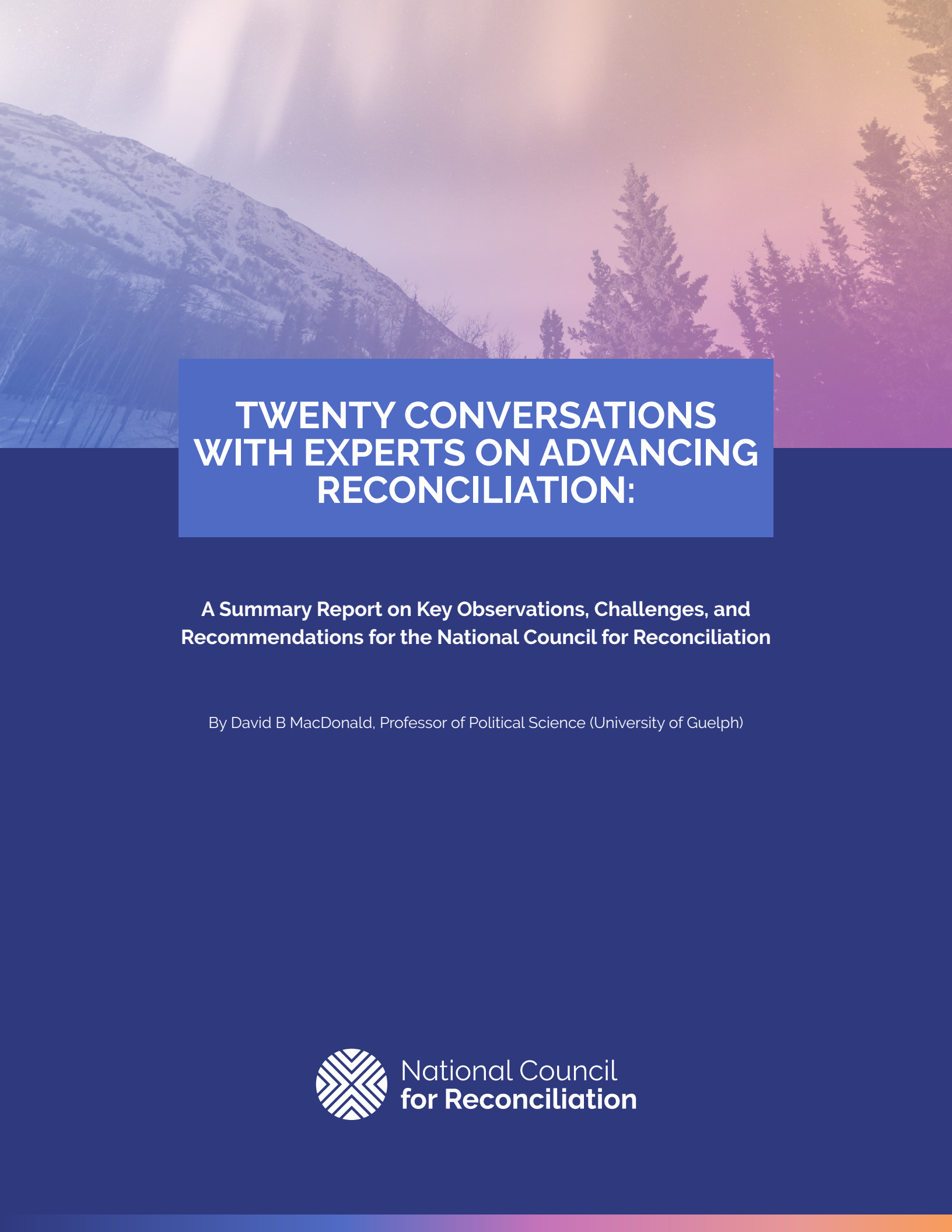




TWENTY CONVERSATIONS WITH EXPERTS ON ADVANCING RECONCILIATION:

**A Summary Report on Key Observations, Challenges, and
Recommendations for the National Council for Reconciliation**

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**National Council
for Reconciliation**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This academic report summarizes key insights from 20 Indigenous and settler experts on the current state of reconciliation in Canada, 11 years after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final reports. It is divided into three parts: first, focusing on some of the positive achievements in reconciliation; second, highlighting a selection of challenges impeding progress; and third, concluding with some recommendations for the National Council for Reconciliation.

Experts report some meaningful progress on the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, but also stagnation and rollback in many cases, as well as new challenges on the horizon. The report begins with some of the positives: normative shifts, including greater public awareness of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, their histories and cultures in general, and, in particular, the legacies of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS). Experts report wider use of land acknowledgements, positive initiatives at the local/municipal levels, active engagement by civil society, and generational improvements in knowledge and openness to reconciliation among school-age, university, and college students. Schools and universities are advancing curriculum reform and Indigenous-led research at different rates. Funding bodies are increasingly prioritizing Indigenous Knowledge and research. There have been positive changes to the legislative architecture, including the formation of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee (ICPC), federal and British Columbia implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), passage of the federal *Indigenous Languages Act*, recognition of genocide in the Indian Residential School system, and an official apology for the killing of qimmiit (sled dogs) with compensation.¹ The TRC also laid the basis for subsequent inquiries (as recommended in its Calls to Action), specifically the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and the Office of the Special Interlocutor on Missing Children and Unmarked Burials (OSI). The experts conclude in their interviews that knowledge of settler colonialism, systemic violence, and the intergenerational legacies of the Indian Residential Schools has increased markedly since 2015.²

However, there are major challenges in implementing the TRC's vision of reconciliation. Governments, churches, and civil society organizations have primarily focused on "soft" or symbolic measures such as commemorations, land acknowledgments, forms of cultural recognition, and concern with equality on terms often defined by settlers. Education about reconciliation remains uneven, and there is pushback in many parts of the country. An active denialist movement, certainly present during the tenure of the TRC, has now become more organized and virulent. Among all orders of government,

1 See: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/nunavik-sled-dog-slaughter-federal-compensation-1.7384345>.

2 For a recent survey from Environics with quantitative data on increased awareness, see: https://environicsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/ENV_COT25_Canadians-on-Reconciliation-and-Relations-with-Indigenous-Peoples.pdf.



there has been reluctance to embrace "hard" rights involving the return of stolen Indigenous Lands, self-determination, and genuine Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Treaty Rights and inherent Indigenous Rights have been, in many cases, subordinated to an agenda of "economic reconciliation," focused on resource extraction, which sets aside the Treaty Rights and the health of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples on their Territories.

Experts also note problems of chronic underfunding and the sunseting or cancellation of programs, highlighting areas such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, missing and disappeared children and unmarked burials, Indigenous language revitalization, Jordan's Principle, and health services in general. These cuts worsen existing inequities in areas such as healthcare, housing, education, child welfare, and justice, including rising problems of Indigenous over-incarceration. Experts identify persistent problems with the federal and provincial governments' failure to collect and publish data on the above areas. Without transparency and regular reporting, evaluating progress towards reconciliation is extremely difficult.

Experts have many recommendations for the Council, whose independent, Indigenous-led operations are crucial to advancing reconciliation. Experts are clear that the Council must display leadership and bold vision. It must promote national conversations about reconciliation and work with all orders of government to achieve concrete results and to document and encourage best practices. It must help construct robust measurement and reporting systems; establish Indigenous-defined benchmarks for evaluation; and work with the media to foster understanding and positive change. The Council must counter denialism and promote education at all levels and for all people in Canada, including newcomers. It must advocate for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, communities, and organizations to promote self-determination on Indigenous terms, including in government, healthcare, and education; through language revitalization; economic prosperity; the return of Indigenous Lands; and the restoration of Indigenous justice systems. It must work to press the government to restore funding for all Indigenous services and ensure that funding is reinstated for the crucial work of locating missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, preventing ongoing violence against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, and for the search and recovery work related to missing and disappeared children. It must promote widespread awareness of the need to preserve Survivor records from the Independent Assessment Process (IAP), which are scheduled to be destroyed in 2027.

The Council must be open to evolving definitions of reconciliation that reflect changing times and must be willing to ground its understandings in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis-defined needs and visions. Reconciliation must also integrate the MMIWG Calls for Justice and OSI obligations alongside the Calls to Action. The Council should highlight best practices across all orders of government and serve as a strong, independent guide for all Canadians on how reconciliation can be achieved.



INTRODUCTION



What is the status of reconciliation in Canada 11 years after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final reports?³ This summary report is the outcome of interviews with 20 Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, community leaders, and practitioners who are experts on various aspects of reconciliation. This report represents only a small proportion of the many experts across the country with insight into these crucial matters. The author is grateful to these learned colleagues for sharing their time and expertise in engaging with the status of reconciliation. They have all provided constructive critiques and suggestions for how Canada can move forward in an era where reconciliation has advanced neither as quickly nor as effectively as many expected.

This report synthesizes key themes and divides them into three main areas:

- The first part assesses some of the more positive legacies of reconciliation since the TRC final reports in 2015. Many experts identified progress in some areas while also noting a rollback in others.
- The second part looks at some of the challenges that arose and persisted during the same period. This part also provides suggestions and recommendations for how problems largely created by the federal government can be remedied. It is also stressed here that other orders of provincial, territorial and municipal governments must also be willing to do their part. The TRC's Calls to Action offer guidance to governments and all sectors of Canadian society to act, reinforcing that reconciliation is a collective and shared responsibility.
- The third and final part looks at the roles the Council can play going forward. Experts were broadly hopeful about the Council's potential to play a leadership role in advancing reconciliation and in holding all orders of government to account: federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal. They stressed that the Council's independence and ability to report publicly without interference will be essential to its credibility and long-term impact.

METHODOLOGY

Working with the National Council for Reconciliation, the author compiled a list of potential interviewees and contacted them for prospective interviews. Experts were selected for their recognized expertise in various aspects of Indigenous Rights and reconciliation, and interviews took place between 16 March and 23 April 2026.

3 The TRC Reports can be accessed here: <https://nctr.ca/publications-and-reports/reports/#trc-reports>.



The methodology employed here was "purposive sampling," where interviewees were selected who were "especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest." Also important was their "ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner."⁴ Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) were rigorously adhered to in this study. Of the experts who agreed to be interviewed, 14 are Indigenous, 6 are settlers, 14 are women, and 6 are men. The author is a male settler of mixed Indo-Trinidadian and Scottish origin. Four experts contacted by the author were unable to participate due to other commitments. Unfortunately, no Inuit experts participated in the interview process, although the author benefited from Inuit guidance in drafting this report and seeks to mitigate this omission by including secondary source material from Inuit experts, organizations, and studies. This academic report is an inaugural summary, and the hope is to have a more complete representation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and perspectives.

Within the report, Indigenous affiliation, if any, as well as institutional affiliation, are noted in (round brackets) initially. Thereafter, only the last name is used. Short biographies of the author and all contributors are located at the end of this report. This summary covers key themes and recommendations from several hundred pages of transcribed conversations. This is not a report card on the Calls to Action, nor does it replicate the type of systematic analysis found on the Indigenous Watchdog website.⁵ The background to these discussions was the political and economic uncertainty in which we live, due in part to political changes south of the border. Participants were aware that the new federal government, since April 2025, has maintained some continuity while also bringing new perspectives and policies towards First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and Indigenous Rights. This has involved billions in cuts and many sunsetted programs; that is, programs intentionally phased out or terminated. Indigenous Services Canada, for example, may see a \$3 billion cut for the coming fiscal year.⁶

The infrastructure gap between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and settlers remains extremely high – in the hundreds of billions of dollars.⁷ Experts expressed concern about a federal government focus on "economic reconciliation," coupled with less consideration by all orders of government of the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

4 Palinkas, Lawrence A et al. "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research." *Administration and policy in mental health* vol. 42.5 (2015): 533-44. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

5 Examples can be found here: <https://www.indigenouwatchdog.org>. The Yellowhead Institute also published reports monitoring the Calls to Action. Their latest was in 2023 and can be found here: <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/report/trc/>.

6 Some discussion of the amounts can be found here: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-budget-2025-9.6966648>; <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/budget-cuts-by-stealth-letting-programs-sunset-to-cut-costs-wont-be-painless/>; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/mmiwg2s-program-funding-indigenous-women-9.7156396>. Specifically, \$3 billion in cuts to Indigenous Services Canada are projected for the incoming fiscal year, as outlined in its 2026-27 departmental plan. *The Hill Times* notes, however, that this does not preclude later funding being added by the government. See: <https://www.hilltimes.com/2026/03/23/indigenous-services-forecasts-a-grim-picture-with-3-billion-cut-sparking-concerns-of-widening-gaps-in-programming/496417/>.

7 See: <https://afn.ca/economy-infrastructure/infrastructure/closing-the-infrastructure-gap/infrastructure/>



The author has tried to keep his own narratives and interpretations to a minimum to prioritize the voices of the experts. Their insights form the backbone of this report, offering a grounded, academic and community-informed assessment of where reconciliation stands today and what is required to move it forward.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE

This document applies a distinctions-based approach, recognizing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples across Canada to respect the distinct diversity of identities, Rights, and governance structures of each. At times, the collective term Indigenous is also used and original terminology is preserved where scholars are quoted directly.



PART 1:

Some Positive Outcomes of The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action



NORMATIVE CHANGES

Many experts noted positive normative changes, though uneven across different parts of the country and among different age groups. Many individual settlers and settler institutions have expanded their education, knowledge, and awareness of the intergenerational harms of the Indian Residential Schools. In many instances, bridges of empathy have been built between settler and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, and many settlers now better understand some of the many negative aspects of settler colonialism. Concepts like settler colonialism, cultural genocide, and genocide, once largely absent from the thinking of many settler Canadians, are now better understood. Many have embraced these concepts, while others have rejected them.

Crystal Gail Fraser (Gwichyà Gwich'in, Associate Professor at the University of Alberta) charts a "meaningful growth in public awareness since 2016 and since the start of the TRC," as well as a "big appetite for Canadians to understand what happens, the state that we're in, and what we can do." Fraser also highlights the success of public-facing reconciliation tools, such as the co-authored resource *150 Acts of Reconciliation*, which addressed "a need for a conversation at the everyday level of what somebody could do." She observes: "There is a need for everyone, including those who were well versed in reconciliation, people who didn't believe reconciliation was a responsibility, and newcomers to Canada who may have no education on Indigenous-Canadian histories." At the same time, she iterates a common reflection among experts: "awareness is not consistently translating into structural change."

For Sheryl Lightfoot (Anishinaabe, Professor at University of Toronto), there has been "significant growth in the country in terms of building better relationships and deepening relationships." Meaningful changes include "more respect for Indigenous Peoples, more inclusion, not always exactly in the manner we would like, but the intent is there." She traces a "normative shift in the last decade," and a "cultural shift that is positive, even though we have lots of work to do yet and backlash remains a risk." She offers a broad societal perspective: "There's a genuine desire to move along the pathway in so many sectors of society, in non-governmental organization (NGO) work, in universities, and at the community level. Fifteen years ago, people would never have ever thought, 'what's the Indigenous perspective on what we're doing?' And now that is more present than ever."

Tricia Logan (Métis, Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia) worked with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) and at the UBC Indian Residential Schools History and Dialogue Centre (IRSHDC).⁸ She recalls "doing a lot of public outreach or research or public

⁸ These two centres play key roles in research and community outreach related to the IRS system. They also work closely with Survivors. See: <https://nctr.ca>; <https://irshdc.ubc.ca>.



engagement," and noticed real policy shifts and a more collaborative environment. She has worked with schools, public servants, and "churches, environmental groups, corporate entities like hydro or accountants, government agencies like public servants." Logan charts changes from public servants, who were willing to admit "openly that their policies were not working, that their policies were often kind of racist or violent against Indigenous Peoples and were looking to change them." Within civil society, she also noticed progress on reconciliation that was not well measured in the literature: "civic engagement that doesn't come up in the metrics, like groups of hikers, groups of Girl Guides, parents' groups, teacher groups, church groups having a reading circle." These examples highlight reconciliation activities occurring outside formal government structures, which are an important but often underreported aspect of progress.

Ian Mosby (Associate Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University) noticed some big changes early on: "a broader acknowledgement, within the public and the media, of what happened: that the residential schools were really bad, were a genocidal institution." He further highlights a "broader cultural acceptance of Indigenous narratives of Canadian history that was really positive in that you can point to the TRC as a really strong example of why that happened." The TRC documented in detail what happened in the IRS system, and "made it quite clear that you could no longer deny it." He also notes a period of consensus among political parties that the IRS system was very negative, that atonement was needed, leading even to "all-party resolutions on genocide." Currently, the situation is hardly ideal, and Mosby concludes that "reconciliation as a word has been denuded in a really profound way." He notes, however, that the work of the TRC "is still very respected — perhaps even more so after the passing of Murray Sinclair." For him: "Right now, the Calls to Action are the best tool we have."

Paulette Regan (settler scholar/practitioner, former Research Director, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada) has also reflected that "Eleven years onward, part of what stands out for me is just how much we are still talking about reconciliation. What gives me hope is that so many people are still committed to reconciliation, and they are learning how to do this work in ways that are decolonizing, not recolonizing." Within a larger context that "both material and symbolic forms of reparations are essential to reconciliation," it is important not to "underestimate the power of symbolic acts." She observes, for example, that "the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a day of reflection and commemoration that honours Survivors and educates people about the history and ongoing legacy of the residential school system." And she is clear that the work must continue: "Designating former residential schools as national historical sites or international sites of conscience also ensures that public education and commemoration are ongoing."

Vanessa Watts (Mohawk and Anishinaabe, Six Nations of the Grand River, Associate Professor, McMaster University) points to increased media engagement with Indigenous issues, charting "a lot



more attention on these issues and in sort of a surprising way. So perhaps, cynically, I would have thought, well, after a couple of years, this is going to blow over." While some issues have indeed blown over, "there's still, at the media level, an interest in engaging with Indigenous experts and reporting on Indigenous issues, which I'm really glad to see."

For David Newhouse (Onondaga, Professor Emeritus, Chanie Wanjack School for Indigenous Studies, Trent University), it is important to understand two structural changes that are foundational: "The first is the idea of Nation, of Indigenous Nation. And the second is Indigenous Government. When I look across the country and at what political leaders are saying, non-Indigenous leaders, they are beginning to recognize Nations and governments." He also points to the growing recognition of Indigenous Knowledge systems "as a distinct category of knowledge, in various areas, in environment, climate, in healthcare, in economics, in education, and that is a fundamental change from the 1970s, where our knowledge was deemed not to be useful."

Reconciliation within Indigenous families and communities has perhaps been the most significant change in many cases. The most movement towards reconciliation, Rachel yacaaʔat George (nuučaañuł, Assistant Professor, University of Victoria) observes, "has been in places where there have been pre-established relationships. If you think about reconciliation in terms of repairing a relationship, I've seen a lot of healing between family members, and that is some of the most important work that's been happening."

For Katherine Starzyk (Professor, University of Manitoba), the biggest change has been in "awareness of residential schools in particular, and this understanding that they were harmful and that the government sometimes has done or is continuing to do harmful things." Malinda Smith (Associate Vice-President Research and Professor, University of Calgary) also notes the rise in awareness of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples amongst settlers, "opening up areas of knowledge, which I think have heretofore been on the margins." In many cases, there has been a growing acceptance of Indigenous leadership in research, policy and public discourse.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN CHANGING NORMS

Local communities can often play an invaluable role in advancing reconciliation, and the Council will find it useful to create a database of community reconciliation initiatives across the country to compile and compare best practices and provide recommendations. George points to municipal-level changes as meaningful markers of progress, citing name changes and Indigenous signage in Port Alberni and Victoria. The Songhees Nation, for example, "has done a lot in terms of implementing new signage, [including] in Victoria Inner Harbour, that shares the importance of those places to Songhees People." While to some these might seem like "small things," she insists that "they are really important



and there should be more." George specifically cites the example of Port Alberni, which is "working to incorporate more nuučaan̓ language around the city, including on street names. This has included new streets and calls to change street names of those who have caused specific harms, such as AW Neill, who was an Indian Agent. So, there are small things happening at those levels that are meaningful. I think it's just taken an extreme amount of time."

Andrew Woolford (scholar of settler origin, Professor, University of Manitoba) provides a concrete example of a "prominent positive experience." Survivors of the Assiniboia Residential School (Winnipeg) formed a grassroots Legacy Group to create a heritage site and hold public events and reunions. He notes "a real eagerness among members of the River Heights neighbourhood to learn about the school. A lot of them were unaware that it was there, and reconciliation has sensitized them to this history and maybe made at least some of them a little bit more receptive to learning about it."

Sean Carleton (settler historian and Indigenous studies scholar at the University of Manitoba) offers an illustrative example of how far the culture of reconciliation had advanced in some regions: "When I go to the Winnipeg Jets games, they start with a land acknowledgement and a statement of why reconciliation is important. And everybody cheers. It's an important part of the civic identity in Winnipeg." For Carleton, there are both challenges and optimism about changing relationships as people become more aware of broken treaties and historical injustices, and their continued impact on contemporary society. Regan emphasizes the importance of the multi-layered and multi-actor nature of reconciliation in Canadian society: "the TRC commissioners issued Calls to Action for everyone to work on. One of the great successes and legacies of the TRC is that everyone can find a call to action that applies to them, their families, communities, schools, workplaces, or places of worship."

In Peterborough, Newhouse highlights how at the municipal level they "appointed for the first time ever an Indigenous Reconciliation Officer," a local person who was able to bring everyone together for a conversation, "because people don't know what to do." He also highlights a proliferation of Indigenous advisory bodies in public institutions: "the desire to include Elders as part of decision-making processes in organizations, both Indigenous and mainstream, advisory councils everywhere. Via Rail has an Indigenous advisory council. CBC has an Indigenous Advisory Council."

INQUIRIES AND INVESTIGATIONS BEYOND THE TRC

The TRC also helped lay the groundwork for further inquiries that have added to Canada's knowledge of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and their ongoing experiences with settler colonialism, structural racism, and genocide. In particular, the creation of the National Inquiry into Missing and



Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls⁹ (2016-2019) and the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor on Missing Children and Unmarked Graves¹⁰ (2022-2025) are key institutions that flowed directly from the influence of the TRC and the Calls to Action. Fraser has enumerated several unprecedented “enormous,” “once in a lifetime” projects, including the National Inquiry and their calls to justice, public revelations of unmarked burials, the apology from Pope Francis, and the creation of the OSI. Watts also cites the National Inquiry as a key milestone in the journey to reconciliation and notes the importance of child welfare funding increases, while contextualizing them within decades of extremely hard work by Indigenous advocacy organizations, including the First Nations Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations.

A further milestone occurred in October 2022, when the House of Commons recognized genocide in the IRS system with the passage of a non-binding motion that represents the will of the House.¹¹ The Canadian Museum for Human Rights and professional associations such as the Canadian Historical Association have also recognized this genocide.

Yet another milestone was achieved in November 2024, when the federal government officially apologized for the wanton and traumatizing killing of thousands of qimmiit (sled dogs) in Nunavik during the 1950s and '60s.¹² This apology came over a decade after the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) reports in 2013-2014, which provided clear evidence of qimmiit killings by RCMP and other government agents, military personnel and others (especially after the “Ordinance Respecting Dogs”).¹³ Before that, in 2010, the federal government officially apologized for the forcible transfer of Inuit families from Inukjuak and Pond Inlet to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord during the 1950s.¹⁴

AN EVOLVING LEGISLATIVE ARCHITECTURE

Another positive development has been the “legislative architecture” built around the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). For Lightfoot: “The TRC Calls to Action were so clear on some of the very large, structural questions about implementing the Declaration legislatively in Canada; the legislative architecture was a big victory.” She notes that the federal UNDRIP Act and

9 See here for their final reports: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca>.

10 See here for their final reports: <https://osi-bis.ca/osi-resources/reports/>.

11 Details can be found here: <https://globalnews.ca/news/9232545/house-of-commons-residential-schools-canada-genocide/>.

12 The apology can be found here: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1732300419996/1732300456676>

13 For discussion, see Qikiqtani Truth Commission Thematic Reports and Special Studies 1950–1975, *QTC Final Report: Achieving Saimaqatigiingniq* (Qikiqtani Inuit Association, April 2014). The QTC observed: “Qimmiit were essential for Inuit life on the land. The care and management of a dog team was an integral part of Inuit culture, daily life, maturity, and survival.” See: https://www.qtcommission.ca/sites/default/files/public/thematic_reports/thematic_reports_english_final_report.pdf; and *Qimmiliriniq: Inuit Sled Dogs in the Qikiqtani Region*, Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Community Histories 1950–1975 by Qikiqtani Inuit Association, April 2013. See also: https://www.qtcommission.ca/sites/default/files/public/thematic_reports/thematic_reports_english_qimmiliriniq.pdf

14 See: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100016115/1534786491628>



B.C.'s provincial Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)¹⁵ have already influenced courts, who have used this "as the lens for interpreting Section 35." Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, identifies the "Rights of Aboriginal Peoples" and states, "The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed."¹⁶ This development "has been incredibly strong and probably stronger and faster than the population was ready for." Likewise, Regan highlights that "the TRC's bold vision of reconciliation based on the recognition and implementation of the UN Declaration and the subsequent legislation at the federal government level and in B.C. and the Northwest Territories is pretty pathbreaking. Many municipal governments have also adopted reconciliation policies and initiatives." Smith also raised similar points.

For Jeremy Patzer (Métis and Saulteaux, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba), UNDRIP implementation means that "there are access points with the UN Declaration, around treaties that tie into Free, Prior and Informed Consent, consultation with Indigenous Peoples, and articles that speak to land-based Indigenous Rights and land-based issues." Patzer notes that Calls to Action 43 and 44 provide a direct link to UNDRIP, calling on governments to "fully adopt and implement the UN Declaration" and "develop a national action plan, strategies and other concrete measures to achieve the goals of the UN Declaration." He describes these as "an anchor point" for contextualizing reconciliation in Canada within a larger international legal framework.

Karine Duhamel (Red Rock Indian Band, former Director of Research, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) observes that UNDRIP can serve as an organizing framework for the entire reconciliation agenda: "the outcomes that we were trying to achieve, and all of these recommendations from various reports were captured as an end state in UNDRIP." It is clear, however, that much remains to be done in this area. Fraser calls on the government to "fully implement UNDRIP," identifying it as one of the most pressing long-term priorities alongside changes to the *Indian Act*, treaty implementation, and the child welfare system. The Declaration has yet to be fully implemented, and we see a rollback in the province of British Columbia with the provincial government attempting to amend or pause elements of the DRIPA. George observes: "It is prudent to reflect on whether societal commitments to reconciliation are truly substantive when they can be so easily cast aside." If the goal is to advance reconciliation "in ways called for by Indigenous Peoples (including land back and water back), and in ways called for by the TRC in line with UNDRIP, these

15 For the UNDRIP Act, see: https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf. Details of the federal enabling law can be found here: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-apropos.html#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Declaration%20on%20the%20Rights,Indigenous%20peoples%2C%20communities%2C%20industry%2C%20and%20all%20Canadians>. B.C.'s DRIPA can be found here: <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>.

16 See: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html>



moves that either stall or completely hamper the progress made raise various alarm bells about what might happen in the future in a 'post-woke' era."

Indeed, what looked like real progress is now taking on different dimensions, with competing views on how the practice of Indigenous Rights can run counter to assertions of Crown sovereignty. Patzer likens this to "two trains speeding directly at each other." He notes legislative commitments made by the federal and B.C. governments, but expresses concern that governments have not been interested in the duty to consult. Instead, they have adopted a focus on "resource extraction, cutting back on red tape, and having an all-hands-on-deck approach to resource development." He notes: "This might be creating a powder keg where we could have some heated conflicts."

RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Several experts referred to the *Indigenous Languages Act* (2019) as a potential, but not yet fully realized, step forward in protecting and helping to revitalize and promote Indigenous languages. The creation of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages¹⁷ is also a potential milestone (Smith; Watts). While there has been some government funding, it has been inconsistent and not necessarily targeted to community efforts. Watts notes the financial starvation of language and cultural revitalization programs: "Languages are still dying in some communities," despite an Indigenous languages commissioner and an Indigenous languages day.

In her home community of Deshkan Zibiing (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation), Eva Jewell (Anishinaabe, Associate Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University) is writing her First Nation's "culture, language, heritage, and wellbeing strategy." She traces a "chronically underfunded language program," drawing from the "same pot of funding historically with recreation, sports and so on." She expresses concern about "the compartmentalization of who we are, the core of who we are as Anishinaabe, being divvied up along these different funding pots." Jewell is optimistic at some levels about her First Nation's language reclamation and cultural movement, which is "really strong" at the "early years center that teaches the language." However, that support is greatly reduced in elementary school to just 10-15 minutes a day, due to the focus on the provincial curriculum. The "chronic underfunding of education" is a serious concern, and "there was never anything about self-determination over education, because the funding to our elementary schools is contingent upon us delivering adequate provincial curriculum." Her views align with her research focus, which "has been on how pressures of settler colonial society deter us from socially reproducing our own worlds, and

17 The Act can be found here: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-785/index.html/>. The website of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages can be found here: <https://commissionforindigenouslanguages.ca>.



how our efforts, our daily efforts and work and labour, maybe as women and in families and care for children and so on - results in half-hearted participation in colonial systems because we have a greater task at hand to reclaim who we are."

Smith reasons that "European countries can have three, four languages, for example. Switzerland has four, Belgium three, and Luxembourg three. And South Africa can have 11 official languages, even if they operate primarily in a few of them," then Canada should take a bigger step in funding and promoting Indigenous languages. To move beyond an official bilingualism rooted in two colonizing cultures, Indigenous languages must receive proper recognition. For example, the Inuktitut fluency of Indigenous leaders like former Governor General Mary Simon should be celebrated rather than scorned. Smith describes Simon's "shabby treatment online" and asks: "If you're going to treat the Governor General that way, what are we going to expect from you, how are you going to treat Indigenous children?" The way forward is to expand the official use of Indigenous languages. Under the Justin Trudeau government, for example, some official announcements, as Smith recalls, "were translated, sometimes in three languages, a couple of Indigenous languages, including Inuktitut and Cree. Official announcements came out in several languages, including Inuit languages. And so, what about Mohawk? What about Cree?"

IMPROVING AWARENESS: EDUCATION AND RECONCILIATION FROM KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12 (K-12)

Several experts cited positive developments in how children were being educated about reconciliation. Fraser notes the particular significance of educational progress in the North: "Northwest Territories is widely recognized as the first jurisdiction to implement residential schooling histories into high school curriculum in 2014." This progress includes community-based educational initiatives, such as the We Always Remember (WAR) Circle, an advocacy group in Yellowknife. This Circle was "a group originally created to implement one call to action, and that is a residential school monument in the capital city of Yellowknife," which has now "grown and has worked to advance broader public education goals." Fraser observes: "Fifty per cent of the population are First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, and so there is a much more public and robust conversation about this than in Southern Canada. It is much easier to access Indigenous perspectives and have them front and central."

Fraser also highlights the unique history of the North relating to the schools: "children were often sent thousands of kilometres away from their home communities. There are only two reserves in all of the NWT, which creates a significantly different context than other regions in Canada. Additionally, the residential schools were sometimes very distant from people's home communities, and Indigenous children institutionalized there were also from diverse populations: First Nation, Inuit, and Métis." The TRC's volume on Inuit and Northern experiences noted distinct histories, but also outlined some



similarities, including the removal of children using coercion, chronic underfunding leading to serious health problems, widespread physical and sexual abuse in specific hostels (Grollier Hall and Turquetil Hall in Inuvik and Chesterfield Inlet, for example), and the suppression of languages in cultures in favour of English and sometimes French-language education.¹⁸

These examples reinforce the reality that the history of settler colonialism is varied across provinces and territories, just as education on that history is distinct in various parts of the country. At UBC, Logan notes a striking cohort effect among new university students who have participated in a comprehensive reconciliation program in their schools. She comments that the divergence in “their awareness, knowledge, vocabulary around reconciliation and residential schools is very stark between staff and faculty, because they’ve had that as part of their school.” She connects this directly to the long-standing work around Orange Shirt Day¹⁹ and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Logan points to the BC Teachers Federation as an early adopter of reconciliation-based education, which resulted in “genuine, long-term changes including language and cultural teachings, Indigenous language classes, [and] complete overhauls of Indigenous curriculum running parallel to the Calls to Action.”

George, drawing on her experience as an educator, notes a generational shift and an increase in “the level of understanding that students are bringing into the classroom in terms of Indigenous history and where we are at with reconciliation.” For her, a turning point may have been reached “where our efforts at education are making a difference, and students, youth, and children are developing much more informed and different perspectives.” Woolford observes from Winnipeg: “Students come into my classroom more aware of colonialism in Canada and some of its harms.” He sees a “kind of baseline awareness they have of the residential school era,” although he concedes that “it’s not perfect awareness.” Also based in Winnipeg, Carleton reflects: “I work with teachers across the country ... talking about residential school denialism and other things.” He notes that “as I talk with teachers in every province, everywhere, they are convinced of the importance of truth and reconciliation, of changing the way that students learn, not just in their classroom, but also adjusting curricula, developing new educational resources and materials, so that the generational change isn’t going to necessarily fade away as easily.”

In an Ontario context, both Newhouse and Watts offer perspectives on advances in education. For Newhouse: “Primary schools, secondary schools, universities and colleges, are doing excellent work

18 The TRC Report, *The Inuit and Northern Experiences*, can be found here: https://ehprnh2mw03.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume_2_Inuit_and_Northern_English_Web.pdf/.

19 Details about Orange Shirt Day can be found here: <https://orangeshirtday.org>.



in terms of educating people about the truth, because if you don't confront the truth and understand the truth, you can never engage in reconciliation." Watts notes of new university students, "there's much more interest and awareness when I see first-year students come in. Coming out of secondary, they're interested, they have questions, their knowledge base is wider." Watts compares student interest and knowledge in her introductory course before and after the Calls to Action: "I noticed an absolute difference in the years preceding the Calls, the release of the Calls in terms of student interest, and ... around their role, I suppose, in reconciliation."

IMPORTANT CAVEATS ABOUT EDUCATION

Despite some positives, many interviewees also outlined problems. As Watts notes in Ontario, in K-12 schools, non-Indigenous teachers often lack the resources and community connections to teach properly, resulting in a damaging "re-emergence of a pan-Indigeneity," where Indigenous cultures can risk being homogenized into a multicultural mosaic that ignores distinctive Indigenous Rights and histories.

Jewell, too, has been clear that because the provinces largely control education, there are major differences between local and provincial priorities. This can mean, in practice, less curricular support for Indigenous histories and languages. Carleton cites the strongly context-dependent elements of K-12 education. In some regions, education on reconciliation is facing intense backlash and depends on the goodwill of provinces that create curricula and local school boards that implement them. In conservative or very religious areas (such as Manitoba's "Bible Belt"), parents actively withdrew their kids from school on Orange Shirt Day in protest, demonstrating a localized rejection of the curriculum. Different parts of the country are "at different stages of the journey of reconciliation." While Winnipeg shows "lots of hope and optimism," Alberta has "an active separatist movement that doesn't understand the legal basis of treaties," and British Columbia is experiencing "an increasingly poisoned political relationship through anti-Indigenous racism and residential school denialism." Carleton argues that the government cannot "basically say from Ottawa, this is what reconciliation is going to look like and assume that it's going to get taken up."

MAJOR IF UNEVEN INVESTMENTS: UNIVERSITIES AND RECONCILIATION

Many experts have spoken positively about some of the advances at the post-secondary level. Newhouse describes the substantive institutional commitments to reconciliation made by universities, including Indigenous strategies, "developed in consultation with their local communities." The changes include "Indigenous advisory councils. Some of them have incorporated Elders as well. They've changed the curriculum. They've hired Indigenous faculty."



Smith outlines how the University of Calgary “is developing an Indigenous research implementation plan, which is consistent with Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP). It includes Indigenous data sovereignty.” Gabel, speaking from McMaster, notes how higher education has changed with cluster hires, with “conversations around making Indigenous studies mandatory. I think of the massive online course that the University of Alberta implemented. We had Vice-President, Indigenous positions.” She provides a concrete institutional example: when she came to McMaster as a graduate student, there were only two permanent Indigenous faculty members: “Now we have the most Indigenous scholars in an Indigenous Studies department of any Indigenous Studies department in Canada.” For Watts, also at McMaster: “the hiring of more Indigenous faculty or staff positions” helps “support mitigating that education gap and that transition period when post-secondary Indigenous students do come in.” These hiring policies also help with both community-building and faculty retention.

Another avenue of progress has been through federal funding bodies such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), collectively known as the Tri-Agency. All have made commitments to advance Indigenous scholars and scholarship. Gabel notes the significance of these institutional changes from her perspective as Scientific Director of the Institute of Indigenous Peoples’ Health at CIHR²⁰: “We’ve seen some stronger commitments to Indigenous-led research in grant processes where certain funding opportunities are designed for Indigenous scholars. Indigenous communities can now apply for CIHR grants. So that’s progress. I would also say that there’s a broader public awareness of colonial harms.” She has noticed a shift away from pan-Indigenous framing to a meaningful shift to distinctions-based opportunities. Gabel connects this to the increase of work on Indigenous data sovereignty: “we’ve come so far in conversations around Indigenous data sovereignty; we’ve even moved beyond OCAP into looking at how distinctions-based approaches, for example, how data sovereignty also applies to Métis communities and Inuit communities. We have our own community-driven priorities now.”

Also focused on national research funding bodies, Smith outlines how, especially informed by the Tri-Agency, “you’re seeing some really positive things around Indigenous research, Indigenous Knowledge, epistemic pluralism, and Indigenous languages revitalization. I’m very optimistic about that.” Smith signals how an increase in the number of Indigenous Canada Research Chairs (CRC) is changing the nature of research: “talking about Indigenous Knowledge, developing Indigenous protocols, including around how you cite Elders, which documents you cite, which ones you put in

20 You can connect to the CIHR here: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/8668.html>.



writing, which ones you don't, and how to recognize oral methodologies or storytelling methodologies." She expresses confidence that Indigenous "research is going to be sustained. It refers to publications that can be included in course syllabi. It means raising awareness about what people need to know. It means more Indigenous research institutes." Particularly informed by the Tri-Agency, research funding is being informed by "the Indigenous Leadership Circle in Research, which advises CIHR, SSHRC, NSERC and the Canada Foundation for Innovation, and the NSERC Reference Group for Appropriate Review of Indigenous Research, which guides ethically and culturally competent peer review."

Another positive is that in February 2026, the federal government announced it would contribute \$50 million to help build Inuit Nunangat University, Canada's first Inuit-led university.²¹

²¹ For details, see: <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/news/2026/02/minister-gull-masty-announces-new-support-to-empower-inuit-and-strengthen-northern-communities.html>



PART 2:

Challenges Impeding the Progress of Reconciliation



POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: UNEVEN RESULTS

Despite some obvious advances in post-secondary education, including Indigenous-focused courses, cluster hires of Indigenous People, prominent roles for Indigenous People in university administration, and Indigenous strategic plans, advisory councils, and other initiatives, there remain concerns for the experts consulted here. At the university level, Smith highlights twin problems of Indigenous tokenism and faculty burnout. While universities are creating “Vice-President, Indigenous” roles, these offices are often staffed by a few people and bear large administrative burdens. Untenured Indigenous assistant professors are often overloaded with committee work (even becoming vice presidents). She outlines concerns for Indigenous faculty coming up for tenure. Are the universities doing what is necessary to support them, “or are institutions undermining Indigenous talent development by putting them in extremely demanding roles, in these often- challenging environments?” At the same time, there is a loss of momentum, as universities face financial problems due to a lack of provincial support and a decline in international student numbers.

Teaching can also be a challenge. Classrooms are not always friendly for Indigenous faculty, especially when they teach non-Indigenous students who are resistant to the material or are influenced by residential school denialism. Watts identifies burdens on Indigenous post-secondary students and faculty. Another issue relates to identity fraud, with some faculty pretending to be Indigenous to gain employment and benefits within the university community. Newhouse signals problems of ignorance among some members of university leadership. Given that existing educational systems have often omitted Indigenous history, current university leaders (such as Deans) have admitted to having very little knowledge of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples or settler colonialism.

The continued problem of hostility at the university level is another area of concern, as noted by Paulette Steeves (Cree-Métis, Professor at Algoma University). In her interview, she observes that colonization has created “a system of apartheid in Canada,” where First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and people of colour are seen as “others” within educational systems. Healing and reconciliation will never move forward, she says, until those who teach the general population are informed about the devastating histories of colonization in Canada. She is clear: “The government has worked hard in some areas to address Calls to Action and healing and reconciliation, specifically within research granting processes. This is greatly appreciated.” However, this has not been adequately carried over into the college and university systems. Despite “a lot of posturing in educational institutions” related to Indigenous, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (IDEI) principles, she sees “very few actions to move towards healing and reconciliation specifically within higher education.”



Despite movement in some parts of the country, many universities do not have mandated Indigenous history courses. Steeves recommends that the Council press the government to make reconciliation education legally required across multiple professions. This makes logical sense, given, as she observes:

"Every degree someone gets, they are going to go out and work with Indigenous People, Indigenous Nations, Indigenous Government departments. Why are they not required to have a course on Indigenous history, colonization, healing, and reconciliation? It should be mandated. The federal and provincial governments should say, ... whether you're in business or law or healthcare, you're going to be working with our Indigenous populations, and we'd really like it if you were informed about their history, specifically the medical field, so you can understand why you're seeing such high rates of mental health and wellness needs."

It would also make good sense for current university faculty to be required "to take a course on healing and reconciliation and Indigenous history before they can teach Canadian history in a university."

Concerns about university education are found in other provinces as well. As Eva Ottawa (Atikamekw Nehirowisiw from Manawan and Associate Professor at the University of Ottawa) explains, in terms of education about First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in schools and universities, Quebec is behind many other provinces. She makes a specific comparison to Ontario, where she is a professor at the University of Ottawa: "In the West, in the English-speaking community, there's a lot more research, much more advanced research. And then, in French-speaking communities, Indigenous French-speaking communities, you know, it's less..." Also, "if it's not French or some kind of Francophone nationalism, it becomes very difficult to get the funding to do other things." She notes the University of Ottawa's positive role in promoting Indigenous Law.

PERFORMATIVE, CHEAP, AND SOFT RECONCILIATION

Several experts stated that the federal and provincial governments have not gone far enough in implementing the Calls to Action. The focus has often been on the easier-to-achieve calls, what Mosby dubs "low-hanging fruit," which require little effort, can be politically popular with the settler majority, and do not diminish settler-state sovereignty. Douglas Sinclair (Peguis First Nation - Founder and Publisher, Indigenous Watchdog) highlights how governments have cherry-picked "easy" symbolic items while ignoring structural issues.

Lightfoot, in her analysis of Indigenous Rights, makes distinctions between soft and hard varieties. She explains: "I see soft rights as the easier ones for states to accept and implement. Things like language, culture, education, and symbolic recognition. They fit more easily within existing structures." The focus is often on cultural rights, which do not seem to threaten state jurisdiction: "It's accommodating the



diversity of Indigenous culture," and multicultural countries like Canada find adoption easier, as there is a framework already in place, "for accepting many cultures and many languages and even separate educational institutions that promote those cultures and those languages." This multicultural framework makes it more likely that Canadian settlers will accept a National "Indigenous Peoples Day with cultural performances," and have begun "recognizing Indigenous languages." A particular problem with soft rights is that they are vulnerable: easily rolled back and defunded when political will or the public mood changes. Lightfoot warns: "One of the lessons that we've learned in the last three years in New Zealand is how easy it actually is to roll back soft-rights victories when domestic politics and the political will shift so dramatically. Those soft rights gains are actually really vulnerable."²²

Many experts consulted for the report distinguished between easy and hard forms of reconciliation, though each used their own terminology. Woolford describes a "minimalist notion" of reconciliation as being akin to "mutual tolerance that different parties learn to tolerate each other and tolerate their differences." In this, "mainstream multiculturalism sometimes provides an example that we are all going to simply accept each other's differences." This type of reconciliation exists "purely at the level of acknowledgement, of recognition, and there is no redistributive or representative transformation that goes along with it." Gabel sees reconciliation still framed as "symbolic or performative rather than structural or sustained." Watts recounts problems of reconciliation being "very performative," and how land acknowledgments serve as a "symbolic gesture" and often fail to delve into actual land rights. While culture and language are now more discussed, Indigenous "Rights aren't talked about" in the broader public sphere. Watts asks: if a land acknowledgement is "acknowledged; is it explained? Is it contextualized? I don't think so."

Regan describes "performative" or "cheap reconciliation" as undertaking the easy tasks without making deeper structural or policy changes. We see this when governments do "performative things that wind up being very token, or they make superficial changes to a program that don't really address the root problems." She stresses that "the hard work really has to happen" at the structural and policy levels, "because none of those things come easily." Land acknowledgments are a good example. They are easy to do and can, on the surface, seem performative. However, they can start a conversation and initiate broader changes, as long as the actions do not stop at the acknowledgment. This is the key issue – these "more performative" elements, Regan notes, "are also extremely important for embedding the concepts, principles and practices of reconciliation in the national discourse."

22 For discussion of some contemporary Indigenous Rights issues in Aotearoa New Zealand, see: <https://e-tangata.co.nz/history/fifty-years-of-the-waitangi-tribunal/>.



In particular, the Trudeau government was noted for its performance in reconciliation. Jewell, for example, recalls how they were “really more about this affective, or quote unquote, heartfelt kind of approach. And the economy was more of a backstage thing. It was more of a, ‘let’s get into a trusting relationship and let me show you I’m vulnerable.’ This time and time again, this is what colonizers do. They’re just like, ‘hey, let’s be cool. Let’s be friends.’” Similar sentiments are noted by Fraser who observes that the Trudeau government was “very big on performative types of symbolic reconciliation.” She explicitly calls for addressing the gap between “symbolic reconciliation” and “material reconciliation.” Woolford similarly discusses Trudeau’s “performance of reconciliation as a kind of rhetorical act” while his actions were often disappointing. Patzer also outlines an affective approach to reconciliation, as a “personal project or endeavour where we change attitudes or we change our outlook on things. That has been a major part of the discourse around reconciliation.”

While most experts noted some positives of the Trudeau era, they also acknowledged the transitory nature of this type of reconciliation. Carleton worries that “the performance can go away” and highlights how the “performance part” initially gave the Calls to Action some momentum, but without structural change, the country will roll back on its progress. This concern underscores Smith’s perceptions regarding the types of reconciliation achieved: “the strongest areas would be public commemoration, curriculum reform, legislative alignment with UNDRIP, including the federal legislation passed in 2021.” While these are positive developments, she rightly signals that “they’re also largely symbolic and discursive in some ways. What’s important to me is what happens in terms of implementation.”

Duhamel, observing the spread of reconciliation discourse amongst professionals, emphasizes that the Calls to Action became a shared reference point: “a sort of currency within various academic and government fields that we reference and talk about, and we know which ones we are trying to meet for government funding.” She identifies a “kind of box-ticking exercise but not in a reconciliatory way” which permits the government to say: “well, through this grant, we’re contributing to this element of the Calls to Action.” Overall, one of the most consistent themes across the interviews was the gap between the rhetoric of reconciliation and its structural realization. Fraser put it plainly: “Meaningful change has not kept up with the political rhetoric around truth and reconciliation.” She adds that while public awareness has grown since 2016, “that awareness is not consistently translating into structural change.”

THE MORE DIFFICULT TASK? RECONCILIATION AS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HARD RIGHTS

While some experts welcome soft rights (symbolic, cultural, easily reversible) as the *start* of a larger process, many are also concerned that this represents the full extent of government and societal



willingness to change. A key issue concerns the lack of willingness of all orders of government to return Territories to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. Lightfoot identifies the problems very clearly: "Hard rights are land, self-government, sovereignty, jurisdiction over resources, consent. These challenge the core of the state's authority and the existing systems and structures." For many settlers, this can be confronting and may raise questions like "how can there be private property title and an underlying Aboriginal title and how can we contend with that?" For many settlers, it is difficult, Lightfoot observes, to "consider that multiple sovereignties and jurisdictions can co-exist, multiple property regimes can exist, [and] that having underlying Aboriginal Rights and Title might mean building a consent structure that is unfamiliar."

From a long-term perspective, governments have largely focused on soft rights, while hard rights remain under-addressed. Certainly, Lightfoot notes: "There are pockets of work that are beginning to address the hard rights issues, but most of the work has been soft." She points to concrete hard rights gains: "There have been a couple treaties done through the [Treaty] Commission in B.C. that are also more hard rights focused and using the Declaration so that they now do treaty-making with the Declaration as the foundation, which wasn't previously the case." She also highlights "experiments in working through co-governance in the Haida Gwaii agreement, and Musqueam's work in Vancouver. Those are examples where there are joint governance and co-governance institutions."

Change, however, is needed. Lightfoot identifies Free Prior and Informed Consent as the most important area of focus for all governments,²³ and is clear about the language being used: "If we continue to use the acronym FPIC, we risk the 'C' being replaced with 'consultation.' We need to begin saying all of it — free, prior, and informed consent — and emphasize consent-based decision-making, consent-based tables, consent-based participation. Individuals have learned that they need to be doing something about reconciliation. They have learned a language. They are throwing that language around, including the acronym FPIC, but either without consciousness of what it actually means, or being intentionally diversionary." So, for example, "they'll say FPIC when they mean a light consultation."

Patzer has noted a similar trend: "We have this continuing push to facilitate resource extraction," which can mean "our nice words about FPIC and duty to consult are being pushed to the wayside." He worries that "we may be in one of those moments where we have these concerns being fomented that reconciliation is about stealing your home." Patzer sees the need for the return of Indigenous Lands, which is necessary "for the continued viability of Indigenous Nations." The focus should be on restoring what was supposed to be the Crown-Indigenous relationship, on "mutual benefit in the relationship, and the fact that what was perhaps written in treaties 150 years ago is not written in stone."

²³ For details on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/consultation-and-free-prior-and-informed-consent-fpic>.



Sinclair centers land and Indigenous sovereignty as the primary roadblock to reconciliation, since the "resource extraction economy has been fundamental to Canada in the past, in the present and into the future, resource extraction on Indigenous Territory." Regan summarizes what she sees as the broader historical pattern: "We've taken some concrete steps towards establishing a more respectful relationship with Indigenous Nations. But in times of economic hardship and political turmoil, there's always a tendency to treat Indigenous Peoples' Rights as if they're easily expendable whenever we have more urgent priorities. And the reality is, of course, that's not true." Similarly, Fraser calls for a shift to material reconciliation: "meaningful conversations about land restitution, about the Indian Act, about fiscal relationships." Jewell also agrees that reconciliation requires restitution, not just new revenue opportunities, "I am all for restitution. There needs to be financial restitution to First Nations, to Inuit and Métis in certain cases about what wealth was stolen from their livelihoods and from their ability to essentially have a quality of life."

For the long term, then, governments must move from performative gestures to what Woolford calls "maximalist" reconciliation, forms of redress that are genuinely "transformative," seeking to create "social relations that do not threaten Indigenous cultures and Indigenous societies in either a direct or subtle manner." Maximal reconciliation is akin to Lightfoot's hard rights, "something much more transformative, [including] thinking about transforming land regimes and the ways in which we think about property." For Woolford: "Transformative means this real work of imagining how things could be different, and how Indigenous and settler relations could operate in a way that would not threaten Indigenous cultures and Indigenous societies in those subtle ways that they often do."

Important attainments in hard rights have been made in the North. Inuit, for example, have constructed a legislative architecture which promotes a focus on hard rights. The Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee (ICPC) was formed in 2017 and has primary responsibility for bilateral forms of reconciliation with the federal government. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national representative organization for Inuit in Canada, representing the four modern Inuit Treaty Organizations across Inuit Nunangat: the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Makivvik, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, and the Nunatsiavut Government. Their pursuit of reconciliation has been rooted in a distinctions-based understanding of Inuit Rights and their political relationship with the Crown.²⁴ This orientation has shaped ITK's engagement with the Calls to Action. While viewing them as important markers of what reconciliation requires, particularly Call 43, urging full adoption of UNDRIP, and Call 41, demanding a national action plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ITK has consistently argued that most reconciliation work happens through direct Inuit-Crown negotiation and not through intermediaries.²⁵

24 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *An Inuit Vision for Arctic Sovereignty, Security and Defence*, June 16, 2025, p.6: <https://itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/An-Inuit-Vision-for-Arctic-Sovereignty-Security-Defence.pdf>

25 For details, see: <https://itk.ca/statement-on-the-6th-anniversary-of-the-trc-calls-to-action/>.



PROBLEMS OF “ECONOMIC RECONCILIATION” AND THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT

Numerous experts expressed concerns about the federal government's use of the term “economic reconciliation,” which implies economic partnerships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples for resource extraction or industrial development on their Territories. Instead of funds being provided to communities through restitution to honour treaties and promote the honour of the Crown, the concept of economic reconciliation entails First Nations communities partnering with government or industry to generate funds for themselves. This concept of economic reconciliation can have negative environmental impacts and threaten Indigenous well-being. “Economic reconciliation” as a term is traced to right-of-centre critics of Indigenous Rights, including some Conservative politicians. It was eventually adopted by some prominent Liberal leaders and by 2025 had become part of the current Liberal government's agenda (Mosby).

Jewell outlines how economic reconciliation positions “the Crown-Indigenous relationship into a neoliberal framework, whereby Indigenous Nations are going to be increasingly shuffled into this relationship where they are stakeholders in certain energy projects or infrastructures that exist in their Territories. And the money that's made from these projects is what's going to fund their particular communities and Nations.” She draws on the example of her own First Nations community, where “Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada is not adequately funding life for our community, where we've been on boiled water advisory for a long time, or at least we've had an inoperable water treatment plan for quite a while.” The push by government is to oblige First Nations “to pay for it ourselves” through becoming “stakeholders.” She concludes: “Our First Nations have been so chronically underfunded for so long that many of us are okay with this economic reconciliation, because at least it's something. But it's not restitution. It's not the restoration of our sovereignty or our economic independence or our free, prior and informed consent over infrastructure, and so on.”

Mosby also summarizes the critique of economic reconciliation: “It's reconciliation without self-government, it's reconciliation without land, it's reconciliation without treaties.” Mosby articulates the point that this is an intentional strategy to abandon the TRC's actual goals, pushing communities into resource extraction rather than granting them sovereignty or returning land: “My understanding is it means getting First Nations to buy into resource extraction in their communities. It's about the government providing funding to get some kind of buy-in by communities to pipelines or mining. It's never about getting land back.” Speaking of the work he did with Jewell at the Yellowhead Institute, Mosby views this “as an attempt to abandon the model of reconciliation in the TRC's final report, which is very much about looking at the day-to-day lives of Indigenous People through these specific lenses, policy lenses, and trying to improve them.” By contrast, economic reconciliation “is both vague



and at odds with the goals of the Calls to Action." This is so, "especially it's being foisted on First Nations in B.C., who literally don't have treaties for the most part and are in these complex negotiations." A focus on reconciliation as atonement by the state towards a "community who has had multiple genocides committed against them," is entirely different from what economic reconciliation offers. To Mosby, "having Indigenous investors in a pipeline corporation" cannot "undo these historical atrocities. That doesn't come even close to doing justice to the fact that people had their languages extinguished and their ancestors murdered."

Sinclair details how federal and provincial legislation aimed at "cutting red tape" for resource projects is being used to sideline Indigenous Treaty and Title Rights. "When you look at Bill C-5 for Canada, Bill 5 in Ontario, Bill 14 and 15 in B.C., the separatism referendum in Alberta, all of this goes back to the Crown asserting its sovereignty over everything, including Aboriginal Rights and Title.²⁶ Fast-tracking some of these projects to get them done faster directly impacts Treaty Rights and environmental impacts on Indigenous Territory." He identifies two key interrelated problems: Treaty Rights and environmental damage. The current prime minister "is doing whatever he can to grow the economy. And that's where fast-tracking projects creates problems of Treaty Rights. And all the resource extraction on Treaty Territories has significant environmental risks." Sinclair is concerned that the ensuing environmental problems will "directly impact Indigenous Peoples more than anyone else in Canada." The projects that the federal and provincial governments seek to implement "are primarily located in Indigenous Territories. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, they're the ones that are going to be on the front lines having to deal with all the negative consequences."

Sinclair highlights that "one of the main fears that a lot of the Indigenous leaders across the country have is that these fast-track projects are going to undermine Free, Prior and Informed Consent." Specifically, there is concern that consultation becomes little more than "a rubber-stamp exercise where a meeting is held, and consultation is determined to have been addressed." He outlines the situation in Ontario, where consultation is held on terms established by the Ford provincial government, especially over the Ring of Fire.²⁷ In this case, only four locations have been identified for consultation meetings: Toronto, London, Thunder Bay and Sudbury. Problematically: "None of them are in the area of the Ring of Fire. So, all these chiefs would then have to leave their reserves and travel hundreds of kilometres for a one-day meeting with Ford's representatives." He provides an illustrative example of the difficulties: "Neskentanga in Ontario has a drinking water advisory that

²⁶ A good discussion of inherent Indigenous Rights can be found here: <https://fngovernance.org/our-inherent-rights/>. This links to a PDF document by Kent McNeil, entitled "A Brief History of Our Right to Self-Governance," prepared for the Centre for First Nations Governance.

²⁷ Concerns about Bill C-5 (federal), Bill 5 and, details of the Bill (Ontario) as discussed by the Chiefs of Ontario can be found here: <https://chiefs-of-ontario.org/resources/protecting-our-lands/>.



they've been dealing with for over 30 years. Others have had fires, floods, and evacuations. They don't have the capacity to fly around Ford's whim to consult." The solution, if the Premier wants genuine discussion and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, is straightforward: "He should be going to their communities and talking to the people within those communities that are going to be directly impacted."

WHO SHOULD RECONCILE? PROBLEMS OF JURISDICTION INVOLVING THE PROVINCES

An important element of the Calls to Action was a focus on all orders of government having responsibility for reconciliation and the promotion of Indigenous Rights. While it is clear in the *British North America Act, 1867* and in the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1982*, that the federal government has responsibility for Indigenous Rights, the TRC has stressed that provincial, territorial, and municipal orders of government must also play a key role in reconciliation. Several experts point out that the federal government is not solely responsible for reconciliation and that other governments must also do their part. A foundational problem is the structural disconnect between the federal government's reconciliation agenda and the day-to-day realities that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples experience under provincial and municipal governance.

Patzer identifies the structural roots of this problem, tracing how the provincial Crown was essentially created in ways that gave it enormous jurisdiction over the lives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples without any commensurate accountability to those Peoples or to the treaties that were supposed to govern Crown-Indigenous relations. First Nations did not receive all the land promised to them, and to some extent, the federal government acknowledges that reality. At the same time, there is a lack of federal accountability. As he articulates, the federal government is sometimes willing to accede to providing some First Nations with specific Territories. First Nations are asked to provide "a wish list of parcels of land that you'd like to add to your reserve base." However, anything of potential value on the list can prompt provincial governments to refuse, leading in some instances to protracted legal cases. Patzer traces the root of the problem to our constitutional arrangements, and "the fact that back in the early 1900s, the federal government decided to use the natural resources transfer agreements to devolve the public lands down into provincial jurisdiction without first making sure that their promises for land base were fulfilled. And so that became provincial land."

Forms of buck-passing ensue, with the provinces refusing to give up any potentially valuable lands, claiming that only the federal government has an obligation to First Nations. Patzer says the provinces "have been one of the largest sources of delay when it comes to resolution of those issues. And there are many issues then where we have this very complex disjuncture with that kind of tripartite relationship, where the federal government is responsible for the Crown's relationship with Indigenous Peoples. But so many of the major institutions and so many sources of jurisdiction are with the



provinces." Patzer elaborates: "As far as the provinces are concerned, all public lands were devolved down to being provincial jurisdiction. And basically, the land parcels that First Nations have any kind of say over are just the reserve lands."

Duhamel similarly recounts the history of the current governance situation: "There was, in the 1950s, a giant transfer of education and social services to the provinces, which dramatically impacted how Indigenous Peoples dealt with the federal government." She continues:

"The transfer of education and social welfare to the provinces had significant impacts on how programs were funded. Provinces that were often also underfunded through the transfer payment process would then choose where they were going to invest their transfer payment money." Given that Canada is not a unitary system, the federal government is not necessarily closely regulating how transfer payments are spent, since federalism assumes that "it's not supposed to be a supervisory relationship."

The provincial government can therefore cut funding to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and blame the federal government. Federalism also creates a lack of accountability at the local level, which Duhamel identifies as a problem of both "jurisdictional crowding and jurisdictional neglect." In areas like child welfare and health, municipal and local bodies can suffer from both too many overlapping jurisdictions and, thus, too little accountability, as everyone claims that someone else should be responsible.

Another key issue identified concerned differential access to the benefits of government policies. Steeves specifically highlights inequalities in terms of "who has a right to claim any benefits that might come from processing what's held in and on land, the Canadian government, First Nations, private companies, and others." She specifically focuses on Métis Rights, asking: "Will they be involved in such developments in any area of Canada?" She observes:

"Métis do not have Rights to reclaim their former homelands. Some First Nations and Indigenous communities in Canada are now speaking out about excluding Métis people and communities from the right of self-government for their communities. There are over 400 years of Métis history in Canada. I have documented hundreds of historical and contemporary Métis communities across Canada; there are thousands of Métis people who are still fighting to reclaim their identity."

The situation is extremely difficult, articulates Steeves, in that they "face a double-edged sword between colonization and those who would deny their existence." She outlines the scope of the problem:



"It is well documented that this creates mental health and wellness issues for thousands of people in Canada seeking to reclaim their ancestors, their histories and their identities. I think we have got into a sad place in history where truth, honesty and wisdom, and the Seven Grandfather Teachings take a backseat to some leaders' hopes for financial profit from lands."

A CONSENSUS VIEW: LONG-TERM FUNDING IS NEEDED

In their interviews, many experts note serious problems with government funding cutbacks and the continued problems of short-term funding (for example, Fraser, Logan, Sinclair, Supernant, Mosby, Watts, Smith, Carleton, Gabel, Woolford, and Duhamel). Nearly every expert identifies the lack of sustained, long-term core funding as a fundamental barrier to reconciliation. Duhamel concludes that "core funding is almost impossible to work without and achieve any kind of measurable or significant result." Indeed: "very sporadic or project time-limited funding hampers efforts towards reconciliation because people can't plan in more than one program cycle or one year or two years, and that's not a very long time to identify concrete markers of progress or results. And if we're not measuring in a comprehensive way, then we are still playing whack-a-mole with funding and with programs."

Regan also identifies long-term funding as crucial, alongside the willingness to carry out "deeper structural and policy changes." "Otherwise," she observes, "you just make superficial changes that do little to change the status quo." Regan also stresses that "multi-year stable funding" was emphasized by both the TRC and the Independent Special Interlocutor, because without it, "Indigenous communities and organizations spend a good part of their time just applying for the next funding cycle. It doesn't create a stable environment." Fraser notes that funding cycles are so short that "there are Nations that I know of who had to pull the pin mid-project." She concludes that "long-term stable funding is what we need because even if funding is reinstated, it is not helpful when research projects lose momentum when there's turnover in staff, when Indigenous governments turn to other projects in the meantime."

A major area of immediate crisis is the termination of funding directed towards addressing the ongoing emergency of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Of concern for Logan was the suddenness and severity of these cuts, which resulted from a lack of political will to continue supporting this important work. Watts also notes the "lack of core funding available from the government for different programs" and the cuts to MMIWG funding.²⁸ Sinclair expands on this crisis and the effects of broad financial rollbacks: "a number of MMIWG programs have been cut as of

28 For recent discussion of cuts to funding, see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/mmiwg2s-program-funding-indigenous-women-9.7156396>.



March 31, 2026, as funding wasn't renewed. The Department of Justice recently planned to let go of 197 employees and 37 executives, lawyers from across the government."²⁹ Sinclair estimates that 20% of these people work on treaty and Indigenous Rights within CIRNAC.

Another critical domain is the urgent work surrounding missing and disappeared children and unmarked burials. Kisha Supernant (Citizen of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, Director, Institute of Prairie and Indigenous Archaeology and Professor, University of Alberta) emphasizes that the current federal "search and recovery" funding for suspected burials of missing and disappeared children was reactive to the news cycles in 2021. Funding is now ending just as some communities are now ready to start detailed research. Indeed: "The archival work, the survivor testimony work, healing work, commemoration work, there were some that only started in the last year or two, and now we're never going to have the opportunity to even search the grounds of their residential school because there's no money for it anymore." Supernant continues: "My understanding is that there is no community funding. There may be one exception to a commitment of funding beyond March 31, 2027. No one is near done, nowhere near." She reflects that "it's possible that CIRNAC, within their big umbrella of funding, may still choose to allocate some of that funding toward this, but there's been no clear announcement of that. And communities that I know are getting mixed messages."

There is an urgency to these processes, as Logan describes: "There is a genuine concern for certain locations where the acute nature of where the places are — the threat, protecting some of the sites as cemeteries and as sacred spaces — has become a political, financial, social, and economic burden on all of those host Nations, the communities where the former schools were located." Logan further describes the acute vulnerability of communities conducting site protection work. She expresses "a genuine concern for certain locations — protecting some of the sites as cemeteries and as sacred spaces. I think part of that is becoming a political, financial, social, economic burden on all of those kinds of host Nations, the Nations where the former schools were located." Supernant is also clear that former school sites where there could be buried children must be protected from being "developed or destroyed or sold." These are sacred places, and "wanting to protect and commemorate is definitely a goal that many communities have."

It is important to note that there has been no comprehensive government response to the OSI's final report so far, a problem noted by both Fraser and Regan. "Findings and implementation measures" remain unaddressed almost two years later (Regan). Fraser also traces how funding cuts ended the work of the National Advisory Committee on Residential Schools, Missing Children, and Unmarked Burials:

²⁹ For discussion and confirmation of the numbers, see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/cuts-targeting-indigenous-rights-staff-at-justice-department-reckless-critics-warn-9.7097164>.



"Without explanation, government funding that was made available after 2021 for residential schools' research was halted at the end of March 2025. To this day, we have not received an explanation. Initially, that funding was a direct response to community needs to undertake work around missing and disappeared Indigenous children related to residential schools and those who died there. That need is ongoing and will take many decades. This is one example of the harmful effects of very short funding cycles. There were many projects that had to come to a premature close because of the abrupt loss of funding."

AN URGENT PROBLEM: DECLINING BUDGETS TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS HEALTH

Many experts cited Indigenous health and access to good-quality healthcare as themes. Steeves notes a serious lack of government support for Indigenous health in her communities: "The reality is that intergenerational trauma is going to expand every year if people cannot get support, facilities, and healing. I don't think the government has considered that. What is the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations today? And if we are going to serve them in any way to deal with healing and reconciliation, how many mental health facilities and people do we need on the ground?" Steeves continues:

"When it comes to addictions and addiction services, if you look at the number of people that were impacted, you're looking at millions of people. Divide that by the number of treatment centres open and funded for Indigenous People. You're going to have less than 0.5%. When you look at the number of impacted people and the number of treatment centers specifically for Indigenous People, it's extremely low."

Steeves observes that "trying to find mental health and addiction services for Indigenous People who are intergenerational trauma Survivors is like looking for a needle in a haystack." The result is that "intergenerational trauma keeps getting passed on generation by generation by generation because there is no healing available." She calls for "understanding that there needs to be a lot more funding and a lot more mental health services."

Related to health, Sinclair asks: "If you don't provide the right funding, then how on earth can you alleviate the concerns and the suffering that is taking place? Jordan's Principle is the biggest example of that. All of the cuts to that program have decimated Indigenous service delivery organizations across the country."³⁰ Sinclair also points to data from tracking news posts about Indigenous issues from primary sources. His tracking explicitly identifies significant problems of systemic racism and

³⁰ As per Brett Forester: "Jordan's Principle is a legal rule ensuring First Nations kids get timely access to public health and social services without bureaucratic delays over which government (provincial, territorial or federal) should pay for it." For a recent discussion of cuts, see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/tribunal-first-nations-education-funding-9.7039685>.



discrimination: 24% in Child Welfare, 33% in Education, 39% in Health and 63% in Justice. Gabel has also prioritized the importance of "addressing anti-Indigenous racism in healthcare systems" and improving cultural safety. She highlights the severe barriers First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples face when accessing medical care, noting that many do not want to go to the doctor due to "racism, and all the barriers that that entails." She argues: "I think a lot of the TRC Calls to Action, particularly ones in health, calls 18 to 24, remain unfulfilled." She continues, "They still face persistent inequities in health, you know, in housing, in access to services." More representation is needed, too, for example, within CIHR. She observes, "I'm the scientific director for the Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health; there are 12 other institutes at CIHR. There's never been an Indigenous person in any other institute, except for the Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health."

Gabel notes that existing monitoring efforts remain fragmented and not well coordinated: "There is significant duplication across agencies, and the overall approach is highly fragmented and ad hoc. I have not seen — or heard of — any single agency, department, or even ministerial or governmental body taking clear leadership on this issue." Gabel also links this rollback of reconciliation to federal budgeting choices: "Even though commitments are often reiterated, funding decisions do not always reflect that sort of scale or the urgency of those commitments. Health is such a prime example because there was no new money in Indigenous health in the federal budget." In northern and remote communities, fragmented funding and short-term staffing models contribute to high turnover among health professionals, undermining the continuity of care important to effective healthcare. For Gabel:

"Advancing these Calls to Action really requires more than just policy or program commitments. We really need to see accountability; we need long-term investment. We need resources, money, and an actual willingness to transform systems, not just adapt them. Without that, its progress is just going to be incremental or not at all, rather than actually transformative."

She argues that self-determination in health must be central: "One of the most important aspects of the TRC, and I would link this specifically to health recommendations, is really the emphasis on self-determination and supporting Indigenous communities to design and to deliver and to govern their own health services. To me, this is where we would see the greatest potential for meaningful and lasting change." This is crucial work in which Gabel is deeply engaged. She concludes that "providing support to communities to design, deliver, and govern their own health services" is necessary.

In the North, Inuit encounter distinct challenges which are important to outline here. These include unique health concerns, with Inuit communities having some of the highest disease and suicide rates globally. There are also extremely high rates of tuberculosis, for which there has been insufficient government funding to eliminate. Food insecurity, chronically underfunded (and overcrowded)



housing and infrastructure, and disease rates are among the highest in the world. Statistics Canada reports that in 2022, more than three-quarters of Inuit children experienced food insecurity. The inequities between Inuit and southern communities remain extreme, and current government funding is insufficient. These are an ongoing legacy of colonial dispossession. Inuit leaders argue that meaningful reconciliation can't be measured by symbolic gestures but by concrete improvements to Inuit lives.³¹

DECREASED SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND DECLINING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Several experts have discussed the problems of access to information and restrictions placed on archives. Mosby discusses a "dramatic rollback" in access to archival information, with Access to Information and Privacy requests taking many years. Library and Archives Canada (LAC) files, specifically Record Group 10 files related to Indian health services, are subject to heavy privacy restrictions, while the RCMP is a "black hole" for information, and many church archives have removed access to limit their liability (points also raised by Sinclair). Watts has noted recent problematic restrictions on patient records for former Indian hospitals, citing an "abundance of caution around privacy." Mosby recounts the absence of structured, long-term support for research on Indian hospitals, medical experiments and the uncovering of other "hard truths" that are foundational for reconciliation: "There are a lot of broad issues that could have had attention, and it would not have cost the government very much money."

To this, Supernant highlights the "huge barrier" that communities face in accessing the data they need from archives. While some churches have opened their vaults, others (like specific Catholic archdioceses) have resisted or provided "data dumps," large numbers of files in unreadable formats. Logan similarly describes the ongoing "uphill battle" to open records and the lack of institutional/state capacity for archiving and digitization. When it comes to locating the burials of missing and disappeared children, Sinclair highlights the need to obtain access to records: "The National Center for Truth and Reconciliation still has roadblocks getting records from the federal government and some of the provinces and territories. Not all the coroner's offices across the country have released all the records that they have of the deaths of Indigenous kids."

Steeves notes, too, that the work of documenting the number of sites involved is still in progress, a scope that extends well beyond the institutions detailed in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. She argues: "If we're looking for unmarked burials and we are to leave no child behind, we need to look at every location that residential schools, Indian hospitals, or Indian day schools existed."

³¹ See: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/minister-gull-masty-2026-inuit-communities-funding-9.7096172>



She has documented and created a database of more than "900 former residential schools, day schools, and Indian hospitals in Canada." Industrial schools are not yet in the database, but should also be included. She concludes: "We need to look at all of them. Every single one needs to search for unmarked burials. The government needs to consider the intergenerational trauma of all of those communities that those children came from."

THE NEED FOR AN INDEPENDENT INDIGENOUS-LED ORGANIZATION ON MISSING AND DISAPPEARED CHILDREN

Supernant argues that further research on missing and disappeared children is needed, alongside support for locating burial sites. She recommends following the "guidance of the sacred obligations outlined by the Office of Special Interlocutor, which is to create an arm's length, independent body that's Indigenous-led, that would bring together folks who do this work, who are Indigenous or work closely with community to support in a broad sense the diversity of community needs." Support would include training for community members, state-of-the-art equipment either for purchase or for use from a regional center. This could be "something like an independent commission, something that had a certain amount of autonomy because there's a lot of mistrust, for good reason, of large institutions like the federal government or the RCMP getting too involved."

In conducting technical work, such as searching for unmarked graves, Supernant emphasizes that communities must be funded directly to lead local operations, rather than relying solely on top-down state structures. A crucial element, too, is to enforce data sovereignty in accordance with OCAP principles. Further research will reveal that a much higher proportion of children who entered residential schools died than was previously thought, and certainly compared to children in mainstream settler schools. Supernant is clear: "The work of finding missing children is truth-telling. And truth has to happen before reconciliation. There were truths shared in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the truths of missing children in the unmarked graves and the history of that were not told enough. That truth is not well enough known for reconciliation even to be possible."

THE MEASUREMENT CALLS TO ACTION: MAJOR GAPS IN ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Jewell identifies the "measurement Calls to Action" as among the most important and consistently neglected: "In each of the legacies, aside from language in child welfare, health, justice, education, there were what we called the measurement Calls to Action, and these called on the federal government to compile information about Indigenous and non-Indigenous attainments in education or the state of child welfare in comparison. And we always wondered why they weren't easily produced." She notes the government's minimal compliance: "CIRNAC put out numbers for one year in 2017, and then they were like, 'yes, we did it.' But no, that needs to be annual, ongoing, measurable data that shows us the trends of the comparables between Indigenous and non-Indigenous."



Mosby also points to the measurement calls to action about mandatory government reporting as emblematic of the government's lack of seriousness: "Call to Action 2, child welfare reporting. Call to Action 9, education reporting. Call to Action 19, trying to find measurable goals when it comes to healthcare outcomes." He notes: "If you don't have the data reporting, you can't even speak in a meaningful way about Canada's progress because we don't even know. A lot of this data is not even being collected." A particular problem is the lack of transparency and clarity in federal budget documents, which often feature promises but rarely indicate how much has been spent and where, from year to year. Mosby recalls: "If you don't have a baseline, if you're not producing the reporting goals, it's hard to tell the difference between new spending and what is actually just renewed old spending. The way the budget documents are written, it's really difficult to tell what is just the same spending or even lower than the previous year." The complexity, opacity, and lack of detail mean government budgeting lacks transparency.

Fraser notes that instead of providing clear, measurable data regarding the gaps, the government relies on ambiguous language and opaque status updates on official websites, bypassing the detailed comparative tracking the TRC requested: "Part of the problem is the federal government is so vague on what they're doing. If you visit their website, it will say something like, '14 or 15 Calls to Action are complete.' And then, '75 in progress.' And we have zero clue what those are, what the timeline is, or what they look like. That information needs to be made public, and we need actions, and we need timelines in order to keep them accountable."

In a similar discussion, Sinclair has identified data access as a fundamental roadblock to reconciliation: "There are five Calls to Action that deal specifically with access to data in child welfare and education (not started) and health and justice (stalled)." However, little, if anything, has been done: "The TRC issued a specific mandate for provinces, territories, and governments to provide data relating to specific items in all of the above. Data is fundamental to solutions. If you do not have the data, you cannot develop effective solutions."

In the health field, Gabel adds that any existing monitoring is fragmented and not public or coordinated: "I think there probably is reporting, but there's so much duplication where there are so many different agencies, and it's so fragmented that there probably is some monitoring, but it's very ad hoc. I haven't seen anything or heard of any one agency or department, or even at the ministerial or government level, taking a lead on this."

On the TRC's justice-related Calls to Action, Watts notes that there have not been clear measurable improvements: "In terms of the justice system, I think there's a lot of work to do. The disproportionate numbers of Indigenous Peoples who have been incarcerated has only increased since the TRC, even



though there are several Calls to Action about the justice system." She explicitly links this to child welfare: "there's still the whole pipeline from child welfare into the prison system, still very much a connection, because we have those disproportionate numbers in the child welfare system, and there is absolutely data that confirms that these two are a connection, and that it's a causal relationship in many ways." Sinclair has also noted similar problems with an increase in Indigenous over-incarceration. Even as awareness has grown, the failure to measure and report on the specific gaps leaves advocates without the necessary information. Sinclair notes: "Every year, Indigenous incarceration rates go higher and higher. In 2015, the rate was 24.4%. In 2024, nine years after the TRC issued their recommendations with a focus on reducing over-representation, the rate is now 33%, so something is not working."

Even without clear data, people can tell there are continued problems. Starzyk notes from her qualitative and quantitative research on Canadian perceptions of reconciliation: "People aren't seeing the progress in Indigenous Peoples' quality of life. So, we're seeing both non-Indigenous and Indigenous folks saying that Indigenous People are not thriving, that there isn't systemic equality, that there isn't representation and leadership, that there isn't a Nation-to-Nation relationship, and certainly there's not personal equality."

THE LACK OF BENCHMARKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GOVERNMENTS

A major recurring recommendation is that the Council must hold governments accountable through rigorous data collection. Government spending can be difficult to track, and the impact of funding is hard to monitor. For example, recent government announcements in 2026 sound promising, such as a federal commitment of \$115 million to renew the Inuit Child First Initiative. This is a temporary program that ensures equal access to essential services, including education and health, for Indigenous children. The government also announced a \$1-billion Arctic Infrastructure Fund, which could have dual benefits for Inuit communities and Canada's defence needs. Another recent \$8.5 billion commitment to overhaul Ontario's on-reserve child and family services looks promising, following an agreement reached by 131 First Nations and the federal government.³² To what extent are these commitments to the Calls to Action? How is success to be determined?

Duhamel has stressed the need for governments to establish concrete goals: "creating benchmarks that are actionable or point us toward the right action would be an important way to deliver on the promises of reconciliation and to make sure it's meaningful to the people who we're working to reconcile with." Duhamel argues that the government tends to "report on outputs, but it doesn't actually often report on results." For example: "If I tell you that I need a new pair of boots and you keep

32 See, for example: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/minister-gull-masty-2026-inuit-communities-funding-9.7096172> and <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ontario-first-nations-child-welfare-deal-funding-roll-out-9.7192941>



bringing me a sandwich, that's not what I said that I needed. It's not helping me." She suggests taking each Call to Action and asking, "so what?" That is: "what did we want to happen here when the TRC made a call for greater awareness training? What's the goal there? We want people to have undergone training. We want them to use it."

Duhamel also emphasizes the longitudinal nature of this work: "We need to develop measurable results and benchmarks, and then we need to have the patience to track them over time and to empower Indigenous communities and organizations to deliver things in the way that makes sense." She notes that "Everybody wants to get things done really quickly, and I get it. I'm like that, too." However, speed is not necessarily beneficial, given that we need "generational changes" and "10-year, 15-year commitments." Duhamel stresses the need to "commit to the longitudinal nature of reconciliation, in our funding and in our actions. And then we need to follow it over time. And I think ultimately, that's how we make it real and that's how we make it meaningful."

To gauge whether reconciliation is being achieved, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples must be central to every stage of the process. Duhamel recommends that benchmarks and measurements must take place using "an Indigenous evaluator or a team of Indigenous evaluators with Indigenous-specific methodologies and evaluation insights. Because researchers will do this in a very particular way, and evaluators will do it in a different way, I think that in this context, it is really important. The challenge with this Council and many other bodies like it is the accountability question. I hope I'm not the only person to say this, but it doesn't have the teeth that I think it ought to have."

Similar to Duhamel's recommendations, Fraser suggests accountability mechanisms and long-term public implementation plans: "moving from reporting on the 94 Calls to Action to actual accountability." Government must include "a clear public implementation plan." She develops this point by suggesting a solution: "to legislate mechanisms of accountability around the 94 Calls to Action — making Canada accountable to the National Council for Reconciliation, and to Canadians more broadly. In that model, what consequences would exist for failing to meet established timelines or implementation goals?"

Smith offers a similar conclusion: "We actually need a TRC implementation plan, [an] action plan." There is a role for the National Council for Reconciliation in mandating, overseeing, or planning to "co-constitute what the legislation could look like, what the implementation could look like." She calls for five-year timelines: "What should be accomplished from the Calls to Action? So, what has been started, stalled, or finished? What is close, but just needs some support? Indigenous People can identify those priorities, and then what will it take, say, five years? What should take a little longer? But without an action plan and timelines for delivery, it leaves it up to chance." Crucially, Smith calls for an "oversight body for implementation," a role the Council could certainly perform.



PART 3:

A New Era in Reconciliation? Recommendations for the National Council on Reconciliation



A LEADERSHIP ROLE FOR THE COUNCIL

The experts recommended that the Council exercise leadership and provide direction and guidance on how the federal, provincial, territorial, and even municipal governments can promote reconciliation (Newhouse, Sinclair, Fraser, Woolford, Duhamel, Regan, Supernant, Smith, Carleton). Due to delays in its establishment and funding, the Council has yet to exercise an appreciable leadership role in advancing reconciliation, which Sinclair calls “a huge, missed opportunity.”³³ Experts have referenced the fact that there was an Interim Board of Directors from 2017 to 2018, followed by a Transitional Committee. Despite promises of federal funding, it is unclear to date how much has been spent and what has been accomplished.

The Council, in its current form, only came into existence after the *National Council for Reconciliation Act* (Bill C-29) came into force on July 2, 2024. For many experts, the Council now has some catching up to do. Newhouse is clear on this point: “There’s no one in the political leadership either now on the Indigenous or on the Canadian or provincial side who is leading it. Reconciliation has become a dirty word because people are saying we’re not achieving what we want it to achieve.” Newhouse continues: “I see reconciliation as this multi-site, multi-generational, multi-actor, national conversation that needed to be moderated and led. As far as I can see, no one is leading it.”

Until recently, there has been no institutional ability for the Council to highlight and call out failures and problems in achieving the Calls to Action. Newhouse points out the current leadership void in implementing the Calls to Action, which the Council can fill: “I think they have to play a leadership role.” He continues: “So far, they have been pretty silent in the public domain. I don’t see them speaking on television, or here, or see them having op-eds in the newspapers, giving interviews or anything to that effect. And so, reconciliation is now almost sidelined on the national agenda.” The issue is serious: “there’s no one telling us, as a country, how to do this, because we’ve never done this before. And so, what we need, again, is someone to say, okay, here’s examples, here’s what you can do.” To this Woolford adds a suggestion that the Council “create space not just for minimalist notions of reconciliation,” but “to try to push the boundaries of what is thinkable.”

33 For details, see: <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs/news/2025/03/inaugural-board-of-directors-for-the-national-council-for-reconciliation-named.html>; https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-northern-affairs/news/2017/12/interim-board_ofdirectorsforthenationalcouncilforreconciliation.html; <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs/news/2024/04/national-council-for-reconciliation-act-becomes-law-a-positive-step-toward-fulfilling-calls-to-action-from-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission.html>. The Minister for Crown-Indigenous Relations described the role of the Council this way: “a permanent, independent, non-political, Indigenous-led organization that will reflect the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and respect the visions of Survivors. It will serve as a catalyst for innovative thought, dialogue, and action and will monitor, evaluate, and report on efforts to advance reconciliation, including implementation of the Calls to Action, at all levels of government and throughout Canada.” See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs/news/2024/07/statement-by-minister-anandasangaree-on-the-coming-into-force-of-legislation-to-establish-the-national-council-for-reconciliation.html>.



Certainly, there is a political necessity for an Indigenous-led non-partisan body to take on this role. Trudeau's embrace of reconciliation as a champion may, as Carleton notes, have created problems, reinforcing the perception that Conservatives were not involved in reconciliation either. After all, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered the apology to Indian Residential School Survivors in the House of Commons. Trudeau's focus on performing reconciliation meant in practice that "a lot of people associate reconciliation with the Liberals, when in reality it was supposed to be bipartisan; it was supposed to change the relationship for all Canadians."

To ensure the Council remains effective, experts argue that it must act independently and expansively. Fraser emphasizes that the Council must move beyond mere observation: "I want the Council to be strong in providing leadership and criticism in advancing the conversation around truth and reconciliation in this country. But if the government is not making progress on any of the Calls to Action and never will, then that cannot be the Council's sole mandate. They need to expand and grow their own vision." Smith asks a pertinent question: "What is the mechanism that the current government, or the provincial governments, have for regular annual updates on the status of their implementation strategy? We need a national, binding reporting and enforcement mechanism in Canada for the TRC, if it's actually going to move forward in a meaningful way."

For Regan, given that the TRC was "fairly broad in scope...the key is for the Council to interpret and implement the mandate with bold vision, like the TRC did." She also defines the Council's role as a mediator of complex truths: "to be that voice of balance and respectful dialogue that encourages people not to shy away from confronting settler-colonial Canada's historical and ongoing injustices relating to Indigenous Peoples." Sinclair frames a key long-term role for the Council and the federal government as narrative work: "The Council is going to have a huge PR job in terms of keeping the conversation and the focus on reconciliation and what it means and how you move it forward. And that does mean calling a spade a spade and flagging and amplifying everything that is impeding or getting in the way of what that means." Central to their role, as Sinclair argues, will be steering the discussion of reconciliation away from "economic reconciliation and residential school denialism," to specific issues like "the over-incarceration of Indigenous People in prisons and Indigenous kids in child welfare."

It is important to note that not everyone is in favour of the Council's structure, and concerns have been raised about its potential effectiveness and representativeness. In 2022, ITK withdrew their support for Bill C-29. One concern was that the Council might undermine the Inuit bilateral relationship with the federal government. Another was that Bill C-29 did not provide the Council with the means to hold the federal government accountable if it failed in its obligations to implement the Calls to Action. Further, the lack of enforcement powers meant that the Council lacked teeth, and its



existence might be used to avoid creating a stronger body.³⁴ Another critique of the Council was that some of the 13 directors would not be representing Indigenous Rights Holders. The ITK also noted that while at least two directors must be from Yukon, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut, and two-thirds of the directors must be Indigenous, there are no other guarantees of further Inuit representation.³⁵ At the time of writing, the ITK had not provided a nominee for a board director for the Council's consideration.

In August 2022, both the ITK and the Métis National Council proposed creating an organization with stronger enforcement powers, calling on Justice Canada to establish an Indigenous Human Rights Commission and Tribunal. The model envisaged would possess the "powers, duties and functions of a National Human Rights Institution, as defined by the Paris Principles." The model would also include independence and pluralism as well as "quasi-judicial competence," and the mandate to "provide recourse and remedy for infringements of Indigenous Rights." Further, the Tribunal would, based on the UNDRIP, create "a body of administrative Indigenous Rights law." The proposal expressed concern that existing bodies in Canada were too controlled by either provincial or federal governments.³⁶

NCR LEADERSHIP AND COOPERATION WITH ALL ORDERS OF GOVERNMENT

The experts stated that the Council must ensure it works with all orders of government, even though it is tasked with reporting only to the federal government. Regan envisages the Council potentially as "an overarching body that could help the whole country move forward. In my mind, that includes all levels of government. Several TRC Calls to Action focus on the roles and responsibilities of provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. Just holding the federal government to account is not going to be enough." Regan makes a crucial point:

"While much of the emphasis regarding the Council is quite rightly on its mandate as an accountability measure to monitor, evaluate and report on Canada's progress on reconciliation, it also has an important public dialogue, education, policy development and research function that is essential to ensuring that the truth and reconciliation process remains dynamic, evolving over time in response to changing circumstances."

Mosby cautions the Council against accepting governmental redefinitions of reconciliation, particularly their embrace of "economic reconciliation," which undermines the TRC's original intent. To counteract this, Mosby advises the Council to stay grounded: "to be speaking to people on the ground

34 For a discussion, see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/itk-reverses-support-c-29-national-reconciliation-council-1.6669809>

35 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/itk-considers-rejecting-role-on-reconciliation-oversight-body-1.7192345>

36 The proposal can be found here: <https://itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Indigenous-Human-Rights-Tribunal-ITK-and-MNC-EN.pdf>



who are experts in this. And a lot of times those experts are people in the healthcare field, Indigenous People, Indigenous physicians or Indigenous nurses or community members working at the local nursing station and in remote communities." Smith also calls for champions to "take up the mantle." She suggests identifying:

"Examples in provinces where good things are happening, as exemplars, to give ideas for other provinces where they're not happening. Municipalities may actually be doing some of the more interesting things. I think of city councils who have advisory circles, who have Elder advisory councils, who champion certain kinds of Indigenous initiatives, and who have Indigenous leads in their governance bodies."

Carleton suggests that the Council develop a database of municipal best practices, making it easier for municipalities to learn from each other's experiences. The Council could develop resources for smaller communities and rural areas, which often lack the capacity to develop their own reconciliation initiatives. "Rural museums and archives" and similar institutions might be interested, but "just don't have the resources to have a travelling exhibit on progress on reconciliation." Carleton also highlights specific examples of municipal actions regarding systemic accountability: "Municipalities have done a lot of work on reconciliation that sometimes gets ignored. If there's a name change or a statute change or some of these different kinds of initiatives, municipalities do play a role, and they're just not as deeply entrenched in the sort of political divide as we see at other levels of politics."

Provincially, Newhouse sees merit in having a cabinet minister in each province responsible for reconciliation. This portfolio could potentially be assigned to the minister currently handling Indigenous affairs.

COMBATting INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL DENIALISM

Denial and denialism were mentioned by most interviewees as serious obstacles to reconciliation. Some suggested making residential school denialism a criminal offence (Supernant). The current federal government's removal of the \$5-million budget to support a program to combat residential school denialism (allocated in previous years under the Trudeau government) was cited as a particular problem that must be reversed (Fraser, Carleton).³⁷ Taking a strong stand against denialism is crucial for the Council, and Regan envisages it playing "an extremely important role in helping people to understand denialism and the motivations behind it." As she explains further, "Denialism is rooted in a reluctance to challenge faulty myths of celebratory settler colonial history that exclude Indigenous

37 Details of the budget allocation can be found here: <https://budget.canada.ca/2024/report-rapport/chap6-en.html>.



history and experience from Canada's national historical narrative." Regan also connects denialism with the politics of fear:

"A vocal minority is spreading a lot of misinformation about residential schools, especially search and recovery efforts to identify and locate the missing children and unmarked burials. There is also misinformation about Indigenous Rights. In B.C., there's been fear-mongering that recent court decisions put private property rights at risk. Denialism doesn't serve the country well, and this is why ongoing education is critical."

Supernant observes that the problems of denialism are not going away: "The deniers are louder and getting more attention. There are a lot of folks in Canada who can be easily swayed by the talking points." She highlights the profound psychological violence this inflicts on Elders, who feel pressured into exhuming remains solely to silence bad-faith actors:

"I've had even Elders and Survivors say, well, we have to dig them up so that we can prove the deniers wrong, which is, to me, just horrific that they have to think that way. And of course, it wouldn't silence the deniers because it will never be enough for them. And if you're always chasing, trying to change their mind, then you won't make the decisions for the reasons you need to."

As such, Supernant supports the Council acting as a trusted authority: "For knowing what's actually happening and for sharing that truth in ways to counter denialism ... would be really valuable." She stresses that demands for exhumations ("where are the bodies?") are both culturally inappropriate and based on misunderstanding: "we're not trying to parade our children's bodies in front of you. That's a horrible thing to ask. We already know children died. We're trying to figure out where they might be buried. That's what we're doing right now and who they might belong to."

Similar to Supernant's observations, Sinclair identifies denialism as a structural threat to the advancement of reconciliation, "becoming much more prevalent. It is getting more voice, more platforms are espousing these ideas around residential school denialism and giving it and feeding the fire." Denialists routinely hijack the narrative of missing children to force a forensic debate that traumatizes Survivors. Sinclair explains this tactic: "They wanted to change the content." In short: "They keep saying, where's the bodies? Where's the bodies? Where's the bodies?" The idea of exhuming bodies to disprove denialists is problematic and does not conform to the mandate of the OSI: "The key thing is identifying the kids that are missing." He continues:

"The denialists don't want to listen to the reasons why things are taking longer than they would like. But the delay is based on respect, on recognition, on honouring the dead. For example, the



Kamloops Indian Residential School had at least 38 different Indigenous Nations with different beliefs, spiritual traditions and cultural practices. So, there are significant reasons why it takes time."

Logan also underlines the effect on Survivors and communities: "How, then, to protect Survivors? Because they have to face — through Facebook messages or comments or phone calls or sometimes through physical threats — physical violence, [and] very severe violent racism." And she insists that denialism and hate are experienced in the middle of ongoing work like ground-penetrating radar (GPR) searches: "It's Survivors who are day-to-day in the middle of doing the work, doing their GPR scans and doing the missing children research and having to also fight hatred and racism and ... violent, illegal activity while they're in the middle of doing the work."

There is also a central role for the federal government, which, as Carleton argues, must be above partisan politics, and must "see residential school denialism as part of the poisoning of the political relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples at large. And if they allow that to take root and fester, this work is going to be impossible." Carleton emphasizes how denialism has become a wedge strategy for the far right, especially in B.C., "where the right is not united, but it seems to be in agreement that Indigenous People are the enemy." He worries that "Discourse and rhetoric have become very dangerous, very hostile, very antagonistic," while "race hatred," is becoming "a political tool for fundraising, but also to gain political momentum." The Council must also work with the churches to call out denialism and deniers, to work, as Carleton suggests, "collaboratively with churches to play a more active role in educating their members and the public about the necessity of reconciliation." Professional associations must also stand up and express commitment to reconciliation. Denialism has already impacted professional education, specifically through the example of the Law Society of British Columbia, which was lobbied by denialists, as Carleton observes, "to change their mandatory cultural competency course. That's a pretty concrete example of how you can have a few people promoting residential school denialism, and they can directly impact a legal regulatory body." Sinclair has also noted the same point.

Sometimes, however, not acceding to deniers' attention-seeking performances is the best course of action. Patzer notes that universities face a unique challenge in handling deniers, observing that ignoring them is often the safest defence against their tactics: "Coming to campuses and trying to stir things up and perhaps getting removed or rejected by security actually helps to feed that kind of renown and that kind of attention-getting."

Woolford maintains that while intellectual arguments have a place, the most potent weapon against denialism is human empathy forged by supporting and platforming Survivors' Voices. The power to influence people lies with the "Survivors' stories, the power was still in the stories themselves and the



ways in which they can relay that." While Survivors are ageing, Woolford notes, "they're very effective at countering and creating empathy that overcomes the misinformation." Their words, too, "connect not just to knowledge enhancement, but to emotional intelligence and empathy [that] can be effective for advancing reconciliation."

In short, the Council can act as a powerful voice against denialism, ensuring that the accurate facts of the Indian Residential School system, MMIWG, and the missing and disappeared children are clearly articulated to the public.

UNDERSTANDING RECONCILIATION AS CONTEXT-SPECIFIC AND EVOLVING

Numerous experts articulate that reconciliation needs to be understood not only through the TRC Calls to Action but also through other processes. One strand of thought concerns how reconciliation must be grounded in how First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples understand of the term. The Calls to Action were never the only way to understand reconciliation. George's understanding of reconciliation is rooted in the Nuu-chah-nulth teaching of "hišukʔišćawaak - everything is one." She explains: "We can't just address one aspect, and if we're talking about the harm caused by colonialism, we can't just talk about residential schools. We have to talk about the ways that we were forced onto reservations, physically removed from our places where our engagement with the ocean and our lands is restricted." This holistic relational framework insists that reconciliation must also encompass reconciliation with Indigenous Land and Territory.

Ottawa observes: "Instead of aiming for systemic reconciliation, we need to place more emphasis on the need for Indigenous Peoples to reconcile themselves with their own legal systems, their identity and their language because of the impacts of colonialism." Regarding her people, she explains: "We are a people of oral tradition; the law is not written, but we live it. We live our own law through our ceremonies, our stories, and especially our language, because in my community, 95% of the population still speaks Nehirowimowin." In her community, the customary legal order of the Nehirowisiwok places the child at the center and aims to empower them through their decision-making autonomy. This approach differs from Western conceptions, particularly those in Quebec, as she notes, which establish a hierarchy where parents are responsible for the child's well-being. According to the Nehirowisiwok conception, Ottawa explains that a person is considered a "dividuality," a notion that highlights responsibility towards others and the reciprocal relationship with all beings, whether human or not.

Newhouse interprets reconciliation through the Calls to Action as a series of ethical questions: "How do we live well together? What are the things that we need to do in order to live well together?" He divides the Calls into four areas, where people can choose to participate based on their own



experiences, expertise, and comfort levels. Promoting equity is the first area, focusing on achieving equity across education, health, and economics. The second area is harmony, which can refer to race relations between peoples. The recognition and restoration of Indigenous Lands and Territories is the third area, with the fourth area devoted to “critical conversations about Canada,” for “people who are thinking about Canada.” Crucial to an Indigenous understanding of reconciliation is what communities need. Newhouse references a five-year study on Indigenous poverty in which he was closely involved that identified two key findings of interest. The first is that “there was no word for poverty in Indigenous languages.” And second, while Indigenous leaders knew that they were poor materially, they prioritized a definition of poverty as “loss of language, loss of tradition, loss of Elders, loss of Knowledge, loss of access to Traditional Territory.” The definition moves beyond the material: “to focus on [Indigenous] Territory, Land, access, language, Knowledge, tradition and spirituality.” Newhouse further emphasizes the importance of Indigenous-led institutional development (governance, research institutes, etc.) as a form of “self-governance” that includes control over health, social services, and education: “I define that as the control and stewardship over the structures and processes of everyday life. What that means in practice is institutions, the development of institutions.”

Duhamel observes of reconciliation that “there’s been lots and lots of progress, but progress mostly led by Indigenous People.” She offers a definition of reconciliation that is explicitly rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and linguistic frameworks. She notes that “there’s no word in my language for reconciliation,” and that much of the concept “has been rendered less meaningful by its co-option by different governments and agencies,” using it in ways “not anchored in an Indigenous understanding, never mind a distinctions-based or community-based understanding.” Drawing on research conducted with Language Keepers and language learners, Duhamel sees reconciliation as “a process that’s grounded in Indigenous ways of living together and living well, that substantively and materially contributes to people being better or doing better as individuals or as collectives, whether that’s in any area of their rights or being able to live their rights.” She emphasizes that one of her research participants described reconciliation in terms of “lifting each other up, not in a saviourist sort of a way, but more in a mutual aid and collaboration” framework, where “we bring all of our gifts and together, all of our gifts give us what we need to live well.”

For Duhamel, reconciliation at its most basic level means “creating a society within which Indigenous People have access to substantive equality and access to the same services, opportunities in a barrier-free or low-barrier way,” conducted “in a way that is respectful of Indigenous values and cultures.” She affirms that reconciliation must include self-determination and Indigenous government: “Indigenous program design and delivery, self-determination, understanding that we’re still operating in a context where there are multiple orders of government, but certainly taking Indigenous Government seriously as a third order of government.”



Jewell reinforces this point from her own community context, describing the community-level impacts of residential schooling in terms that go beyond individual trauma to encompass a collective spiritual and cultural void: "A lot of families in our community rejected Christianity, but didn't have the means to fulfill and to populate an original spiritual system or cultural system. So, in its void were a lot of social issues." For Jewell, reconciliation within the community means rebuilding the capacity for social reproduction, to "recreate our worlds as Anishinaabe people." She describes this as responding to cultural genocide, and asks: "How do we reproduce and recreate these systems? What are the practices, the community institutions or community practices and movements and cohesions that we can strengthen to get us into a future where we embody our worlds again?"

Jewell is also critical of how reconciliation has been defined externally. She argues that "Canadians should not be defining what the terms of reconciliation are. They're not the ones that are being reconciled with. We should be guiding the process." When asked when reconciliation would be achieved, she responded: "It will be achieved when we no longer face inequities, when we have the same standards of life that we define for ourselves — not a Canadian standard of life, an Anishinaabe standard of life, an Oneida standard of life, a Dene standard of life. That's what reconciliation is supposed to be." Jewell stresses that Survivors' primary concern was not pipelines or "economic reconciliation" but the healing of relationships between generations: "And the Survivors, they described the extreme mistreatment that they had and that they didn't want it to happen to another generation of children. We can't say with certainty that that's not happening to another generation of children, and that should actually be the focus. Canada needs to stop the systems that are continuing the harm right now."

A key strand involves contextualizing the Calls to Action within the much larger history of inquiries and recommendations for Indigenous justice. These recommendations also concern how understandings of reconciliation will naturally evolve as political events proceed. Newhouse insists we see the TRC as one crucial point in a much longer process:

"Murray Sinclair's report was the combination of almost half a century of work that started with the Supreme Court's decision that said there might be something called 'Indian Rights'. Indigenous leaders took the opportunity and began to put their ideas forward over the next half-century. So, the report itself was built upon the Royal Commission, but also built upon a growing sense of Indigenous leaders that there was a possibility of change."

Newhouse emphasizes the critical need to view these earlier and later reports as an interconnected intellectual foundation for the entirety of Canada's path forward:



"I think you have to include them, because they all fit together. The MMIWG report addresses misogyny in Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous communities as well. And it provides more detail than the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] did and more concrete solutions. We do have a set of what I call 'reconciliation documents' that provide us with the intellectual foundation: the Jane Stewart statement. We've got the Stephen Harper statement. We've got RCAP. We've also got the MMIWG and the TRC. All those fundamental documents set out a course of action. Then you've got all the academic analysis and community analysis that go along with them."

Sinclair also takes a historical approach and lists a whole suite of "reconciliation documents"³⁸ beyond the TRC that provides an intellectual foundation for understanding this concept:

"Historically, there is *The Hawthorn Report* (1963), *The Penner Report* (1983), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) 1996, the Kelowna Accord (2005) and finally the TRC (2015). Now add the recommendations of the MMIWG National Inquiry (2019) and numerous other reports like B.C.'s *In Plain Sight* (2020), *Sites of Truth, Sites of Conscience* (2024), and the Special Interlocutor report. All these fundamental documents set out a course of action. Add all the academic and community analyses that go along with them. As you can see, there is a substantial body of knowledge that one can draw upon right now to chart a course."

He explicitly says the Council *must* integrate the 231 Calls for Justice (MMIWG) and the Special Interlocutor's obligations: "Call to Action 41 calling for the MMIWG inquiry is complete but also has an asterisk because there are 231 Calls for Justice that have to be followed up on."

Regan likewise makes a compelling case for understanding reconciliation as encompassing the recommendations that have emerged from successive inquiries and commissions. She states: "I don't really think you can separate them out and say, well, we're only going to deal with the TRC Calls to Action." She continues: "The TRC called for a National Inquiry into MMIWG, and the Independent Special Interlocutor's report builds on the TRC report and Calls to Action for further investigations into the missing children and unmarked burials. Taken together, these three investigative bodies provide a comprehensive overview of the interconnected historical and ongoing injustices that must be remedied through reparations."

³⁸ For the Hawthorn Report, see: https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/aanc-inac/R32-421-1976-eng.pdf; for RCAP, see: <https://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/EB/prb9924-e.htm>.



Duhamel argues that reconciliation must be understood as a living concept: “the TRC Calls to Action are really, really comprehensive. They’re reflective of what the TRC heard in the same way that I think the MMIWG Calls to Action are different and are reflective of what we heard.” Yet neither can be the “only way we should define reconciliation,” which is better understood as “an evolving concept, something that’s dynamic, and it should be, from my perspective. If it were a static concept and it never changed, it would mean that we weren’t really working on it. It’s changing because we’re working on it, because we’re asking questions, because we’re having these really important conversations.” Duhamel warns against the inertia of treating the Calls to Action as frozen in time: “If we’re having the same conversation in 2036 about what it should be, then we haven’t done the work. Because it hasn’t evolved at all. The marker of inertia would be if its meaning did not change.”

Fraser also notes that more change is needed beyond the Calls to Action, which are “important,” but also “not enough.” She explains: “We also need changes in the *Indian Act*, changes to treaty implementation, changes to the child welfare system and Jordan’s Principle, reinstating funding around residential school research, and fully implementing UNDRIP.” Fraser also raises key concerns about the legal disappearance of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. The *Indian Act* in particular, she notes, “is also a model of non-existence.” She continues: “If we keep with the current blood quantum regulations, which are rooted in colonialism and racism, Canada won’t have any Status Indians left. And I believe that that is their goal.”³⁹ The question then is how do we create “an equitable place in Canada where Indigenous Peoples can be sovereign, and in relation with the Canadian Government? This is a conversation that needs to be brought up in a meaningful way.”

PRESERVE THE RECORDS OF THE INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Several experts discussed the upcoming destruction of Survivor testimony and records compiled during the Independent Assessment Process (IAP). The IAP process took place between 2007 and 2012 and resulted in about 38,000 claims. In September 2027, as per a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, the records are to be destroyed. Living Survivors can request that they be given their file, or that the NCTR or another body preserve it.⁴⁰ So far, very few records have been requested, and experts have discussed ways to preserve them. Logan outlines the scope of the issue: “every time I present to Survivors or to community members, there’s still people that don’t know about it, or don’t realize that, or don’t make the connection of what the IAP records are, that if they did receive compensation, and if they did receive, I don’t think the whole narrative is matching up all the time.” Logan approaches this carefully: “It’s a huge loss to have those destroyed,” but she is also aware of

39 For a discussion of the “second generation cut off,” see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/un-technical-advice-2nd-generation-cut-off-9.7197109>

40 Details of the situation and how to preserve the records are here: <https://nctr.ca/archives-and-collections/iap-adr-records/>.



the extremely sensitive nature of the material involved. Having worked on studies on IAP and Common Experience Payments at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope, she observes: "there's some really horrific things in there" and "the amount of detail they had to provide in order to receive the IAP was pretty, pretty intense."

The destruction of these records would be an incalculable loss to the record of what happened in the Indian Residential School system, including the identity of many perpetrators and the frequency and type of abuses that took place. The Council can and should promote information about the upcoming destruction and ensure that all Survivors and their families are aware of the issues. If Survivors do not want their records preserved, they don't need to take any further action. However, if Survivors do not yet know what will happen to their records and wish to preserve them, they will need to follow up soon. The Council, through a national campaign, can help all Survivors understand the situation.

PREPARE NEW MATERIALS AND NEW STUDIES

The Council can create a network of experts: community leaders, practitioners, and academics to engage in dialogue and study the status of reconciliation and how to move forward. Publications could be produced similar to those co-edited works created by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in their research series, such as "From Truth to Reconciliation" (2008), "Response, Responsibility, and Renewal" (2009), and "*Cultivating Canada*" (2011).⁴¹ Research and collaboration could be similar to the "academic friends" networks maintained by United Nations mechanisms, such as the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development.

As Canada becomes more diverse, religiously, ethnically, and linguistically, it is important to understand that newcomers, no matter their background, also play a key role in promoting reconciliation. They also have the capacity, individually and collectively, to support the rollback of reconciliation in its various forms. As such, everybody must be fully educated about the history and ongoing legacies of the negative aspects of settler colonization, as well as being clearly taught about First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples as continuing Rights Holders within the state. A key focus here will be preparing new educational materials for prospective citizens. In general, and outside the scope of formal state-funded education, Smith notes the need for more newcomer education, for educational programs for immigrants/newcomers regarding Indigenous histories. The 2012 Canadian citizenship guide remains virtually unchanged despite Calls to Action (93 and 94) and Liberal government promises to overhaul the guide and the citizenship test.⁴² To this, Fraser notes, "the thousands of newcomers that come to Canada every single year that have no education on

41 Books and shorter research studies can be ordered and downloaded at the Legacy of Hope: <https://www.legacyofhopestore.ca/collections/all>.

42 The guide can be viewed here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/discover-canada.html/>.



Indigenous histories in this country, and possibly even think that Canada is the saviour, right? Some of these people have actually come from countries with ongoing genocide."

Newhouse argues for the importance of documenting the local efforts already underway, noting that "no one is at this point cataloguing and talking about" the significant reconciliation work happening at the community level. He suggests that making this work visible would help demonstrate that reconciliation is not simply a government project but a genuinely multi-actor national endeavour. Regan has suggested that the Council might need to partner with "key provincial, territorial, or municipal organizations that are already doing this work," rather than replicate efforts underway at the regional or local level.

Carleton also suggests working at the municipal and regional levels as part of a multi-level long-term strategy, including organizing speaker series through public libraries and creating travelling exhibits on reconciliation for schools or local museums. He also suggests the Council partner with the NCTR to develop an Honorary Witness certificate program, similar to the University of Alberta's Indigenous Canada 12-lesson, Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).⁴³ This could be a course on Indian Residential Schools and reconciliation that Canadians can take, become an Honorary Witness, and which "comes with a certificate and an NCTR pin."

Smith suggests that the Council partner with Statistics Canada to produce material based on statistical information: "annual infographics on various issues, they put out research reports, data reports on educational attainment, justice, other kinds of things." This partnership could yield regular results: "each year on the TRC National Day, it can reproduce one of these reports and some infographics, to let us see what's happening around the Calls to Action, around justice or over-incarceration, or primary school enrollment, or high school attainment." She calls for "a sustained collaboration as part of Canada's commitment to the TRC, UNDRIP, the Indigenous language revitalization, a whole cluster of commitments."

43 See the course here: <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html>.



CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS



Reconciliation in Canada, 11 years after the TRC's final report, shows some demonstrable, but very uneven, progress, coupled with a rollback of many initiatives. There have been genuine normative shifts in favour of reconciliation, especially evident in K-12 education in some provinces and through Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Universities have, in many cases, undertaken reconciliatory reforms. Local and municipal progress has been important in many regions, although not in others. Positive developments also include the incorporation of the UNDRIP into federal and provincial law (in B.C.), the passage of the *Indigenous Languages Act*, and the recognition of genocide in 2022. Also positive has been the creation of the National Inquiry-MMIWG and the OSI.

The symbolic or performative Calls to Action have received more government attention than those dealing with deeper structural change. Soft Indigenous Rights have been privileged over hard rights. The Crown, both federal and provincial, continues to assert its sovereignty, and Indigenous self-determination through the return of lands has not proceeded very far. Forms of "economic reconciliation" have been promoted by governments that do not honour the treaties or the right of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples to free, prior, and informed consent.

Core funding for programs has been problematic. Many programs have been cut by the federal government, often without any warning, including funding for MMIWG and for the identification and location of missing and disappeared Indigenous children. This budget insecurity makes long-term planning for many key services for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and communities virtually impossible. Major funding gaps and disparities in outcomes remain in areas such as education, health, social services, and justice. Jordan's Principle is not being respected. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples continue to be subject to overincarceration. There is a lack of political will to engage in "measurement reconciliation," adhering to the Calls to Action on reporting discrepancies in funding and outcomes between the treatment of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and settlers. Without transparent data, it is very difficult to hold governments accountable, progress cannot be evaluated, and outcomes cannot be adequately measured and analyzed.

Numerous experts also report continued anti-Indigenous racism as a causal factor in reducing Indigenous well-being. Economic reconciliation and a focus on large projects mean that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and communities may be coerced into trading clean water and a safe environment for participation in resource-extractive projects. Too often, this is not a free choice but the cost of access to basic services that others take for granted. Treaty Rights are thus not upheld, in favour of a neoliberal and assimilatory agenda, which is not in keeping with the spirit of reconciliation and runs counter to the Calls to Action. Residential school denialism has accompanied the establishment of the TRC and has grown in influence and virulence. This has created harm for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and communities and has had an especially negative toll on Survivors.



SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows is a non-exhaustive list of some of the key recommendations offered by the experts consulted here, which are briefly outlined below:

Experts recommend that the Council and all orders of government focus on accountability, measurement, and implementation. This focus must include the federal government tracking, compiling, and publicly reporting annual data on the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in such areas as child welfare, education, health, and justice. An action plan should be created in coordination with the Council, be legally binding, and include timelines and concrete, actionable benchmarks. There should be legislated consequences if governments fail to meet their implementation goals and timelines. Indigenous evaluators and Indigenous-specific methodologies should be employed to monitor progress, including the achievement of benchmarks.

The Council should exercise bold leadership, moving beyond observation to take a strong, independent leadership role in guiding Canada, highlighting both government successes and failures, while pushing the boundaries of reconciliation. The Council should hold all orders of government to account. In addition to working with people in the federal government and the public service, the Council should encourage provinces to appoint a cabinet minister responsible for reconciliation. The Council should create a database of local and municipal reconciliation initiatives and share best practices, particularly for rural and smaller communities.

The Council should establish a network of experts (academics, practitioners, and community leaders) to engage in ongoing dialogue and research on advancing reconciliation. The Council should lead regular media engagement to promote national discussions. It should also create a website rich in research and documentation. Regular materials, including infographics, should be published (perhaps in partnership with Statistics Canada), as well as longer community-accessible pamphlets and more detailed edited collections or books.

At one level, the Council should continue to encourage the promotion of symbolic and soft rights as valuable aspects of reconciliation in their own right. However, these must also be clearly contextualized as precursors to more concrete and challenging "hard" forms of reconciliation. One must never be a substitute for the other. Implementing hard rights — including land restitution, Indigenous self-government, sovereignty, and jurisdiction over resources — is essential. Implementation must be fully in consonance with UNDRIP, and all orders of government must fully honour the duty to engage in Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. Furthering reconciliation must not be reduced to light consultation. The federal and provincial governments must provide genuine financial restitution for stolen Indigenous Lands and resources, rather than employing "economic



reconciliation" to coerce chronically underfunded Indigenous communities into unequal resource extractive relationships on their traditional lands.

Government funding cuts for Indigenous programs must be restored. Federal and provincial governments must replace short-term, cyclical project grants with stable, multi-year core funding to enable Indigenous organizations and communities to plan and sustain reconciliation initiatives successfully. The federal government must reinstate recently cut MMIWG funding and funding for Indigenous organizations like the National Advisory Committee on Residential Schools, Missing Children, and Unmarked Burials. Funding should also be reinstated for programs devoted to researching/ searching for missing and disappeared children from Canada's network of residential schools, day schools, Indian hospitals, and sanatoria. Related to Indigenous health, the government must increase funding and facilities and services for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, including mental health services, treatment services, and a full restoration of the funding for Jordan's Principle programs. The Council should encourage all orders of government to advance Indigenous self-determination by supporting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in designing, delivering, and governing their own health services.

While the Calls to Action must play a central role in monitoring reconciliation efforts and in holding orders of government to account, the Council should be open to broadening the definition of reconciliation to fully incorporate Indigenous definitions and carefully consider how Indigenous success is understood in relation to traditional standards of life. Previous and subsequent inquiries should also be incorporated, and reconciliation must be viewed holistically. It should also be seen as an evolving, dynamic concept rather than a static and unchanging one.

The Council, together with all orders of government, must work diligently to support communities leading research and ground searches for missing and disappeared children. An arm's-length, independent (from government), Indigenous-led body or commission must be created to work with communities to share best practices, and train and equip them to carry out the crucial work of identifying their missing loved ones. Principles of Indigenous data sovereignty, including OCAP principles (where applicable), must be fully honoured in these processes. Funding and support must be available for ground searches for unmarked burials at every location where residential schools, day schools, and Indian hospitals existed. The Council should work with all involved parties to reduce barriers to access to government, church, and police archives for researchers and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

The Council must work with the government to launch a nationwide and well-funded campaign to inform Survivors about the scheduled 2027 destruction of Independent Assessment Process (IAP)



records. Survivors must have the choice of whether they wish to preserve their horrific but historically vital testimonies.

Increased education and societal awareness must be promoted by mandating university courses on Indigenous history, colonization, and reconciliation, and by requiring further training for current university faculty. The outdated Canadian citizenship guide must be overhauled, and supplemental educational materials should be created for newcomers. The Council should work with local and provincial organizations to develop curriculum materials to educate K-12 students about reconciliation, building on successful models and best practices. Funding and training should be expanded to increase the viability of Indigenous languages as official languages.

Experts call for denialism to be challenged at all levels: locally, provincially, and federally, and through civil society and church organizations. Governments and churches must play a core role in promoting truth and countering denialism. Federal funding must be restored to combat denialism and ensure that the truth is prioritized. The Council can play a role nationally in presenting a strong voice against denialism. Anti-Indigenous racism and stereotyping continue to be a serious problem throughout Canada and in all institutions. The Council must play a leading and guiding role in working with orders of government, churches, and civil society to monitor and combat racism and its serious and negative impacts on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

The experts consulted here are hopeful that the Council be able to play a leadership role as a national voice advocating for reconciliation, countering denialism, working with all orders of government, encouraging dialogue and bridge-building, while also holding the federal government to account. The Council should not just monitor, but also help build robust measurement and reporting tools, establish benchmarks, and partner with like-minded organizations across the country to advance truth and reconciliation. The Council, experts argue, must also be open to inclusive and evolving understandings of reconciliation beyond the Calls to Action. A focus on long-term relationships, animated by living well together and living well on distinctly Indigenous terms appropriate to each society, must be promoted.



BIOGRAPHIES



REPORT AUTHOR

Dr. David MacDonald is an Indo-Trinidadian and Scottish settler from Treaty 4 Territory, Regina, Saskatchewan. He is a full professor of political science at the University of Guelph and an Honorary Academic at Waipapa Taumata Rau / University of Auckland. He has previously been a Pūkenga Matua (Senior Lecturer) in Political Studies at Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka / Otago University and has worked as an academic consultant for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. He shares an SSHRC Insight Grant (with Sheryl Lightfoot) on Indigenous practices of self-determination in comparative perspective. His recent publications include *Myths, History Wars, and Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada and other Settler States* (Cambridge University Press, 2025); and two co-edited books with Emily Grafton, *On Settler Colonialism in Canada: Lands and Peoples* (University of Regina Press, 2025), and *On Settler Colonialism in Canada: Relations and Resistances* (University of Regina Press, 2025). He is completing the second edition of *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and the Challenge of Conciliation* (University of Toronto Press, 2027). He is the chair of the Committee on the Status of Representation and Diversity of the International Studies Association.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Sean Carleton is a settler historian in the departments of history and Indigenous studies at the University of Manitoba. His research looks at the history and political economy of schooling, colonialism, and capitalism in Canada. He is the author of *Lessons in Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia*. He is also a Member of the Royal Society of Canada College.

Dr. Karine Duhamel is an Anishinaabe historian and member of Opwaaganasiniing (Red Rock Indian Band) with advanced degrees in history and education. She served as Director of Research for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2018–2019) and chaired the data working group for the MMIWG2S+ National Action Plan (2021). Since 2022, she has served as Director of Indigenous Strategy at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, leading implementation of federal research funding commitments to Indigenous research. She also serves as a Speaker for the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, as a contributor to violence prevention education, and as a Research Affiliate at the University of Manitoba.

Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser (Gwichyà Gwich'in) is a historian and Indigenous studies scholar at the University of Alberta whose work centres on Indigenous histories of colonial schooling, oral history, governance, and community-driven research in the Canadian North. She is the author of *By Strength, We Are Still Here: Indigenous Peoples and Indian Residential Schooling in Inuvik, Northwest Territories* and co-author of the national bestseller *Talk Treaty to Me: Understanding the Basics of Treaties and Land in Canada*. Her



scholarship and public engagement were recognized with a Governor General's Award for Scholarly Excellence (2025). She leads Survivor-centred, community-engaged projects that support public education, Indigenous methodologies, and truth-telling grounded in Indigenous Knowledge systems.

Dr. Chelsea Gabel is the current Scientific Director of the Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. She is an Associate Professor in the Indigenous Studies Department and the Department of Health, Aging and Society at McMaster University. She is Métis, originally from Rivers, Manitoba and a citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation. Dr. Gabel holds a Canada Research Chair Tier 1 in Indigenous Well-Being, Community Engagement, and Innovation. Dr. Gabel's current research focuses on Indigenous health policy, reconciliation and health, Métis health and well-being, data governance, arts-based research, ethics, and the importance of intergenerational relationships.

Dr. Rachel yacaaʔat George is nuučaanhut of Ahousaht and Ehattesaht First Nations and grew up in the Metro Vancouver area of British Columbia on the Territories of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. She is an Assistant Professor in Indigenous Studies at the University of Victoria and holds a PhD in Indigenous Governance (UVic). Her research has primarily focused on Indigenous politics, reconciliation, justice, and pathways of decolonization through storied practice. Most recently, this has centred explorations of coastal Indigenous governance and storytelling as it pertains to care, kinship, and our lively and fluid forms of relationality with the ocean.

Dr. Eva Jewell is Anishinaabe from Deshkan Zibiing (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation) in southwestern Ontario, with paternal lineage from Oneida Nation of the Thames. Her research is in areas of Anishinaabe cultural/political reclamation and Indigenous experiences of work and care. From 2019-2023, Dr. Jewell co-authored a widely cited annual report for Yellowhead Institute on Canada's accountability in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Dr. Jewell is an associate professor in the sociology department at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot (Anishinaabe, Lake Superior Band of Ojibwe, Keweenaw Bay) is a globally recognized expert in Indigenous Rights and global politics, a 2026 Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Fellow, and a full professor in Political Science and the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto. She serves as Vice Chair and North American Member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), which she previously chaired. Her research addresses Indigenous-state relations, rights frameworks, and Indigenous self-determination in global politics.

Dr. Tricia Logan (Métis) is an Assistant Professor at the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies and the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Logan's



Grandmother and family members attended the Qu'Appelle residential school in Lebreton, Saskatchewan. As a researcher and advocate for Survivors across Canada, she started research on Métis experiences at residential school, at the Manitoba Métis Federation (SW) in 2000 and later worked for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and most recently, Academic Director at the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre.

Dr. Ian Mosby is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Toronto Metropolitan University. Mosby co-authored, with Eva Jewell, the Yellowhead Institute's *Calls to Action Accountability* reports between 2019 and 2023, which tracked Canada's progress towards completing the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. His current research examines the history of medical experimentation on Indigenous Peoples during the 1960s and 1970s.

Dr. David Newhouse is Onondaga from the Six Nations of the Grand River community near Brantford, Ontario. He is Professor Emeritus of Indigenous Studies at Trent University in the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies and Business Administration at the School of Business Administration. His research interests focus on the emergence of modern Indigenous society, and he has many decades of teaching experience in Indigenous studies. While acknowledging the challenges of national reconciliation, he has worked to create spaces of dialogue that foster greater understanding of how to live well together in a shared world. He has received numerous awards for his excellence in research, teaching, and service.

Dr. Eva Ottawa is an Atikamekw Nehirowisiw researcher from Manawan and Associate Professor in Law at the University of Ottawa. Deeply involved in her nation, she served as Grand Chief for two terms, from 2006 to 2013. She is the recipient of the First Peoples Medal from the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, the René-Lupien Thesis Prize, and the Paris Bar Medal. At the University of Ottawa, she played a central role in the Certificate in Indigenous Law program and has directed the program since 2022. She is actively involved in research, notably with the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok and other First Nations. She is a co-researcher on the Miromatisiwin – Towards Well-being project in Manawan. She is also a collaborating researcher documenting the Innu legal order among the Pekuakamiulnuatsh of Mashteuiatsh.

Dr. Jeremy Patzer is Canada Research Chair in Comparative Indigenous Rights and Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Manitoba. He is a citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation, and his Métis and Saulteaux roots come from the West Interlake of Manitoba, with family names such as Spence, Monkman, Pottinger, and Dumas. His research interests centre on Indigenous Rights and the forms of legal-political resolution, repair, and rights protection that develop within settler-state contexts.



Dr. Paulette Regan contributes to academic and policy research, public history education, and dialogue on decolonial theory, ethics, and practices of reconciliation in the broader international context of Indigenous Rights and state reparations. She is the former research director at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and a senior researcher/lead writer on the Reconciliation Volume of the TRC Final Report. Dr. Regan was also a senior researcher/lead writer on the interim and final reports of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools. Regan is the author of *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling and Reconciliation in Canada* (University of British Columbia Press, 2010) and other academic publications.

Mr. Douglas Sinclair, a member of Peguis First Nation in Manitoba, launched Indigenous Watchdog in February 2020 after three years of development. He served on the Board of Directors for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto for 15 years, including three years as President, when NCFST negotiated their Child Welfare mandate with the Ontario government. He was the Toronto coordinator for the Environics Research *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study*, leading a team of researchers who conducted interviews with First Nations, Métis and Inuit participants about their urban experience. He has been married for 49 years with three daughters and four grandchildren.

Dr. Malinda S. Smith is an Associate Vice-President Research and Professor of Political Science at the University of Calgary. Her scholarship spans international and comparative politics, with a focus on Africa and the African diaspora, and rigorous inquiry into equity, pluralism, and decolonization in higher education. She is a co-author of *The Equity Myth*, co-editor of *Nuances of Blackness in the Canadian Academy*, and *Critical Concepts*. Her national advisory roles span SSHRC's Governing Council, Statistics Canada's Immigration and Ethnocultural Statistics Advisory Committee, ISED Canada's External EDI Advisory Board, and the Scarborough Charter Board (Vice-Chair). Dr. Smith's contributions have been recognized with a Trudeau Foundation Fellowship, an honorary doctorate from Simon Fraser University, the ISA–Canada Distinguished Scholar Award, and a University of Alberta Distinguished Alumni Award.

Dr. Kisha Supernant (Métis/British) is the Director of the Institute of Prairie and Indigenous Archaeology and a Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include the use of digital technologies in archaeology, Indigenous archaeology, community-driven research, and heart-centred archaeological practice. Dr. Supernant collaborates extensively with Indigenous communities in western Canada, emphasizing ethical research relationships and Indigenous Rights to cultural heritage. Over the past several years, she has been helping Indigenous communities use technology to locate and protect unmarked graves.



Dr. Katherine B. Starzyk is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Manitoba and a Founding Member of the Centre for Human Rights Research. Born in Poland, she brings her identity as a Polish Canadian woman to her work. Her research examines how to shift attitudes toward past and present human rights issues, using diverse methodologies in collaboration with students in her Social Justice Laboratory and partners across disciplines. Currently, alongside Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators, Dr. Starzyk devotes much of her time to the Canadian Reconciliation Barometer.

Dr. Paulette Steeves (Cree-Métis) is an Indigenous archaeologist and Professor of Geography, Geology, and Land Stewardship at Algoma University. Dr. Steeves was awarded a Canada Research Chair Tier II in Indigenous History, Healing, and Reconciliation 2019-2024 and 2024-2029. Dr. Steeves's primary research focuses on the Western Hemisphere's Indigenous Paleolithic, reclaiming Indigenous Peoples' history, and homelands. She has built extensive databases of Pleistocene-age archeological sites in the Western Hemisphere (the Americas). She weaves Indigenous Knowledge from oral traditions and rock art through archaeological evidence that supports an early human entry into the Western Hemisphere as early as 200,000 years before the present. Her book *The Indigenous Paleolithic of the Western Hemisphere* was published in July 2021 and was awarded an American Library Association Choice 2022 Outstanding Academic Title award.

Dr. Vanessa Watts is Mohawk and Anishinaabe Bear Clan, Six Nations of the Grand River and an associate professor of Indigenous Studies and Sociology at McMaster University. Dr. Watts holds the Paul R. MacPherson Chair in Indigenous Studies as well as a Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Colonial Histories, Indigenous Futures. She and her team are exploring themes of remembrance and transformation by promoting education, culture, and justice amid histories of institutionalization at residential schools and tuberculosis sanatoria through their project: "Re-Neighbouring as Reconciliation: Indigenous Stories of Resistance." This research is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in partnership with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

Dr. Andrew Woolford is a Professor of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Manitoba, an emeritus member of the Royal Society of Canada College, and former president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. His most recent books include *Genocide in Canada* (2026) and *Did You See Us? Reunion, Remembrance, and Reclamation at an Urban Indian Residential School* (2021), which he co-edited. He has contributed reports to the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada and *Gottfriedson et al. v HMTQ* on genocide through assimilative education. He is currently completing a book titled *Genocide with Nature* and beginning research on the topic of the British Home Child program.



EXPERT INTERVIEWS

- Sean Carleton, April 14, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Karine Duhamel, April 13, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Crystal Fraser, April 20, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Chelsea Gabel, April 16, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Rachel Yacaa?at George, March 30, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Eva Jewell, March 18, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Sheryl Lightfoot, March 16, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Tricia Logan, April 10, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Ian Mosby, April 14, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- David Newhouse, March 20, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Eva Ottawa, March 19, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald in French and translated into English for the report)
- Jeremy Patzer, March 20, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Paulette Regan, April 19, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Douglas Sinclair, April 15, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Malinda Smith, April 21, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Katherine Starzyk, April 14, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Paulette Steeves, March 16, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Kisha Supernant, April 8, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Andrew Woolford, April 9, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)
- Vanessa Watts, April 13, 2026 (Interviewed by David MacDonald)



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