

Indigenous Reconciliation Policy Briefing

Reconciling our history for the health of our future

We need those in our health-care system to learn the history behind TB in Indigenous populations and approach TB-affected communities with understanding, patience, and compassion.

Tina Campbell

Opinion



Tuberculosis isn't an issue of Canada's past; it is an issue of our present. I am hopeful, through honest reconciliation, we won't let it continue to define our future.

In most instances, a non-Indigenous person may not be aware of tuberculosis (TB) or its impacts in Canada. Ask an Indigenous person about the disease, you may learn it is experienced differently throughout families and communities. The rate of disease for non-Indigenous people born in Canada is 0.4 per

100,000 people. The rate of TB in Inuit communities and First Nations on-reserve populations is 300 times and 40 times higher, respectively. Indigenous people make up five per cent of Canada's total population, but experience the highest rate of disease and TB-caused mortality.

A question that often arises is: why in 2022 do we still have populations that continue to suffer from a treatable and preventable disease? When you look at the history, you understand why.

Decades of systems-based discrimination and segregation with institutions such as residential schools, TB sanatoriums, and Indian hospitals have deprived Indigenous communities of the cultural, social, and economic tools needed to eliminate TB.

TB disease is directly influenced by the social determinants of health.

Many remote communities face inadequate housing conditions with poor ventilation, which can increase TB transmission. Nutritious food and access to safe drinking water are either unavailable or too costly, affecting the health of individuals. Communities are under-resourced to handle health-care demands and other priority programs may overshadow TB. Health-care providers may not be offered education on the historical treatment of TB and the continuing effects of the attempted colonization of Indigenous peoples. With this understanding, care can be geared towards a holistic, client-centred approach. For



James Bay district doctor and agent T.J. Orford examines a child showing signs of tuberculosis in 1946. When you look at the history, you understand why, in 2022, we still have populations that continue to suffer from a treatable and preventable disease, writes Tina Campbell. Photograph courtesy of Library and Archives Canada

example, this may include mental health resources to work with clients who continue to experience intergenerational traumas.

Like others who grew up in Canada, I was not aware that TB was still around or that it disproportionately affected communities in which I grew up. I learned about my grandmother's and aunt's experiences in TB sanatoriums and how connected TB was with my history. Working for nine years in Iqaluit, Nunavut, as a public health nurse in a TB clinic, I saw firsthand the impact the disease had on my community. Fast-forward to 2020 in a new role as a TB program adviser during a global pandemic with most resources allocated towards COVID-19, I found myself in the centre of

co-ordinating response teams to support active TB outbreaks within First Nations communities in northern Saskatchewan.

TB is the second-deadliest infectious killer in the world behind COVID-19. Unlike COVID-19, we've known about TB for hundreds of years. We have been able to come up with tactics to identify, screen, prevent, and treat the disease, and we've been able to apply that knowledge to achieve near pre-elimination targets for Canada's non-Indigenous population. The same is possible for the Indigenous population if the political will exists.

First, we need to bring together the experts and apply the tactics that have proven to work in jurisdictions across the country. The federal

government should establish a National TB Elimination Oversight Committee to bridge the knowledge of TB experts, clinicians, TB-affected communities, and provincial, territorial, and Indigenous representatives. This body can establish a strategy, co-ordinate resources, and share best practices.

Second, we need the tools to understand the disease, so the right resources can be deployed. This year, the Canadian Thoracic Society published a new version of the Canadian Tuberculosis Standards, which include a monitoring and performance framework. If implemented, this framework would produce performance metrics for all TB programs across Canada, and facilitate tracking progress towards the goal of elimination.

Finally, on a local level, we need to embed the history of colonization in our conversations about TB. We need those in our health-care system to learn the history behind TB in Indigenous populations and approach TB-affected communities with understanding, patience, compassion, and a relationship focused on building trust.

Historical treatment of TB and continuing effects are deeply connected. This is something I witness daily in the populations I work with. If Canada is serious about honouring the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, we need to see urgency and the political will to act. Honest reconciliation requires action.

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The Hill Times

Looking to the next milestone in Métis reconciliation

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of Métis families, recognized them as separate and distinct from the First Nations of the region, but largely excluded them from the Treaty, and suggested "the half-breeds at Sault Ste. Marie and other places may seek to be recognized by the Government in future payments." There is no doubt that the role the Métis played fighting for their rights alongside their First Nations neighbours and kin at Mica Bay was critical to their inclusion in Robinson's report. Despite local First Nations chiefs calling for Métis rights and interests to be addressed in the treaty negotia-

tions, the broader Métis community was excluded in this Treaty negotiation.

This autumn also marks the 19th anniversary of the landmark Métis rights victory at the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Powley*. The decision ushered in a new era of Métis rights recognition following a decade-long legal battle questioning whether Steve Powley and his son Roddy, as Métis, had the right to harvest a moose from their traditional lands around Sault Ste. Marie for their family to eat. At the time, the Province of Ontario took the position that the Métis had no rights to harvest whatsoever. But after 10 years of litigation,

four levels of court and 14 judges agreed that while Métis were by and large excluded from Treaty negotiations, their rights continue to be protected under Section 35 of the Constitution.

The courts recognized and affirmed that there were distinct Métis people and communities on the land before Canada became Canada and Ontario became Ontario, with a culture and identity of their own, and that their rights were entrenched in Section 35.

This recognition did not just apply to the Powley family's traditional lands around Sault Ste. Marie and has benefited Métis communities from Ontario-westward in affirming their inherent rights and claiming their rightful place as one of the Indigenous peoples in Canada. In 2017, the province of Ontario—based on years of historical research and negotiations with the Métis Nation of Ontario—recognized seven historical Métis communities that meet the evidentiary requirements set out in the



We look ahead, emboldened by our shared spirit of resilience, to self-government and self-determination as the next milestone on our journey to Métis reconciliation, writes Margaret Froh. Photograph courtesy of the Métis Nation of Ontario

Supreme Court's decision on *R. v. Powley*.

The Powley victory set the stage for a series of achievements for Métis people, not just in Ontario, but also across the Métis Nation Homeland, including the groundbreaking signing in 2019 of the Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreements, with the Government of Canada.

The story of our Métis ancestors fighting for our rights in Mica Bay ties directly to the story of the Powley's harvesting their moose and having their right to do so recognized by the Supreme Court in September 2003.

With another autumn season upon us, we reflect on the journey Métis have been on to have our rights recognized, and we look ahead, emboldened by our shared spirit of resilience, to self-government and self-determination as the next milestone on our journey to Métis reconciliation.

Margaret Froh is the president of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

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