

## It's time to begin our journey together

October 6, 2016

Dear Northerners,

As mother of three and grandmother of two, I can't imagine what it must have been like to have my children taken away and sent to a residential school.

Six of 17 Ontario residential schools were located in Northeastern Ontario. Students were called by a number, forbidden to speak their mother-tongue, and couldn't practice their own religion. As many of you have read, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission uncovered many other experiences by students at the schools including malnutrition, abuse, and inadequate living conditions. The Commission's final report released nine months ago has 94 calls to action to address the intergenerational trauma caused by the schools.

Here in Northeastern Ontario, where 11 per cent of our population identify as Aboriginal, the legacy of residential schools lives on in the mental, physical, and social health of Aboriginal Northerners. As health system planners, we've looked at the facts and are well aware of the higher rates of chronic disease, addiction, and suicide. We've also heard first-hand about the need for our own Northeastern Ontario reconciliation plan.

I'm proud to say that we now have a plan that was developed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people – a [North East Local Health Integration Network Aboriginal Health Care Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

As Gloria Daybutch, the Chair of the Local Aboriginal Health Committee (LAHC) said at our recent launch of the plan, "It's time for action so future generations never have to suffer from uncontrolled poor health and well-being."

The four strategies of our reconciliation action plan were developed using the directions of the medicine wheel – Opportunities (*East*), Relationships (*South*), Knowledge and Understanding (*West*), and Sustainability and Evaluation (*North*). Under each strategy are concrete actions, including:

- Supporting increased access to traditional healing programs.



*Gloria Daybutch, Chair of the North East LHIN Local Aboriginal Health Committee*



*Me, Louise, on the day of the event – a proud moment as North East LHIN CEO.*

- Strengthening mental health and addiction services and ensuring Aboriginal health care leaders are helping to lead the work needed.
- Continuing to collaborate with all levels of government to minimize gaps in services.
- Encouraging health service providers to make their physical environments more welcoming to Aboriginal people.
- Developing a plan to ensure cultural competency safety training for our staff, board members, as well health service providers.

Our Board approved the plan on September 21, and we've made a commitment to report back on its progress on an annual basis. As Northerners, we need to deliver on a vision for the path forward and we must take these important first steps together. These steps began at a celebration later that day at Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre in Sudbury. The Young Thunderbirds, a group of boys who have been together for three years, led the way with their drumming and singing.

Then one of the Thunderbirds, 13-year-old Bronson McLaughlin-Assinewai, came to the podium and talked about unity. "Unity is the established bond between family members. Without this, we experience loss of culture, and our traditions are not passed down. United we support each other," he said. "We must be united in saving our culture for future generations."



Bronson McLaughlin-Assinewai

Angela Recollet, the executive director of Shkagamik-Kwe said it best in her closing comments "this is a pivotal time of shift with youth voices being heard and elders sharing past practices."

I was just finishing high school when the government started to close residential schools in the 1970s. It took until 1996 before the last one was shut down. But the act of closing doors didn't end the lasting effects of the schools on people and their families. We now need to heal together and support one another on this journey of reconciliation. I encourage you to start by reading the plan.

Chi Mii-gwetch.

Louise



Young Thunderbird Drumming Group