

Alberta Doctors' Digest

The AMA and Indigenous health: A timeline

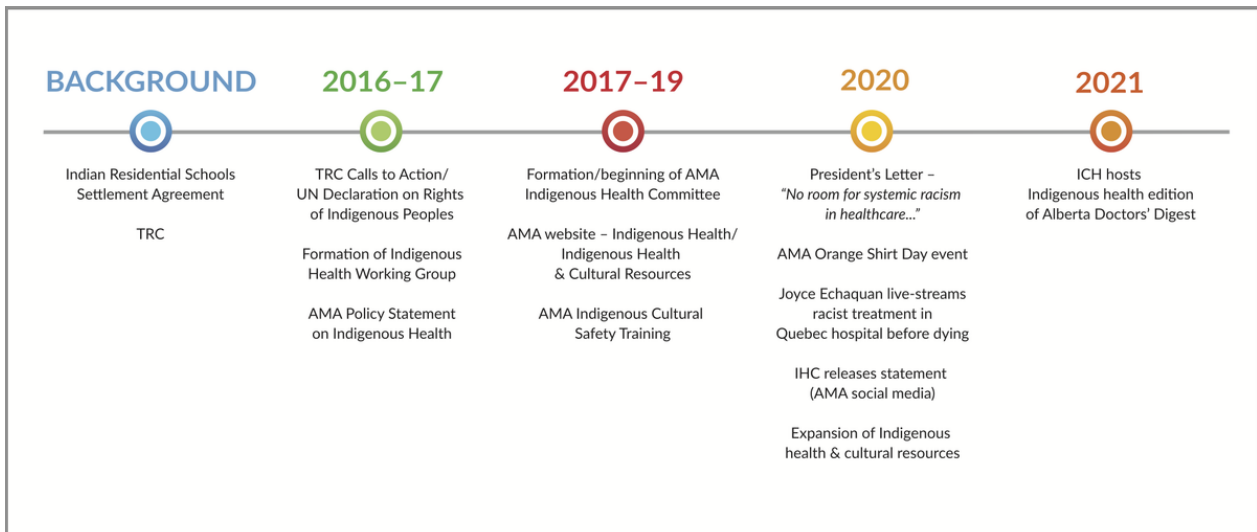
Background

Formed in 2008 as the result of a section (Schedule N) of the [Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement \(IRSSA\)](#), the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada \(TRC\)](#) overcame a somewhat beleaguered start and under new direction, undertook an ambitious series of national events from 2010 to 2014, at the same time conducting community hearings in over 70 communities, along with statement-gathering programs, research, public outreach and community activities, and events in additional communities.

With their tireless cross-country work, the commission sought to “reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of church-run residential schools...” and “guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, governments, and Canadians generally.”

Through a statement-gathering, truth-sharing process and extensive research, the TRC collected roughly 7,000 statements and five million records, with their final, IRSSA-related task being to establish a home for these materials, which they did, with the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation \(NCTR\)](#) at the University of Manitoba.

In December 2015, the commission released its final report: [Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future](#). This report contained [Calls to Action](#) addressing five areas of societal concern: Child Welfare; Education; Language and Culture; Health and Justice. The eight health-related Calls to Action (#18-#24 and #55, iv) call on all levels of government, medical and nursing schools and health care practitioners to undertake legislation, training, education, funding, and more in order to achieve reconciliation by closing the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.



AMA Indigenous health timeline

2016-17

On the basis of both the TRC’s health-related Calls to Action and Articles within the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), the AMA formed an Indigenous Health Working Group, for purposes of “(setting) out our organization’s support and commitment to respond to the *Truth and Reconciliation report’s Calls to Action* relating to health matters” and “(reflecting) our determination to provide leadership in improving access to and quality of care provided to Indigenous communities in Alberta.”

The result was the [AMA Policy Statement on Indigenous Health](#) (July 2017).

2017-19

Under the guidance of AMA Professional Affairs and then-Assistant Executive Director, Dr. Lyle Mittelsteadt, the [AMA Indigenous Health Committee](#) (IHC) began to form in 2017, with its first meeting held in February, 2018.

The IHC was formed for purposes of developing and carrying out the commitments contained in the *AMA Policy Statement on Indigenous Health* as well as the *TRC’s Calls to Action*. By bringing together Indigenous physicians, health care stakeholders and Indigenous public members, the committee seeks to apply its expertise and influence to improving health care outcomes for Alberta’s Indigenous peoples.

AMA website – Following formation of the IHC and in support of the *AMA Policy Statement on Indigenous Health*, an [Indigenous health](#) webpage was created in 2018, followed shortly by composition of the [Indigenous health and cultural resources](#) page.

Overseen by the IHC, the resource page provides links to resources to assist AMA members in their development of knowledge and understanding of Alberta’s (and Canada’s) Indigenous populations and their history; for purposes of “identify(ing) and clos(ing) the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities...” (#19 - *Health - TRC Calls to Action*).

Indigenous Cultural Safety Training – In February 2018, the AMA Board of Directors participated in [Indigenous Cultural Safety Training](#), followed by staff training in January 2019.

Organized by AMA Professional Affairs and facilitated by Brenda Reynolds, an Indigenous cultural consultant of Saulteaux heritage (and recipient of a 2019 AMA [Medal of Honor](#) award), the one-day session helped staff “recognize and increase knowledge; enhance self-awareness; and examine any perceived biases and stereotypes of Indigenous people; while promoting positive relationships between service providers and Indigenous people.”

2020

June/July

AMA statement on systemic racism – On June 3, 2020 the AMA issued the following statement via social media in response to a growing national and international outcry against systemic racism:

“Each of us has a role to play in opposing systemic racism. As physicians dedicated to serving patients, we believe a healthy environment strives for equity and embraces, respects and values our differences.

Inclusive cultures strengthen our country, and our health.

“This supports a sustainable system in which all Albertans share the benefits - patients and their families, physicians and all health care team members.

“With system partners, we have a commitment to co-creating safe, healthy, equitable and inclusive cultures where all are respected, valued and supported fairly to achieve their full potential.”

President’s Letter (July 3) - [“There is no room for systemic racism”](#)

September

Following Dr. Mittelsteadt’s retirement in August 2020, Gayle Burnett, Chief Strategy Officer, AMA, was appointed as Interim AED, Professional Affairs, including oversight of the IHC.

The IHC organizes the AMA’s first [Orange Shirt Day](#) event. In the days leading up to Orange Shirt Day on September 30, members of the IHC submitted photos of themselves and their families in orange. The online campaign called on AMA members (perfectly timed to include RF members), Board of Directors, [staff](#) and [management](#) to “Wear Orange!” in recognition of the day and to learn more about Canada’s [Indian Residential School system](#).

October

In response to the tragic death of [Joyce Echaquan](#), a 37-year-old Indigenous woman and Atikamekw mother of seven who live-streamed the racist slurs and poor treatment she received from hospital staff before she died in Joliette, Quebec, the AMA Indigenous Health Committee [released a statement](#) of sympathy and protest against anti-Indigenous systemic racism in health care.

A new resource page – [News clips - systemic racism in health care](#) – was added to *Indigenous health and cultural resources* on the AMA website. This page houses clips (primarily curated from [AMA News for Docs](#)) pertaining to systemic anti-Indigenous racism in health care.

2021

In the fall of 2020, the IHC had begun work on a special edition of *Alberta Doctors' Digest*, dedicated to issues and topics pertaining to Indigenous health and the long-standing, fraught relationship of Indigenous peoples and the Canadian health care system. [Joyce Echaquan's](#) chilling recording of her tragic death in a Quebec hospital on September 28 laid bare the long-standing ugliness of systemic racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples in health care in this country, and brought a new sense of meaning and urgency to the IHC's work on this stand-alone, Indigenous health issue of ADD.

Addressing the disparities and gaps in Indigenous health care, and supporting our members and staff as they continue to learn, improve and hold space for Indigenous peoples is a priority for the AMA. We CAN do better. We MUST do better.