

The following statement is joining the current movement of reflection and action within different groups of professionals, to improve the care for members of the First Peoples of Quebec. It also commends the other initiatives put in place in this direction in the past year. It is a collective commitment by professional associations and orders to work to improve care, particularly with respect to the mental well-being of members of the First Peoples communities of Quebec. It is part of a process to find concrete avenues of action regarding access to and quality of mental health and well-being care. These avenues are to be developed under the leadership of a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals involved in such care.

**Statement in solidarity with First Peoples of Quebec
(Inuit and First Nations)**

Issued by the Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec, the Association québécoise de psychiatrie de l'enfant et de l'adolescent, the Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec, the Ordre des psychoéducateurs et psychoéducatrices du Québec, the Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation du Québec.

The past year has reminded us of the tragedies and traumas faced by First Peoples for generations in Quebec and Canada. This reality was, in fact, already recognized in 1996 by the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. It named these tragedies, the fundamental rights violated, and the racism resulting from colonization and policies of assimilation. Notably, the *Commission* described the residential schools system, which aimed at “killing the Indian within the child”, and recommended that the Government of Canada establish a commission of inquiry into this dark part of Canadian history. This inquiry, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, described in its 2015 report the cultural genocide perpetrated by the residential school system. In 2019, the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* brought to light the reality of “persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses”. The same year, the *Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec [Viens Commission]* came to the conclusion that systemic discrimination was being experienced by First Peoples. In 2020, the tragic death of Mrs. Joyce Echaquan served as a reminder of this rampant racism, most often hidden in silence, within our institutions and society. Recently, the discoveries of hundreds of anonymous graves of First Peoples children near former residential schools in British Columbia and Saskatchewan has brought back painful memories for many families. In addition, many First Peoples families are still awaiting answers about their children who disappeared while being admitted to hospital in Quebec. What’s more, First Peoples communities are confronted, on a daily basis, with the negative effects of social inequities that pose multiple challenges to their health and wellbeing. The resiliency of First Peoples is all the more poignant considering the burden of their lived experience.

We share the immense sadness experienced of late with respect to the loss of First Peoples children. We want to recognize the weight of the pain experienced by First Peoples due to the traumatic events of the past and the colonialism which unfortunately continues today. We also wish to recognize the impact that this had, and continues to have, on the well-being and mental health of First Peoples. An added impact is that of COVID-19. We wish to bear witness to the need for health and social service professionals to show solidarity with First Peoples children, youth, adults and elders and offer them all possible support. We undertake to make the necessary efforts to promote and provide well-being and mental health care that meets the needs of the First Peoples of Quebec, in a spirit of collaboration with their communities, listening and in complementarity with the care initiatives put in place by the First Peoples themselves. This commitment also means working on the necessary structural changes to the health care system, to root out systemic racism and to allow First Peoples full participation in decisions around care, both in its provision and its governance.

The recent tragic events are a pressing reminder of the work that remains to be done. Care must also be taken to achieve the highest standards of practice; standards that are culturally relevant and secure and in keeping with the spirit of healing. This implies a duty to learn about the historical context and contemporary realities experienced by First Peoples.

It is high time in Quebec to build a respectful and constructive dialogue with First Peoples in order to best encourage and support their well-being. There are bridges already under construction to build on, carried by members of the First Peoples and their allies. Health and social services professionals must be at the forefront of this dialogue and support.



Dr. Claire Gamache, president, Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec



Dr. Lila Amirali, president, Association québécoise de psychiatrie de l'enfant et de l'adolescent



Mr. Pierre-Paul Malenfant, president, Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec



Mr. Denis Leclerc, president, Ordre des psychoéducateurs et psychoéducatrices du Québec



Mrs. Josée Landry, president, Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation du Québec

Text prepared by health and social services professionals who are part of the working group on the statement: L. Nadeau, R. Chaala, E. Chachamovich, S. Fraser, D. Gaulin, A. Gomez-Carrillo, J. Harvey, S.-R. Hordyk, L. Kirmayer, J. Marchand, S. Mauger, J. Morency, M. Pickles.

February 1st, 2022