



The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition acknowledges that we are on unceded Algonquin-Anishinaabe territory

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Shame on Majority of Ontario's Political Leaders:

Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health & Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition Call Out 3 of 4 Leaders for Turning Backs on Racism in Health Care System

(Ottawa, ON): A nursing teacher said an Inuit woman with a high-risk pregnancy and all other Indigenous people are just “junk.” An emergency room doctor refused to give a First Nations woman who had self-harmed removable sutures because he “didn’t have time for this and she should have gone to her reserve for help.” Emergency staff handcuffed an Indigenous woman to a hospital bed and referred to her as “some other Inuk drunk.” A nurse saw a First Nations man’s status card and immediately said he was “another crack head Indian.” And a doctor revealed to an elderly First Nations man who had a broken ankle that they had “lost” him in the hospital for over three days (he had been shuffled from the waiting room to a room on the third floor without any explanation).

Did all these Indigenous people who sought help at their local hospital deserve the treatment they received just because they are Indigenous? Do the other 208 people who shared their story of anti-Indigenous racism deserve to be ignored? Or the individuals who came forward to give their witness accounts of discrimination deserve to be dismissed?

What about all the other Indigenous people living in Ontario? Should they continue to anticipate that when they seek help at a health care facility or institution—whether it be a hospital, community clinic, pharmacy, or paramedic service—they may be called names, be reported to security or child welfare authorities without just cause, be ignored, be denied medications or treatment, or have pain willfully inflicted on them?

It seems that most of Ontario’s political leaders, with the exception of Liberal Party leader Steven Del Duca, believe this is just fine.

“How else can we interpret the silence of most of Ontario’s political leaders in the face of the overwhelming evidence we presented to them citing Indigenous-specific racism in the health care system?” asks Allison Fisher, Executive Director of the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and co-chair of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition.

When the Centre and members of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition launched *Share Your Story: Indigenous-Specific Racism & Discrimination in Health Care Across the Champlain Region* on May 25, they also issued a challenge to Ontario’s political party leaders. They asked each of the the four political party leaders to sign a declaration that, if elected, they would make ending racism and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in Ontario’s health care system a top priority.

“The time to take responsibility and swift action is now,” says Ms. Fisher. “Our report clearly shows that our health care system and the people who work in them are failing Indigenous peoples. We simply

asked political party leaders to take that swift action if elected. Steven Del Duca has committed to taking swift action. For the others, their response has been thundering silence.”

Share Your Story uses the experiences and eye-witness accounts of more than 315 Indigenous people who sought health care services to illustrate and highlight deeply embedded racist and stereotypical attitudes in Ontario’s health care system. The culmination of five years of research, the Ottawa Public Health-funded Wabano/Coalition report interweaves the personal stories with the history and impacts of settler-colonialism policies and practices. The report concludes with a fulsome set of 27 recommendations clustered into seven themes, with additional recommendations within each theme.

Findings in the report include the following:

- 76% felt they could have received better service if they were able to hide their Indigenous identity
- 26% of all reported incidents of anti-Indigenous racism also included one or more types of discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability
- 78% reported that they sometimes or always experience anti-Indigenous racism in the health care system
- 59% felt their experiences of racism and discrimination had negatively impacted their physical well-being
- 72% felt their experiences of racism and discrimination had negatively impacted their mental well-being

Non-Indigenous health care providers working in hospital emergency departments and maternity wards especially, in paramedic services, and in community settings, like clinics, view Indigenous Peoples as racially inferior; diseased, addicted, and mentally unwell; a burden; aggressive; and bad parents.

“What is needed is cooperative action between policy- and law-makers—and for the next premier of Ontario to make it their mission to do something about it. Clearly, only the leader of the Liberal Party is prepared to act. The leaders of the other political parties do not have the courage or inclination to right this terrible wrong,” says Ms. Fisher.

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Note: The declaration that was sent to the leaders of Ontario’s political parties along with copies of the report for their signature asked them to:

- Make it a priority to end racism and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in Ontario’s health care systems and institutions
- Ensure that Indigenous Peoples have the same access to health care and receive the same services as non-Indigenous people
- Serve and support Indigenous People’s right to health, and to the right to receive kind and culturally competent care
- Eliminate racism and discrimination in Ontario’s health care “hot spots”
- Engage Indigenous health service partners and communities in designing and delivering service programs that meet the specific health needs of Indigenous Peoples and that realize measurable, positive health outcomes

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