



OTTAWA ABORIGINAL COALITION

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition Release Damning Report, Call on Ontario Political Parties to End Racism in Health Care

(Ottawa, ON): Today, the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and members of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition issued a challenge to Ontario’s political party leaders—to commit to action to end widespread racism and discrimination against Indigenous people in Ontario’s health care system. The call comes on the heels of a report commissioned by the organizations citing overwhelming evidence of racism and discrimination throughout Ontario’s health care facilities. Each political party leader has been asked to sign a [declaration](#) committing its government, if elected, to immediately take the actions necessary to end racism and discrimination in Ontario’s health care system and to make it a top priority.

“The conclusions in this report are horrific but unfortunately, not surprising. Indigenous-specific racism is embedded in Canada’s colonial history, and only by taking responsibility can we achieve better health outcomes for Indigenous peoples in this country,” says Wabano’s Executive Director Allison Fisher. “And the time to take responsibility and swift action is now.” The findings of anti-Indigenous racism are highlighted in the Coalition’s comprehensive report from the *Share Your Story* research project, entitled *Indigenous-Specific Racism & Discrimination in Health Care Across the Champlain Region*. The report uses the experiences and eye-witness accounts of more than 200 Indigenous people who sought health care services across the Champlain region to illustrate and highlight deeply embedded racist and stereotypical attitudes. “These stories of racism within the health care system are our truth.

Our people deserve to be able to speak our truth and we deserve to be heard,” says Ms. Fisher. The truth is that the report’s findings are shocking. 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 people as racially inferior; diseased, addicted, and mentally unwell; a burden; angry and aggressive; and bad parents. The report cites a conversation between a nursing student and her teacher about an Indigenous woman who had a C-section as a result of a high-risk pregnancy; she quotes the teacher as saying, “Don’t be political with me. You are to do what I’m saying. These people think they own the country when we are the ones that own this country. These people are junk.” Or, the anesthesiologist treating a young Indigenous woman with a large abscess as a result of a

ruptured appendix who was in a great deal of pain and needing medication: “Given your history, you will likely be an addict ... in fact, you already are an addict.” Or, the third-year student in epidemiological health research, who, after being attacked by her partner, was told by the emergency room nurse that she was stupid as there’s “no such thing as epidemiology research” and then was subsequently handcuffed to her hospital bed.

Of the 315 stories of anti-Indigenous racism collected in late 2018 and early 2019, the stories of racism were further validated and 91% were rated by Wabano’s research interviewers as a clear case of anti-Indigenous racism based on criteria they developed. The participants themselves believe that negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples shape how health service providers treat them.

Startlingly, the highest frequency of both overt and covert racism, negative stereotypes, and discrimination in the region occurs in hospital emergency departments and maternity wards (70.8% in Ottawa and 65.2% in rural communities), followed by community health clinic settings and paramedics.

The report outlines the following unsettling findings:

- 76% of participants 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
- 73% felt their experiences of racism and discrimination had negatively impacted their mental well-being

“Collectively, the findings clearly show that discrimination and racism are real and a part of everyday interactions with health professionals working in clinics, hospitals, social service referral agencies, and paramedic services within the region,” says Mikki Adams, a member of the Coalition. “This is absolutely unacceptable.”

The report concludes with a fulsome set of 27 recommendations divided into seven themes, with additional recommendations couched within each theme. “Indigenous people, organizations, and health providers must be engaged to work with and collaborate on the measures that need to be implemented for change to take place at the systemic level,” says Ms. Fisher. “The provincial government must commit to change; to end racism; to provide competent and safe care, and to enforce this. We are part of the solution; we must be part of the solution.”

In addition to launching the report, the Coalition and Wabano have issued a [declaration](#), asking the leaders of each political party in Ontario to sign, and commit to effecting systemic change. “These deeply embedded stereotypes continue to harm Indigenous people today. The institutions of power have the responsibility and duty to provide good health care, to also commit and make the necessary change, to stop the racist abuse. If we don’t, Indigenous people will continue to suffer harm,” says Ms. Fisher.

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