

Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

To the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada,

The Indigenous community of Montreal has worked tirelessly since 2008 to establish an Indigenous health centre in our city for the approximately 30,000 Indigenous people living here. We have met with every level of government and different stakeholders in the healthcare system and to date, no substantial support was provided by these parties. Montreal is the only large city in Canada that does not have a centre focused on the healthcare needs of Indigenous people. Despite the variable sizes of their urban Indigenous populations, other major cities such as Toronto and Vancouver have healthcare facilities serving the Indigenous urban population, such as Anishnawbe Health Toronto and the Vancouver Native Health Society in the Down Town East Side of Vancouver.

Instead of providing much needed support for an Indigenous health centre in Montreal, government representatives and healthcare stakeholders have instructed our collective to use the existing services. However, despite Premier Legault's denial of systemic racism within our healthcare system, the findings of the Viens Commission (2019) as well as several prominent cases in the news reveal that Indigenous people are subjected to racism when seeking services in existing health institutions. This was tragically brought to light once again by the deplorable treatment of an Atikamekw Indigenous woman, Joyce Echaquan, who recorded her treatment as racial slurs and insults were hurled at her by nursing staff.

Joyce Echaquan's death in a Joliette hospital is the result of the systemic racism embedded in the healthcare system. Her death has solidified our belief that Indigenous people in Montreal require access to services that are stigma-free in order to feel culturally safe when managing their health needs. This is a right of Indigenous People that has been outlined in the UNDRIP's articles 18 to 24 (2007), the TRC's 94 Calls to Action (2015), and other commissions and inquiries. Therefore, Honourable Prime Minister, we urgently need the federal government to provide financial support for the development of the Indigenous health centre in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke.

We applaud and thank you for making a renewed investment in Urban Programming for Indigenous People, where close to fifty percent (50%) of Indigenous people now reside. When it comes to health care and social services, the federal government must take up this same type of leadership to fill this vacuum that affects the lives and health of urban Indigenous people in Montreal.

We are seeking federal core financial support to establish the physical operations; we have been in formation with an elected volunteer Board of Directors since 2016. The First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities support this initiative, as will be made evident by the letters you will be receiving. The province will surely welcome federal investment and through the health authorities, dedicate medical staffing to provide services to many who feel marginalized and voiceless. The Health Center will then be able to work with Traditional Elders, Indigenous Health Navigators, and executive staff members who can also provide training to non-indigenous systems. By having these culturally safe services, we are certain that health outcomes and determinants of health equity will improve.

We call upon you and the federal government to take action now and support this worthwhile cause. The time is now, Honorable Prime Minister. We cannot wait while lives are lost because of the racism ingrained in our healthcare system.

Thank you in advance.

Signed,