

Department of Community Health & Epidemiology

Position Statements

November 4, 2021

Position Statement on False Claims to Indigenous Identity

We have been enormously troubled about the recent public revelations surrounding the claims to Indigenous identity of a member of our department. The University of Saskatchewan has initiated an expedited investigation and we anticipate the release of the findings on this case in due course. In the meantime, we feel it is important to state our position on pretendianism in our spheres of teaching, research, and professional practice. We stand with Indigenous colleagues who have led the way.

False claims to Indigenous identity are inextricable from the Indigenous-focused scholarship built on them. We cannot teach integrity to future generations of scholars and leaders if we do not also model this in our own work. We also cannot expect society to value the knowledge we produce if we cannot demonstrate it has been built on a foundation of integrity.

Over the past week we have heard the hurt, disappointment, and frustration in the words and voices of Indigenous scholars, students, and peoples. We are only beginning to grasp the magnitude of the impact false identity claims and equivocal institutional responses are having on Indigenous peoples, families, and Nations. They have most certainly eroded trust and set back relationships at a time when non-Indigenous peoples and institutions have been called to respond to truth and reconciliation. Pretendianism is a serious concern for which we are all accountable.

It is imperative that academic institutions and those that fund research with Indigenous peoples recognize and act on their accountabilities for identity claims, ensuring that Indigenous researchers, faculty, staff, students, and the Nations to which they belong, determine appropriate ways to do so. We are pleased to see that these efforts are underway with renewed momentum and urgency in recent days.

The Department of Community Health and Epidemiology is committed to truth and reconciliation, and as academics and health care professionals, to the core value of integrity. We rededicate ourselves to this core value and to the actions to which we have been called to build new and meaningful relationships with the Indigenous peoples of this land we share.

June 3, 2021

This past week we have been deeply saddened to learn about the undocumented burial of 215 Indigenous children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. This is devastating news that unequivocally confirms what former attendees, their families, and communities already knew and have been talking about for decades. This news has reopened raw wounds in all Indigenous communities across Canada. We mourn with them. There will be findings like this at other former residential school sites, as other Indigenous communities are undertaking similar investigations on the grounds of former schools in Canada. Reconciliation demands that we publicly recognize this genocide, which continues in the disproportionate harms to and deaths of Indigenous children in child welfare. We must be unrelenting in our advocacy for redress, for research that continues to lay bare these truths, and for ensuring that all those in our classrooms and in our lives never forget.

March 25, 2021

The 47 findings and 17 recommendations found within the final report of the Public Interest Investigation into the RCMP's Investigation of the death of Colten Boushie and the events that followed reveals clear evidence of discrimination and insensitivity. Further, the appalling behaviour that has been directed at the Boushie family and Indigenous peoples, (in particular of the online community), has been fuelled by these systemic deficiencies. Sadly, this has continued unabated since Colten Boushie was shot and killed by Gerald Stanley in the summer of 2016.

At the same time, this past year of the pandemic has seen a surge in violence directed at Asian peoples, including right here in our own communities. We support President Peter Stoicheff's recently released statement on anti-Asian racism. These events and responses are high profile markers of insidious, ongoing, and deeply entrenched xenophobia, discrimination, and white privilege that have no place in a healthy and just world.

We condemn the hatred, violence, and oppression that continues systemically and in individual behaviours in Canada and elsewhere against Indigenous peoples, people of colour, of the Muslim faith, and diverse gender identities. Anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogy, research, and practice are central to our vision for an equitable society. We will continue to ensure that staff, students, and faculty are supported to advance this vision safely, humbly, and respectfully as a collective and in our individual actions.

October 15, 2020

Once again we are called to stand against our racist and discriminatory system and society that culminated on September 28, 2020, in Joyce Echaquan's tragic and horrific death under the eyes and abuse of those whose very professions are dedicated to care -with dignity- for human life. Joyce Echaquan was a 37-year-old Indigenous wife and mother of seven and a member of the Atikamekw Nation from Manawan. We are ashamed of what happened and feel that as a society we have failed her, her family, and the wider community of Indigenous people. Unfortunately, this treatment is not unique to her nor to the province of Quebec.

This is a reminder that racism is pervasive and rampant in our healthcare system and our educational structures. This systemic racism is unacceptable and shameful, and it must stop. As the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology in a College of Medicine, we have a deep responsibility to shape health professionals under our training, now and in the future, to provide safe, humanizing, and compassionate health care, to remove systemic barriers to health careers encountered by Indigenous peoples, and to collectively advance health equity in policies and programs across all sectors and jurisdictions. We commit to doing better.

June 6, 2020

The Department of Community Health & Epidemiology stands in solidarity with those engaged in resistance to the persistent individual and systemic violence, police brutality, dispossession, and death inflicted on racialized peoples in Canada, the United States, and around the world. We mourn the unjust deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tamir Rice, and many more in the United States. Similarly, in Canada we mourn Colten Boushie, Jacob Sansom, Maurice Cardinal, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Tina Fontaine and all the missing and murdered Indigenous women. The disproportionate burden of resistance is carried on these same racialized shoulders. As members of a department whose mission it is to promote equity, we reaffirm our responsibility to call out injustice, and dismantle white privilege and settler colonialism. We also rededicate ourselves toward meaningful allyship in ways that do not manipulate, tokenize, usurp, or silence racialized peoples, identities, and knowledge.