

THE CANADIAN GRIEF ALLIANCE

March 2, 2021

Hon. Mark Miller, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Indigenous Services
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Hon. Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health

Hon. Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

Dear Ministers Miller, Hajdu, and Bennett:

We are writing on behalf of the Canadian Grief Alliance (CGA), and members of the national Elders and Knowledge Carriers Circle convened by the Canadian Virtual Hospice, to bring to your attention the serious issue of burgeoning, unsupported grief experienced by Indigenous Peoples exacerbated by COVID-19 and to encourage you to make addressing these needs a priority.

The Canadian Grief Alliance is a national coalition of grief experts and more than 150 leading Canadian health organizations convened to bring attention to the unprecedented surge in the volume and complexity of grief due to the pandemic and to work with governments to implement a community-based, public health approach to this largely unacknowledged crisis within a crisis. Organizations supporting the CGA include: Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Canadian Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Network, All Nations Hope Network, Kilala Lelum (Urban Indigenous Health & Healing Cooperative), Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc., Two-Spirit in Motion, Morning Star Lodge at the University of Saskatchewan, as well as the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Nurses Association and the Canadian Psychiatric Association (list of member organizations attached).

Elders and Knowledge Carriers, supported by Indigenous health scholars, Indigenous organizations/partners, the CGA and First Nations, Inuit and Métis who shared their personal narratives in the Canadian Virtual Hospice's video project "Indigenous Voices: Stories of serious illness and grief" have identified this as a priority area in need of support and services. At a national Elders and Knowledge Carriers Circle convened in 2020, the impact of generations of unsupported grief was a predominant theme.

As you have noted in your public statements, the second wave of the pandemic is disproportionately impacting those in community and off-reserve. Addressing this substantial policy and service gap requires partnership with Indigenous Peoples to develop culturally safe community-based approaches. We are committed to working with you to seek immediate and long-term approaches to address this national gap in equity-oriented care for Indigenous Peoples.

.../2

The generations of grief that Indigenous Peoples carry as a result of colonization and structural violence are disregarded and ignored by public health and public policy responses to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

The impacts of colonial dispossession, loss of ancestral lands, Indian Residential School system, child welfare system, and systemic racism have eroded social structures. This has resulted in inter-generational trauma, struggles with addictions and mental health, and poor health outcomes. Death rates exceed those of the general population across all ages and all causes, including suicide and substance use. Increased incidences of traumatic and multiple deaths, combined with an almost total lack of Indigenous-driven grief services and supports, compounds the already complex, unresolved, and disenfranchised grief while amplifying the impacts, which include: depression, anxiety and thoughts of suicide. During an Elder and Knowledge Carriers Circle convened by the Canadian Virtual Hospice, an Elder indicated:

“...what if grief and trauma is really hurting us because we aren’t acknowledged in how we grieve. We aren’t acknowledged and we aren’t encouraged to talk about it. It is like okay that happened now get on with it.”

Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately underserved by the health system and have little or no access to culturally safe grief supports. Therefore, they are disproportionately impacted by deaths due to all causes during COVID-19. The complexity of pandemic-related and impacted grief, coupled with an absence of grief supports, significantly increases mental health risks. Timely access to culturally safe grief resources can prevent or lessen mental health risks.

The deaths of Indigenous Peoples on- and off-reserve due to COVID-19 pandemic creates a further imperative to implement a multi-system approach that addresses immediate needs while seeking longer-term approaches to entrenched systemic issues.

1. In the immediate term, meeting urgent needs on- and off-reserve requires a coordinated and collaborative approach by the federal government for the immediate enhancement of services that includes but isn’t limited to:
 - a. Access to culturally safe grief services;
 - b. A series of supportive, culturally safe resources, developed by and for Indigenous Peoples that include but are not limited to text materials, videos, webinars and podcasts that meet different learning and support needs and broadband access;
 - c. Training of healthcare providers and community leaders to support grief in culturally safe, inclusive ways.
2. A comprehensive policy initiative driven by Indigenous communities focused on equity-oriented care principles aligned with cultural safety and trauma and violence informed care for a national response to grief and healing to be effective. This must be developed through a mental health lens that is integrated across systems of care. An environmental scan will

identify sparse existing programs and services. The policy approach must be community-driven, with cultural safety and equitable access being guiding principles. Determining need and developing programs and services must be community- and contextually specific with consideration for enhancing the capacity of existing organizations to provide grief support.

We respectfully request a meeting at your earliest opportunity to discuss opportunities to engage with First Nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada on community-based approaches.

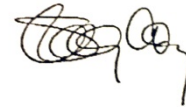
With respect,



Carrie Bourassa, PhD
Scientific Director
Morningstar Lodge
University of Saskatchewan



Holly Prince
Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar
Centre for Education and Research on
Aging & Health
Lakehead University



Shelly Cory
Co-founder
Canadian Grief Alliance

Elders and Knowledge Carriers Circle Signatories:

Peter Irniq, Ontario/Nunavut

Stella Johnson, Métis Nation British Columbia

Mary Jane Kavanaugh, Lac Seul First Nation, Ontario

Rosella Kinoshameg, Wiikwemkoong First Nation, Ontario

Donna Loft, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, Ontario

Albert McLeod, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Ella Paul, Millbrook First Nation, Nova Scotia

Roberta Price, Coast Salish peoples, British Columbia

Jeroline Smith, Peguis First Nation, MB

Organizations supporting the Canadian Grief Alliance

National

Canadian Medical Association
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Psychiatric Association
Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Canadian Association for Spiritual Care
The Enchanté Network
Young Adult Cancer Canada
Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
Canadian Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Network
All Nations Hope Network
Dying With Dignity Canada
Canadian Association for Marriage & Family Therapy
End of Life Doula Association of Canada
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada
Canadian Alliance for Grieving Children and Youth
Canada Bereavement Registry
Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives
Schizophrenia Society of Canada
Melanoma Network of Canada
Canadian Health Advocates Inc.
Canadian Medical Hall of Fame

Alberta

Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Association
Covenant Health Palliative Institute
Caregivers Alberta
Hospice Calgary
Red Deer Hospice
Hospice Society of Camrose and District
Children's Grief Centre
Healthy Directions
Transitions Music Therapy
Oliver's Funeral Home

British Columbia

BC Hospice Palliative Care Association
BC Centre for Palliative Care
Family Caregivers of BC
Island Health
Vancouver Island Health Authority
BC Bereavement Helpline
Camp Kerry
Kilala Lelum (Urban Indigenous Health & Healing Cooperative)
Abbotsford Hospice Society
Vancouver Hospice Society

Organizations supporting the Canadian Grief Alliance

British Columbia (continued)

Delta Hospice Society
Hospice Society of the Columbia Valley
Prince Rupert and District Hospice Society
Victoria Hospice Society
Peace Arch Hospice Society
Burnaby Hospice Society
Crossroads Hospice Society
100 Mile District Hospice Palliative Care Society
Sea to Sky Hospice Society
Desert Valley Hospice Society
West End Seniors' Network
Moving Forward Family Services
Life and Death Matters
Honour End of Life Care
Pacific Well-Being

Manitoba

Palliative Manitoba
Rainbow Resource Centre
Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.
Cancer Care Navigation Services - Northern Regional Health Authority
Rock Lake Palliative Care
Peguis Home & Community Care
Robert Smith School

New Brunswick

NB COPES Child and Family Grief Center

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador Palliative Care Association

Nova Scotia

NS Hospice Palliative Care Association
Doctors Nova Scotia
Caregivers Nova Scotia
Hospice Halifax
Colchester East Hants Hospice Society
Good Grief Halifax

Organizations supporting the Canadian Grief Alliance

Ontario

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario
Ontario Association of Social Workers
RNAO Palliative Care Nurses Interest Group
Centre for Education and Research on Aging & Health at Lakehead University
de Souza Institute
Hope House Community Hospice
Dundas County Hospice
Hospice Outreach Programs of Elgin
Hospice Muskoka
McNally House Hospice
Madawaska Valley Hospice Palliative Care
Hazel Burns Hospice
Hospice Wellington
Dr Bob Kemp Hospice and Bereavement Services
Heart House Hospice
St. Joseph's Hospice Sarnia Lambton
St Joseph's Hospice London
Hospice Northwest
Roger Neilson House
Evergreen Hospice
Hospice Peterborough
Matthews House Hospice
Doane House Hospice
Kensington Health
Near North Palliative Care Network
Bereavement Ontario Network
Bereaved Families of Ontario - South Central Region
Bereaved Families of Ontario – Ottawa
Bereaved Families of Ontario – Kingston
Bereaved Families of Ontario - Midwestern Region
Healing Broken Hearts
Good Grief! Bereavement Healing Services
Gilda's Club of Greater Toronto
The Hummingbird Centre for Hope
Grief Recovery Ontario
Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre
Children and Youth Grief Network
The Lighthouse Program for Grieving Children
Seasons Centre for Grieving Children
Jewish Family and Child Service of Greater Toronto
Victorian Order of Nurses - Oxford
Unity Health Toronto
Selah Resources
Hulse, Playfair & McGarry

Prince Edward Island

Hospice PEI

Organizations supporting the Canadian Grief Alliance

Quebec

Association québécoise de soins palliatifs

McGill Council on Palliative Care

Maison Michel Sarrazin

Réseau Québécois de recherche en soins palliatifs et de fin de vie

Regroupement des Infirmiers-Infirmières Ressources en don d'organes et de tissus du Québec

Palli-aide accompagnement en soins palliatifs Saguenay inc.

Parents Orphelins, l'Association des parents qui vivent un deuil périnatal

Albatros Montréal

Groupe des Aidants du Sud-Ouest Myra's Kids Foundation

West Island Cancer Wellness Center

Hope & Cope

ORA Loss & Living Program, Ste. Genevieve United Church

Unitarian Church of Montreal

ADATH Congregation

Connexions Resource Centre

Saskatchewan

Prairie Hospice Society

Morning Star Lodge, University of Saskatchewan

Augustana Lutheran Church

The Good Foundation Inc.

Territories

Hospice Yukon

and 18 private enterprises.