

# What We Heard

Regarding the Observance of September 30,  
the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation  
in Manitoba



**2022 Manitoba Engagement**  
*with Residential School, Day School,  
and Sixties Scoop Survivors*

For more information, please contact:

Manitoba Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations  
Policy and Strategic Initiatives  
300-352 Donald St.  
Winnipeg, MB, R3B 2H8  
Phone: 204-945-2510 in Winnipeg (toll free#?)  
Email: [IASgeneral@gov.mb.ca](mailto:IASgeneral@gov.mb.ca)  
Fax: 204-945-3689

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## **Acknowledgements**

Manitoba Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations expresses sincere gratitude and appreciation to those who met with us to discuss provincial recognition of September 30. Recognition of this day brings up difficult subject matter such as abuse, loss of children and intergenerational trauma, and we know that these are not easy to discuss or revisit.

We thank the Survivors who shared their experiences with us, the families and community members who spoke about what this day means to them, and Indigenous leadership for their wisdom on paths forward.

To those with whom we engaged, thank you.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Manitoba government is taking action to enable Manitobans to recognize and participate in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It is important to ensure that the steps taken to formalize the day are a reflection of its values, including honouring Survivors of residential schools and their families and ensuring public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools.

A variety of legislative and non-legislative options are available to formally recognize September 30 in Manitoba. Measures could include new or amended legislation, the closure of schools and other activities to mark the importance of the day.

Manitoba Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (IRNR) undertook an engagement process with Indigenous leadership and residential school Survivors to identify perspectives on the optimal approach to recognizing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation provincially.

The objectives of the engagement were to:

- hear directly from residential school Survivors on their views with respect to a variety of questions related to the recognition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in Manitoba;
- take steps to ensure that Manitobans are encouraged and given the opportunity to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and reflect upon the lasting legacy of residential schools in Canada; and
- respond to Call to Action 80, in alignment with Manitoba's commitment to reconciliation, as outlined in *The Path to Reconciliation Act*.

A number of facilitated discussions were held throughout March 2022, including several discussion sessions at a Survivors' conference hosted by the Wa-Say Healing Centre on March 29, 2022. 'We Are Still Here: The Survivors Legacy Conference' brought together more than 600 Survivors of residential schools, day schools, and the Sixties Scoop.

This report provides a summary of **what was heard** during these facilitated discussions. The goals of the discussions were to determine:

- the meaning of the day to Survivors, Leadership, and those they represent
- the broader importance of the day to the people of Manitoba, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous Manitobans, specifically, messages that should be communicated to Manitobans through recognition of the day
- how Manitoba could recognize September 30 provincially

Recommendations put forth for messages that should be communicated to Manitobans regarding the meaning of the day to Survivors, Leadership, and those they represent included:

- September 30 is not a celebration; it's a day of reflection, of recognition of Survivors, and of honouring the children who did not return home.
- Orange Shirt Day has deep value; wearing an orange shirt signifies support for Survivors and acknowledges their experiences. It sends the message that Every Child Matters.
- Indigenous culture is alive and continues to thrive, despite colonial efforts.

- Governments and churches must accept accountability and create real change alongside apologies. This is imperative for healing and reconciliation.
- Non-Indigenous Manitobans have a lot of learning and unlearning to do with regard to Indigenous history, experiences, and cultures; this is imperative for reconciliation.
- The day is important for healing, and resources for culturally appropriate methods and ceremonies need to be supported.

Recommendations regarding the broader importance of September 30 to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Manitobans included:

#### Education:

- Education is imperative; schools should implement educational activities leading up to the day.
- Changes to the school curriculum are needed regarding Indigenous history and culture, colonization, and residential schools. The changes are needed from K to 12.
- Survivors, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers should be invited to schools to share their experiences.
- We should provide training created by Indigenous educators to teachers on content added to the curriculum, in order to ensure it is taught accurately and appropriately.
- We need to recognize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methodologies provincially, including land-based education, science, and language instruction.

#### Public Awareness:

- Implement awareness campaigns throughout September that educate the general public on the history of colonization, residential schools, and the experiences of Indigenous peoples on this land.
- Facilitate Indigenous-led public workshops throughout September for non-Indigenous peoples to educate themselves and reflect on their personal accountability and responsibilities. Increased understanding of Indigenous culture, heritage, and perspectives helps non-Indigenous Manitobans to honour and appreciate the diversity of Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing.
- Examine material given to immigrants and newcomers to Manitoba to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous history. Inaccurate stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, heritage and culture should be challenged by providing education on treaties, colonization, residential schools, and other relevant subjects.
- Develop professional learning for government workers on September 30, and increased cross-cultural awareness for the RCMP, health system workers, correctional and immigration officers.

Recommendations for how Manitoba should recognize September 30 provincially included:

#### Public Commemoration:

- Hold memorials, feasts, or ceremonial family days.
- Lower all official flags.
- Organize marches and rallies where teachings and educational events can be provided. People should wear orange to bring awareness to Manitobans, and participation from Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples should be encouraged.

#### Political Acknowledgment:

- Provide acknowledgement from all elected officials through collaborative Indigenous media events.
- Provide an annual statement from the government acknowledging the government's role in the wrongdoings of residential schools on September 30.
- Ensure politicians and public servants participate in ceremonies and educational activities.

#### Support and Resources:

- Increase government resources to support community activities and events.
- Eliminate cut-off dates for provincial grants for First Nations and communities that fund Survivors.
- Build Indigenous-run healing centres in communities, as well as lodges with additional focus on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

#### Legislation:

- Solidify September 30 as a statutory holiday, day of remembrance or other legislated day, and connect this legislation with Orange Shirt Day.

#### Collaborative Planning:

- Commit to Indigenous involvement at leadership tables, policy development and legislation regarding September 30.

## **Content Warning**

Please note that sensitive matters and personal experiences, such as residential schools, abuse, trauma and family loss are discussed throughout this report. This content can be triggering and traumatizing, so please be aware and contact supports as needed.

The Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line (**1-800-721-0066**) is available 24 hours a day for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of their residential school experience.



## BACKGROUND

Residential schools operated within Canada for more than 150 years,<sup>1</sup> and it is estimated that over 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children attended. The federal government adopted an official policy of funding residential schools across Canada in the 1880s, with the explicit intent of separating Indigenous children from their families and cultures. By 1920, attendance at these schools was made compulsory by the *Indian Act* for all Treaty-status children between the ages 7 to 15. Fourteen recognized schools were operated in Manitoba from 1888 to 1996.<sup>2</sup>

The schools were frequently underfunded, overcrowded, and had substandard qualities of education. Thousands of Indigenous children suffered physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuse at these schools, and the resulting trauma continues to negatively impact Survivors and their families today.

Over 4,000 children died while attending residential schools in Canada, although the actual number remains unknown and is estimated to be much higher. Approximately one third of these children were not recorded by name, one quarter did not have a recorded gender, and one half did not have a recorded cause of death. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) estimates that over 300 of these deaths occurred within schools located in Manitoba, however the total number of children who died and/or remain missing is likely much higher.<sup>3</sup>

In the TRC's final report, 94 Calls to Action (CTA) were issued in two broad categories to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation. CTA 80 calls for the establishment of a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:

*We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.*

On June 3, 2021, Parliament passed Bill C-5, An Act to Amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act, and the Canada Labour Code (National Day for Truth and Reconciliation) to establish September 30 as the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, an annual commemoration and federal statutory holiday.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation honours the lost children and Survivors of residential schools, their families, and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the healing and reconciliation processes, and the national day provides opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada to participate in both. It also provides the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the bravery and resilience of the Survivors who have continued to share these truths.

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<sup>1</sup> Residential schools operated in Canada from 1831 to 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Manitoba Residential Schools, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba. <https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/manitoba/>

<sup>3</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015. Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Volume 4. [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2015/trc/IR4-9-4-2015-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-9-4-2015-eng.pdf)

The new day of observance coincides with Orange Shirt Day, a pre-established day of observance on which Canadians are encouraged to wear orange shirts to honour Indigenous peoples who attended residential schools. It is an Indigenous-led, grassroots, commemorative day that honours the children who survived residential schools and remembers those who did not. It received its name based on the experience of Phyllis Webstad who, as a young girl, wore a new orange shirt to her first day at the St. Joseph Mission Residential School (British Columbia). This shirt was taken from her upon her arrival.

The image of this orange shirt is now a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom, and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations. The observance of Orange Shirt Day encourages remembrance, teaching, and healing, and provides an opportunity for all Canadians to participate in meaningful discussions about the effects of residential schools and the legacy they left behind.<sup>4</sup> The specific date was chosen because it is within the time of year in which children were taken from their homes and forced into residential schools, and because the timing provides modern schools with the opportunity to set the stage for anti-racism and anti-bullying policies for the coming school year.

In 2017, Manitoba passed the Orange Shirt Day Act. This act affirmed that September 30 was to be known throughout Manitoba as Orange Shirt Day, but it did not establish September 30 as a holiday, statutory or otherwise.

In accordance with Bill C-5 amendments, Manitoba closed its provincial legislature, schools, and some public services on the first official National Day of Truth and Reconciliation in 2021. British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island acknowledged the day in a similar fashion. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Manitoba have called for further provincial action to recognize September 30 in Manitoba.

## ENGAGEMENT

IRNR engaged with Indigenous leadership and residential school Survivors to invite perspectives regarding approaches to recognizing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation provincially. The information contained within this report is centered around Survivor experiences, opinions, and recommendations.

The objectives of the engagement were to:

- hear directly from residential school Survivors on their views with respect to a variety of questions related to the recognition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in Manitoba;
- take steps to ensure that Manitobans are given the opportunity, and are encouraged, to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and reflect upon the lasting legacy of residential schools in Canada; and
- respond to CTA 80, in alignment with Manitoba's commitment to reconciliation, as outlined in The Path to Reconciliation Act.

A number of facilitated discussions were held throughout March 2022, including several discussion sessions at a Survivors' conference hosted by the Wa-Say Healing Centre on March

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<sup>4</sup> About Us – The Story of Orange Day. Orange Shirt Society. <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/about-us.html>

29, 2022. 'We Are Still Here: The Survivors Legacy Conference' brought together more than 600 Survivors of residential schools, day schools, and the Sixties Scoop.

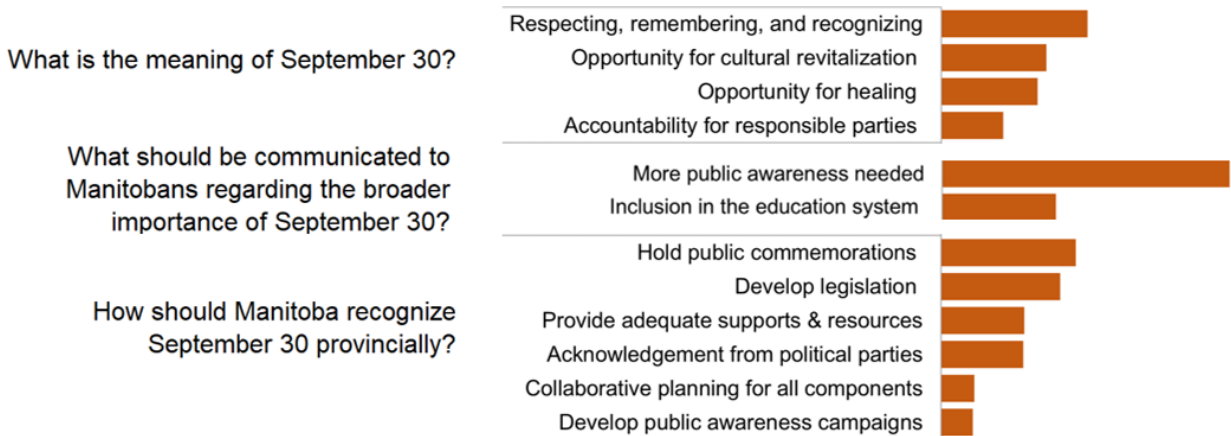
# WHAT WE HEARD OVERVIEW

## Key Themes

The following sections read as if they were written by many voices. In essence, they were. This was an intentional stylistic choice made by the authors to better reflect the many voices, perspectives, opinions, and experiences heard throughout the engagement process. Brief introductions to the themes are included as needed, and all statements provided by engagement participants are italicized. Minor structural edits were made for clarity and/or privacy reasons as needed, but the words were written verbatim as often as possible.

The term statutory holiday is regularly used by those with whom we engaged in its common parlance which may or may not align with or refer to the formal definition of a General Holiday. While there may be differences in the interpretation and intention of the terms used, there was common agreement by all parties that September 30 should be a day of somber reflection and consideration, not just a day off.

With this in mind, it is important to note that the following sections do not necessarily represent the position, priorities, or perspectives of the Government of Manitoba or Manitoba IRNR. Interpretation by IRNR was limited to the determination of themes based on participant responses. An overview of these themes is provided in the following image, and detailed responses from participants are provided below.



## The Meaning of the Day to Survivors


Several key themes emerged throughout the engagement (see image below). Themes included the need to respect, remember, and recognize the legacy of residential schools and their ongoing impacts, as well as the resiliency of Survivors and their families; the need for cultural revitalization for Survivors and their families to reclaim what was lost; the need for responsible parties to accept accountability; and the importance of the day in terms of healing for Survivors, their families, and the families of children who were lost.

What is the meaning of September 30?

Respecting, remembering, and recognizing 

Opportunity for cultural revitalization 

Opportunity for healing 

Accountability for responsible parties 

## **Respecting, Remembering, and Recognizing Lost Children, their Families, and Survivors**

Respecting, remembering, and recognizing the loss of all the children that did not return home from residential schools is of primary importance. Since May 2021, the Canadian public has been rocked by the identification of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential schools. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples throughout the country grieved the loss of these lives. However, for Indigenous Survivors, families and communities, these graves re-opened deep wounds caused by residential schools.

*As the numbers of graves grow, we need to honour the sites. Each grave identified is the resting place of a sibling, a child and a friend. It is of great importance for non-Indigenous Manitobans to understand the solemnity of each grave, and its impact on Indigenous families and communities. September 30 is not a day to celebrate; rather it is a day of reflection and acceptance and a day to recognize Survivors. It is about paying tribute to the children who did not return home from residential schools and for those that are still held there in spiritual and emotional capacity.*

*September 30 provides one of a number of opportunities to reflect and share the reason for observing the date – including sharing the personal stories of Survivors. Those who survived residential schools went through horrific ordeals of trauma and abuse as children. The lives of Survivors were forever altered by residential schools, and they deserve to be honoured and remembered. September 30 should be taken as an opportunity to reflect and learn about the history of residential schools – what it was like to be a parent and have your child taken, or be a child and be taken away from your parents, family and community. Recognizing the experiences of residential school Survivors, and the longstanding impact on the lives of Indigenous families and communities is an appropriate way for Manitobans, particularly non-Indigenous Manitobans, to observe September 30.*

*The majority of national attention, including that of the TRC, has focused exclusively on residential schools. Although day schools, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop were all distinct experiences, common experiences were had. The experiences of day school scholars, and those who were part of the Sixties Scoop, should also be reflected in the recognition of September 30. Similar experiences, such as abuse and trauma, separation from family,*

*community and their homes, are shared by many. It is important to acknowledge these differences and commonalities and ensure that both are given appropriate recognition.*

*September 30 should not just be another day off, but a day to reflect on the experience and legacy of residential schools. Observing the day could take many different forms, but the day should be an opportunity for Survivors to share their stories, a day for reflection on the truth of our history as a nation, and to observe the meaning behind the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. September 30 provides a platform for Survivors to share their stories, to be heard and validated, and encourages non-Indigenous Manitobans to deepen their understanding of residential schools and the abuse Indigenous peoples experienced.*

*Orange Shirt Day has deep value. The meaning of wearing an orange shirt, or an orange pin, is similar to wearing a poppy for Remembrance Day. It signifies support for Survivors and acknowledges their experiences at residential schools. The orange shirts provide a public display of solidarity and sends the message that Every Child Matters. This message resonates very deeply for many people, and is an integral part of September 30.*

### **Opportunity for Cultural Revitalization**

Residential schools had a deeply detrimental impact on Indigenous culture. A core tenet of the schools was to rid Indigenous youth of their culture or to “kill the Indian in the child.” This included banning language, traditions, ceremony and other important elements of Indigenous culture, and punishing those who disobeyed. Part of the legacy of residential schools is a large loss of Indigenous cultural identity. To counteract this legacy, there is a need to recapture Indigenous culture, language, traditions and spirituality and teach it to young people, particularly Indigenous youth.

*September 30 provides an opportunity to demonstrate that the mission to eradicate Indigenous culture failed – by holding cultural events, using Indigenous languages and integrating ceremony into the day.*

*As the residential school system played a big role in stripping Indigenous language and culture from Indigenous peoples, the government should be responsible for providing resources for cultural revitalization, such as language training, and facilitating opportunities for re-forging cultural connections for Indigenous peoples, particularly youth. Reinforcing these aspects of Indigeneity will be integral to fostering a sense of pride in Indigenous culture and identity.*

*Indigenous spirituality has been carried on from time immemorial. Like other aspects of Indigenous culture, Indigenous spirituality was repressed and punished at residential schools. As a result, many Indigenous peoples were disconnected from their spirituality. Undoing this damage is part of addressing the legacy of residential schools, and is an important part of September 30. This could be accomplished through holding spiritual teachings and ceremony to observe the day, and youth-Elder activities to foster traditional connections.*

### **Accountability for Responsible Parties**

When mass atrocities are committed, such as the theft of Indigenous children from their families for over 160 years, accountability for the wrongdoing is often an integral part of the healing process. Multiple parties were involved in imposing the residential school systems, including government, Christian churches of multiple denominations, and those who participated in enforcement, such as the RCMP. While the individual architects of the residential school

system themselves have long since passed away, the institutions responsible for its implementation are still present in today's society.

*September 30 is a day where Manitoba admits the wrongs of the past. It is a day for government and churches to own the responsibility. Much was done to children in residential schools that can't be reversed or changed. Accountability can take many forms. Taking responsibility can include officially and publicly apologizing, such as former Prime Minister Stephen Harper did in 2011,<sup>5</sup> official acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing can validate Survivors' experiences and bring a measure of closure. However, apologies must not be empty. They have to mean something. Unless apologies are followed up with meaningful action, they can easily become nothing more than lip service. Change in behaviour requires policy, legislation, and actions – not words. It requires more than saying sorry. It requires changing the justice system so that Indigenous peoples are not overrepresented; changing the health care system so that Indigenous peoples have equal health outcomes. This is accountability.*

*The truth of how the nuns and priests abused children needs to be told. This abuse has left deep scars on many people. There is a desire for churches to own the responsibility for that, and be brought to justice. The government and churches need to be involved in funding revitalization and healing efforts as a part of reparations. Statues of those who were in power during the implementation of residential schools, such as Queen Victoria, should not be kept on display. It is not right to honour them because of their role in residential schools.*

*There should be a recognition of the unmarked graves as evidence of crime. The graves being identified at residential school sites are not only tragedies, but also crimes. Accountability for the fate of the children in unmarked graves should be raised as a criminal matter.*

*Accountability goes beyond those who were responsible for implementing residential schools. Non-Indigenous Manitobans should take personal responsibility for living on Indigenous land. Many non-Indigenous Manitobans have significant learning and un-learning to do regarding Indigenous history, experiences and culture on the land we inhabit. Taking on this work, and becoming personally invested in reconciliation is part of non-Indigenous Manitobans' role in reconciliation.*

## **Opportunity for Healing**

*September 30 is a day of healing for many Indigenous peoples. This includes mental, physical, cultural, emotional and spiritual healing. September 30 is a day for collective healing for those impacted by residential schools; a day to have safer spaces to reflect, share stories, give and receive support, cry, laugh, and have experiences of injustice validated. Survivors are looking for programs to help heal their minds and strengthen their families. Culturally appropriate healing supports, using traditional Indigenous methods such as ceremony and sweat lodges, or the services provided through existing Indigenous healing centres (e.g., Wa-Say, Anish Corporation) need additional resources to expand their operations.*

*September 30 has meaning as a specific day, but it will take generations to heal and have true reconciliation. Intergenerational trauma is a reality that many people deal with on a daily basis. However, intergenerational healing also exists and, for many, this work is just beginning. There is a need to break the cycles of abuse and trauma. Trauma and healing are passed through*

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<sup>5</sup> The engagements that formed the basis of this report occurred days before Pope Francis officially apologized for the role of the Catholic Church in residential schools.

families. Children will feel the healing passed on to them. Many Indigenous people are just starting to hear about their family's history as Survivors begin to share their stories. There is healing that is taking place as stories are shared and the truth comes out. Younger generations often do not know their history, but are affected by intergenerational trauma, so they need to learn the truth, and experience healing. Healing from residential schools is a journey and it will take generations. This also means the non-Indigenous peoples will be required to be part of this journey for generations.

September 30 is also a day to come together and recognize the strength of Indigenous peoples. The healing process should be Indigenous-owned and led. Healing services cannot only be provided through colonial methods such as psychiatrists and therapists. Traditional healing processes also need to be recognized and utilized. Indigenous peoples know what is needed to bring healing. That knowledge has not been lost. Healing also means an unlearning of what has been imposed through colonization, including the shame associated with being Indigenous. People need healing so they can see and believe that Indigenous ways are good, and to regain pride in their identity as Indigenous peoples.

### **The Broader Importance of the Day to the People of Manitoba, Including Indigenous and non-Indigenous Manitobans**

Two key themes that emerged throughout the engagement are the need for increased education and public awareness regarding the history and experience of colonization on Indigenous peoples (see image below). While similar, the Education section within this report describes feedback related to formal learning settings, such as schools and universities, while the Public Awareness section is related to learning beyond these systems.

What should be communicated to Manitobans regarding the broader importance of September 30?

More public awareness needed



Inclusion in the education system



### **Inclusion in the Education System**

Leading up to September 30, schools should implement education campaigns so that students know what the day means. Changes need to be made to the school curriculum to teach children, from kindergarten to grade 12 and beyond. Integrating mandatory courses about the treaties and treaty rights, Indigenous languages, history as told by Indigenous peoples, ceremony and culture in the public school curriculum will help inform youth of the history of this land from an Indigenous perspective. Indigenous and non-Indigenous children need to be given opportunities to learn about what previous generations went through and the strength of Indigenous peoples to endure colonization.

Bringing Indigenous educators such as Survivors, Elders and Knowledge Keepers into schools to share their experiences and teach young people would ensure that the learning experience is



*authentic and meaningful. Manitoba teachers also need to receive training from Indigenous educators on any content that is added to the curriculum so that they are given the necessary tools to teach the material to children in an accurate and appropriate way.*

*It is important that courses about residential schools and issues faced by Indigenous peoples be mandatory for all students, throughout their education, including post-secondary. For many years, history was taught from a European perspective that omitted Indigenous knowledge and experiences. To counteract incorrect narratives and excluded Indigenous perspectives, all young people should be taught a new curriculum. This material should include positive information about Indigenous history and culture, not just residential schools. Indigenous knowledge and teaching methodologies should be recognized provincially. This includes land-based education, science and language instruction.*

*It is especially important for Indigenous youth to be given opportunities to learn about their own culture, language and history for credit. Indigenous youth need to learn the real history of Canada and Manitoba, and to be proud of their heritage and contributions.*

Specific messages for Indigenous youth include:

- *our First Nation culture is so important; it's important to know your own culture first;*
- *listen to your Elders' stories;*
- *know your own history, including the horrors of what Canada did to our ancestors;*
- *know how strong the generations before you were and how much they went through to get where we are today;*
- *we are still here; and*
- *learn about the children buried in unmarked graves.*

## **More Public Awareness Needed**

There is much learning to do beyond the scope of formal education settings. The general public in Manitoba, and beyond, needs to be made aware of the true history of colonization and the experience of Indigenous peoples on this land. September 30 provides an opportunity to recognize the trauma and pain caused by residential schools. The news of the unmarked graves throughout Canada in 2021 refocused the public's attention on this history, but more work needs to be done.

*The people who experienced the schools should be telling their stories. No one should be speaking on their behalf. Non-Indigenous people need to know what was done to Indigenous peoples – the stripping away of language and culture, and the breaking apart of families. The residual pain of these experiences is still present. It is important to ensure no one forgets that major interruption to Indigenous lives. The assimilation efforts stripped people of their culture, language, and practices. Non-Indigenous Manitobans have a duty to educate themselves on the history of Manitoba and Canada, and know the truth about the impacts the state, religion and law enforcement institutions have had on Indigenous peoples. Struggles with poverty, housing, addiction, health and other factors can be linked to residential schools. It is important that non-Indigenous Manitobans connect the experience of residential schools and the result in Indigenous populations today.*

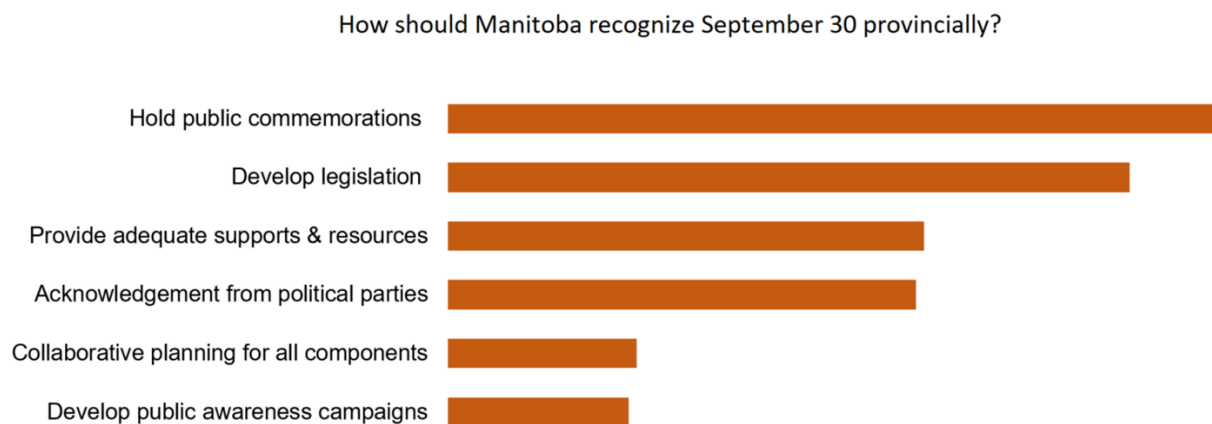
*September 30 is also an occasion for non-Indigenous peoples to educate themselves and reflect on their personal accountability and responsibilities while living on Indigenous lands, to*

*honour and appreciate Indigenous peoples who have been on this land since time immemorial, and respect their lands and ways. There are many misconceptions about Indigenous peoples, including that they do not pay taxes, which feed into discriminatory behaviours and policies. Cultural education and sensitivity training, especially for public servants, social and support workers, health care workers, law enforcement and teachers is crucial to counteract systemic racism. Open, honest, and uncomfortable conversations need to happen for the public to learn the whole truth of our history. These should be led by Indigenous peoples, and not filtered through the government.*

*Immigrants and newcomers to Manitoba should be given information to challenge and change the stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, so they understand the history and know why things are the way that they are. Education about the history of Indigenous peoples, including treaties, colonization and residential schools should be provided upon arrival so they know the history of this land.*

## **How Manitoba Could Recognize September 30 Provincially**

Six key themes emerged throughout the engagement on how Manitoba can recognize September 30 provincially (see image below). These key themes include public commemoration, political acknowledgment, support and resources, legislation, collaborative planning and public awareness campaigns. Within each of the key themes, participants provided detailed feedback and context on how this should occur. Additional sub-headings were added as necessary.



### **Holding Public Commemorations**

A number of recommendations regarding public commemorations were provided, including gatherings, ceremonies, memorials, marches, and rallies.

*September 30 is not a day to celebrate. Rather, it is a day of reflection and acceptance and is a day to recognize Survivors. It is important to consider providing events and teachings during the week leading up to September 30. A day is not enough and a team is necessary to work and brainstorm together to provide time for employers and the people of Manitoba to take this time off to learn.*

*Memorializing September 30 is an important method to commemorate children lost to the Indian residential school system. It is important to keep workers working and schools open and instead, take that day to learn the truth of residential schools. There should be a week of events integrated publicly into schools. This would allow for early education by highlighting the communities and First Nations where the schools were located and how many students attended these schools. This could be accomplished by creating a map of residential and day schools showing historical facts like attendance, who ran them, how far from their home communities children had to go to attend, what we know about any associated graves and/or legal documents and make it available to schools, faith groups and libraries. Young people need to hear these stories.*

*Honour the children by having a feast with activities including a dance, a powwow and making outfits and clothing such as t-shirts, sweaters, ribbons, bags and hats. People can bring children's shoes to place around a sacred fire to honour the children and to create opportunities to start learning about culture and spirituality. Honour the children who never came home to their communities through ceremony.*

### **Memorials to the Children from Residential Schools**

*Build a wall with a list of children's names that went to residential and day schools, starting with Survivors who are still with us. Residential schools that are still standing should be made into museums to display the ugly truth of the abuses that occurred. Each community should have a monument and acknowledgement of Survivors and of those who didn't make it home. This should be funded by the government. Each community should also receive funding to research the names and locations of lost children, so they can be added to the memorial.*

### **Healing Ceremonies**

*Healing ceremonies are a way Manitoba could recognize September 30. Commemorate the day with ceremonies such as a healing powwow with drumming or a walk to raise awareness and teach the impact of the day. Provide ways to heal and recognize the day with our own ceremonies in communities.*

### **Lowering the Flags**

*Lowering of flags will highlight the day. If a week-long event happened, lower all Canadian flags to half-mast. Every government building should also fly an 'Every Child Matters' flag at half-mast.*

### **Marches and Rallies**

*Wearing orange will help to bring awareness to Manitobans. Events are also needed, such as rides, walks, parades or gatherings. Organize a walk or a march in Winnipeg and provide teachings. Have a traditional feast and commemoration and include a focus on languages with Elders giving prayers in their own language. Have speakers at events speak in their Indigenous language and then, have someone translate that into English. For all events, there should be minimal or no police presence as it makes people very uncomfortable. Instead, provide more security ambassadors.*

*The ceremony at St. John's Park in 2021 is a good example of an event that can be supported. It brought different speakers and so many people came outdoors to dance and have a powwow on the grounds, so people were grounded. The bigger the field, the better. Also provide bleachers as it's harder for people to see with lawn chairs. Make it visually accessible for everyone.*

## **Honouring Survivors**

*Recognize the Survivors by having a ceremonial family day – a day of family celebrations to host ceremonial activities and children's activities. Employers and people need to take this time off (the day or the week) to learn about sharing circles, sacred fire, and to acknowledge all the children who didn't make it home, all the Survivors, and the children of Survivors.*

## **Participation from Indigenous and non-Indigenous People**

*Make gatherings open to the public to bring awareness that this day is for everyone. All races, all cultures gather together on this day. This day is a celebration of a new beginning for Indigenous peoples to have a positive impact on change. This would open the door for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together so we can engage with everyone.*

*Manitobans will educate themselves. Non-Indigenous Manitobans will learn about a day to embrace all cultures; recognize the spirit that Creator gave us. A day to change the denial, to walk in our shoes for a couple of hours; to go on to the land and be taught by Indigenous peoples; to access healing centres and sweat lodges. This would be therapy for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.*

## **Develop Legislation**

*The government needs to legislate a day to be recognized by all, just like November 11, where we take a moment of silence and honour Indigenous peoples.*

*We should continue to have Orange Shirt Day. Manitoba should connect a new day to the original intent of September 30, which was to acknowledge trauma and the values of kinship that were taken away from First Nations peoples through residential schools, day schools, and the Sixties Scoop. The focus should be recognizing the ripple effects of trauma.*

*September 30 should be solidified as a provincial holiday to reflect on the harms committed by the government and for Manitobans to learn. This should be a statutory holiday so the rest of the province can recognize the day. A statutory holiday will allow for gatherings to happen, though we will already be holding ceremonies on that day. A statutory holiday is needed so that people can participate without loss of pay.*

*It shouldn't be just a day off. It should maybe be similar to November 11 with a service of some sort, or educational projects or activities. It needs to be promoted to make sure people of other cultures are aware of what September 30 represents, that it is not just a holiday, and that it promotes the awareness of the history of Indigenous peoples. This is something that is often put on the back burner and will keep simmering if it is not dealt with out in public. This day should have its own history like other important days, like an All Family Day or Residential School Day. Manitoba should recognize September 30 as a statutory holiday for all*

*those affected to celebrate and acknowledge all Survivors and those beautiful angels that never made it home. Make it memorable!*

*There needs to be a time frame on mandates to get this topic into the school curriculum. One day off to recognize Indigenous history and celebrate Indigenous ways of life, and another day for learning like mandatory assembly in schools for non-Indigenous people; a day for settlers to practice responsibility while living on our land, and to be accountable.*

*Make it a day off of work so people can gather with their families and commemorate the day together. Legislate a holiday so that it is recognized annually for generations to come. The harms of colonization happened over generations, so the grieving and commemoration should also be long-term and engage all of society.*

*Employers in Manitoba must recognize and honour the day, and enable their employees to do the same. People should not be working, but rather listening and learning.*

### **Provide Adequate Support and Resources**

*The province should provide continual support for local groups caring for their communities. Watch us, join us and provide support, provide us with funding to lead and organize what we want to do on September 30.*

*Each community should receive funding to research and visit these sites to find out the names of our lost children. Their names will then be added to a commemorative wall.*

*Indian Residential School funding has to be applied for annually – that needs to be eliminated. Funding must be there and available at all times in order to educate and work at healing our people.*

*Younger generations need a place to vent their anger. Last year's event in the city was good. Make more grants available provincially for First Nations, especially for language revitalization and land-based learning.*

*The government built all the residential schools, so, in turn, the government should build healing centres in our communities. Indigenous people should run these healing lodges and healing programs to heal the wounds of the Indigenous peoples across Canada. This should also include a retreat, a sanctuary for women<sup>6</sup> and ceremony to gain strength and heal. There's no such place right now for women to go for us to get back to our spirituality and gain knowledge.*

### **Acknowledgement from Political Parties**

*Indigenous peoples need to see politicians and ministers demonstrate a true understanding of what the day represents. In Manitoba, ministers and political leaders should come together and do a public engagement, not give an empty apology or scripted speech. This would demonstrate commitment, and an understanding of the importance of truth and reconciliation within the context of Indigenous histories. They must demonstrate a united effort to actively engage in truth and reconciliation.*

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<sup>6</sup> The TRC drew a connection between the disproportionate victimization of Indigenous women and girls and the intergenerational legacy of residential schools in Call to Action 41.

*Recognition of Indian Residential School families and survivors at all levels of government acknowledgement on public platforms such as television, radio, and social media. Once Manitoba has accepted and acknowledged the past then maybe there can be Nation to Nation sovereignty, equality, including women's voices and leadership recognized by the colonial government.*

*Yearly acknowledgement from the government in Indigenous languages. The day before the statutory day, the government could make an acknowledgement statement, which will be provided to a different Indigenous person and nation yearly.*

*It is important for government to admit their wrongdoings in order to look back and to look forward. The leadership also needs to recognize the differences between Inuit, First Nations and the Métis. The government should respect Indigenous peoples, and take responsibility for their actions so it will never happen again. Have a day where Manitoba admits the wrongs and owns the responsibility.*

*The churches and government did a lot to us that we can't reverse or change. Manitobans need to "see it" and "feel it" by coming to our reserves.*

*Government employees need to participate in celebrations and take cultural training to understand and respect our culture. Government workers should have workshops to learn. Recognition of the families and Survivors of Indian Residential Schools by all levels of government on public platforms such as television, radio, and social media. Invite the government leaders, provincial elected representatives or the Premier to the next Residential School Survivors conference to listen to Survivors, hear their thoughts and concerns, and provide an update on how Manitoba is recognizing this day. Also have a pipe ceremony at the Legislative grounds with the Premier and all Ministers. Even a sweat lodge, with the Premier and Ministers participating. Develop a week of teachings for the government leaders to participate in.*

## **Collaborative Planning for All Components**

*The province is working towards recognizing September 30, however, too often, the government just gives Indigenous peoples options to choose from and makes the decisions. So, let Indigenous peoples lead and truly collaborate.*

*It is positive that Inuit, First Nations, and Métis are being engaged individually. Each culture is distinct and voices may be lost when everyone is placed together.*

*Make sure Knowledge Keepers and teachers blaze trails together and include the Indigenous teachings in curriculum. Listen to the counsel of Grandmothers.*

*Work with us on everything that has to do WITH us.*

*Indigenous peoples need to be part of creating policy, to be at the table, to lead, to make decisions; not people in government offices making decisions, not government saying we will give you funding and this is how you will spend it, but us leading. Government can watch, learn and see what we (Indigenous people) do to honour the day, and then follow our example. It shouldn't be the government and non-Indigenous people organizing it. Rather, Indigenous peoples should lead.*

## **Develop Public Awareness Campaigns**

*More information is needed at the community level. This can be done through a variety of awareness campaigns via social media, television, radio, or billboards. Stories specific to Manitoba residential schools could be compiled.*

*It is important to have visuals, not just words. There should be an information campaign leading up to the day, and promotional videos or other materials should be created by Indigenous peoples to accurately communicate the message to the broader public.*

## **Additional Important Comments**

Extended Acknowledgement Period:

*Efforts to raise the public's awareness on these issues should not be limited to one day a year. Week or month-long educational and awareness campaigns should be implemented, similar to Black History Month. This could involve Elders, Survivors and Knowledge Keepers going into schools to speak with students and share their experiences. This would encourage public interest and increase the general understanding of where this country and this land and all its peoples have come from. While September 30 is an important day, and it should be recognized and observed, these matters go beyond one day.*

Respect Indigenous Agency:

*The Chief and Council system is not the traditional Indigenous system. The Indian Act does not work for the people. Indigenous peoples have a right to self-governance including traditional forms of leadership, such as Clan Mothers. Traditional Chiefs are chosen by Clan Mothers, who have known them all their lives, who have seen them grow and know who they are. Women's voices and leadership needs to be recognized by colonial governments. The Grandmothers are the seed carriers and the youth will tend to those seeds and guide the direction of this day.*

*Recognition of Indigenous governance and self-determination regarding land, identity, food, health, education, housing and child care systems is important. Governments need to recognize people's agency in defining their own identity, both individually and collectively. Indigenous ways of living and being should not be overpowered by Canadian ways, especially not on Indigenous lands. Self-determination is an inherent right of Indigenous peoples and needs to be fulfilled.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A large number of recommendations were provided by engagement participants. These recommendations are summarized below.

### Messages to Communicate Regarding the Meaning of the Day to Survivors

- September 30 is not a celebration; it's a day of reflection, of recognition of Survivors, and of honouring the children who did not return home.
- Orange Shirt Day has deep value; wearing an orange shirt signifies support for Survivors and acknowledges their experiences. It sends the message that Every Child Matters.
- Indigenous culture is alive and continues to thrive, despite colonial efforts.
- Governments and churches must accept accountability and create real change alongside apologies. This is imperative for healing and reconciliation.
- Non-Indigenous Manitobans have a lot of learning and unlearning to do with regard to Indigenous history, experiences, and cultures; this is imperative for reconciliation.
- The day is important for healing, and resources for culturally appropriate methods and ceremonies need to be supported.

### The Broader Importance of September 30 to Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Manitobans

#### Education:

- Education is imperative; schools should implement educational activities leading up to the day.
- Changes to the school curriculum are needed regarding Indigenous history and culture, colonization, and residential schools. The changes are needed from K to 12.
- Survivors, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers should be invited to schools to share their experiences.
- Provide training created by Indigenous educators to teachers on content added to the curriculum to ensure it is taught accurately and appropriately.
- Recognize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methodologies provincially, including land-based education, science, and language instruction.

#### Public Awareness:

- Implement awareness campaigns throughout September to educate the general public on the true history of colonization, residential schools and the experience of Indigenous peoples on this land.
- Facilitate Indigenous-led public workshops throughout September for non-Indigenous peoples to educate themselves and reflect on their personal accountability and responsibilities while living on Indigenous lands, to honour and appreciate Indigenous peoples who have always been on this land, and foster respect for their lands and ways.
- Examine material given to immigrants and newcomers to Manitoba to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous history, including treaties, colonization and residential schools. Inaccurate stereotypes about Indigenous peoples should be challenged.



- Develop professional learning for government workers on September 30 and increased cross-cultural awareness for the RCMP, health system workers, correctional and immigration officers.

## **How Manitoba Should Recognize September 30 Provincially**

### Public Commemoration:

- Hold memorials, feasts, or ceremonial family days.
- Lower all official flags.
- Organize marches and rallies where teachings and educational events can be provided and wear orange to bring awareness to Manitobans. Encourage participation from Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

### Political Acknowledgment:

- Provide acknowledgement from all elected officials through collaborative Indigenous media events.
- On September 30, provide an annual statement from the government acknowledging the government's role in the wrongdoings of residential schools.
- Ensure politicians and public servants participate in ceremonies and educational activities.

### Support and Resources:

- Increase government resources to support community activities and events.
- Eliminate cut-off dates for provincial grants for First Nations and communities that fund Survivors.
- Build Indigenous-run healing centres in communities, as well as lodges with additional focus on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

### Legislation:

- Solidify September 30 as a statutory holiday, day of remembrance or other legislated day, and connect this legislation with Orange Shirt Day.

### Collaborative Planning:

- Commit to Indigenous involvement at leadership tables, policy development and legislation regarding September 30.