



CANADIAN
MENTAL
HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE
POUR LA
SANTÉ MENTALE

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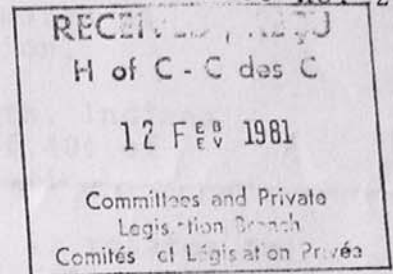
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February 5, 1981

Program reference no. 25

The Right Honourable Pierre E. Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2



Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

On behalf of the Canadian Mental Health Association, I wish to express our support for the positive action taken towards entrenching aboriginal and treaty rights constitutionally.

The Canadian Mental Health Association supports the Native peoples of Canada, and their representative organizations, in their efforts to obtain legislative guarantees to protect aboriginal and treaty rights and the special status of Native peoples in Confederation.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is most concerned about the mental health of Native peoples in Canada. We are aware, for example, that:

- . for Indians on reserves, compared to the rest of the population of our country:

- 1 violent deaths are three times higher,
- 2 suicides, particularly in the 15 - 24 age group, are more than six times higher,
- 3 average life expectancy is 10 years shorter;

in addition:

- 1 the strength and stability of family units appear to be eroding with higher divorce rates, more births outside marriage and more children placed in care,
- 2 participation in the labour force stands at only two-thirds of national levels and employment at a mere 32% of the working age population,
- 3 between 50% and 70% of the Indian population receive social assistance,
- 4 one in three families lives in crowded conditions;

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moreover:

- 1 approximately 9% of the prison population is Indian or native, compared to an estimated 3% to 3.5% share of the national population,
- 2 in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the North, Indians and other natives represent upwards of 40% of the population in jails and penitentiaries.

Discussion of, or definition of mental health as it relates to Native peoples must take place in the context of Native peoples' history, strengths and culture. We believe there is a causative relationship between powerlessness, racism, poverty and the increasing incidence of mental health problems among Native peoples. Attempts to deal with the symptoms such as alcoholism, increased disruptive behavior, etc. - while not dealing with the basic social, political, economic and legal issues - will inevitably be unsuccessful.

You and your government have taken steps that we believe will lead, ultimately, to the resolution of some of the basic problems now experienced by Native peoples in Canada. We heartily commend your decision.

We hope that the Canadian Mental Health Association will, in the future, be in a position to lend a hand to the Native peoples of Canada, and their representative organizations, in building social, cultural, and economic stability and, thus, improved mental health.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Stephenson
National President

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cc: Hon. Jean Chrétien, Minister of Justice
Hon. John Munro, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs
✓ Senator Harry Hays, Joint Parliamentary Committee
Mr. Serge Joyal, Joint Parliamentary Committee
Mr. Del Riley, National Indian Brotherhood
Mr. Harry Daniels, Native Council of Canada
Mr. Eric Tagoona, Inuit Tapirisat