

Alliance for Perinatal and Reproductive Justice

Too many dead Indigenous babies and pregnant people – TIME FOR ACTION!

We, a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous physicians, nurses, midwives, researchers, Elders, Knowledge Holders, and advocates, stand together to call for urgent action on Indigenous perinatal health, justice, and wellness. Babies and childbirth are sacred. Too many Indigenous families are experiencing preventable harm and death in high income countries such as Canada, United States, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand. Even one is too many.

This is a systemic structural failure of multiple governments to address their ongoing legacies of colonialism, provide reparations for these harms, and uphold the Rights of Indigenous peoples as asserted in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous families continue to experience culturally unsafe and fragmented systems of care that perpetuate racist, traumatic, and other harmful healthcare experiences. These structural inequalities contribute to higher rates of avoidable death and harm in relation to pregnancy. This cannot continue and urgent reforms that dismantle inequities must be prioritised.

It is essential to analyze and report on data with an Indigenous lens as this highlights the privilege that advantages non-Indigenous peoples. This holds the current systems to account. ACTION, resourcing, and support are urgently needed to create Indigenous led culturally safe and responsive healthcare pathways that work for all to eliminate preventable harm and death.

We call on the Canadian, United States, Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand governments to:

1. Dismantle the systemic structural barriers resulting in health inequities in the form of avoidable death and harm during the perinatal period by:
 - a. Working with Indigenous people to redesign a system that promotes and enables the best start to life for Indigenous babies and people having babies.
 - b. Providing equitable and sustainable funding to Indigenous community-controlled organizations, governments, and communities to grow and expand culturally safe and responsive perinatal care that upholds traditional practices, privileges Indigenous values, and supports people who are pregnant to safely birth in their appropriate setting.
2. Address the inequitable representation of Indigenous peoples in the healthcare workforce by:
 - a. Providing sufficient and sustainable funding to (re)develop the Indigenous healthcare workforce through appropriate resources to train, mentor, and support Indigenous healthcare providers, researchers, and traditional medicine providers.
 - b. Providing for Indigenous roles in health leadership and governance structures.
3. Eliminate anti-Indigenous racism through:
 - a. Providing accurate public education of a country's colonial history and the conditions Indigenous peoples have faced and continue to face, and supporting the provision of work-based opportunities for anti-racism training and reflection work.
 - b. Requiring healthcare institutions and professional bodies to develop accessible and confidential mechanisms for patients to report racist acts and hold healthcare providers and systems accountable.
4. Build relationships with Indigenous peoples based on a recognition of Indigenous individuals' Human Rights and Indigenous peoples' collective rights, which includes:
 - a. Providing equitable social and economic resources as reparations for the appropriation of resources from Indigenous lands, relocating Indigenous peoples from their traditional and resource-rich areas, and appropriately funding systems and services in areas with a high proportion of Indigenous peoples.
 - b. Recognizing Indigenous peoples' collective right to self-determination over health services and research, including determining and developing health services, research priorities, processes, data, and dissemination.

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