



# Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## THE MANITOBA ADVOCATE'S STATEMENT OF CONCERN ON YOUTH SUICIDE

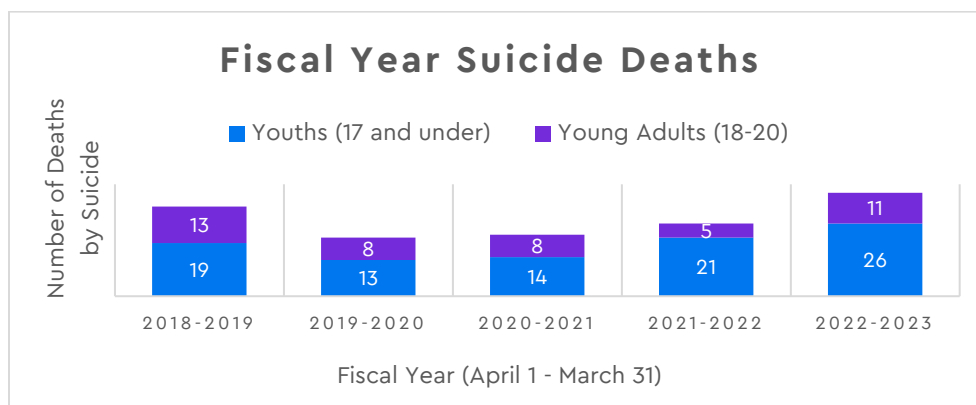
*Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott calls for emergency meetings and urgent action to address the ongoing youth suicide crisis after highest annual number of deaths by suicide reported to the Advocate office.*

### TREATY 1 TERRITORY AND HOMELAND OF THE RED RIVER MÉTIS, Winnipeg, Man., Dec. 1, 2023 –

To reinforce the significance of the enduring youth suicide crisis in Manitoba, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is calling for emergency meetings and urgent action from government agencies, mental health organizations, and educational institutions, in collaboration with community leaders, families, and young people.

In accordance with *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act (ACYA)*, MACY is notified by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) of all deaths of children, youth, and young adults under the age of 21 across the province. Through child death reviews, investigations, public special reports, and research, MACY tracks manners of death of young people to detect systemic issues and trends to inform action and recommendations to address gaps in youth serving public services and systems.

Death by suicide remains the leading manner of death for children and youth ages 10-17 in our province. As the figure below reveals, during the last five fiscal years, 138 children, youth, and young adults have died by suicide. **"Last fiscal year, we tragically lost 37 young people under the age of 21 to suicide,"** said Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott.<sup>1</sup> As Gott explains, **"this is the highest annual number of deaths by suicide MACY has been notified of by the OCME, representing a 42% increase from the 26 children, youth, and young adult deaths by suicide recorded in 2021-22. These deaths are preventable. The time for action is now. The province must act quickly. Children cannot keep waiting."**



<sup>1</sup> The number of deaths by suicide for last fiscal are based on the manner of death described in the notifications sent to our office by the Chief Medical Examiner and may be subject to change post autopsy.

Indigenous children, youth, and young adults, particularly those living in First Nations communities, continue to be overrepresented within these alarming numbers. Indeed, since the ACYA came into force in 2018, Indigenous children, youth, and young adults have consistently represented the majority of deaths by suicide in our province, at an average of 70%. Furthermore, MACY is seeing more children and youth dying at younger ages. These harrowing statistics, representing lives lost, reveal distressing trends that require urgent and coordinated action from all partners.

Gott emphasizes, "We must come together, allocate resources, and develop effective short- and long-term strategies to prevent further loss of young lives where children and youth in Manitoba can thrive emotionally, mentally, and physically."

Over the past decade, many of the 64 First Nations across Manitoba have declared a state of emergency related to youth suicide. They continue to call on all levels of government to intervene to ensure substantive equality in health and social services. Despite repeated states of emergency, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and youth continue to face inequities, systemic racism, and discrimination.

The consequences of enduring social and health inequities have been highlighted in numerous special reports issued by MACY. These findings clearly show children and youth face significant barriers to accessing mental health and addiction services in Manitoba, including barriers to obtaining help in their local communities. Service inequities for children and youth remain across the province, especially in rural and remote areas. MACY's reports have outstanding recommendations that urge critical follow up and action by the provincial government in the areas of mental health, addictions, and education.<sup>2</sup>

In 2021, MACY released a report titled *The Right to be Heard: A Special Report on the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Youth Listening Tour*. It featured the thoughts and opinions of hundreds of youth from across Manitoba who discussed community issues and proposed solutions for a better future. Overwhelmingly, youth spoke about the need for more investments in accessible mental health and addictions programming, education, and the need for more recreational activities that provide healthy opportunities and facilitate community belonging. We need to listen to the voices of children and youth, and take effective action so the issues youth have identified can be rapidly addressed and eliminated.

It is evident that effective prevention of suicide will require partnerships and collaboration across different sectors, governments, communities, and Indigenous organizations to address the conditions which give rise to suicide attempts and deaths by suicide. Ensuring youth participation is imperative. To this end, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit youth need to be provided with opportunities to engage in discussions about their health and welfare, as their voices are essential for long-term improvements. The care and protection of children is a shared responsibility and cannot depend on any one program, one system, or one level of government to be accomplished. Change must occur at all levels – from front-line service providers to larger systems – to better protect all children, youth, and young adults in our province. Suicide prevention is unique to each individual and community. Most First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families are rebuilding, reclaiming,

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<sup>2</sup> For a summary of these reports and more information, please see pages 54-55 of last year's [Annual Report](#), and our [recommendation tracking page](#).

and returning to their traditional cultural practices, all of which have healing and protective impacts on children, youth, young adults, families, and communities at large. Meaningful investments to support these waves of reclamation and revitalization at the community level will benefit all Manitobans.

"As Manitoba Advocate, one of my central responsibilities is to educate the public, especially young people, about children's rights. It is also the responsibility of my office to ensure the Manitoba government acts in ways which comply with these rights, as is its legal obligation. My office will continue to be vocal in highlighting youth suicide, urging immediate action, including emergency meetings and the development of a Provincial Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy. The heartbreaking loss of young lives is a grim reminder of the pressing need for a multifaceted approach which focuses on early intervention, accessible mental health services, de-stigmatization of mental illnesses, and increased community support. It is imperative we come together to address the root causes, break down current barriers to seeking help, and provide a nurturing environment so youth can find hope, resilience, and the support they need to navigate the challenges they face. Our collective efforts can help save young lives, building a brighter, more compassionate Manitoba for generations to come." – Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott

**The Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott is available to speak to media.**

**If you or someone you know is struggling, help is available.**

Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line (toll free): 1-877-435-7170

Kids Help Phone (toll free): 1-800-668-6868

24-hour Youth Crisis Services in Winnipeg: 204-949-4777

24-hour Youth Crisis Services outside Winnipeg: 1-888-383-2776

Residential School Survivor Support Line: 1-866-925-441

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**Media Contact:**

Brittany Valcourt

Public Education Coordinator, MACY

(204) 914-3746

[bvalcourt@manitobaadvocate.ca](mailto:bvalcourt@manitobaadvocate.ca)

### **About the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth:**

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The office represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or should be receiving, provincial public services. MACY does this by providing direct advocacy support to young people and their families, by reviewing public service delivery after the death or serious injury of a child, and by conducting child-centred research regarding the effectiveness of public services in Manitoba. The Manitoba Advocate is empowered by legislation to make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of services provided to children, youth, and young adults. MACY is mandated through *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, guided by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and acts according to the best interests of children and youth.