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Manitoba Advocate’s investigation into suicide, homicide deaths of 45 boys reveals common risk factors include poverty and discrimination

Advocate makes 4 recommendations to address systemic inequities experienced by First Nations children, youth, and communities

WINNIPEG, TREATY ONE TERRITORY, HOME OF THE METIS NATION – The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is releasing a new special report today, which stems from an aggregate investigation into the lives of 45 boys who died by suicide or homicide between 2009 and 2018. *Finding the Way Back: An aggregate investigation of 45 boys who died by suicide or homicide in Manitoba* is a special report structured to reflect the wisdom of the medicine wheel, with four chapters representing the four directions and stages of life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood.

Guided by MACY’s Knowledge Keeper and Elders Council, the Advocate combined investigative and qualitative research approaches in the drafting of this report. Together with Dr. Marlyn Bennett, an Indigenous scholar and professor at the University of Manitoba, MACY also held a digital storytelling workshop with two First Nations boys, Michael Breland and Trevor Merasty. They created a music video, [“Lied To”](#), being released today alongside the special report, in which the boys reflect on their lived experiences.

“As we created this report, Elders spoke to us about the importance of recovering what has been lost: the traditions and ceremonies that connect young boys to their grandparents and support their identity development, including storytelling,” said Ainsley Krone, Acting Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth. “In this special report and video, the Government of Manitoba has an opportunity to listen to the voices of young men and their families. Together, we must honour the lives lost by investing in a future where boys – and First Nations boys in particular – have equal opportunities to grow and thrive.”

The aggregate investigation revealed common and modifiable risk factors for the young men who died, 78% of whom were identified as First Nations youth and 49% of whom lived in northern Manitoba. Risk factors included living in poverty; experiencing racism and discrimination; witnessing caregiver substance use and intimate partner violence between adults; involvement with the justice system; poor attendance in school; and problematic substance use. Gang involvement was also a commonality among many of the young men who died by homicide.

Finding the Way Back follows a similar aggregate investigation focused on girls, [“Stop Giving Me a Number and Start Giving Me a Person”: How 22 Girls Illuminate the Cracks in the Manitoba Youth Mental Health and Addiction System](#), which was released by the Advocate last year. Both investigations found an urgent need for immediate investments and improvements to the youth mental health and addiction systems.

“My office has 13 open and outstanding recommendations previously made to the provincial government to address known gaps in youth mental health and addiction services, including a call to

create and publish a youth addictions strategy,” Krone said. “I continue to call on the Manitoba government to expand the availability of these services immediately, in order to prevent the possibility of future losses of children and youth.”

The four new recommendations made to the Government of Manitoba in today’s report are:

1. Coordinate between government and child and family services authorities to include evidence-based and culturally safe supports for parents with substance use disorders in their homes with the goal of reducing apprehensions.
2. Continue work on an Indigenous Inclusion Strategy that includes culturally appropriate school engagement initiatives tailored to Indigenous boys to help close the achievement gap and increase high-school completion rates.
3. Demonstrate development or continuation of sustainable initiatives in anti-racist education for all students, administrators, teachers, and support staff.
4. Collaborate with the Government of Canada and consult with Manitoba communities to update, fund, and implement a provincial youth gang prevention strategy.

To read the *Finding the Way Back* report, click here. To read MACY’s past special reports, recommendations, and to view recommendation compliance tracking, visit our website: ManitobaAdvocate.ca. To watch the music video, “Lied To,” written by and featuring MACY’s Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad members Michael Breland and Trevor Merasty, [click here](#).

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth is also hosting a webinar *How to support Indigenous boys* with Ryan Beardy (G.A.I.N), Jonny Meikle, and Devon Henderson (Strength in the Circle). Join the virtual conversation on November 8th, 1-2pm, register here:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4JN7gArTSemKb8oWdBbrHQ

About MACY: MACY is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. It represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving or entitled to public services, including child and family, adoption, disability, mental health, addictions, education, victim supports, or youth justice. The office does this by advocating directly with children and youth, or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Advocacy also involves reviewing public services after the death of any young person when that young person or their family was involved with a reviewable service as defined in *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (the ACYA). Additionally, the Manitoba Advocate is empowered under provincial law to make recommendations to government and other public bodies, conduct child-centred research, disseminate findings, and educate the public on children’s rights and any other matter under the ACYA.

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