

healing that has happened as a result of working together for over five years. We will continue to remember the children of the past and present. In the Bentwood Box, as symbols of our work together, we place a program of the first ceremony, a DVD from the museum display, flower and ribbon pins from the third feast, and a copy of guidelines we have published of our experience, for those who wish to undertake a similar recovery of a residential school cemetery.¹⁶⁵

For the most part, the residential school cemeteries and burial sites that the Commission documented are abandoned, disused, and vulnerable to disturbance. While there have been community commemoration measures undertaken in some locations, there is an overall need for a national strategy for the documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries. This work is complex and sensitive. Although former schools might be associated with specific Aboriginal communities, the cemeteries may contain the bodies of children from many communities. They may also contain the bodies of teachers (or their children) who died while working at the institutions. No one set of recommendations will serve all circumstances.

Call to Action

- 75) We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.

As infrastructure and resource development accelerates throughout Canada, the risk of damage to undocumented residential school cemeteries increases. Depending on the jurisdiction, environmental impact assessments, which include the assessment of heritage sites, are usually required prior to development. This generally involves a review of existing documentation, evaluation of the potential for heritage sites within the development zone, and also often a physical search. Such work is often done in phases, with preliminary review of centralized archives and databases to inform subsequent investigation. Local knowledge about residential cemeteries might not be readily accessible to non-local planners, resource managers, and impact assessors. Therefore, it is important that locally collected information is shared with agencies responsible for land-use planning, environmental impact assessment, and protection and regulation of cemeteries.

Such information sharing is hindered by limited documentation, unclear jurisdictional responsibility, and uncoordinated consolidation of information. These problems could be addressed through the establishment of a registry of residential school cemeteries that could be available online. At a minimum, such a registry should include the identification,