

Commentary on the Report on Indigenous Health Dialogue of Truth and Reconciliation within the Cumming School of Medicine

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The Cumming School of Medicine's Report on Indigenous Health Dialogue of Truth and Reconciliation provides an excellent overview of matters pertaining to faculty's efforts to address Indigenous Health. With a connection to *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, the University of Calgary's Indigenous Strategy, the report directly focuses on academic staff efforts and gives attention to matters pertaining to students. Recognizing that there are hundreds of academic staff within the faculty, (See Appendix D in the report) the efforts of the individuals involved in addressing Indigenous engagement should be commended and supported.

One of the ways to advance Indigenous engagement is to recognize that there is no area of health that does not impact Indigenous people or the relationship between Indigenous people and health providers, educators and researchers. This recognition would support the report's point of promoting inclusion to move towards a more representative academic population of full-time academic members who are Indigenous persons (15 to 33 academic members when a comparison is made with city, provincial and national Indigenous populations). This need for increased inclusion of Indigenous people in the academic ranks is compounded in light of some other key considerations, including the significant growth of Indigenous people and need for a larger number of Indigenous people to be engaged in societal institutions to address the growth and societal shortcomings/barriers impinging on Indigenous peoples.

In recognition of our knowledge about a disproportionate workload placed on Indigenous peoples in academia, and considering the significant work to be addressed as identified in this report, there is great need for faculty to advance its efforts of addressing matters related to equity and inclusivity as it relates to Indigenous peoples, even in this period of provincial austerity. Including an equitable number of Indigenous peoples within the faculty can support new and innovative perspectives and approaches to health for all people, strengthen relationships with communities in the region that face barriers to improving health of their members, and promote a workforce that is more respectful and engaging of all members in Canadian society.

The report provides great information on background and current activities related to Indigenous engagement in health. It outlines five prominent recommendations for the Cumming School of Medicine (CSM). By attending to these recommendations, the CSM would be better positioned to positively impact the health outcomes for Indigenous people and reflect the Alberta Medical Association's Policy Statement on Indigenous Health, Canadian Medical Association's Statement on Equity and Diversity, and the Association of Faculties of Medicine in Canada's priority which "seeks to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous people by ensuring Canadian medical schools respond to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, by training more Indigenous health professionals and by committing to develop safe working and learning environments for Indigenous learners, faculty and staff."

This report well presents matters pertaining to academic staff. The CSM would be further strengthened by increasing the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in other roles, including technical and support staff, determining how to support Indigenous staff members, and ensuring that policies and actions are in place to help retain Indigenous academic and other staff members. Similarly, the report recognizes that Indigenous students face barriers and other challenges, including those related to admissions, retention, access to appropriate supports, and racism. There is need to advance efforts of leadership, staff, and students to address cultural safety, inter-cultural capacity, cultural competence, cultural humility, and racism, including systemic racism within the CSM.

The issue of racism warrants particular attention. As noted by the Canadian Medical Association statement on racism, “Racism is a structural determinant of health and drives health and social inequities.” While the report does note racism, the identification that there is attention needed by faculty to address racism on its various levels is an important point, particularly when related associations have called for such attention. The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada has stated that they are committed to ensuring “that our environments are diverse, inclusive, culturally safe and foster equity. We will implement institutional change and lead in addressing systemic racism through education and curricular innovation, research and advocacy for equity, diversity and inclusiveness.” This attention should recognize the various forms of racism, including structural, systemic, interpersonal (individual acts) and embodied racism. As well as related matters including micro-aggressions, implicit bias, and the connection between policies and institutional practices.

While the report focuses on the CSM, it is noteworthy that there are opportunities to join in efforts taking place across the University of Calgary’s campuses. Other faculties, schools and units are addressing several of the actions identified in the report. Units and committees such as the Indigenous Research Support Team, the Indigenous Strategy Implementation Committee and its sub-committees, the Taylor Institute and various faculties are addressing activities related to ethics, developing educational opportunities for staff and academic members, and the recruitment and hiring of individuals from Indigenous communities. The activities taking place across the institution support the CSM’s efforts as they implement the report’s recommendations. Joint efforts would strengthen the connection between the Foothills campus and other campuses.

Overall, this report provides a clear overview of the efforts taken place at the CSM and highlights key recommendations for a path forward. With its current efforts, and attention to the points and recommendations made in this report, the CSM is better positioned to walk in a parallel manner with Indigenous peoples, address impacting concerns, and advance its efforts at Indigenous engagement. Our team, and other teams look forward to our continued work with the CSM to implement the University of Calgary’s Indigenous Strategy, *ii’ taa’poh’to’p*, and the recommendations in this report.