



CANADIAN
MENTAL
HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE
POUR LA
SANTÉ MENTALE

National Office:
2160 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4S 2Z3

Bureau national:
2160, rue Yonge
Toronto, (Ontario)
M4S 2Z3

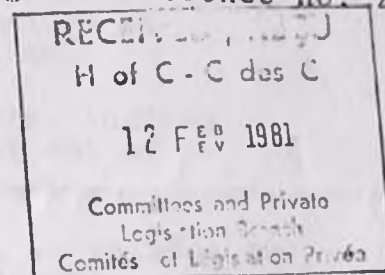
national president
président national RICHARD STEPHENSON

general director
directeur général GEORGE ROHN

(416) 484-7750

February 5, 1981

Program reference no. 25



The Right Honourable Pierre E. Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

On behalf of the Canadian Mental Health Association, I wish to express our support for the positive action taken towards entrenching aboriginal and treaty rights constitutionally.

The Canadian Mental Health Association supports the Native peoples of Canada, and their representative organizations, in their efforts to obtain legislative guarantees to protect aboriginal and treaty rights and the special status of Native peoples in Confederation.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is most concerned about the mental health of Native peoples in Canada. We are aware, for example, that:

- for Indians on reserves, compared to the rest of the population of our country:

- 1 violent deaths are three times higher,
- 2 suicides, particularly in the 15 - 24 age group, are more than six times higher,
- 3 average life expectancy is 10 years shorter;

in addition:

- 1 the strength and stability of family units appear to be eroding with higher divorce rates, more births outside marriage and more children placed in care,
- 2 participation in the labour force stands at only two-thirds of national levels and employment at a mere 32% of the working age population,
- 3 between 50% and 70% of the Indian population receive social assistance,
- 4 one in three families lives in crowded conditions;

26-05-2006 07:38



The Right Honourable Pierre E. Trudeau

February 5, 1981

. moreover:

- 1 approximately 9% of the prison population is Indian or native, compared to an estimated 3% to 3.5% share of the national population,
- 2 in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the North, Indians and other natives represent upwards of 40% of the population in jails and penitentiaries.

Discussion of, or definition of mental health as it relates to Native peoples must take place in the context of Native peoples' history, strengths and culture. We believe there is a causative relationship between powerlessness, racism, poverty and the increasing incidence of mental health problems among Native peoples. Attempts to deal with the symptoms such as alcoholism, increased disruptive behavior, etc. - while not dealing with the basic social, political, economic and legal issues - will inevitably be unsuccessful.

You and your government have taken steps that we believe will lead, ultimately, to the resolution of some of the basic problems now experienced by Native peoples in Canada. We heartily commend your decision.

We hope that the Canadian Mental Health Association will, in the future, be in a position to lend a hand to the Native peoples of Canada, and their representative organizations, in building social, cultural, and economic stability and, thus, improved mental health.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Stephenson
National President

RS:

- cc: Hon. Jean Chrétien, Minister of Justice
- ✓ Hon. John Munro, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs
- Senator Harry Hays, Joint Parliamentary Committee
- Mr. Serge Joyal, Joint Parliamentary Committee
- Mr. Del Riley, National Indian Brotherhood
- Mr. Harry Daniels, Native Council of Canada
- Mr. Eric Tagoona, Inuit Tapirisat