THE CATALYST

Celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day

National Indigenous Peoples Day takes place each year on June 21st, and is dedicated to celebrating the rich diversity, history, resilience, and culture of Indigenous Peoples. Over 1.8 million people in Canada identify as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, each with unique traditions, cultures, and languages spoken.

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June 21st is also the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year, and holds spiritual and cultural significance for many Indigenous groups and communities. It signifies the arrival of warm weather, the beginning of summer, and symbolizes a new season of life. For generations, many Indigenous groups and communities have celebrated their culture and heritage on June 21, and as a nation, Canada has officially observed this day since 1996.

National Indigenous Peoples Day is also an opportunity to learn about Indigenous history and cultural traditions and about how to take action and commit to Reconciliation. At the Mental Health Commission of Canada, we are thrilled to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day and would like to take the opportunity to highlight the important work of one of our partners, the Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF).

LHF is a National Indigenous charitable organization dedicated to education and fostering Reconciliation. Their mandate is to educate and create awareness and understanding about the history and intergenerational impacts of the Residential School System, Sixties Scoop and Day Schools, and to address racism, foster empathy and understanding, and inspire action. Since 2000, LHF has worked with Survivors, Indigenous communities, researchers, and curators to increase awareness of the Residential School System's history and ongoing impacts. They have shared 800 stories, curated 30 active exhibitions, and visited 100 cities to echo their mission. They have also developed a host of educational resources including school curriculum, toolkits, posters, activity booklets. Their work sheds light on the resilience of Indigenous communities and the importance of carrying out consistent efforts to address decolonization and promote healing and Reconciliation.

Teresa Edwards, Young Fire Woman, LHF's Executive Director and In-House Legal Counsel stated, "Having people in Canada partner with Indigenous Organizations with donations or seeking training such as the Indigenous History Workshop offered by LHF, and speaking out against racism will continue to help foster Reconciliation."

So how can we be involved? There are many ways to acknowledge Indigenous communities and the contributions of individuals and organizations such as LHF.

On June 21st, 2024, many celebrations are taking place across Canada. You can find and participate in events near you, like the Summer Solstice Indigenous Festival at M?dahòkì Farm. Engaging in Indigenous-led celebrations is a meaningful way to show appreciation and support for Indigenous Peoples and build ties between communities and cultures.

Beyond this day, we can commit to learning about Indigenous history and cultures, and Reconciliation. Attending webinars, participating in anti-oppression training, taking courses on the history of Indigenous people living in Canada (like the Indigenous Canada course offered by the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta), and reading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action are good starting points. We can also actively support Indigenous Peoples and communities and work to enrich our own lives and perspectives by educating ourselves and being an ally. To learn more on practicing allyship, please see LHF's toolkit: 'How to Be an Ally: A Toolkit for Aspiring Indigenous Allies'.

Author: Lavanya Virmani

A Program Manager with the Policy and Research Team at the Mental Health Commission of Canada. She has a master's in Public Health from the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto and a bachelor's degree in Psychology from McGill University. Her experiences so far have deepened her drive to continue working towards ensuring equitable access to mental health supports.

Mental Health Commission of Canada
https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/
350 Albert Street, Suite 1210 Ottawa ON K1R 1A4
Tel: 613.683.3755 | Fax: 613.798.2989
mhccinfo@mentalhealthcommission.ca