

Statement On the Lack of Funding in Federal Budget 2025 for Investigations into Missing Children and Unmarked Burials

The Canadian Archaeological Association expresses our deep concern and profound disappointment that **no new funding has been announced in Federal Budget 2025** to support the critical and ongoing investigations into missing children and unmarked burials associated with Indian Residential Schools across Canada.

The search for these children who died in Indian Residential Schools and related institutions is not only a technical or archaeological undertaking; it is a moral obligation and a sacred responsibility owed to Survivors, families, and Indigenous Nations, as outlined in the 42 Obligations contained within Special Interlocutor Kimberly Murray's final report. The path to truth, justice, and reconciliation requires sustained federal leadership and investment. The complete absence of new funding in Budget 2025 represents a devastating setback to this essential work.

Investigations into unmarked graves are still in their early stages, and it is clear that this work will take decades to complete. Communities across the country are developing capacity, building trust, and overcoming systemic barriers including limited access to records, lack of technical training, safety and security issues, and ongoing racism. These efforts require long-term, predictable, and sufficient funding, not uncertainty and neglect.

We stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities leading this work in calling for **immediate, renewed, and sustained federal investment**. Without it, Canada risks undermining the very reconciliation it claims to uphold through laws such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act .

We also note the ongoing lack of coordination and national support for training, data governance, and equipment sharing, leaving many communities isolated in navigating this complex and sensitive work. Without federal action, disparities between community investigations will deepen, and some Nations may be left unable to even begin their searches.

While the Canadian Archaeological Association's Working Group on Unmarked Graves (CAA WGUG) has developed publicly accessible resources, such as *Searching for Missing Children: A Guide to Unmarked Graves Investigations* and *A Guide to Remote Sensing Techniques*, to support community-led initiatives, these resources alone cannot substitute for the federal responsibility to ensure this work is properly resourced and supported for the long term.

As experts supporting community-led investigations, CAA WGUG members have seen firsthand the significant costs borne by Indigenous Nations. Communities are being forced to make impossible choices between equipment, health supports, commemoration, and staffing, while hidden and recurring costs such as software, training, and equipment upgrades further strain already limited resources. The absence of federal investment leaves communities to shoulder these burdens alone.

We therefore urge the Government of Canada to act swiftly to correct this critical omission in the federal Budget tabled in November 2025, and commit to sustained, multi-decadal funding that supports:

1. **Comprehensive Investigations:** Ensuring that every potential site of unmarked graves is thoroughly and respectfully investigated using appropriate technologies and methodologies, including supporting staffing within Nations to support this work.
2. **Community Support and Healing:** Providing long-term resources for the mental health and well-being of Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, and affected Indigenous communities.
3. **Capacity-Building:** Investing the development of a comprehensive, Indigenous-led training program for all aspects of burial site investigations.
4. **Collaboration with Indigenous Leadership:** Ensuring Indigenous Nations lead all aspects of investigation, commemoration, and healing, guided by their laws and protocols.
5. **Commemoration:** Supporting communities in honouring the children who never returned home, in ways they determine appropriate, and facilitating the repatriation of children to their home communities at the request of families and Survivors.

The absence of renewed funding in Budget 2025 signals a deeply concerning retreat from the Government of Canada's stated commitment to truth and reconciliation. Without urgent action, the search for missing children will face significant delays, public trust will be further eroded, and the opportunity to honour and bring these children home may be lost for generations to come.

The CAA calls on all Members of Parliament and federal decision-makers to immediately address this critical omission and ensure that no community is left without the means to find, name, and bring home their children.