

The Honourable Gary Anandasangaree
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Anandasangaree,

The Canadian Archaeological Association Working Group on Unmarked Graves joins the call for increased funding to support the investigation into missing children and unmarked burials associated with Indian Residential Schools across Canada. The work to investigate these institutions has only just begun and the Canadian Government needs to ensure that proper funding is available for organizations to complete their comprehensive investigations. We echo the calls of the Survivors' Secretariat and other lead communities in their call for more support and funding.

The painful legacy of the Indian Residential School system has had devastating impacts on generations of Indigenous peoples. It is crucial that we prioritize truth, justice, and reconciliation by ensuring that every child who never returned home is acknowledged and properly laid to rest with dignity in a matter determined by their families and communities.

We commend the Government of Canada for taking initial steps in supporting the investigations and providing resources to Indigenous communities. However, the scope and scale of these investigations demand further financial commitment and resources to ensure they are conducted thoroughly, respectfully, and in collaboration with impacted communities.

The Canadian Archaeological Association (CAA) is a charitable organization and the national archaeological organization of Canada. In June 2022, the CAA formed a Working Group on Unmarked Graves (WGUG) in response to the findings of unmarked graves at Kamloops Indian Residential School. The WGUG represents archaeologists from all over the country with expertise in mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), ground searches (Ground Penetrating Radar), and community-based investigations, among other specialties. To support communities in the search for missing children at Indian Residential Schools (IRS), sanatoria, and hospitals, we have produced two written documents: *Searching for Missing Children: A Guide to Unmarked Graves Investigations* and *Searching for Missing Children: A Guide to Remote Sensing Techniques*. We also have a series of companion videos that present the same information as the documents for individuals that prefer audio-visual presentations. These resources can be found at <https://canadianarchaeology.com/caa/resources-indigenous-communities-considering-investigating-unmarked-graves>.

Based on our roles in supporting multiple community-led investigations across the country, it is clear to our group that the search for missing children and investigating unmarked graves will take decades to resolve and not the short timeline indicated by the funding structure implemented by the federal government, especially the recently announced two-year commitment of \$91 million. The timeline is also problematic in light of the complexity of achieving community consensus on objectives and approaches, developing and training of project teams, building

internal capacity to carry out searches, and identifying outside expertise to assist with the searches. The systemic barriers that communities face in terms of local technical capacity, training, racism, safety and security issues, access to records and expertise, land disputes, among other critical issues, are impeding their efforts to determine the whereabouts and number of unmarked graves in a timely manner. The government is providing insufficient financial resources to help communities identify and mobilize necessary expertise to navigate the complicated process of locating children who died as Indian Residential Schools (IRS), hospitals, and sanatoria. The varied funding arrangements and amounts lead to disparity of treatment between the different community searches being prioritized. With the limits to overall funding, there may not be any funding left to apply for when communities who have not yet begun the process are ready.

As experts on the application of ground search technologies, we understand the significant financial resources needed to undertake the search process, but also acknowledge the technical portions of the work are a small part in the overall journey of bringing the children home. The financial burden on individual nations to purchase equipment often consumes multiple years of their funding, which delays the start of critical processes. Investing heavily in equipment diverts essential resources away from other necessary areas, such as staffing and health supports, that are vital to completing the work. Furthermore, hidden costs—such as equipment antiquation, software for processing and interpretation, staff training, and the need to pivot when techniques fail—quickly deplete budgets. These costs are even more acute in remote and northern communities. When a community chooses to work with outside contractors, there is no process to ensure that communities are working with a reputable company that knows how to deploy appropriate technologies to the specific context. This has led to some communities being misled, overcharged, and their data not being provided.

Significant gaps remain. Without clear timelines, communities face uncertainty about whether to invest in technology or staff. There are no established training programs at academic institutions to ensure Indigenous nations and students receive accredited training for this work. Additionally, the lack of clear guidance on whether nations should share or pool equipment, as well as unresolved issues surrounding data storage, data sovereignty, and archival solutions, continues to hinder progress. Federal support is urgently needed to address these challenges, including determining where technology should be deployed and ensuring sustained funding over the decades-long work involved in finding the children.

We strongly urge you to advocate for increased funding in the upcoming budget and parliamentary sessions to support:

1. **Comprehensive Investigations:** Ensuring that every site suspected of containing unmarked graves is thoroughly investigated using state-of-the-art methods and technologies.
2. **Community Support and Healing:** Providing adequate resources to support the mental health and well-being of survivors, intergenerational survivors, and affected Indigenous communities by allowing for local and national gatherings.

3. **Education and Awareness:** Promoting public education and awareness initiatives about the history and ongoing impacts of the residential school system, fostering a deeper understanding of Indigenous histories and cultures.
4. **Collaboration with Indigenous Leadership:** Ensuring that Indigenous communities lead the process of investigation, commemoration, and healing, respecting their traditional knowledge and protocols.
5. **Commemoration:** Allow and support impacted communities to honour the children who never returned home in a matter respectful to their beliefs.

By prioritizing these efforts, Canada can take significant steps towards reconciliation, healing historical wounds, and rebuilding trust with Indigenous peoples.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kisha Supernant, Chair, on behalf of the [Canadian Archaeological Association Working Group on Unmarked Graves](#)

Dr. Katie Cottreau-Robins, President, Canadian Archaeological Association.