

MAY

RED DRESS DAY

RED DRESS DAY IS THE NATIONAL DAY OF AWARENESS FOR MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS AND TWO-SPIRIT PEOPLE (MMIWG2S+), observed annually on May 5.¹ The commemorative date was born out of Métis artist Jamie Black's REDress Project – an installation art project that aimed to draw attention to the gendered and racialized nature of violence against Indigenous communities.² By displaying disembodied red dresses in public spaces, Ms. Black visually represented the staggering number of Indigenous women who are no longer with us. The red dress has become a visual representation of the urgent need for action to address the root causes of this epidemic of violence, and a poetic symbol of the collective grief experienced by Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (Canada).

Did you know?

In many Indigenous communities, red is understood as the one colour visible to the spirit world. In addition to symbolizing lifeblood or urgency, the red dresses also serve as a beacon to guide the spirits of lost loved ones home.³

Connection to Doctors Nova Scotia's work

Healthcare providers play an integral role in addressing health inequities and in protecting the rights and lives of Indigenous women. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls identified that the MMIWG2S+ crisis constitutes a genocide of Indigenous people.¹ As a result of systemic racism, colonial policies and the continued marginalization of Indigenous people, Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be killed or disappeared than other women in Canada.⁴ In a healthcare context, Indigenous patients continue to experience barriers to care, including racism, lack of access to culturally safe essential services, and mistrust of institutions rooted in historical and ongoing harms.

The path to ending violence against Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people requires meaningful system transformation and addressing historical trauma through the provision of culturally safe care.⁴ Culturally safe care requires ongoing learning and humility. It also compels us to listen to the voices of survivors and to support Indigenous-led approaches to healing and wellness, such as the work being done by Tajikeimik, the new and developing health and wellness organization in Mi'kma'ki.⁵

Ways to get involved

Commemorating Red Dress Day is vital to advancing human rights and there are many ways to recognize the date.⁶ In addition to wearing red or participating by displaying a red dress, individuals can participate by:

- amplifying Indigenous voices and perspectives in daily life
- educating yourself and increasing awareness of damaging beliefs and attitudes you may hold
- engaging with community
- holding yourself and others accountable for words and actions
- calling out and addressing systemic issues
- building supportive networks

References

1. *What is Red Dress Day? How missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people are honoured on May 5* – tinyurl.com/53vcfwmy
2. *The REDress Project* – tinyurl.com/43mnn95v
3. *StrongHearts Native Helpline | MMIW: Red Symbolizes a Call for Attention* – tinyurl.com/yymvntze
4. *Canadian Encyclopedia: Red Dress Day* – tinyurl.com/4xzb28xz
5. *Tajikeimik* – mhwms.ca
6. *Native Women's Association of Canada: Red Dress Day Toolkit* – tinyurl.com/3ea8pdps



The path to ending violence against Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people requires meaningful system transformation and addressing historical trauma through the provision of culturally safe care.⁴