

ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE COMMUNICATION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION TO THE FAMILIES OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN WHO WENT MISSING OR DIED AFTER BEING ADMITTED TO AN INSTITUTION

SECRÉTARIAT AUX RELATIONS AVEC LES PREMIÈRES NATIONS ET LES INUIT



2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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The Direction de soutien aux familles du Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit, in collaboration with the Direction des communications, produced this publication.

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR RELATIONS WITH THE FIRST NATIONS AND THE INUIT



Bonjour, Hello, Kwei, Kwe, Kwai, Kuei, Qey, Shé :kon, Waachiya, Ulaakut,

Another year of searching has come to a close since the enactment in 2021 of the Act to Authorize the *Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died After Being Admitted to an Institution*.

This third report, prepared with the same heartfelt emotion as the last, echoes the voices of the 116 families supported by the Direction de soutien aux familles of the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit, the organization Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière, and their many invaluable partners, on the journey in search of the truth about 199 children. We continue on this long and sometimes painful path thanks to the determination, strength and resilience of the children's families.

Through extensive partnership efforts spearheaded by the Direction de soutien aux familles, this year brought the first two exhumations of children. We sincerely hope that the process will bring truth, peace and healing to their families. I especially acknowledge the pivotal involvement of Quebec's Bureau du coroner and the Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale in these efforts, which has enabled us to reach an important stage in our searches.

My most sincere thanks go to my former special advisor, Anne Panasuk. Until the end of her term as councillor in June 2023, her contribution to the dissemination of the Act and to community relations was crucial to launching the efforts. An early ally of families, she now continues her essential work with Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière.

I would also like to thank the members of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act. Since its enactment, their recommendations have enriched support initiatives for families. My appreciation goes to the members of the Interdepartmental Committee Pertaining to the Act, for their involvement at every stage, and to all the organizations that have been actively engaged for over two years in gathering information for families.

Children are the beating heart of your communities. I'm grateful that we can work together to shed light on their stories. Finally, my deepest thanks go out to the families who, day after day, month after month, pursue their quest for truth in the most inspiring way.

Merci, Thank you, Tshinashkumitnau, Wela'liog, Qujannamiik, Nakurmiik, Chiniskomiitin, Niá :wen, Meegwetch, Mikwetc, Woliwon, Tiawenhk.

Ian Lafrenière

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTION DE SOUTIEN AUX FAMILLES



As another eventful year draws to a close, the Direction de soutien aux familles has continued to support families in their quest for truth.

To date, 199 “little beings of light” are working alongside us in the search for missing children.

In the summer of 2023, and for the first time in its work, the Direction de soutien aux familles coordinated two exhumations requested by families. It rallied numerous partners and ensured that meeting families’ needs in terms of support, governance, communication and transparency remained our top priority throughout the process.



Furthermore, our daily efforts in building relationships with all organizations and institutions targeted by the Act have led to the establishment of new collaboration agreements, which will serve as essential tools in supporting families.

Our team has also grown to enable deeper research into the inquiries made by families, particularly in documenting the circumstances surrounding children’s disappearance or death.

Furthermore, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière have worked to strengthen and solidify their partnership to provide comprehensive support to families.

On behalf of the Direction de soutien aux familles, we would like to express our gratitude. Thank you to all the families we work alongside, to our colleagues at Awacak, to our partners in the institutions covered by the Act, to our partners in Indigenous communities and organizations, and to the researchers and experts who accompany us and contribute to the families’ quest for truth.

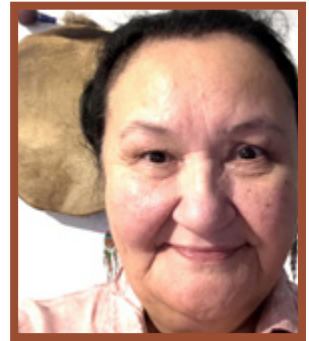
Patrick Lahaie

Associate Secretary General
for Indigenous and Inuit Relations

Julie Martel

Director of Family Support

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AWACAK – PETITS ÊTRES DE LUMIÈRE



As we enter the third year of our efforts to uncover the truth and gather documents for Indigenous families who lost children after admitting them to hospitals in Quebec, it has become evident that the officials, doctors, nursing staff, religious figures and Indian Affairs agents of that time did not respect Indigenous families. At no point were families informed about transfers, surgeries or deaths, nor were they given the opportunity to see their deceased children in these institutions.

The number of research requests increases each year, and I am still surprised by the sheer volume of inquiries. We're now nearing 200 registered children reported by their families.

The 1992 deadline poses a significant challenge for us, as some families lost children after that time. Removing this deadline is crucial to providing support to families who have lost their children and are enduring immense suffering.

As I write these words, I feel deep sorrow and compassion for my people. I long for them to finally be free from the decades of suffering they have endured, and I hope that we can improve our services with the recommendations and suggested changes.

I realize that Awacak still has a lot of work ahead of it, for many years yet. Our team at Awacak our partners in the Direction de soutien aux familles, the doctors and all our other collaborators anticipate several more years of effort to deliver long-awaited answers to the children's families.

Migwetch.

Nin Françoise

Françoise Ruperthouse



MESSAGE FROM MARJOLAINE ÉTIENNE, ON BEHALF OF THE MONITORING COMMITTEE ON THE CARRYING OUT OF THE ACT



Kuei,

Getting to the truth about our missing children is vital, so that our women, families and communities can begin healing. To do so, we believe that direct involvement of Indigenous partners and organizations at all levels is crucial for ensuring proper implementation of the Act.

Collaboration between the Government of Québec and the various Indigenous stakeholders, as part of the implementation of this Act, is a key factor to be prioritized on the road to truth and reconciliation.

On behalf of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act, I would like to thank everyone involved in the ongoing implementation of the *Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died After Being Admitted to an Institution*. The commitment and dedication of everyone involved are essential to ensuring that this Act can deliver justice and healing to the grieving families.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the wholehearted commitment of the entire Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act to do everything in our power to help all families of missing children find the truth and, ultimately, peace.

Tshinashkumitinau,

Marjolaine Étienne

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I. BACKGROUND TO IMPLEMENTING THE ACT

Indigenous children missing or dead after being admitted to an institution

On August 3, 2016, the establishment of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) was announced. The commission of inquiry was mandated to “look into and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls, including sexual violence” (NIMMIWG, undated : online).

Several families testified before the committee in Quebec about children who died or went missing, in circumstances unknown to their families, after being evacuated from the community for medical reasons or, more broadly, after being admitted to a health and social services institution.

For instance, the testimony revealed that seven Atikamekw babies evacuated for medical reasons between 1950 and 1973 went missing. Other witnesses reported the disappearance of eight Atikamekw babies in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as an Innu child (NIMMIWG, 2019 : 109–110).

While the NIMMIWG was pursuing its work, Anne Panasuk, then an investigative journalist, revealed, in a series of reports on the Radio-Canada program *Enquête* and in a podcast titled *Chemin de croix*, the disappearance between 1971 and 1972 of eight children from the Innu community of Pakua Shipi after being hospitalized in Blanc-Sablon, in the Côte-Nord region. She also reported on missing Atikamekw children.

The families that the NIMMIWG commissioners and Ms. Panasuk met conveyed their suffering, but also stated the institutions did not inform them of the death or disappearance of their children. Moreover, several witnesses mentioned that contradictory or erroneous information was sent to the families, which sometimes led to children the families had believed dead eventually being found :

“In the fall of 1958 and the summer of 1959, respectively, a one-year-old boy and his five-year-old sister went missing under similar circumstances at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in Amos. Decades later, in 1996, the members of the family traced them to a hospital in Baie-Saint-Paul. They learned that the boy had died in 1965, not in 1958 as they had been told at the time. His sister was still alive and was 37 years old. She had been kept in the same hospital in Baie-Saint-Paul and was unable to walk or talk. This story, whose incredibility is surprising, raises doubts as to the fate of several children whose parents were told they had died. Other witnesses are convinced that the babies were kidnapped to be used in medical experiments or sold to non-Indigenous families” (NIMMIWG, 2019 : 110).

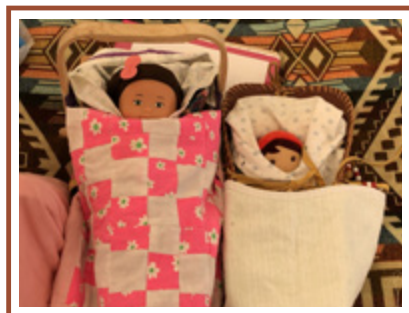
At the conclusion of the testimony from the families and the research conducted by the NIMMIWG team, the National Inquiry concluded that the parents who testified had not been informed of their children's state of health, that they were not consulted as to the care to be given to their children and that they did not have the power to consent to the transfer of their children to specialized centres or long-term care facilities :

"When their children died, the parents were not told the truth about the circumstances of the deaths or where their children were buried. In almost all the situations examined, the bodies were never returned to the parents after death. The children's bodies were buried, but the family was not told where or what funeral rite, if any, was performed. One of the children was found in a common grave years later" (NIMMIWG, 2019 : 111).

At the conclusion of nearly three years of investigation, the NIMMIWG released its final report on June 3, 2019. The final report was accompanied by a supplementary report specific to Quebec containing 21 calls for justice, one of which urged "the Government of Québec to provide Indigenous families with all the information it has about children who have been apprehended following admission to a hospital or any other health centre in Quebec" (Call for Justice 20).

The *Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died After Being Admitted to An Institution* (the Act) stems from a desire to respond to this call and thereby humbly contribute to possible healing, in a spirit of respect for the families.

From suffering to the quest for the truth



Children's dolls in tikinakan (Atikamekw cradleboards). Lac Decelles, July 2021.

Families grieving the death or disappearance of an Indigenous child after they were admitted to an institution have been seeking answers for many years. Since the Act came into force in September 2021, they have regularly expressed their need for information to understand the circumstances that led to their children's absence. Certain families in recent years had already submitted their questions to the NIMMIWG committee members and shared with them their suffering. Others, alone or collectively, had begun to seek answers from institutions. Still others, not knowing which organization to turn to, remained silent, sometimes with a feeling of guilt.

Over the past nine years, numerous fact-finding commissions have made it possible in Quebec, and more broadly speaking in Canada, to document, disseminate and denounce the experiences of families and First Nations and Inuit communities in the 20th century colonial context. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada marked a basic milestone in the recognition of the traumatic events experienced by many children sent to residential schools and their families. The deliberations of the NIMMIWG (2019) and, almost simultaneously, of the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Quebec (2019) were followed and rounded out by the reports of the Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors (2020) and the Special Commission on the Rights of the Child and Youth Protection (2021), each of which devoted a major section to Indigenous children and families. Even more recently, working groups with targeted expertise have formulated several recommendations on violence affecting women and, more specially, Indigenous women.

The tragic death in September 2020 of Joyce Echaquan rekindled painful experiences and sustained long-term fear of public institutions in the communities as well as in urban areas. Coroner Géhane Kamel's inquest report concerning the death of Ms. Echaquan, tabled in September 2021, concluded that "the racism and prejudice that Ms. Echaquan faced certainly contributed to her death [courtesy translation]" and recommended, consequently, that the Government of Québec "recognize the existence of systemic racism in institutions and commit itself to contributing to its elimination [courtesy translation]" (Bureau du coroner, 2021 : 21).

More recently, on October 4, 2023, the Québec Ombudsman released its first follow-up report on the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Quebec. The report underscored both the progress made and the significant amount of work that still lies ahead. The adoption and implementation of the Act is among the achievements highlighted by the Québec Ombudsman (Québec Ombudsman, 2023 : 8).

Finally, just a few days before this report was completed, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* was constitutional. Implementation of this legislation could enable First Nations and Inuit to exercise their jurisdiction over child and family services.

At the heart of these deliberations, the need to facilitate the quest for truth and restore the First Nations and Inuit's trust in Quebec's public institutions was repeatedly pinpointed as a condition for healing and a step toward reconciliation.

In this context and to promptly respond to Call for Justice 20 in the NIMMIWG report and the needs of the families concerned, in fall 2020, the Government of Québec proposed the inclusion of six amendments to Bill 31 (the *Act to Amend Mainly the Pharmacy Act for the Purpose of Facilitating Access to Certain Services and to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information Concerning Certain Missing or Deceased Indigenous Children to Their Families*), which was under consideration at the time. The six new sections were intended to facilitate access to information held by the institutions in order to enable families to learn the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or death of a child.

The initial amendments received a mitigated response from Indigenous families and organizations. The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) joined with the Québec Ombudsman to request that the First Nations and the Inuit participate fully in consultations concerning response to the bereaved families. In a joint brief submitted with the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC), it requested a separate bill to facilitate the implementation of a mechanism to afford access by the families to the personal information held by Government of Québec departments and bodies on Indigenous children who died or went missing. The requests were formulated to support those of the families who would subsequently establish the non-profit organization Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière.

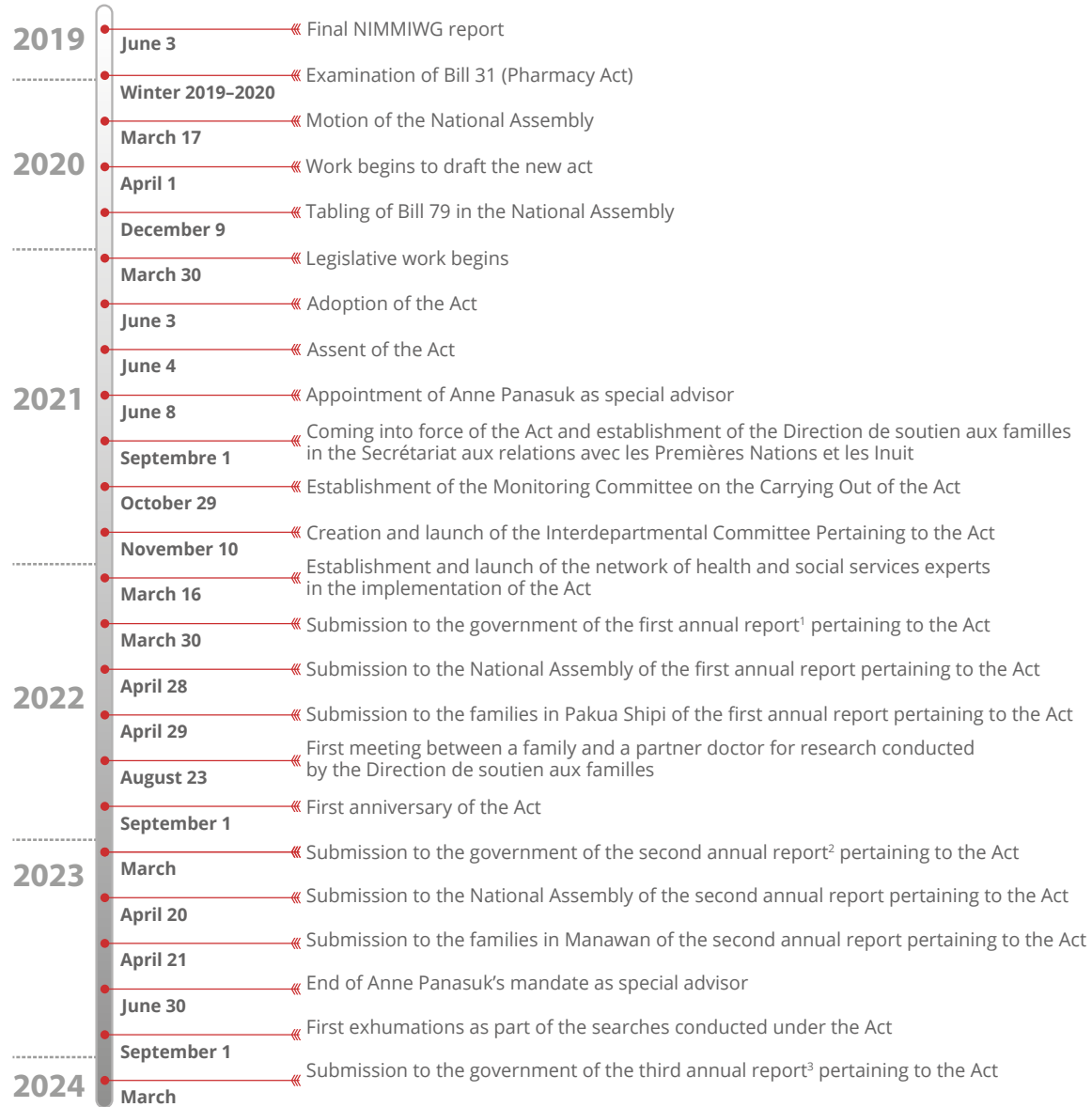
Bearing in mind these questions and given that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic demanded the prompt sanction of Bill 31, the *Act to Amend Mainly the Pharmacy Act for the Purpose of Facilitating Access to Certain Services* was adopted and then sanctioned on March 17, 2020, without the six sections dedicated to Indigenous children.

The same day, the National Assembly adopted a motion calling for the government to table a separate bill stipulating that personal information concerning certain Indigenous children who went missing or died

be communicated to their families (National Assembly of Québec, 2020), thereby confirming its desire to elaborate a new bill in response to the needs of Indigenous families.

After approximately one year of deliberations, the *Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went missing or Died after Being Admitted to An Institution* was adopted on June 3, 2021. The parliamentary proceedings leading to its adoption were guided by a shared and bipartisan vision of the dignity of children and their families' quest for truth. The Act came into force on September 1, 2021.

Timeline - Key Milestones in Implementing the Act



1. The first annual report pertaining to the Act covered the first six months of the Act's implementation (September 1, 2021, to February 28, 2022).
2. The second annual report pertaining to the Act covered the period from March 1, 2022, to February 28, 2023.
3. The third annual report pertaining to the Act covers the period from March 1, 2023, to February 29, 2024.

The Act in a nutshell

The Act is meant as a tool to support the families searching for information on the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or death of their children after these latter were admitted to an institution, bearing in mind the families' distinctive linguistic and cultural traits, and their psychological and spiritual needs.

Guided by a preamble that targets families' quest for the truth, their healing process and reconciliation, the Act seeks to make accessible to the families certain information held by institutions, public bodies and religious congregations, to enable them to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or death of their children. For the Act to apply, the child must have been admitted to an institution prior to December 31, 1992.



Presentation of the second annual report pertaining to the Act to the National Assembly of Québec on April 20, 2023. From left to right and top to bottom: Patrick Lahaie (Associate Secretary General, Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit), Pierre-Paul Niquay (Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière) / François St-Louis (MNA for Joliette), Florence Dupré (Coordinator, Direction de soutien aux familles), André Albert Morin (Monitoring Committee, Quebec Liberal Party), Raoul Quitich (Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw) / Paul St-Pierre Plamondon (Monitoring Committee, Parti Québécois), Françoise Ruperthouse (Acting Director General, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière), Anne Panasuk (Special Advisor) / Ian Lafrenière (Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit), Julie Martel (Director, Direction de soutien aux familles), Viviane Echaquan Niquay (Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière), Manon Massé (Monitoring Committee, Québec solidaire).

Preamble to the Act

AS the circumstances under which Indigenous children went missing or died after they were admitted to a health and social services institution of Quebec, while taken in charge for health reasons or after being evacuated without the presence of their parents, remain unknown to their families ;

AS the National Assembly recognizes the suffering caused when a child goes missing or dies ;

AS the National Assembly wishes to put in place a response to support Indigenous families in their quest for truth when they seek information on the circumstances under which an Indigenous child went missing or died and in their process of healing, and to embark on the path of reconciliation ;

AS the National Assembly wishes to work in a spirit of cooperation with the Indigenous peoples, considering such aspects as their linguistic and cultural characteristics, and to keep Quebecers' collective memory alive.

The Act empowers the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit (the Minister) to investigate institutions, bodies or religious congregations when one or more factors suggest that information likely to reveal the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or death of an Indigenous child exists but has not been communicated pursuant to the measures that the Act stipulates.

With the goal of supporting the families' manifold needs, it allows for the implementation of culturally reassuring support measures. The measures, which are examined later, are made possible through the collaboration of an array of partners. They are intended to offer the families guidance and support throughout the process in a spirit of respect for their culture, language and history.

Moreover, from the standpoint of their healing process, the Act provides for assistance for the families that so desire concerning a possible application to the Superior Court for an order of disinterment.

Lastly, the Act stipulates that an individual can lodge a complaint with the Minister when the person is dissatisfied with the services received while seeking information from an institution, agency or religious congregation, and it makes the Minister responsible for reporting on the implementation of the Act in this annual report.

Partner organizations at the heart of implementing the Act

In June 2021, shortly after the Act was adopted, Anne Panasuk was appointed as the Minister's special advisor for family support.

To ensure the implementation of the Act upon its entry into force, a new branch was established within the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit (SRPNI) : the Direction de soutien aux familles.

In September 2021, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière, the first registered organization formed by families of Indigenous children who went missing or died, joined these interveners to contribute to applying the Act, alongside all other partner organizations.

The Special Advisor for Family Support

On June 8, 2021, Anne Panasuk, a journalist who conducted investigations with Innu families in Pakua Shipi and Atikamekw families whose children died or went missing after being hospitalized, was appointed Special Advisor for Family Support of the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit.

Until the end of her mandate in June 2023, Ms. Panasuk was responsible for supporting and advising the Minister in the implementation of the Act, in particular by ensuring optimum relations and communications between Indigenous families and the Government of Québec.

In collaboration with the family support team, her responsibilities included the following :

- Coordinating the statutory Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act, including its contributions to the annual report ;
- Maintaining relations between Indigenous families and the Government of Québec during the implementation of the Act ;
- Informing Indigenous families about the support offered by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak ;
- Supporting and advising the Direction de soutien aux familles in the implementation of the Act ;
- Contributing to the preparation, dissemination and presentation of the annual report stipulated by the Act.

Anne Panasuk's two-year term as special advisor ended in June 2023. Since then, she has continued her involvement with the families as part of the Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière team.



Anne Panasuk, Former Special Advisor (March-June 2023).

The Direction de soutien aux familles

Established on September 1, 2021, the Direction de soutien aux familles of the SRPNI is tasked with ensuring the implementation of the Act while respecting the needs of families.

More specifically, it is responsible for :

- assisting families in all aspects of their research (requests to institutions, for civil status documents, to government departments, public bodies and religious congregations, to identify a burial site and obtain related documents, for exhumation, etc.) ;



The Direction de soutien aux familles team. From left to right: Simon Charette, Véronique Laveau, Louise Morin, Catherine Morin Boulais, Florence Dupré, Julie Martel.

- working with families to develop and implement tailored research strategies that meet their wishes and objectives ;
- facilitating and coordinating, upon the request of the families it supports, meetings with healthcare and social services experts (primarily doctors and nurses), exhumation specialists or any other relevant experts to analyze and interpret the obtained documentation ;
- coordinating the network of health and social services experts supporting the implementation of the Act ;
- coordinating the Interdepartmental Committee Pertaining to the Act ;
- coordinating a committee of partners on exhumations ;
- developing any approaches and partnerships aimed at establishing expertise required for the implementation of the Act ;
- communicating to institutions, government departments and agencies, and religious congregations information concerning the Act and its implementation ;
- communicating to partner Indigenous organizations information concerning the Act and its implementation and offering them presentations and updates, as needed ;
- coordinating the preparation and drafting of the annual report.

The Direction de soutien aux familles is a permanent member of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act. It works with families, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière, Indigenous organizations and the institutions covered by the Act to fulfill its mandate.

The Direction de soutien aux familles team works under the supervision of a director of family support who reports to the Secrétaire général associé aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit in the SRPNI.

The team also includes a research coordinator, three family support advisors and an administrative technician. The coordinator is notably responsible for developing and implementing the Direction de soutien aux familles's key directions and tools, as well as for establishing all necessary partnerships to fulfill its mandate and support families. The administrative technician is responsible for developing and updating the database of information gathered through research and for archiving. Meanwhile, the role of the advisors is focused on supporting families and conducting research.

The first of the three advisor positions, created in February 2022, has been occupied consistently over the past year. Two additional positions, created in January 2023, were filled in early fall 2023 :

- A position primarily focused on supporting families in their search for information, including coordinating the network of health and social services experts.
- A mainly research-oriented position, aimed at acquiring, at the request of families, new knowledge concerning the historical, political and sociological context of the periods when children disappeared and died. This position also includes support for several families.

The Direction de soutien aux familles was supported by initial funding of \$2 million over two years (2021–2023), included in the Government of Québec's 2021 budget. In addition to consolidating this \$1 million annual funding, the 2023 budget includes an **additional \$4.5 million over 5 years** (2023–2028) to support the families of missing or deceased Indigenous children.

Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière

Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière was founded by and for Indigenous families whose children went missing or died. More specifically, the organization's mission is to :

- put Indigenous families in Quebec whose children went missing or died in touch with each other ;
- help Indigenous families in Quebec find their missing children ;
- help Indigenous families in Quebec to determine the causes and circumstances surrounding the death or disappearance of their children ;
- pursue all the sociological, anthropological or legal research necessary to assert the rights of the Indigenous families in Quebec whose children went missing or died ;
- make the necessary representations to authorities to assert the rights of the Indigenous families in Quebec whose children went missing or died ;
- defend and promote the interests of Indigenous families in Quebec whose children went missing or died ;
- heighten the general public's awareness of the situation of families Indigenous families in Quebec whose children went missing or died.



The Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière team. From left to right: Pierre-Paul Niquay, Kim Lagueux Ruperthouse, Francoise Ruperthouse, Lorianne Trapper, Chantale Awashish.

The five founding members of Awacak are :

- Françoise Ruperthouse
- Pierre-Paul Niquay
- Viviane Echaquan Niquay
- Chantale Awashish
- Viviane Chilton

To attain its objectives, Awacak collaborates with the Direction de soutien aux familles.

The Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act

Section 21 of the Act stipulates that "A monitoring committee on the carrying out of this Act, composed of representatives of various groups or of persons, is created by the Minister, in order to contribute to improving the services offered to the families of Indigenous children who went missing or died, in particular with regard to complaints and concerning the status of the processing of applications."

Coordinated by Special Advisor Anne Panasuk, the Committee was officially set up at its first meeting on October 29, 2021. Since fall 2023, it has been coordinated by Geoffrey Kelley, who served as Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs from 2011 to 2012 and again from 2014 to 2018.

Testimonial from Geoffrey Kelley on the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act

In fall 2023, I was honoured to accept the proposal of the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit to coordinate a unique committee : the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act. After spending many years working with Indigenous families, communities and nations during my various terms as minister, how could I refuse ?

From our initial meetings, I encountered an exceptional committee, distinguished by both its composition and its mandate, central to numerous historical and political issues related to inter-nation relations, the process of reconciliation and the healing of families.

In this committee, I reencountered and met a group of individuals—men and women from diverse backgrounds—who work tirelessly with families and are resolute in their pursuit of truth.

Thus, we face an incredibly inspiring challenge : to stand shoulder to shoulder with families, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière, the Direction de soutien aux familles and every member of the Committee, in a collective quest for truth. After all, reconciliation always involves coming to terms with our history—even when that history is marked by sorrow and tragedy.

Geoffrey Kelley
Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act

The Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act held three meetings between March 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024 :

- November 17, 2023
- January 8, 2024
- February 14, 2024

The Monitoring Committee's composition was fairly stable during this period, but some adjustments had to be made because of the availability of its members.

The Monitoring Committee comprised nine permanent members between March 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024. It has retained the same composition as in 2022–2023, although some of the representatives have been replaced :

- Anne Panasuk, Special Advisor to the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit (March–June 2023)
- Replaced by Geoffrey Kelley, Coordinator of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act, effective October 2023
- Julie Martel, Director, Direction de soutien aux familles
- Florence Dupré, Coordinator, Direction de soutien aux familles
- Françoise Rupertouse, Director General, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière
- Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
- Marjolaine Étienne, President, Quebec Native Women
- Florence Picard, Legal Affairs Advisor, Regroupement des Centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (March–April 2023). Replaced by Amélie Lainé, Strategic Development Director,

Regroupement des Centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, as of April 2023, then by Annick Gill, Strategic Development Advisor, Regroupement des Centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, as of January 2024

- Raoul Quitich, Assistance Officer for the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program, Council of the Atikamekw Nation
- Ejinagosi (Richard) Kistabish, Anicinape Elder and Advisory Aid

In addition to the permanent members, observer members represent the opposition parties and the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse. The following four observer members, present since October 4, 2022, remained in their positions throughout the period covered by this report :

- André Albert Morin, Official Opposition Critic for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Quebec Liberal Party
- Manon Massé, Second Opposition Group Co-critic and Critic for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Québec solidaire
- Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, Leader of the Third Opposition Group and Third Opposition Group Critic for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Parti Québécois
- Nicole Anne Vautour, Director of Youth Investigations, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse

Among its key attributions, the Monitoring Committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Act and formulating recommendations pertaining to it. Appendix 1 gives the mission statement and the full list of members.

Since the first report on the Act in March 2022, the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act has made five recommendations, focusing on the preservation and archiving of data collected pursuant to the implementation of the Act (2021–2022 report), and then on exhumations and funding for Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière (2022–2023 report). The response to the initial recommendations and to the Monitoring Committee's new recommendations are presented in Section 4 and in the conclusion, respectively.

The concerted efforts of partners has been supported, since the early days of the Act's implementation, by initiatives and research in a number of institutions, both covered and not covered by the Act, including medical and religious archivists, cemetery and parish officials, civil servants from various public departments and agencies seeking answers and solutions to access information, as well as researchers, doctors and exhumation and identification specialists.

During this third year more than ever, the individual and institutional contribution of each of these partners has been central to the work the Direction de soutien aux familles has carried out at the families' request.

II. THIRD ANNUAL REPORT : MARCH 1, 2023, TO FEBRUARY 29, 2024

This third annual report summarizes the work carried out between March 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024.

Following the key themes of previous reports and striving to show developments in time where relevant, it outlines the main accomplishments in various areas :

- 1- travel and communication
- 2- support for families in their searches
- 3- sectoral developments
- 4- investigations and complaints

This annual report notably reflects on the completion of the first exhumations carried out a spart of searches under the Act, as well as the various developments in terms of healing over the past year.

Along the way, it seeks to amplify the voices of families and the various stakeholders involved in the searches. At times echoing each other, the testimonials provide insight into the ongoing quest for the truth and highlight the progress made over the past three years, steadily and humbly advancing on the path toward trust and healing.

Travel and communication

The communication activities carried out during the first two years of the Act's implementation by the Special Advisor, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak culminated in two achievements over the past year : the establishment of structured tours and visits with families, and the widespread dissemination of the Act and its implementation tools across various government, institutional, academic, citizen and media platforms.

Travel and visits to the communities

Following the preparation of the second annual report, a tour to share results with the families in **Manawan** took place in March 2023. Between March 13 and 17, 2023, around 10 families received the findings of the research carried out under the Act, in the presence of the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak and the former special advisor. The team from the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program for the Atikamekw Nation was also present when families so desired.

This tour led to the **presentation of the second annual report** to the families of **Manawan** on April 21, 2023. On this occasion, the minister, members of his cabinet, the Special Advisor, the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière, and several members of the Monitoring Committee attended a ceremony organized by the special advisor and the Manawan Band Council. Following the presentation of the progress report to attendees, several testimonials from families provided an opportunity for the loved ones of the missing or deceased children to have their voices heard.



Presentation of the second annual report pertaining to the Act to the Atikamekw families of Manawan, April 21, 2023.

From November 6 to 9, 2023, a results-sharing tour was held in **Matimekosh-Lac-John and Kawawachikamach**, in the Côte-Nord region. During this tour, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak met with four families to deliver the initial research findings and discuss their wishes for the next steps. At this time, announcements were aired on the Matimekosh community radio, and communications were established with the authorities of the Kanatamat Tshitipenitamunu school

and the community health centre. Connections were also established with the staff of the Naskapi CLSC in Kawawachikamach and with outreach workers from the Naskapi Nation. A return visit to the communities of Matimekosh and Kawawachikamach could take place in coming months to continue some of the meetings.



Results-sharing tour in Matimekosh-Lac-John and Kawawachikamach (Côte-Nord), November 6 to 9, 2023. From left to right: Simon Charette (Direction de soutien aux familles), Florence Dupré (Direction de soutien aux familles) and Françoise Ruperthouse (Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière).

From January 29 to February 1, 2024, a results-delivery tour took place in the communities of **Pikogan and Lac-Simon**, located in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, to meet with four families. During this period, public meetings were held in Pikogan and Lac-Simon in collaboration with the band councils and health centres of both communities and attended by representatives from the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak. Several families attended both meetings, and nearly a dozen expressed interest in initiating a search in the coming months.



Pikogan community cultural centre (Abitibi-Témiscamingue), site of the public meeting held in January 2023.

In addition to these three tours, several individual visits to families, communities or institutions were conducted over the past year. On April 13, 2023, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and the Special Advisor visited the Atikamekw community of **Wemotaci** to hold a public meeting. The Act and the support services offered to families were presented on this occasion.



Public meeting held in Pikogan (Abitibi-Témiscamingue) on January 30, 2023, by Awacak – Petits êtres de Lumière and the Direction de soutien aux familles.

On April 24, 2023, the Direction de soutien aux familles team and Awacak travelled to **Baie-Comeau**, in the Côte-Nord region, to support two families making a request for exhumation and to testify before the Court for this purpose. These hearings resulted, several weeks later, in the granting of the first two exhumation authorizations, which are detailed further in section II.8 of this report.

On June 12, 2023, the Direction de soutien aux familles visited various sites in the Eastern Townships region for research purposes. These visits were intended to prepare for family visits in early fall 2023, conduct on-site assessments (taking photographs to share with the families) and carry out further research with the people in charge. During this excursion, they visited the East Bolton Cemetery in Austin, accompanied by its caretaker, and visited the former Cecil Butters Memorial Hospital residence. They also surveyed the Pine Hill Cemetery in Magog and held discussions with a witness identified by the Direction de soutien aux familles.



Pine Hill Cemetery (Magog, Eastern Townships), June 2023.

During summer 2023, the planned tours and visits were significantly impacted by the forest fires that swept through Quebec, affecting numerous First Nations communities. This summer standstill was followed by an intensive catch-up effort starting in late August 2023. In total, **seven trips**, lasting from one to several days, took place **between August 30 and October 27, 2023** :

- August 30 to September 1, 2023 : Exhumations in Pessamit with the presence of the families, the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and partner experts.
- September 6, 2023 : Commemoration and funeral ceremony at a burial site with a family at Saint-Patrice Cemetery in Magog in the Eastern Townships, attended by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Anne Panasuk.
- September 6–8, 2023 : Presence of the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak and Anne Panasuk at the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials, organized by the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools, in Montréal. On this occasion, the Direction de soutien aux familles met with a family they were assisting and talked with governmental and federal partners.
- September 9, 2023 : Commemoration and ceremony at a burial site at East Bolton Cemetery in Austin in the Eastern Townships, attended by the Direction de soutien aux familles, the Nunavut Family Information Liaison Unit and the family's collaborating physician.
- October 5–6, 2023 : Working meeting of all teams from the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak in Saint-Sauveur in the Laurentides region. These initial days of joint reflection notably initiated the drafting of a joint commitment statement, which will continue in the coming months.
- October 13, 2023 : Identification of a burial site in Thetford Mines, then in Joliette, with a family and the Direction de soutien aux familles.
- October 27, 2023 : Identification of a burial site with a family in Québec City, attended by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak.

The results-sharing tours and community town hall meetings will carry on into the next year. Additionally, to reach families living in urban areas outside of communities, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak plan to start a tour presenting the Act and its implementation tools to Monitoring Committee member organizations in the coming months. Often serving individuals and families living away from their communities, these partners can act as information hubs, widening the network for sharing information about the support services available to address families' research needs.

Communication activities

The implementation of the Act and support for families rely on regular communication activities aimed at informing families, institutions and the general public about the services available in the search for children who have gone missing or died after being admitted to an institution.

Over the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière have jointly responded to invitations from two separate organizations to publicize the measures set out in the Act, family support services and ongoing research.

The first of these took place during awareness-raising activities organized by the **Protecteur du Citoyen** during the week of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. On September 28, 2023, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak delivered a video conference to all Québec Ombudsman staff in Montréal and Québec City on their work with families. This provided an opportunity to reflect on the gradual building of trust between the two teams, the essential humanity in implementing joint support for families and the ongoing collaboration at the heart of the Act's implementation.

The second presentation, also conducted via video conference, followed an invitation from an organizer of a **gathering of survivors of residential schools** held in Chisasibi in November 2023. On November 7, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak presented the main support services available to families of Indigenous children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution and answered questions from families, primarily from the Cree community. The Direction de soutien aux familles took advantage of the opportunity to raise awareness of the Act.

The Act in the media

Over 2022–2023, media interest in the searches being conducted for and by families under the Act heightened, particularly with the airing of two brief segments by TVA/LCN journalist and anchor Marie-Claude Paradis-Desfossés. These focused on the presentation of research findings to one of the families, in Nutashkuan. However, in 2023–2024, media attention shifted primarily to the first two exhumations carried out under the Act.

Between March 2023 and February 2024, there were a total of 22 press articles directly related to the Act, along with 23 radio mentions during news segments or interviews, and 20 references to the Act on television news bulletins, reports or interviews, for a total of 65 media appearances.

The spotlight was on the first two exhumations carried out in Pessamit, in the Côte-Nord region, in August and September. While initial discussions about possible exhumations emerged as early as April 2023, the bulk of media coverage occurred between June 15 and September 7. During this period, 51 press articles focused on the exhumations, accounting for nearly 80 % of all media coverage related to the Act over the past year.

Throughout these procedures, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak ensured that the families' desires for privacy and respect of their private lives were strictly upheld, both by the media and by various partners.

Three news reports also focused on the search efforts of families supported by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak. On March 6 and on April 24, 2023, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) aired segments highlighting the research conducted by Atikamekw families in Manawan. Then, on September 9, an article was featured on Radio-Canada's *Espaces autochtones*, shedding light on the investigation carried out by a family from Manitoba, whose child passed away in a Quebec institution.

Additionally, four press articles, two radio features and three television programs mentioned children who had gone missing or died after being admitted to an institution, as part of media coverage of the second edition of the First Nations Expedition. This initiative, which brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous snowmobilers in the name of reconciliation, aimed to honour the memory of the missing or deceased children.

The media's attention to the searches for Indigenous children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution plays a significant role in spreading awareness about the Act and the support services available to families. It also helps in educating the public about the intergenerational traumas experienced by these families. However, the Direction de soutien aux familles remains cautious about excessive media coverage, in order to respect the families' privacy and ensure that services continue to be possible for families who do not wish to publicize their efforts. Therefore, the Direction de soutien aux familles prioritizes media requests based on the families' expressed preferences and needs.

The work of the Special Advisor (March–June 2023)

By Anne Panasuk, former Special Advisor for Family Support

My term as special advisor ended on June 30, 2023. For two years, I was committed to promoting awareness of the Act and advising the minister to ensure families' needs were addressed. My primary focus was on building trust with families and communities and ensuring transparency in the process of searching for the causes and circumstances of their children's deaths or disappearances.

Since then, I've joined the team at Awacak, as announced in the video shared on social media that Minister Lafrenière produced to thank me for my contribution. When I first shed light on the plight of families whose children had gone missing, through reports on Radio-Canada's investigative program *Enquête* nine years ago, I pledged to stand by these families on the path to truth. One point that families have made clear to me is that the journey is not over.

I mention this because some of the work initiated during my tenure as special advisor bore fruit in the months after.

This third year of implementation of the Act has been one of consolidation. Like in previous years, work spanned several fronts. Besides regular work meetings with the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak, I'd like to highlight a few specific actions.

With families or communities

Communication efforts with communities continued, albeit hindered by the wildfires that erupted in spring 2023.

In March 2023, the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw welcomed us for a public meeting in Manawan. The Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak spent several days delivering research results to about 10 families, providing them with comprehensive folders detailing all steps taken and the retrieved documents.

In April, the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw of Wemotaci requested a public assembly in their community.

Awacak met with several families to fill out search requests. Although the Atikamekw have been informed about the Act from the outset, it sometimes takes time for families to decide to uncover facts that may reopen the wounds of loss.

We could only manage one meeting with the Pikogan Band Council to plan the organization of a public assembly with the Anicinape, who were affected by the wildfires. Discussions continued among Awacak, the Direction de soutien aux familles and the team at the Pikogan health centre to facilitate the public meeting, which finally took place in January 2024.

In addition to this on-the-ground communication work, I continued to stay in touch with families who, individually, requested either information, assistance in filling out research requests or for me to be present during the delivery of information found by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak or during ceremonies at the cemetery.

With the Eeyou Cree and the Inuit

At the request of Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty, I travelled to Chibougamau in March 2023 to meet with the leaders of the Grand Council of the Crees, who were holding their annual meeting. Awacak's director, Françoise Rupertouse, joined us via Zoom for the event.

One of the chiefs took the opportunity to request a search on his sister, who had disappeared during a hospital stay. The Direction de soutien aux familles was able to find the information, to the family's satisfaction. Additionally, the Chief agreed to participate in video and radio interviews at the Cree radio station to discuss the Act, alongside representatives from Awacak and one of the partnering physicians.

We talked with the Grand Council of the Crees, and it was agreed that our initial focus should be on disseminating information through their community radio station. These initial talks, which began in spring 2023, eventually led to the production of radio and video reports that may be aired in 2024.

I attended numerous virtual meetings with members and healthcare professionals from the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS), the Ungava Tulattavik Health Center and the Inuulitsivik Health Center to determine the best approach for reaching out to potentially affected Inuit families. Together with Awacak and Inuit outreach workers, we devised a communication plan aimed at the 14 Northern Villages. While this plan was slated for translation into Inuktitut by the NRBHSS, to my knowledge, this step has yet to be completed.

Furthermore, I facilitated connections between Awacak and organizations such as the Saturviit Inuit Women's Association, the Qavvivik Inuit Family and Community Health Centre, and the Southern Quebec Inuit Association. These connections were made to seek guidance on engaging with the Northern Villages and to explore the possibility of recruiting help from the Inuit for Awacak's efforts.

Raising awareness among the public or targeted audiences

My mandate or my book lead me to be regularly invited to give lectures or interviews on missing Indigenous children. This helps raise awareness among the general public and, when targeting specific audiences, helps forge alliances.

I met with the Saint-Lambert Council for Seniors, the Cercle des femmes universitaires du Québec, journalism students at the Université de Montréal, CEGEP students, and high school students (École Sophie-Barat in Montréal).

For the past three years, I've been delivering a specialized presentation to students at the Faculty of Medicine at the Université de Montréal, providing a platform to discuss biases that should be avoided in their future professional practice.

For all these meetings, I prepare relevant PowerPoint presentations. I was joined by Françoise Ruperthouse, Director General of Awacak, for a talk given to members of the Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec.

The same applied to a presentation made to doctors at the McGill University Health Centre. Following this, several doctors expressed interest in supporting families and becoming part of the network of physicians working with Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles. They were encouraged to reach out for further involvement.

These public presentations, along with the outreach efforts made by the Direction de soutien aux familles to health and social services experts, have allowed us to get doctors and nurses involved who have become valuable allies. In this regard, the Direction de soutien aux familles organized two meetings with partner physicians, which I attended.

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec

A collaborative effort was initiated with the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BanQ) at the suggestion of Hélène Laverdure, Curator and Director General of the National Archives. She reached out to me to organize collaboration with the archivists with whom the Direction de soutien aux familles has been in contact since the beginning.

She presented her project of a Quebec register of archival collections and information sources useful for research conducted by families of missing or deceased children, which we were able to review and enhance. It was presented by Marie Grégoire, the President and Chief Executive Officer of BANQ, to Minister Ian Lafrenière.

During a meeting with various officials from BANQ, the Direction de soutien aux familles was able to present its current and future needs.

To commemorate this collaboration, I delivered the closing keynote address at the 52nd conference of the Association des archivistes du Québec in June 2023.

Media

The media showed sporadic interest in our work, mainly during specific events. For instance, when we visited the Atikamekw, Radio-Canada Mauricie and *Boréal Express* requested an interview.

During the presentation of the annual report in Manawan, APTN was on-site conducting interviews. I also gave a lengthy interview to APTN as part of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

In English-language media, the CBC and the Toronto Star reached out to me but have not yet aired any reports.

Connections with Indigenous communities in Canada

In October 2023, I was invited as a former advisor by the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples to discuss the children missing from Quebec hospitals and the Act. This legislation has attracted keen interest not only from senators but also from various Indigenous associations across Canada.

Kimberly Murray, the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools, appointed by Ottawa, has taken an interest in our work over the past year. Her mandate is to identify necessary measures and to recommend the establishment of a new federal legal framework to process and protect anonymous graves and burial sites.

She invited me to speak at the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials held in Vancouver in January 2023. I was again invited to the meeting held in Montréal in September 2023. I requested that the director general of Awacak also speak. This allows us, as I jokingly say, to “spread the good news” : to discuss this groundbreaking legislation and the positive impact of reparations on families.

Attended by representatives of Indigenous organizations from across Canada, these talks have recently yielded results. Just before the holiday season, representatives from 88 Indigenous communities in Ontario asked me, during a virtual meeting, to talk to them about the Act and its background, and to discuss strategies for obtaining similar legislation in Ontario.

This would be a significant step forward for us and for them. Children from Indigenous communities in Quebec were sometimes transferred to hospitals in the neighbouring province of Ontario, for which we have so far been unable to obtain records.

Monitoring committee

As mandated by the Act, I oversaw the monitoring committee until the end of my tenure. Since then, Minister Lafrenière has appointed Geoffrey Kelley to take over.

During the committee meeting on February 13, 2023, as outlined in the previous report, we decided on the venue for presenting this second report to Indigenous people. I was tasked with organizing such an event in the community of Manawan, with the valuable assistance and collaboration of Chief Sipi Flamand.

The committee members, both permanent and observers, were dedicated and thorough in their duties. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to them.

Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière

By Françoise Ruperthouse, Director General of Awacak

Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière

Awacak's work was once again limited this year due to widespread forest fires across Quebec. However, the number of missing children reported to us has doubled since last year.

Awacak's mission remains unchanged, and we strive to uphold it to the best of our ability, year after year.

Board of directors

In 2023, changes were made to the board of directors. Two of the four members stepped down from their positions for personal reasons and were therefore replaced. The current members are :

- Chair : Viviane Echaquan Niquay
- Member : Marie Josée Wapistan
- Member : Gilbert Chachai
- Member : Sylvestre Desterres

Founding members

- Françoise Ruperthouse
- Pierre-Paul Niquay
- Viviane Echaquan Niquay
- Viviane Chilton
- Chantale Awashish

Our partners

The work and mission of Awacak would not be possible without our partners :

- The Direction de soutien aux familles
- Lawyers Arsenault, Dufresne and Wee
- Doctors and nurses
- The Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale
- Band council members from various communities
- Community outreach workers

Community tours and staff

- Françoise Ruperthouse : Director General
- Pierre-Paul Niquay : Recruitment/Information Officer
- Chantale Awashish : Recruitment Officer/Researcher
- Lorianne Trapper : English-speaking Recruitment Officer
- Kim Lagueux Ruperthouse : Office Agent (part-time)
- Anne Panasuk: Consultant

Here are the employees of Awacak: We recently hired Lorianne Trapper to handle contacts and recruitment in the coming months among Anglophone Anicinape, Eeyou and Inuit communities. We're very proud to have her on board.

As I've mentioned in previous years, we started our work with the Innu late due to the pervasive presence of COVID-19. We had to postpone a few public gatherings, but we still managed to do our due diligence in all Innu and Atikamekw communities.

The meetings in the Atikamekw communities have also now come to an end, but there are still several ongoing searches, there and also among the Innu.

We are now holding public meetings with the Anicinapek, and we visited Pikogan and Lac-Simon.

Once again, we are struck by the magnitude of stories of Indigenous children who have gone missing or died in Quebec. So many families still suffer today from the disappearance of their children. It is heartbreaking to know that all these families were not granted their right to support their sick children or to see them after their passing.

As of today, we have counted 199 missing children, and we have only finished surveying the third First Nation in Quebec.

The year in review

The wildfires in Abitibi slowed down our work, but we still conducted follow-ups with the families from the Innu and Atikamekw communities virtually, always accompanied by the Direction de soutien aux familles of the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit.

Two exhumations were carried out for families in one community. One family has now found peace and has been able to begin their grieving process and put the uncertainty away. Awacak continues to provide emotional support, and the ceremony held was part of that support.

Awacak has stressed the significance of exhumations in aiding families' grieving process and of ensuring the child's identification.

Awacak is present in all visits with families and all communities.

Awacak accompanies families on all cemetery visits. Alongside Anne Panasuk, Awacak held initial meetings with the Cree for the preparation of public assemblies.

Virtual meetings were also held with various Inuit associations and the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services.

Awacak further conducted multiple conferences at the Université de Montréal and the Montreal General Hospital, along with several interviews aimed at raising public awareness. Lastly, a website is now ready to be visited : www.awacak.ca



Françoise Ruperthouse (Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière) announcing the presence of Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles on community radio during the results-sharing tour in the communities of Matimekosh-Lac-John and Kawawachikamach (Côte-Nord, November 2023).

Testimonial of Anouk Raphaël concerning the supportive care and attention of Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles at the request of her family with respect to Hattie Wapachee

On my behalf and on behalf of my husband and the Wapachee family, I want to thank the Awacak team for its excellent efforts and the support received from the Direction de soutien aux familles during the search for Hattie Wapachee, a child who died in 1956 at the Roberval hospital and was interred at the Mashteuiatsh cemetery.

Both teams offered tremendous support and were constantly attentive to our needs. They offered us all the available services that we needed throughout the lengthy search process.

The outcome provided many answers to unresolved questions. We, and the parents and family of little Hattie, obtained dates, answers concerning the death, and learned where the child is buried.

Once again, I would like to call attention to the excellent work done and sincerely thank everyone for everything that has been accomplished thanks to them.

Anouk Raphaël
daughter-in-law of the Wapachee family

Monitoring committee

Awacak also participates in meetings of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act, where Indigenous organizations and political parties sit to monitor and assist our work. Recommendations to enhance the efforts of Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles stem from these gatherings.

Testimonial from Françoise Rupertouse, Acting Director General of Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière

So many children have been laid to rest without their parents being able to see their bodies and without families being able to hold rituals to accompany them beyond. Sadness, anger and grief permeate every community gathering we've held. After visiting the Innu and Atikamekw, we are now with the Anicinapek and are receiving just as many requests to search for missing children. Indigenous Peoples have been denied the necessary or adequate support.

I feel profound sorrow for these families. It's clear that Indigenous families have been denied their human rights and leaving them without answers is utterly inhumane. These people deserve apologies and requests for forgiveness, just like students of residential schools and the murdered or missing women.

I'm deeply grateful for the trust people have placed in Awacak. Thank you.

Nin Françoise
Acting Director of Awacak

Supporting families in their search for information

To maintain the confidentiality of the personal information entrusted by families to the Direction de soutien aux familles for research purposes, the data presented in this report does not enable individual identification.

As of February 29, 2024, the Direction de soutien aux familles has conducted information searches **concerning 199 children, based on requests received from 116 applicants**. This reflects an increase of nearly 66 % in the number of children in searches and 45 % in the number of applicants⁴ compared to the second annual report submitted in March 2023.

While these figures may suggest a slowdown in the rise of requests to the Direction de soutien aux familles and its partners, it's important to note that the sharp increase observed between the initial six months of implementation (Report 1) and the end of the second year (Report 2) was largely due to the mobilization of several families already familiar with the Act. Some had followed its development closely and had even participated in the NIMMIWG's work. As we conclude this third year of implementation, both the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak are poised to enter a new phase in disseminating information about the Act and the associated support services, especially among English-speaking Indigenous communities.

The following pages provide an overview of the key findings from the research and the significant sectoral developments as of February 29, 2024.

4. The first annual report of the Act submitted in March 2022 reported searches for 55 children, with 35 applicants. The second annual report of the Act submitted in March 2023 reported searches for 120 children, with 80 applicants.

Welcoming and supporting families, at their own pace

The considerations the Direction de soutien aux familles outlined in its initial report, nearly six months after the Act came into effect, continue to be relevant two years later and they warrant reiteration to establish certain methodological parameters in this report.

Generally speaking, the **nature of the** Direction de soutien aux familles's **support varies according to each family's specific needs and goals.**

Most requests are actively processed by the Direction de soutien aux familles. This involves, among other steps, devising and implementing research strategies ; requesting access to user records or administrative information ; searching for civil status documents and potential burial sites ; or identifying witnesses. Other requests progress at a slower pace, in accordance with the communications and decisions the families make.

As of February 29, 2024, 104 of the 116 requests sent to the Direction de soutien aux familles were considered active—**nearly 90 %**. This represents a slight decrease (2 %) compared to the observations made in the second annual report of the Act, but nonetheless confirms a high level of activity. The continued pace of community visits despite the forest fires over the summer of 2023, Awacak's awareness-raising efforts with families and the ongoing collaboration between Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles certainly contribute to this high level of activity. The lesser activity of a few inquiries can be explained by our respecting the decisions and pace of the families involved.

The intake protocols for families, established during the initial two years of implementing the Act, have been upheld in the past year to ensure the most compassionate and respectful support for their needs (interpretation, emotional or spiritual support, comfort with using technology, geographical distance, etc.).

When families wish, intake meetings are arranged either with or without the Direction de soutien aux familles. As of February 29, 2024, over 84 % of families undergoing research with the Direction de soutien aux familles were accompanied jointly by Awacak. Other families directly approached the team at the Direction de soutien aux familles. While Awacak's support was offered at the start of the process, they have yet to opt for it.

The intake meetings provide an opportunity to present Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles's support services, to ensure that families are eligible for the provisions of the Act and to lay the groundwork for the search strategy, which is then validated by the family and implemented by the Direction de soutien aux familles. Often, the establishment of trust hinges on these initial discussions, which must be maintained throughout the support process. Some applicants are accompanied, either regularly or occasionally, by family members during these interviews : siblings, children and spouses, as well as counsellors, psychologists, interpreters, Elders or representatives. Such meetings were primarily conducted between March 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024, by Awacak, which then provided the required information to the Direction de soutien aux familles to initiate the research. Special Advisor Anne Panasuk also conducted certain interviews, alone or with Awacak, remotely or in person.

Once the intake interviews are completed, the information gathered from the families is, with their consent, forwarded to the Direction de soutien aux familles, and then the search process begins. Regular reviews and follow-ups are subsequently carried out with the families and partners—whether to deliver information or documents, discuss the progress of the procedures, outline future steps or ensure the families’ comfort and address any potential needs.

Listing these different approaches to supporting families by partner organizations shows that **there is no one-size-fits-all process**. Instead, the aim is to respond appropriately to the families’ needs, rather than making them conform to a rigid procedure.

It also reflects the evolving coherence in partnership between the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak since the Act came into effect.

Testimonial⁵ from Reg Nepinak about the search conducted at his family's request about his sister Marlene Charlotte

About September 2022, I met Kimberly R. Murray, Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites, in Edmonton. I asked her if she could help me with finding contacts in Quebec to help bring home the remains of a younger sister who was born with spina bifida, taken to Quebec when all medical facilities to help her in Manitoba were exhausted. Kim said she had contacts in Quebec and would forward them to me.

I was introduced to Anne Panasuk, who guided me to Simon Charette, from the Family Support Unit, who support Indigenous families in their search for information.

Simon and his team led myself and my sisters, who had wanted to have our sister Marlene's remains brought home to Manitoba. Realising we don't speak French, Simon went above and beyond to ensure we understood all he was telling us.

I kept Kim Murray apprised of how our story was progressing, and eventually she asked us to present in the Montréal convention on September 7.

We were able to meet Simon, who took us to tour the cemetery where Marlene was buried. Marlene was buried four days prior to Mom and Dad being notified. She was buried as "unwanted," which was not the case at all. SHE IS MISSED BY OUR FAMILY.

Kitchi Megwetch for this program !

Sincerely.

Reg Nepinak
Family of Marlene



Reg Nepinak and his sister Marlene Charlotte, as children. Marlene Charlotte was hospitalized, then died in Quebec.



Reg Nepinak and his sister Marlene Charlotte, as children. Marlene Charlotte was hospitalized, then died in Quebec.



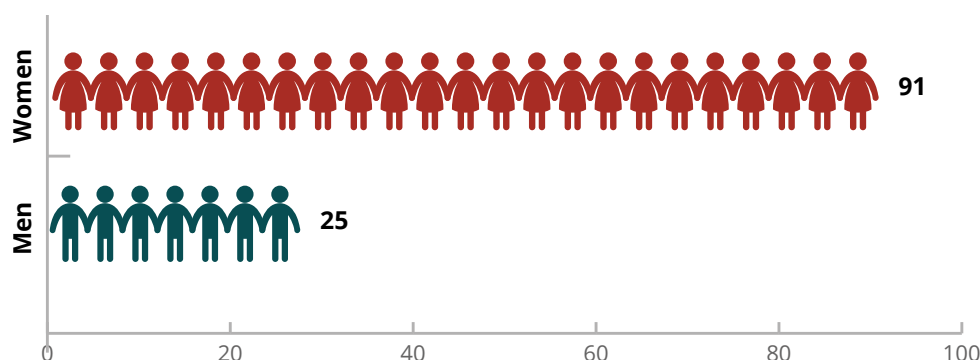
Reg Nepinak and his sisters Joanne and Sharon, at the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials organized by the Independent Special Interlocutor in Montréal, September, 2023.

5. This is the original version of a testimonial submitted by the family. Its French translation appears in the French version of the report.

Highlights of the requests

Although some of the searches have not had significant developments for several months, all of the requests processed by the Direction de soutien aux familles as of February 29, 2024, are considered still in progress. Of the 116 applicants, a clear **majority, over 78 %, are women** (Figure 1). This confirms the trend observed in the first two reports, which showed that 70 % and 75 % of applicants were women, respectively.

Figure 1 : Identification of applicants by sex

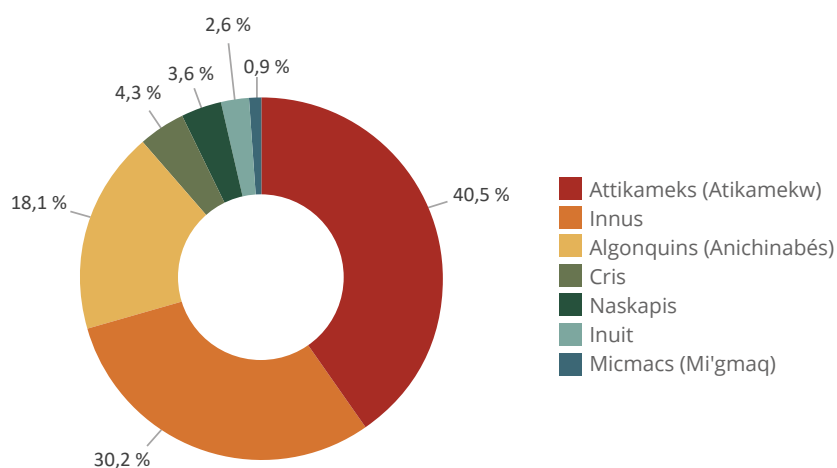


As illustrated below, the Atikamekw (40.5 %), Innu (30.2 %) and Algonquin (18.1 %) nations are still the main groups represented by the families identified (Figure 2). However, there has been a notable increase in the number of Atikamekw families making requests in the past year, by more than five percentage points compared to 2021–2022.

This increase, already noticeable in 2021–2022, is linked to the public meeting held in Wemotaci and the tour organized in Manawan last year. It also stems from Awacac's important work with Atikamekw families.

Notably, two more families from communities outside Quebec made requests this year, bringing the total to four.

Figure 2 : Nations represented in searches through the Direction de soutien aux familles



With the Act now in force, there is still a great deal of awareness-raising and communication work to be done, particularly with the Cree and Naskapi nations and the Inuit, as well as the Mohawk, Mi'gmaq and Wolastoqiyik nations. Inuit families are still very underrepresented and are currently mainly from Nunavut. It should be noted that the Direction de soutien aux familles has not received any requests from Inuit families in Nunavik under the Act, despite the discussions held between the Special Advisor and various Inuit authorities in the last few months of her mandate and the subsequent communications plan. In addition, the Direction de soutien aux familles had initiated several discussions with the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services in 2021–2022, as well as a collaboration with Donat Savoie, who was mandated by the Makivik Corporation to identify Inuit patients (children and adults) who died in sanatoriums.

These communication efforts must be continued, intensified and prioritized over the coming year with the nations concerned. The same applies to families living outside the communities, for whom a communication plan is also being developed.

The table below gives details, by nation and community, of each application received by the Direction de soutien aux familles.

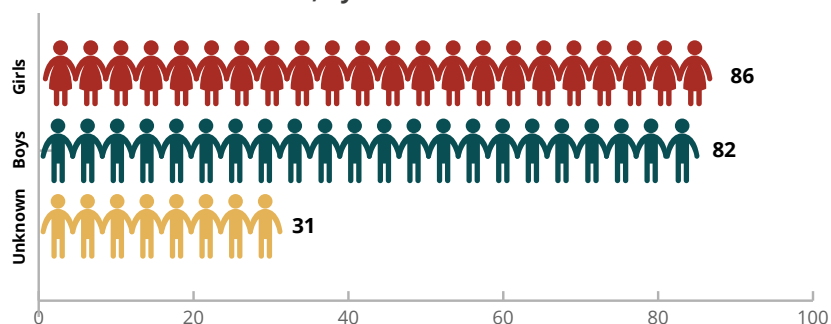
Table 1 : Nations and communities represented in Direction de soutien aux familles searches

Families' Nations and Communities	Number of Requests	Number of Children
Atikamekw	47	96
Opitciwan	22	41
Manawan	15	34
Wemotaci	10	21
Innu	35	45
Pakua Shipi	9	12
Unamen Shipu	7	7
Pessamit	7	7
Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	5	9
Nutashkuan	3	6
Matimekush	2	2
Mashteuiatsh	2	2
Anicinape	21	43
Pikogan	7	25
Lac-Simon	7	10
Winneway	2	3
Kitcisakik	1	1
Winnipegosis, Manitoba	1	1
Timiskaming	1	1

Families' Nations and Communities	Number of Requests	Number of Children
To be specified	2	2
Cree	5	7
Mistissini	3	3
Waswanipi	1	3
Waskaganish	1	1
Naskapi	4	4
Kawawachikamach	4	4
Inuit	3	3
Nunavut (outside Quebec)	3	3
Mi'gmaq	1	1
Gesgapegiag	1	1
Mohawk	0	0
Huron-Wendat	0	0
Wolastoqiyik	0	0
Wabenaki	0	0
TOTAL :	116 families	199 children

Similar to previous years, while women represent the majority of applicants to the Direction de soutien aux familles, there is also a slight majority of girls among the children in searches : 43 % of searches are for girls, compared with 41 % for boys (Figure 3). In less than 16 % of cases, the child's sex has not been clearly determined, either because the families do not know or because there is contradictory information between the family history and certain testimonies or documents obtained by the applicants. This proportion rose slightly from the previous year.

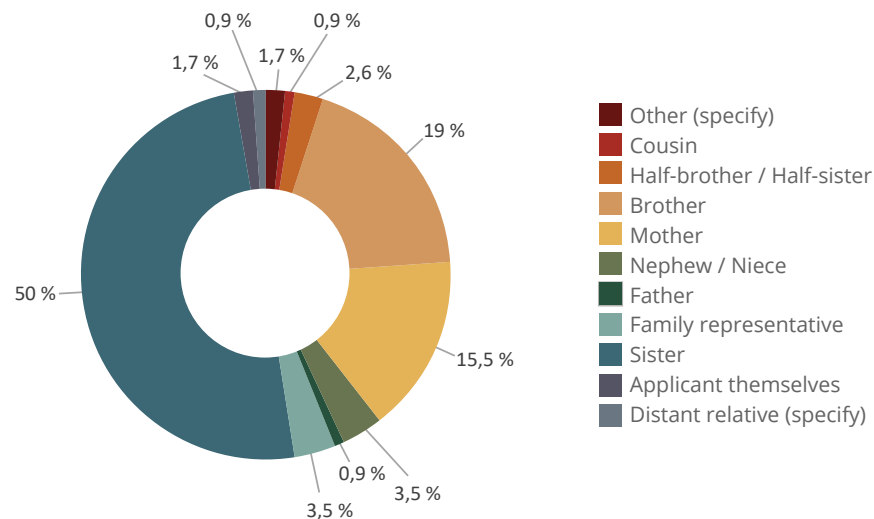
Figure 3 : Identification children in searches, by sex



Over 71 % of applicants are siblings of the child (or children) being searched for (Figure 4). This proportion, which includes half-siblings, confirms the trend observed in the two previous assessments. It further reinforces the relevance of the Act's exceptions allowing members of the child's extended family (up to and including "any significant person") to receive personal information.

Less than 17 % of applicants are a parent of the children sought. Without the exceptions provided for in the Act, parents would have been the only people authorized to receive information about missing children. In other words, had the Act not been passed, the medical records of less than 13 % of the children currently sought by the Direction de soutien aux familles would have been accessible to their families.

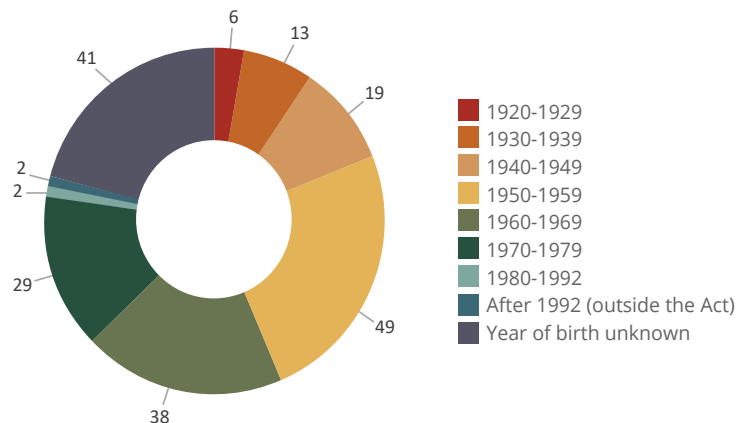
Figure 4 : Applicants' relationship to the children in the searches



Finally, while few applicants were represented by a third party during the first months, there has been an increase this year in giving power of attorney to Awacak, following systematization and development of the practice for these families. The aim of granting power of attorney is to enable families, who would have difficulty sending requests to institutions (due to lack of Internet access or digital literacy, for example), to engage Awacak to send and receive on their behalf the various requests prepared by the Direction de soutien aux familles. This power of attorney in no way diminishes the families' control over the search process, as they remain in charge of every stage. Over the past year, Awacak has developed **a new power of attorney** for families that specifies how data collected at their request might be used. These uses include transferring their search results, for conservation and archiving, to Professor Suzy Basile at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT). However, none of these uses is a prerequisite for conducting a search, and families are free to choose which method will be used.

Generally speaking, the children targeted by the searches currently underway with the Direction de soutien aux familles were born between 1924 and 2003 (Figure 5). For 20 % of the children, the exact date of birth is not yet known, representing an increase of eight percentage points from the last assessment. This is due in particular to the characteristics of the applications received at the end of the last tour of Abitibi-Témiscamingue in January 2024, for which searches have only just begun. The Act does not apply for two search requests sent to the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak as the births took place after 1992.

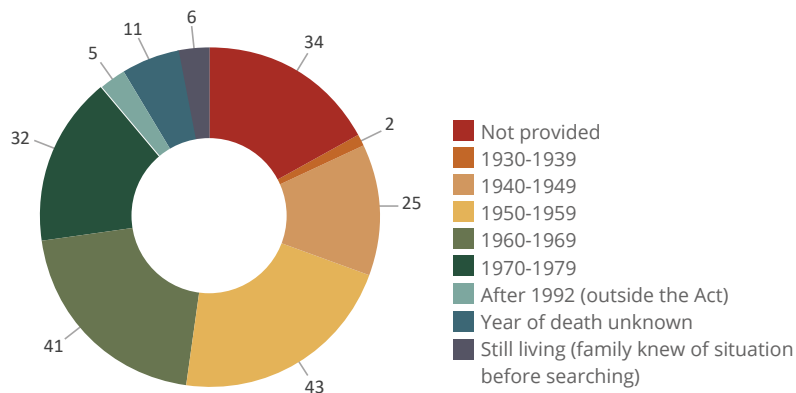
Figure 5 : Sought children's birth years



The figure below (Figure 6) illustrates the most common periods of death or disappearance. In particular, it illustrates the substantial decrease, over the searches carried out by the Direction de soutien aux familles in the last year, in the proportion of children whose exact date of death or disappearance is not known. Whereas the first annual report indicated 33 % and the second report less than 12 % of such cases, this date was unknown in 5.5 % of cases as of February 29, 2024, either because it was not provided by the family at the start of the search or because it was not discovered by the end of the search.

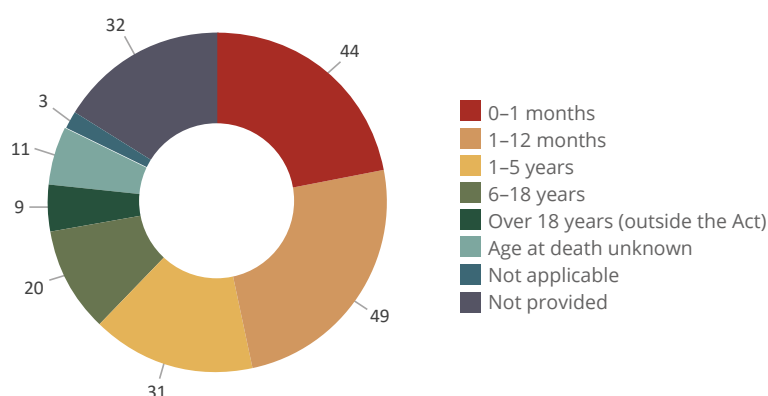
In 3 % of cases (6 children), the children are still alive, and their families knew this before starting the search with the Direction de soutien aux familles : 5 children had been adopted, and 1 child was living with his family at the time of the search. Finally, there was the issue of the two children born after December 31, 1992. To complete the picture, it should be noted that in 2.5 % of cases (5 children), the exceptions provided for in the Act cannot be applied to searches due to, in this case, the death or disappearance of the children concerned after December 31, 1992. The families of these children continue to receive help in their search from the Direction de soutien aux familles and all the tools at its disposal.

Figure 6 : Years of children's death or disappearance



The age at which children died or disappeared (Figure 7) continues to be varied. A majority of cases involved infants aged one year and under (nearly 47 % of the children being searched for, confirming the trend observed in the first two years), and over 47 % of these deaths or disappearances before the age of one took place in the first month of life. Among the 199 children investigated, nearly 15 % of deaths or disappearances occurred between the ages of 1 and 5, and 20 deaths (nearly 10 %) between the ages of 6 and 18.

Figure 7 : Ages at which children died or disappeared



Similarly to the dates of death or disappearance, the age of the children at the time of their death or disappearance was unknown (at the start of search) or is still unknown (at the end of search) in nearly 21.5 % of the cases. While this is a 9-point increase in this category compared to the last report, it still represents a substantial decrease (over 11 %) since the first application report, thanks to the Direction de soutien aux familles's and its partners' research. This increase since the previous report can be attributed to the new applications received at the end of the last tour of Abitibi-Témiscamingue in January 2024, for which searches have just begun.

To aid understanding, the Direction de soutien aux familles processed all the data to compile an initial analysis of the medical trajectories and causes of death of certain children.

An initial analysis of medical trajectories and causes of death

Each child being sought under the Act has their own story. An initial cross-sectional analysis of some of the data collected by the Direction de soutien aux familles since the Act came into force does, however, reveal a few lines of convergence.

At the time of writing, the Direction de soutien aux familles had sufficient information for 168 of the 199 children whose cases it was looking into, enabling it to paint a preliminary picture of their medical trajectories and causes

of death. The information available for the other children was still inadequate, either because the searches are ongoing or they were interrupted at the request of the families. The data presented in the following pages relate specifically to these 168 children and may therefore differ from the main trends presented in the previous section.

In order to analyze the medical trajectories and causes of death of the children concerned, the Direction de soutien aux familles reviewed the medical records and death notices⁶ obtained under the Act, establishing the following information for each child :

- Date of birth
- Hospital of birth
- Transfer to health or social services institution
- Reasons given for the transfers
- Date of death
- Hospital of death
- Causes of death, medical history and known health problems

With regard to causes of death and health problems, some medical records and death notices contain codes associated with the Standard Nomenclature of Diseases and Operation (Thompson and Hayden, 1961) or the International Statistical Classification of Diseases. For all files containing such codes, the Direction de soutien aux familles has identified their meaning based on the type of document and the year.

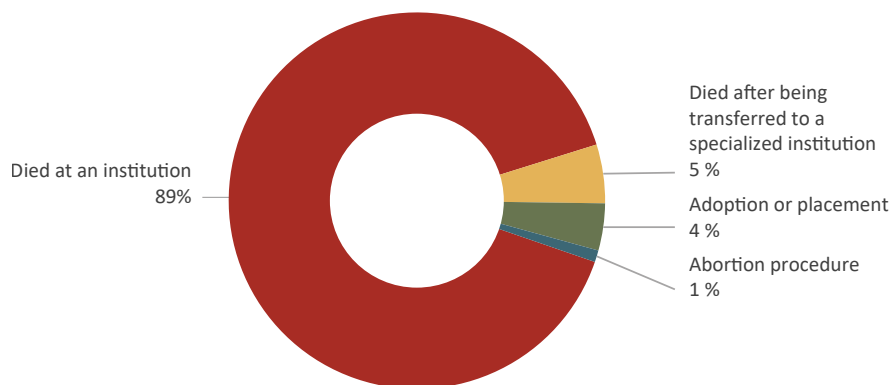
The Direction de soutien aux familles also found information in birth and death certificates provided by the Directeur de l'état civil, as well as in register excerpts (births, deaths or burials) obtained through the collaboration of dioceses, parishes and cemeteries.

As Figure 8 below shows, the Direction de soutien aux familles's research into these 168 children aims to shed light on four particular circumstances of death or disappearance. The vast majority (89 %) concern the death of a child in a healthcare facility. In 5 % of cases, families lost track of a child who was transferred to an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities⁷. Finally, a few families hope to find a child who was adopted or placed in foster care with or without their consent (4 %) or to clarify the context around what they have identified as an abortion procedure (1 %).

6. These bulletins are also known as death certificates or SP-3s.

7. These institutions have gone by various names over the years, including "asylums" and "psychiatric hospitals."

Figure 8 : Types of circumstances of death and disappearance of children being sought



The following sections provide further information on these four circumstances of death or disappearance. A word of caution, however : **Generalizations should not be drawn from these results.** First, they are only preliminary results and, second, they relate only to a fraction of the children searched for under the Act and a tiny proportion of the Indigenous children who died during the period in question. At this stage, the Direction de soutien aux familles's objective is to describe a situation ; **further research is imperative before any potential explanations can be offered.**

Furthermore, in respect of both its commitment to the applicants and the confidentiality principles of the *First Nations of Quebec and Labrador's Research Protocol* (FNQLHSSC, 2014), the Direction de soutien aux familles presents the results in a manner that preserves the anonymity of the families requesting the search. To do so, the Direction de soutien aux familles followed the guidelines of the First Nations Centre (2007 : 18), which states that "[r]esearch results will be presented in a grouped manner such that individuals cannot be identified." As noted by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement : Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC 2022 : 50), the protection of anonymity is essential to "ensure that [participants'] human rights, and the ethical principles set out in this Policy, are not compromised," i.e., to respect individuals and have concern for welfare and justice.

Children who died in healthcare institutions

General statistics

One hundred and fifty (150) children researched by the Direction de soutien aux familles died in a healthcare facility. These children were born between 1924 and 1977. Figure 9 shows that **the most frequent birth periods are 1950–1959 and 1960–1969**.

For 16 % of the children, the exact date of birth is not known ; the results from ongoing searches could change this over the coming months.

Figure 9 : Distribution of children who died in healthcare institutions, by year of birth

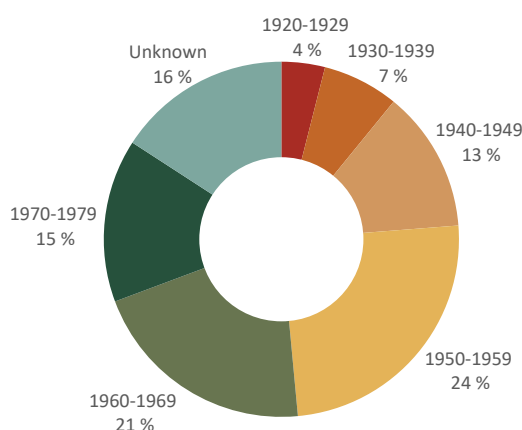
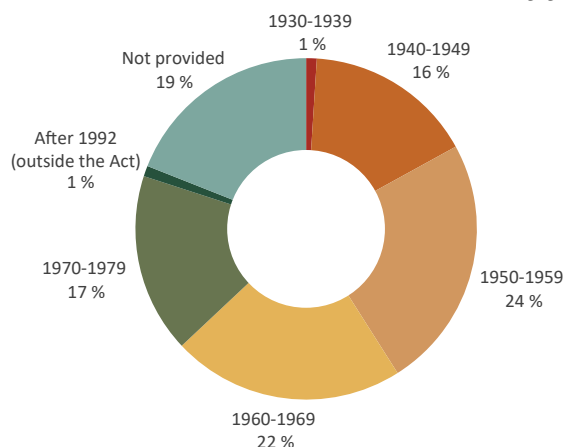


Figure 10 shows the time periods during which children in this study died in an institution. Since the start of the Direction de soutien aux familles's research, **most deaths occurred between 1950 and 1969, followed by 1970–1979 and 1940–1949**. In 19 % of cases, the date of death was left blank, as it was not known or is yet to be established. In 1 % of cases (two families), the exceptions provided for in the Act cannot be applied because the death of their children occurred after December 31, 1992.

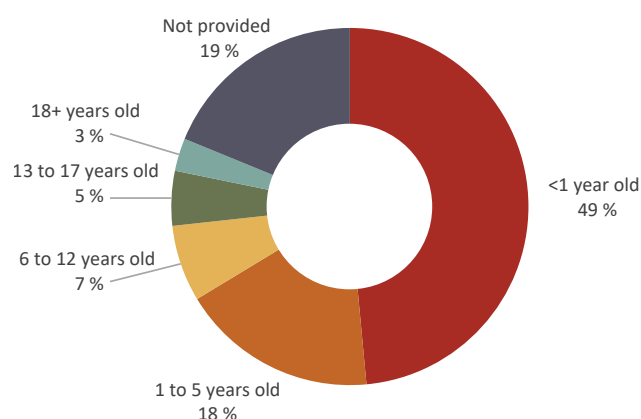
Figure 10 : Distribution of children who died in a healthcare institution, by year of death



Following the recommendations of a member of its network of health and social services experts, the Direction de soutien aux familles has adopted new age classes in this section of the report to group the deaths of the children in the searches under the Act. As shown in Figure 11, **almost half the children who died in an institution (49 %) lived less than one year**, which seems to be in line with the general trend observed for all children researched by the Direction de soutien aux familles as of February 29, 2024. Of these infants, 42 % are thought to have died within the first month of life, according to documentation found during the research.

The percentage of deaths by age group declines as children get older : 18 % of children died at pre-school age (1–5 years old), 7 % at school age (6–12) and 5 % in adolescence (13–17). In 3 % of cases, the children sought died in adulthood. Finally, as the date of death was not provided in 19 % of cases, it is currently impossible to determine the age at death for this group.

Figure 11 : Distribution of children who died in a healthcare institution, by age at death



Causes of death

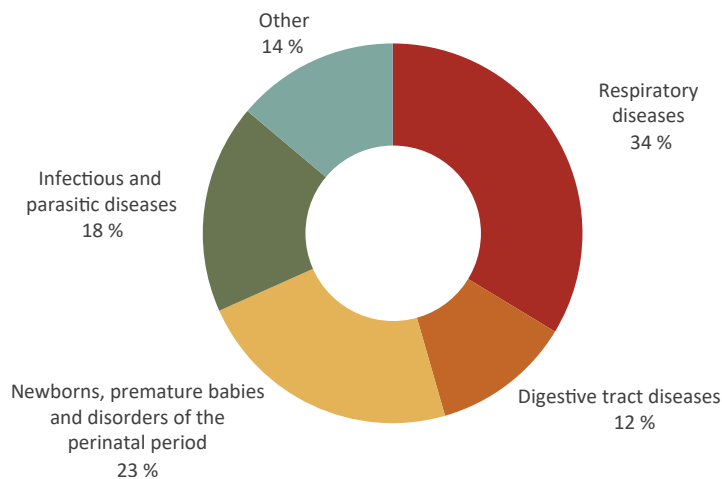
At the time of writing, the Direction de soutien aux familles has documented the cause of death of 102 of the 150 children who died in a healthcare institution (68 %). Adopting the recommendation of a member of its network of health and social services experts, the Direction de soutien aux familles has grouped causes of death based on major diagnostic categories (Collectif CoCoa, 2019). The resulting categorization was then validated by this member to ensure its scientific accuracy.

Figure 12 illustrates the causes of death of the children who died in healthcare institutions. Most of the causes fall in one of four major diagnostic categories, in the following order :

- 1- Respiratory diseases (34 %)
- 2- Newborns, premature babies and perinatal conditions (23 %)
- 3- Infectious and parasitic diseases (18 %)
- 4- Digestive tract disorders (12 %)

The “Other” category includes deaths caused by disorders of the nervous system, circulatory system, hepatobiliary system and pancreas, skin, subcutaneous tissue and breasts, kidney and urinary tract, blood and blood-forming organs, and from burns.

Figure 12 : Distribution of deaths by major diagnostic category



A preliminary analysis does not appear to show that deaths occurred in the context of an epidemic. As new information becomes available, more in-depth analyses could be carried out at a later date with the help of the network of health and social services experts.

Nevertheless, given the current knowledge, it is possible to provide a few details about children who died from diseases that fall into the four most frequent major diagnostic categories.

Respiratory-related deaths

Among the **35 children with respiratory diseases, the main cause of death was pneumonia (71 %)**. The other deaths were caused by bronchiolitis, pulmonary haemorrhage, respiratory failure and complications linked to whooping cough or measles. In more than 90 % of cases, children with respiratory diseases died before the age of 3.

Table 2 below shows the community of origin of these children and the time period during which they died.

Table 2 : Community of origin of children who died of respiratory tract disease and time period of death

Community of Origin	Time Period (Years) of Death	Percentage of Children
Pakua Shipi	1970-1974	29 %
Manawan	1956-1973	17 %
Opitciwan	1962-1968	11 %
Wemotaci	1951-1961	14 %
Lac-Simon	1972-1976	6 %
Pessamit	1970	6 %
Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	1950-1958	6 %
Mistissini	1966	3 %
Nutashkuan	1953	3 %
Pikogan	1948	3 %
Unamen Shipu	1960	3 %

Deaths among newborns, premature babies and children with perinatal conditions

Among the 23 newborns, premature babies and children with perinatal conditions, fetal death (stillborn babies) was the main cause of death (43 %). Among live-born babies, 60 % lived less than a week. The main reasons for their deaths were complications linked to meningocele, encephalopathy or prematurity, except in five cases (22 %) for which the cause was unknown or impossible to determine.

Table 3 shows the community of origin of newborns, premature babies and children with perinatal conditions and the time period during which they died.

Table 3 : Community of origin of children who died from a perinatal condition and time period of death

Community of Origin	Time Period (Years) of Death	Percentage of Children
Manawan	1948-1971	39 %
Opitciwan	1961-1973	30 %
Wemotaci	1954-1957	17 %
Winneway	1967	9 %
Pessamit	1972	4 %

Deaths from infectious and parasitic diseases

Among the 18 children who had infectious and parasitic diseases, the main cause of death was tuberculosis (61 %). Other causes of death include septicemia, meningitis and pyoderma. As shown in Figure 13, the age at which the children died from infectious and parasitic diseases varied. Most of them were less than one year old and a few had reached adulthood.

Figure 13 : Distribution of children who died in a healthcare institution from an infectious or parasitic disease, by age at death

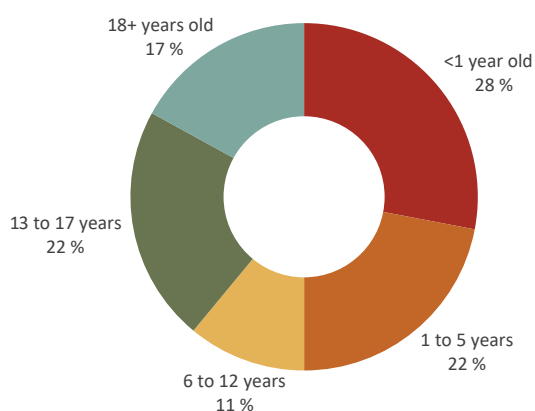


Table 4 shows the community of origin of the children with infectious or parasitic diseases and the time period during which they died.

Table 4 : Community of origin of children who died of an infectious or parasitic disease and time period of death

Community of origin	Time period (years) of death	Percentage of children concerned
Opitciwan	1944–1950	28 %
Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam	1948–1950	22 %
Manawan	1950–1956	17 %
Nutashkuan	1960–1961	11 %
Pikogan	1949–1950	11 %
Kawawachikamach	1952	6 %
Mistissini	1956	6 %

Deaths related to digestive tract diseases

Of the 12 children with digestive tract disorders, all died of gastroenteritis between the ages of 1 and 22 months.

Table 5 shows the community of origin of the children with digestive tract diseases and the time period during which they died.

Table 5 : Community of origin of children who died of digestive tract disease and time period of death

Community of Origin	Time Period (Years) of Death	Percentage of Children
Kawawachikamach	1957	17 %
Manawan	1945-1956	17 %
Wemotaci	1952-1970	17 %
Kitcisakik	1967	8 %
Matimekush	1958	8 %
Mistissini	1955	8 %
Nutashkuan	1964	8 %
Unamen Shipu	1958	8 %
Winneway	1952	8 %

Place of birth

The place of birth is currently known for 62 of the 150 children (41 %) who died in a healthcare facility. These children were born between 1928 and 1976. Table 6 shows the community of origin of these children, their place of birth and, where applicable, the hospital of birth. To ensure the families' anonymity, the number of children per trajectory is not indicated.

Table 6 : Community of origin and place of birth of children who died in institutions

Community of Origin	Place of Birth	Hospital
Kawawachikamach	Fort-Chimo ⁸	n/a
	Lac John	n/a
	Schefferville	n/a
Lac-Simon	Val-d'Or	Hôpital Saint-Sauveur
Manawan	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
	Joliette	Hôpital Saint-Eusèbe
	La Tuque	Hôpital Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Macamic	Sanatorium Saint-Jean
	Manawan	n/a
Matimekosh	Schefferville	n/a
Nutashkuan	Havre-Saint-Pierre	Hôpital Saint-Jean-Eudes
	Nutashkuan	n/a
Opitciwan	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
	La Tuque	Hôpital Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Opitciwan	n/a
	Senneterre	Hôpital de Senneterre
Pakua Shipi	Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon	Hôpital Notre-Dame de Lourdes
	Pakua Shipi	n/a
	Terre-Neuve	n/a
Pessamit	Baie-Comeau	Hôtel-Dieu de Hauterive
Pikogan	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	Sept-Îles	Hôpital Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérance
	"In the woods" ⁹	n/a
Unamen Shipu / La Romaine	Unamen Shipu / La Romaine	n/a
Wemotaci	La Tuque	Hôpital Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Wemotaci	n/a
Winneway	Ville-Marie	Hôpital Sainte-Famille

n/a : not applicable or information not available

As part of her study on access to midwifery services for Indigenous communities in Quebec, anthropologist Suzy Basile (2023) mapped in 2021–2022. Some of the communities the researcher visited are also where some of the families supported by the Direction de soutien aux familles live. Although conclusions cannot yet be drawn at this stage of the research, as the data is not exhaustive, a preliminary comparison between the trajectories established by the Direction de soutien aux familles (1928–1976 period) and by Suzy Basile (2021–2022 period) sheds light on different scenarios in terms of birthplaces.

8. Until 1979, the name "Fort-Chimo" was commonly used to designate the Northern Village of Kuujuaq.

9. Literal transcription of the information contained in the SP-3 death notice.

Table 7 shows that, over the years, pregnant women from certain communities went :

- mainly to the same place to give birth (case of Lac-Simon) ;
- to different places to give birth (as in Matimekush) ;
- to a larger and more diversified number of birthing sites (as in Wemotaci) ; and
- to a smaller number of birthing sites (as in Manawan).

Table 7 : Community of origin and place of birth of children who died in an institution

Community of Origin	Place of Birth (1928–1976 ¹⁰)	Place of Birth (2021–2022 ¹¹)
Lac-Simon	Val-d'Or	Val-d'Or
Manawan	Amos Joliette La Tuque Macamic Manawan	Joliette Shawinigan
Matimekosh	Schefferville	Sept-Îles Québec City
Nutashkuan	Havre-Saint-Pierre Nutashkuan	Québec City
Opitciwan	Amos La Tuque Opitciwan Senneterre	Roberval Québec City
Pessamit	Baie-Comeau	Baie-Comeau Jonquière
Pikogan	Amos	Amos Montréal
Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	Sept-Îles "In the woods" ¹²	Sept-Îles
Wemotaci	La Tuque Wemotaci	La Tuque Shawinigan Montréal Nicolet Trois-Rivières

More in-depth and contextualized research, particularly in relation to the changing configuration of Quebec's health and social services network over these different periods, may provide additional elements of understanding and analysis over the coming months.

10. Data from the Direction de soutien aux familles

11. Data from Suzy Basile (2023)

12. Literal transcription of the information contained in the SP-3 death notice.

Place of death

At the time of writing, the Direction de soutien aux familles had documented in its research the place of death of 111 of the 150 children who died in a healthcare institution (74 %). These children died between 1942 and 2007. Table 8 shows the community of origin of these children, the place of death and, where applicable, the hospital of death. To ensure the families' anonymity, the number of children per trajectory is not indicated.

Table 8 : Community of origin and place of death of children who died in an institution

Community of Origin	Place of Death	Hospital
Kawawachikamach	Québec City	Immigration Hospital
	Sept-Îles	Hôpital Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérance
Kitcisakik	Val-d'Or	Hôpital St-Sauveur
Lac-Simon	Montréal	Montreal Children's Hospital
	Val-d'Or	Hôpital St-Sauveur
Manawan	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
	Joliette	Hôpital Saint-Eusèbe
	La Tuque	Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Manawan	n/a
	Montréal	Hôpital Maisonneuve
	Montréal	Hôpital Notre-Dame-des-Anges
	Québec City	Hôtel-Dieu de Québec
Matimekosh	Sept-Îles	Hôpital Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérance
Mistissini	La Tuque	Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Roberval	Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Michel
Nutashkuan	Havre-Saint-Pierre	Hôpital Saint-Jean-Eudes
	Nutashkuan	n/a
	Sept-Îles	Hôpital Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérance
Opitciwan	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
	Caughnawaga	Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Joliette	Hôpital Saint-Eusèbe
	La Tuque	Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Opitciwan	n/a
	Québec City	Immigration Hospital
	Roberval	Sanatorium Saint-Michel
	Senneterre	n/a
Pakua Shipi	Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon	Hôpital Notre-Dame de Lourdes
	Pakua Shipi	n/a
	Newfoundland	n/a

Community of Origin	Place of Death	Hospital
Pessamit	Baie-Comeau	Hôtel-Dieu de Hauterive
	Pessamit	Pessamit
Pikogan	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
	La Tuque	Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Montréal	Montreal Children's Hospital
	Pikogan	n/a
Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	Adstock	n/a
	Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	n/a
	Havre-Saint-Pierre	Hôpital Saint-Jean-Eudes
	Québec City	Immigration Hospital
	Roberval	Sanatorium Saint-Michel
Unamen Shipu / La Romaine	Havre-Saint-Pierre	Hôpital Saint-Jean-Eudes
	Québec City	Centre hospitalier de l'Université Laval
Waskaganish	Amos	Hôtel-Dieu d'Amos
Wemotaci	La Tuque	Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph de La Tuque
	Roberval	Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Michel
Outside of Quebec	Montréal	Montreal Children's Hospital
Winneway	Ville-Marie	Hôpital Sainte-Famille
	Rouyn-Noranda	Hôpital d'Youville

n/a : not applicable or information not available

Some of the 111 children died in their home communities, while others were in healthcare facilities at varying distances from their families. Among the most remote cases were the Kawawachikamach children who died in Québec City, 950 km away, and the Pikogan children who died in Montréal, over 600 km away.

Table 8 also shows that some healthcare facilities admitted children from several communities. At Hôpital Saint-Jean-Eudes in Havre-Saint-Pierre, the Direction de soutien aux familles located the names of children from the Côte Nord communities of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, Unamen Shipu / La Romaine, and Nutashkuan. At the Centre Hospitalier Saint-Joseph in La Tuque and Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Michel in Roberval, the children came from communities within a wide radius of the facility. In large institutions, such as the Immigration Hospital in Québec City (a federal hospital) and the Montreal Children's Hospital, the communities of origin of the children found by the Direction de soutien aux familles vary widely and do not seem to correspond to a geographic logic of transfer.

To better understand the links between the communities of origin of missing or deceased Indigenous children and Quebec's health and social services institutions, the Direction de soutien aux familles will be documenting the history of the main hospitals covered by the Act in the coming months. The box below provides a preview of the type of information that will be collected.

IMMIGRATION HOSPITAL (Québec City)

The Government of Canada opened the Immigration Hospital on August 13, 1897, on the site of today's Christ-Roi nursing home (Lépine 2003). This facility was also known as the Hôpital Parc Savard because it was built on land owned by a man named Elzéar Savard (Société historique de Québec 2015 : online). Four chief medical officers succeeded : Dr. J.D. Pagé, Dr. Laurin, Dr. J.M. Couillard and Dr. E. Labrecque (Lépine 2003).

The Immigration Hospital was first intended for all immigrants and, from 1921 onwards, became focused on those who landed at Grosse-Île¹³ suffering from minor illnesses (Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises, n/a). It also regularly took in sick or injured sailors (Lépine, 2003).

The Hospital also treated people with contagious diseases. Soldiers were sent there during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–1920, and a wing for soldiers suffering from tuberculosis was set up in 1942 (Lépine, 2003). It was also occasionally used for quarantine (Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises, n/a).

First Nations patients (particularly the Huron-Wendat living in Loretteville) were admitted starting in 1946, and Inuit patients as of 1948 (Lépine, 2003). According to Lépine (2003), Inuit patients were sent to Hamilton, Ontario, starting in 1952 ; however, research by Donat Savoie indicates that they were hospitalized at the Immigration Hospital until at least 1956.

The Immigration Hospital ceased operations in 1958 or 1959, according to sources. Administrative records of children sought by the Direction de soutien aux familles show that a few Indigenous children were transferred from the Immigration Hospital to other institutions on December 29, 1959. Research into these transfers is still underway.

In 1960, the federal government ceded the Immigration Hospital to provincial authorities, who then granted responsibility for it to the Corporation de l'Hôpital Christ-Roi. A general hospital, the Hôpital Christ-Roi opened in 1963 (Société historique de Québec, 2015).



Immigration Hospital (Québec City, 1908). Source: John Woodruff, Library and Archives Canada, number 3724198, 1908

13. The main port of entry for immigrants to Canada, Grosse-Île served as a quarantine station for the Port of Québec from 1832 to 1937 (Parks Canada, 2023). Three hospitals were located there: in 1832, 1880–1881 and 1910 (Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises, n/a-b). When the quarantine station closed, the medical equipment was transferred to the Immigration Hospital (Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises, nd).

Place of burial

In several cases, the Direction de soutien aux familles was able to find information on the burial site of children who died in a healthcare facility. This information generally comes from the collaboration of dioceses, parishes and cemeteries, which is covered in greater detail in section II.9.

To date, the Direction de soutien aux familles has documented the burial sites of 98 of the 150 children who died in healthcare facilities (65 %) in the course of its research. These children died between 1942 and 1977. Table 9 shows the community of origin of these children and the place where they were buried. To ensure the families' anonymity, the number of children per trajectory is not indicated.

Table 9 : Community of origin and burial place of children who died in an institution

Community of Origin	Place of Burial
Kawawachikamach	Québec City
	Sept-Îles
Lac-Simon	« Abitibi »
	Lac-Simon
Manawan	Amos
	Joliette
	La Tuque
	Laval
	Manawan
	Québec City
	Saint-Hubert
Matimekush	Sept-Îles
Mistissini	La Tuque
	Mashteuiatsh
Nutashkuan	Nutashkuan
Opitciwan	Amos
	Joliette
	La Tuque
	Mashteuiatsh
	Opitciwan
	Québec City
Pakua Shipi	Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon
	Maliotenam
Pessamit	Pessamit
Pikogan	Amos
	La Tuque
	Pikogan
	Saint-Hubert

Community of Origin	Place of Burial
Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	Havre-Saint-Pierre
	Maliotenam
	Mashteuiatsh
	Québec City
Unamen Shipu / La Romaine	Havre-Saint-Pierre
	Québec City
	Unamen Shipu / La Romaine
Waskaganish	Amos
Wemotaci	La Tuque
	Mashteuiatsh
Winneway	Rouyn-Noranda
Outside of Quebec	Montréal

The cemetery in which a child is buried is less often known. The Direction de soutien aux familles has, however, been able to confirm several exact burial sites for some of the children concerned by this analysis :

- Children buried in Amos are in the cemetery in Amos.
- Children buried in Laval are in the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Cemetery.
- Children buried in Montréal are in the Hawthorn-Dale (Des Trembles) Cemetery.
- Children buried in Sept-Îles are in the Lauredale Protestant Cemetery.
- Children buried in Québec City are in the Saint-Charles Cemetery, Mount Hermon Cemetery or Notre-Dame-de-Belmont Cemetery.

At present, it is not possible to establish clear trajectories from the hospital of death to the cemetery of burial.

Given its current knowledge, the Direction de soutien aux familles is unable to establish the complete life trajectory, i.e., from birth to death and burial, of the majority of the 150 children who died in a healthcare facility. The information found through the research is often only partial, and even when extensive files are available, it is only rarely possible to confirm that aspects of the child's life aren't missing. This is why, for the time being, no conclusions can be drawn about links between places of birth, death and burial.

Finally, since the data presented do not concern all the children targeted by the Direction de soutien aux familles's research, no generalization of the results can be made at this stage of the work.

Children who died after being transferred to an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities

General statistics

Nine children died after being transferred to an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities. Given the small number of children concerned by this situation, the Direction de soutien aux familles will not present detailed statistics on the children’s years of birth, years of death or age at death, to avoid compromising the families’ anonymity.

Generally speaking, the children who died in an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities were born between 1937 and 1973, and more precisely for a third of them, during the 1960–1969 period. In two cases, the exact date of birth is not known. The children died between 1957 and 2010, and at a greater rate during the 1960s and 1970s. A third of children transferred to a specialized institution died in adulthood ; the remainder died between the ages of less than one and six.

All the families concerned were looking for children who went missing before December 31, 1992, during the period covered by the Act. The number of children who died after being transferred to an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities that the Direction de soutien aux familles is looking into is on the rise : there were three in 2021–2022, seven in 2022–2023 and nine in 2023–2024.

Health problems and causes of death

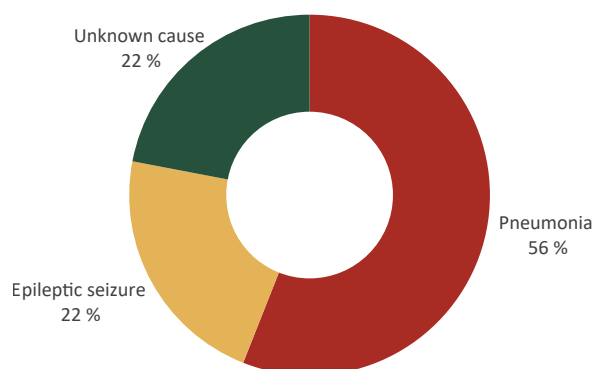
The children who lived in an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities were born with similar health problems (Table 10). Most were living with an intellectual disability (78 %) and some form of paralysis (67 %). Some suffered from epilepsy (43 %), had psychomotor problems (33 %) or were born with microcephaly (14 %).

Table 10 : Health problems of children who died in an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities

Health Problem	Percentage of Children
Intellectual disability	78 %
Cerebral palsy, quadriplegia or paraplegia	67 %
Epilepsy	43 %
Psychomotor problems	43 %
Microcephaly	14 %

Figure 14 shows the causes of death of children transferred to an institution specialized in long-term care and intellectual disabilities. According to the preliminary analysis conducted by a member of the network of health and social services experts, the deaths appear to be due to complications stemming from the children’s health problems. Acquiring new information could enable us to refine this analysis over the coming months.

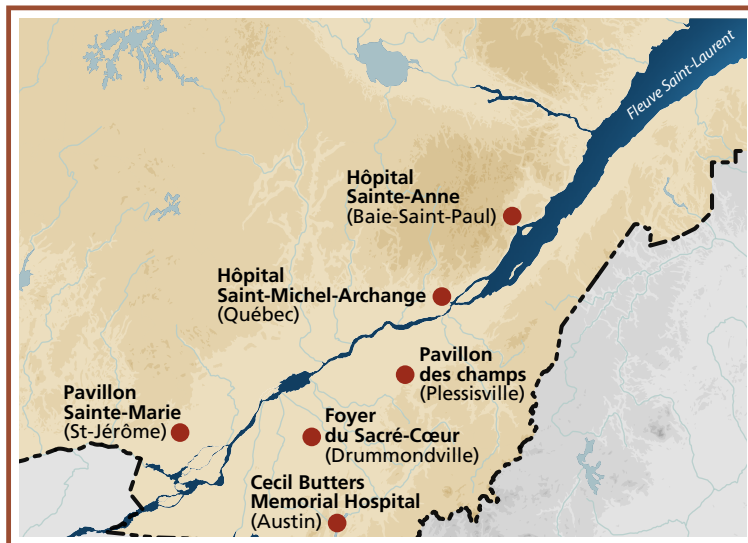
Figure 14 : Distribution of children who died in an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities, by cause of death



Institutions targeted by the research

The children who died in an institution specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities came from various Indigenous communities, including two from outside Quebec. Map 1 shows the institutions in which they were staying at the time of their death. To prevent children from being recognized, the Direction de soutien aux familles will not present the trajectory between the community of origin and the place of death.

Map 1 : Institutions specializing in long-term care and intellectual disabilities where children covered by the Act died



With the exception of children from outside Quebec, the children were transferred to these facilities from Hôtel-Dieu in Amos, the Immigration Hospital in Québec City or Hôpital Saint-Eusèbe in Joliette. The box below briefly describes the six specialized institutions for people with intellectual disabilities being researched under the Act.

Public and private institutions for long-term care and intellectual disabilities

Cecil Butters Memorial Hospital (1947–1990)

Located in Austin, in the Estrie region, Cecil Butters Memorial Hospital was founded in 1947 by nursing assistant Lily Esther Hudson and her husband, John William Butters. The institution was named in honour of their son Cecil, who died in a military training camp in 1943 (Hamel-Beaudoin, 2005). In 1955, this centre specialized in the care of children with intellectual disabilities took in over 120 children (Hamel-Beaudoin, 2005). It became the Dixville Home in 1958 and, following a number of sanitary issues identified as a result of epidemics, the hospital closed its doors in 1990 (Bilan Québec, 2023).



Cecil Butters Memorial Hospital

Source : Butters Foundation, 2024, History, online (<https://butterfoundation.ca/history/>), January 3, 2024.

Hôpital Sainte-Anne (1889–present)



Hospice Sainte-Anne (Baie-Saint-Paul).

Source : J.A. Kirouac, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, s. d., <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/5345>.

Hôpital Sainte-Anne was founded in Baie-Saint-Paul in 1889 by Abbot Ambroise Fafard. Also known as Hospice Sainte-Anne, it welcomed “the parish’s elderly and destitute residents,” [courtesy translation] (Perron and Gauthier, 2000 : 153) who were given farming, shoemaking or laundry tasks. Quickly taking on this special vocation, the institution was named Hôpital Sainte-Anne in 1936, and its patient numbers rose from 45 to 1,146 during the first half of the 20th century (Harvey, 2002 ; Perron and Gauthier, 2000). Until the 1950s, Hôpital Sainte-Anne provided care for people with intellectual disabilities ;

later, it began to offer services to the local population (Harvey, 2002). In 1973, the Petites Franciscaines de Marie congregation, who had run the establishment since 1891, handed over the rights (Harvey, 2002). Hôpital Sainte-Anne became Centre hospitalier de Charlevoix in 1973, then Hôpital de Baie-Saint-Paul in 2006 (Fondation Hôpital de Baie-Saint-Paul, 2016). In 2018, the building was demolished, and a new hospital was built 500 metres from the old one (Agence QMI, 2018).

Pavillon des champs (1978-1988)

This residential centre for people with intellectual disabilities appears to have opened in Plessisville in 1978. It was first managed by the Corporation Les deux rives¹⁴ of Cap-de-la-Madeleine, then by the Maison Ste-Clothilde¹⁵ of Sainte-Clothilde-de-Horton starting in 1984 (De Billy, 1984). In 1979, it cared for some 40 disabled children aged 5 to 14 (Forand, 1979). During a deinstitutionalization process that lasted from March to December 1987, the 20 or so young people who had been living at Pavillon des champs were relocated to group homes in Plessisville and Princeville (Fontaine, 1987 ; La Tribune, 1987). The establishment closed in 1988. In 1989, the Réseau communautaire de l'Érable acquired the Pavillon des champs (Corporation de développement communautaire de L'Érable, 2023) and then allegedly sold it to a funeral complex in 2021.



Pavillon des champs (Plessisville).

Source: Fontaine, Jean, 1987, "Les enfants auront tous quitté le Pavillon des champs le 18 décembre," La Feuille d'érable, December 15, 1987: A3.

Foyer Sacré-Cœur (?-1976)



Foyer du Sacré-Cœur (Drummondville).

Source: Giroux, Maurice, 1975, "Le Foyer du Sacré-Cœur est menacé de fermeture," Le Jour, February 21, 1975: 2.

Foyer Sacré-Cœur

was a private hospital in Drummondville. It served as a care home for people aged 3 to 22 with intellectual or physical disabilities (Gougeon, 1976). In 1973, its capacity of 160 patients was reduced to 80 by the Ministère des Affaires sociales, and "a policy of transferring the most treatable children to other care homes" [courtesy translation] was implemented (Giroux, 1975 : 2). The Foyer closed in 1976, and patients were transferred to more specialized centres in Montréal, Trois-Rivières and Baie-Saint-Paul (Gougeon, 1976). The building now houses office spaces.

14. In addition to the Pavillon des champs in Plessisville, this company also managed the Pavillon Dagenais in Cap-de-la-Madeleine and day-care centres in Nicolet, Shawinigan and Victoriaville.

15. It was also responsible for what was then identified as an "asylum" in Sainte-Clothilde-de-Horton. In 1987, Maison Ste-Clothilde became NOR-VAL (for NORmalisation and VALorisation), a "public corporation whose mission is to offer rehabilitation services to people with intellectual disabilities" [courtesy translation] (Fontaine, 1987: A3).

Hôpital Saint-Michel-Archange (1845–present)

Called the Asile provisoire de Beauport when it opened in 1845 in the former manor house of Lord Robert Giffard¹⁶ this psychiatric hospital moved to its present site in 1850. It changed names several times : Québec Lunatic Asylum in 1850, Asile des aliénés de Québec in 1865, Asile Saint-Michel-Archange in 1912, Hôpital Saint-Michel-Archange in 1923 and Centre Robert-Giffard in 1976. The Sœurs de la Charité de Québec religious congregation managed the institution from 1893 to 1996.

The hospital's capacity grew from 900 beds in 1912 to 1,650 beds in 1930, and to over 4,305 by the end of the 1940s, although only around 100 beds were reserved for children. In addition to welcoming patients with intellectual disabilities, the facility also started a nursing school to provide training in the care of these patients (Daigle, Guérard and Hamel, 2008).



Hôpital St-Michel-Archange

Source : Tremblay and Dion, n.d., Bibliothèque et Archives du Québec, online <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2247552>.

Pavillon Sainte-Marie (1974-2016)



Pavillon Sainte-Marie (Saint-Jérôme).

Source : Prévost, Henri, 2016, "Le futur CHSLD sur le site du Pavillon Ste-Marie," TopoLocal, December 24, 2016, online (<https://www.topolocal.ca/2016/11/04/futur-chsld-de-99-lits-site-pavillon-ste-marie/>), January 3, 2024.

Pavillon Sainte-Marie in Saint-Jérôme opened in 1974. It cared for people with severe intellectual disabilities, severe behavioural disorders or significant physical disabilities (Lacoursière, 2016). At the time of its closure in 2016, between 60 and 70 people were hospitalized there (Lacoursière, 2016 ; Radio-Canada, 2016). Groupe Champlain, owner of this private residence, relocated residents to long-term care hospitals (CHSLDs), nursing homes and group residences in the region, notably in Mont-Laurier (Lacoursière, 2016). Some went to Hôpital Rivière-Rouge (Lacoursière, 2016). The building was set to be demolished to construct a new CHSLD (Prévost, 2016).

16. Robert Giffard de Moncel (c. 1589–1668) was a surgeon. He was the first physician at Hôtel-Dieu de Québec (Provost 2016).

Abortion procedures

Two families contacted the Direction de soutien aux familles to shed light on the circumstances of what they identified as abortion procedures. These procedures were performed at Hôtel-Dieu in Amos and Hôpital Saint-Eusèbe in Joliette between 1959 and 1979.

The Direction de soutien aux familles' research on behalf of these two families is in its early stages.

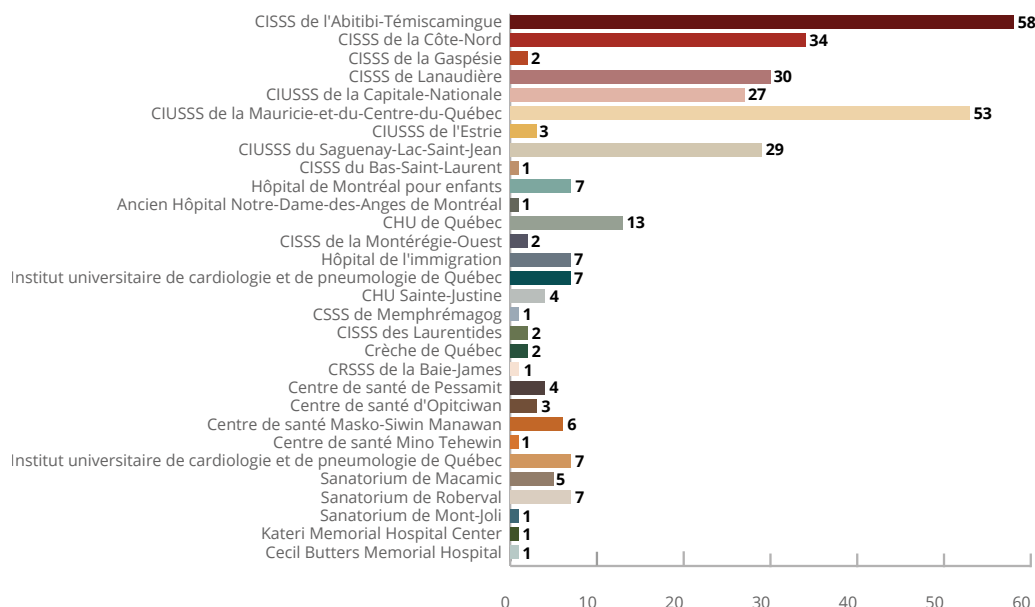
Working with health and social services institutions

After this first analytical study of the medical trajectories of some of the children being sought under the Act, it is clear that the collaboration of health and social services institutions, which are custodians of various kinds of archives, is essential and critically important.

Searching for user files

When sufficient information is available, most searches begin with requesting access to the children's medical records from the institutions concerned. As of February 29, 2024, 293 requests for access to user files have been sent to health and social service institutions, for all the active searches since 2021 (Figure 15).

Figure 15 : Establishments targeted by requests for access as part of Direction de soutien aux familles searches



To date, these requests have resulted in locating at least 66 medical documents for the children involved in the searches. Medical information to support the death or disappearance of a very young child is sometimes filed in the parents' (particularly the mother's) medical files.

Several requests are still being processed at the time of writing. In the case of requests for access that received a negative response, the explanations provided by institutions over the past year are consistent with those of previous years :

- In accordance with the Act Respecting Health Services and Social Services, the Archives Act and the Organization and Management of Institutions Regulation, medical document archiving and retention schedules allow certain documents to be destroyed after specific amounts of time after the death of a user. These schedules must be accepted by the BANQ.
- Certain archives have been transferred to other organizations (sometimes to be identified), after their closure.
- Some archives were accidentally destroyed by fires, floods, etc., over the past 50 years.
- Further, some institutions do not know much about old archives that have not yet been digitized or catalogued.

Hospitals that were under federal responsibility during the period of hospitalization of certain children present particular challenges for Direction de soutien aux familles research. The medical archives of these hospitals, often closed, were not always transferred to provincial institutions and, if they still exist, some are not within the health and social services network. This was the situation of the medical archives from the Immigration Hospital in Québec City, which the previous report noted were still missing after several months of searching by the Direction de soutien aux familles team, federal government officials and Donat Savoie, commissioned by Makivik. In recent months, however, the perseverance of our research has paid off, as, following a request to Library and Archives Canada, the Direction de soutien aux familles has received almost 1,500 pages of archives concerning this former hospital. Although they do not include medical records, these administrative documents list the names of several children from Direction de soutien aux familles searches, enabling the families concerned to add a few bits of information to their knowledge of the circumstances of their child's death or disappearance.

In addition to medical records, 85 death records (SP-3 forms) have been made available to families as a result of research carried out with the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux since the Act came into force. Access to these documents within the strict framework of implementation of the Act is extremely important for families, as they are sometimes the only documents to include a reference to the medical cause of death or to a burial site.

Death Records

Death records, also known as "SP-3 forms," are provided by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS). Around 1975, the MSSS began referring to the forms as "records" and assigning them the acronym "SP." The numerical order assigned to the records corresponds to the order in which events tend to occur in the course of a lifetime (with the exception of stillbirths, for which the form was added later) : births (SP-1), marriages (SP-2), deaths (SP-3) and stillbirths (SP-4).

Although the Direction de soutien aux familles and its partners make every effort to find out as much as possible, there are rare cases where there is little or no information, which prevents us from clearly answering families' questions. This possibility is discussed with families early on in the process, to transparently establish the various possible outcomes and assure them that all possible steps will be taken, beyond the results of the search. It should also be noted that obtaining a child's medical file is often only the beginning of a series of other research paths aimed, for example, at understanding the circumstances of a death or finding a burial site, details which the family does not know in most cases. What's more, the lack of medical records does not signal an end to the search. Instead, it activates other avenues, as the search turns to religious archivists, parishes, presbyteries, social services institutions or even certain witnesses.

Searches of institutions' administrative archives

The past year has seen an increase in the number of requests made to institutions' administrative archives. While the previous report mentioned three such requests, four additional requests were made between March 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024. Most of these requests have been forwarded to the families; others were still being processed by the institutions concerned, at the time of writing.

These requests aim to document certain practices that were in force, during the periods concerned by the research process, relating to the transfer and medical care of children, as well as the death of young children in hospital. They also aim to identify existing information on certain diagnoses and pandemics. In a few cases, the results have shed light on how certain hospitals operated in terms of caring for children.

Ongoing collaboration

Over the past year, we have strengthened our collaboration with institutions regarding the implementation of the Act. Teams have made themselves regularly available to answer questions from the Direction de soutien aux familles, and response times to requests for access to user files have decreased.

During the period under review, the promising practices put in place by certain institutions were continued. These include, for example, the integration of liaison officers for Indigenous users to follow up on requests made under the Act, and the adaptation of responses for families searching for a missing or deceased child, detailing all the search steps taken. More recently, in January 2024, the team at the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue has mobilized to find the location of a birthing room in which one of the children being sought was born and to organize a visit at the family's request. This visit could take place over the next few months, at the family's convenience.

Testimonial by the CIUSSS de la Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec about collaborating to implement the Act

The Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died After Being Admitted to an Institution has enabled us to better support Indigenous families in our area for several years now.

For many families, finding this information is an integral part of their healing process. We are privileged to be able to help them.

In fact, our organization has established a very good working relationship with the Direction de soutien aux familles. This special relationship of trust and the deeply human approach to this process are key elements for our teams.

Nathalie Laperrière and Jessica Welsh
Medical archivists
CIUSSS de la Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec

On October 17, 2023, some 121 members of the health and social services network, mainly medical archivists, information access officers and liaison officers for Indigenous users, took part in the annual follow-up meeting organized by the Direction de soutien aux familles. On this occasion, the Minister praised the efforts of the teams at the facilities, and Awacak's director general presented to the participants the organization's mission and the supported families' needs.

The cementing of this essential collaboration—a guarantee of in-depth research—continues to provide the Direction de soutien aux familles and the families it supports with a better understanding of the medical archives and the changes in the way hospital institutions functioned during the 20th century. It is an essential step in repairing the sometimes severely damaged bond of trust between families and the health and social services network. At a later stage in the search, it also enables other partners, members of the network of health and social services experts, to contribute to families' quest for truth.

Deploying the network of health and social services experts

To ensure that families have the fullest and clearest possible understanding of the medical documents found in the course of their search, the Direction de soutien aux familles set up a network of health and social services experts a few months after the Act came into force. Whether they are suggested by the Special Advisor, contacted by the Direction de soutien aux familles or referred by other colleagues, these experts have a desire to contribute to the search for children who have disappeared or died in institutions. Some of them have helped several families over the past year.

A few numbers on the evolution of the network of health and social services experts

There are currently 20 experts in the health and social services network. The team includes eight family doctors, five pediatricians, an obstetrician, a psychiatrist, an infectious diseases microbiologist, a midwife and three nurses. Six of these experts are First Nations members. At the request of families, and according to their availability and specialties, the members of this network help interpret the medical information and documents obtained in the research process.

Three meetings of the network of health and social services experts were held over the past year. These meetings included the expert members, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak. The first meeting took place on June 6, 2023. It provided an opportunity to review the Collège des médecins du Québec's support for the work accomplished under the Act and to look at the expansion of the network of health and social services experts to meet the families' needs.

The second meeting was held on November 29, 2023. On this occasion, the members expressed a common desire to document the context and medical practices of the periods of disappearance or death of the children concerned by the Direction de soutien aux familles's searches.

A third meeting took place on February 26, 2024, with psychologist Dr. Judith Morency. This meeting was dedicated to Dr. Morency's presentation on offering support for families experiencing traumatic bereavement.

Testimonial of Dr. Steve Ballou, Family Doctor

I decided to take part in this project because of my professional and personal experience with Indigenous people.

It seems to me that our society has committed many wrongs against Indigenous people, and now we have the opportunity to answer their questions and provide explanations, wherever possible.

Above all, I hope it will improve communication.

Dr Steve Ballou

Family doctor, Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre
Expert member of the health and social services care network

Meetings with families : Sensitivity to the timeframe

Between March 1, 2023, and February 28, 2024, 10 medical document interpretation meetings were held between physicians and families. One meeting was held in person, four by videoconference and five in a hybrid format. In this last one, an Awacak member was present with the family, while the partner physician and the Direction de soutien aux familles attended by videoconference. These meetings involved six partner doctors.

Without speaking in place of the families in their assessment of the meetings, follow-up discussions with the Direction de soutien aux familles show that, as in the previous year, many families considered them to be an essential step in their journey. Over the past year, after receiving medical documents, families have almost systematically asked to meet with a doctor.

Over the past few months, several families have also asked that search follow-up meetings and meetings with partner physicians be held separately. This would allow families to hold shorter meetings and to take some time to absorb the information at their own pace before meeting with an expert. In some cases, the Direction de soutien aux familles also organized additional follow-up meetings between families and partner doctors when new questions arose or when the information required further explanation.

The heavy emotional nature of these meetings call for adapting the time frame to each family, as well as for each stage of their journey. The time frame is central to the family's journey, and the expert members of the health and social services network are attentive to this.

Testimonial of Dr. Claude Cyr, Pediatrician

As a physician who works with Indigenous families, I am humbled to share my testimony. The names of Rosie, Caroline, Kathleen, Gerry, Robert, Carmen, Monique, Violetta, Sylvia, Alice, Juliette, Tony, Frank, François, Joseph, Jacqueline and so many other Indigenous children who died without their parents in our institutions resound as a call to collective action for reparation and support for the families affected.

Collaboration between medical experts, health institutions, the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak and Indigenous communities is crucial to honouring the memory of these precious children. We are working together to provide respectful, culturally appropriate and sensitive care to bereaved families, offering holistic support in their grieving process.

Documenting these stories is an essential step toward collective healing and recognition of past suffering. By giving voice to these names and their stories, we're working toward a future where the health and well-being of Indigenous children is a top priority.

Our shared commitment to preserving the memory of Rosie, Caroline, Kathleen, Gerry, Robert, Carmen, Monique, Violetta, Sylvia, Alice, Juliette, Tony, Frank, François, Joseph, Jacqueline and all the other Indigenous children guides us along the path of justice, reconciliation and the building of a society where every child is protected, cherished and honoured, in keeping with their culture and ancestral values.

I'm honoured to contribute to this collective effort, and I'm convinced that our ongoing work will help bring peace and healing to these families and their communities.

With respect and dedication,

Claude Cyr, MD, MSc, FRCPC

Full Professor, Université de Sherbrooke

Pediatrician, CHUS

Expert member of the health and social services network

Current developments

Following several discussions with the MSSS about ensuring the project's future, the Direction de soutien aux familles has developed a vision for financing the network of health and social services experts, whereby the SRPNI would assume the costs of expert members' contribution to supporting families.

During fall 2023, a draft contract was submitted for discussion to each member of the health and social services network, to determine the best way to define the experts' role with families. At the time of finalizing this report, discussions were underway between the Direction de soutien aux familles and each of the partner physicians concerning these contracts.

Lastly, several members of the health and social services network assist the Direction de soutien aux familles in conducting analyses to better understand and document the medical realities and practices of the time periods during which the children died or disappeared. These contributions are essential in answering many of the questions families have in their search for the truth.

Interdepartmental work: A network of government partners in support of the families

Since the Act came into force, the Direction de soutien aux familles's collaboration with governmental departments and agencies has been fundamental in retrieving information for the families involved. It has two main components :

- **1 : An interdepartmental committee to :** to :
 - suivre l'application de la *Loi* en recevant, à l'occasion de chacune des rencontres du comité interministériel, un rapport des travaux effectués par la Direction de soutien aux familles ;
 - assurer, par la participation active de chacun des ministères et organismes membres, la cohérence et la pertinence de l'action gouvernementale auprès des familles concernées par la *Loi* ;
 - collaborer à des travaux précis visant l'application de la *Loi* à son plein potentiel pour les familles, en développant notamment des pratiques pertinentes ou en échangeant les informations nécessaires à leur développement ;
 - contribuer à l'élaboration du rapport annuel de la *Loi*.
- **2 : Bilateral work** with targeted ministries and agencies, according to specific needs and projects arising from ongoing searches.

The Interdepartmental Committee

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act met four times between March 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024 : on May 16, September 19, December 12 and February 6.

Its mandate is presented in Appendix 2. To ensure the independence required to carry out their mission, certain organizations are not members of the interdepartmental committee, even though they are central to the implementation of the Act. These are identified in the second section of Table 11 below ("Other Departments and Agencies" section). The Direction de soutien aux familles works with these organizations on a bilateral basis, depending on the projects in development.

Table 11 : Contributions and work in progress, by department and agency

1- Members of the Interdepartmental Committee		
Governmental Departments or Agencies	Type of Collaboration	Specific Work Completed or In Progress
Ministère du Conseil exécutif Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit Direction de soutien aux familles Direction des relations avec les Autochtones	SRPNI's Direction de soutien aux familles coordinates the Interdepartmental Committee. The Committee collaborates with SRPNI's Direction des relations avec les Autochtones on certain residential school-related searches.	The Direction de soutien aux familles sits on the Comité intergouvernemental de suivi sur les pensionnats and participates in its regular meetings. Ongoing meetings have been held on an as-needed basis since November 2021.

Governmental Departments or Agencies	Type of Collaboration	Specific Work Completed or In Progress
Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux Direction des affaires autochtones Access to Information and Privacy Directorate	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Implementation of the process for accessing death records. Targeted collaboration for specific needs (documentation, access to documents, youth protection, etc.).
Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec Direction de la gestion des programmes et du soutien à la prestation de service Direction des affaires juridiques	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Targeted search collaboration.
Ministère de la Justice Direction des affaires autochtones Other departments as required	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Collaboration on targeted search projects.
Bureau du coroner	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Collaboration on follow-up research to support families in their quest for information about deceased or missing Indigenous children. Collaboration on work related to exhumation and identification of deceased persons. Collaboration on targeted research.
Ministère de la Sécurité publique Direction de la coordination ministérielle et des affaires autochtones	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Collaboration on exhumation work. Collaboration on targeted research projects.
Directeur de l'état civil du ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Application of the process for handling requests for civil status attestations and documents under the information access agreement (Entente de communication de renseignements par attestations).
Ministère de la Culture et des Communications Direction des politiques, de la prospective et de la main-d'œuvre Direction des opérations en patrimoine	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Collaboration on exhumation work. Work related to financial support for commemorative activities.

Governmental Departments or Agencies	Type of Collaboration	Specific Work Completed or In Progress
Ministère de l'Éducation Direction des relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuits et nordicité	Monitoring the implementation of the Act.	
Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur Direction des relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit	Monitoring the implementation of the Act.	

2- Other Departments and Agencies

Ministères ou organismes gouvernementaux	Type de collaboration	Travaux précis réalisés ou en cours de réalisation
Commission d'accès à l'information		Appeal processing within the Commission's jurisdictional activities. Mediation meetings between families and public bodies in the context of appeals, when requested by the parties.
Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale	Collaboration in developing tools and processes and in search follow-ups.	Collaboration on work related to exhumation and identification of deceased persons. Collaboration on targeted searches.
Sûreté du Québec Division des relations avec les communautés autochtones Service de l'accès et de la protection de l'information		Implementation of access to information processes consistent with the spirit of the Act. Collaboration on specific requests.
Ministère du Conseil exécutif Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques, à l'accès à l'information et à la laïcité		Support and consulting services to the Direction de soutien aux familles on access to information processes, privacy and data archiving.
Ministère du Conseil exécutif Secrétariat à la communication gouvernementale Direction des communications	Collaboration in developing and distributing communication tools.	Support and consulting services to the Direction de soutien aux familles on implementing the communication plan related to the implementation of the Act, including the production, translation and distribution of tools.

3- Special Collaborators		
Ministères ou organismes gouvernementaux	Type de collaboration	Travaux précis réalisés ou en cours de réalisation
Protecteur du citoyen		Collaboration on specific requests.
Ministère du Conseil exécutif Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit Bureau du secrétaire général associé		To preserve the independence of the complaints process, SRPNI has assigned this responsibility to a person in the organization with no connection to the Direction de soutien aux familles.

Bilateral work with government departments and agencies

Death record searches

The Direction de soutien aux familles's bilateral collaborations with departments and certain public agencies are developed to meet ongoing or more occasional needs for information in the implementation of the Act.

The Entente de communication de renseignements par attestations, signed in February 2023 between the Directeur de l'état civil (DEC) and the SRPNI, is a concrete example of the collaboration between the Direction de soutien aux familles and the DEC that has been in place since the Act came into force. Through this collaboration, 168 requests for death certificates have been made to the DEC since September 2021. The DEC has either completed all the searches requesting death certificates or they are still in progress. As of February 29, 2024, 116 death certificates had been issued to families. Excluding the eight requests in progress at the time of writing, this represents a positive response rate of over 68 %, confirming the trend observed in the 2022–2023 report, despite a slight drop of 4 % compared with the data presented in the last report.

Thanks to the collaboration of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, as of February 29, 2024, the Direction de soutien aux familles had delivered 85 death records (SP-3 forms) to the families it works with, out of the 140 requests made in the course of its searches since the Act came into force, representing a positive response rate of almost 61 % for these documents. This rate also represents a slight drop (four percentage points) compared to the previous year's data. This decrease may be due to two factors : such documents could not be found in certain years or in certain circumstances, or certain information provided at the start of a search was imprecise. Sometimes, as the search progresses, such information may become clearer, which would lead to new requests.

In many cases over the past year, the unsuccessful search for death certificates (DEC) and death records (MSSS) has instigated the Direction de soutien aux familles to pursue its research with other institutions as well as with families. The new information obtained during such research was either more precise or different from that initially available, which led to new requests to the DEC and the MSSS, sometimes with positive responses after these new efforts.

When the answers were negative or when no other relevant information was found, the Direction de soutien aux familles continued to document, through discussions with experts in the field, the practices in use between the 1930s and 1980s to record deaths of newborns or young children.

In other cases, the absence of these documents has sometimes led to research into the possible adoption of the children concerned, a subject that will be discussed later in this report.

Projects in progress

In addition to the collaborative partnerships established and consolidated since the Act came into force, major projects led by the Direction de soutien aux familles and a number of government departments and agencies have continued, some of them coming to fruition over the past year.

Regular discussions with the **Ministère de la Culture et des Communications** (MCC) continued and diversified over the past year. The MCC was included in a discussion forum with the federal government to establish a consultation to gain a cross-sectional view of funding opportunities for commemoration activities related to residential schools and, more broadly, to missing or deceased Indigenous children. There were also discussions about possible excavations on the site of an old Innu cemetery in Natashquan, and about exhumations.

A major achievement of the past year was the collaboration with the **Bureau du coroner**, the **Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale** (LSJML) and the **Ministère de la Sécurité publique**, which led to the first two exhumations, in late summer 2023, related to searches conducted under the Act. These exhumations took place after several months of preparation, consultation, tracing and communication with the families concerned, as well as the creation of new partnerships in this field of expertise. While the exhumations do not signal the end of the search or of the family's journey, they have led to the establishment of solid partnerships and, more than anything, to certain advances for the families.

Work on exhumation and identification : Key advances for families

Families' exhumation and identification needs

The families' needs for exhumation and identification were expressed soon after the Act came into force. From the very first meetings, several families expressed their wish to be able to exhume the bodies of their children, most of whom had not been buried in their community cemetery, so that they could be buried close to their people.

Some families have also expressed doubt about the identity of children for whom records or burial information have been found by the Direction de soutien aux familles. According to the family histories collected, few parents were able to attend the burial of their children and even fewer family members saw the deceased before they were buried. Many families were never informed of their child's death, which heightens the sense of doubt and the need for concrete proof of death.

Over the past two years, the Direction de soutien aux familles has identified two recurring exhumation needs by the families it assists : exhumation to **identify** children and exhumation to **repatriate** children. The two needs are often expressed in related ways by the families.

Awacac offers member families a legal support service that enables them, in collaboration with the Direction de soutien aux familles, to prepare exhumation authorization requests addressed to the Superior Court of Québec, to represent families before the Court, to follow the exhumation process with them and to cover the legal fees.

In addition to section 18 of the Act, which states that "the Minister may assist and guide the families of missing or deceased Indigenous children in completing the formalities surrounding an implementation to the Superior Court for an order of disinterment," the Direction de soutien aux familles has, over the past year, ensured that the budgets required are available to fund the exhumations and reburials of children in the implementation of the Act.

On February 29, 2024, **two exhumations were carried out** as a result of searches completed under the Act. These two exhumations were followed by steps to identify the exhumed deceased, as provided for in the agreement between the coroner's office and SRPNI concerning the identification of exhumed Indigenous children.

The agreement concerning the identification of exhumed Indigenous children

To address families' needs regarding exhumation and identification, the Bureau du coroner and the Direction de soutien aux familles signed the **Entente concernant l'identification d'enfants autochtones exhumés** agreement in October 2023. It is designed to meet the tangible needs of families requesting the exhumation of a child. More specifically, it establishes the respective commitments of the chief coroner and the Minister for the purposes of confirming the identity of exhumed persons in the context of searches under the Act.

Under this agreement, a family may ask the chief coroner to determine the identity of the exhumed body. As with every other stage of the family's search, the Direction de soutien aux familles can assist them with this request.

If an identification is possible, the chief coroner will transport the human remains to the Montréal morgue for identification, using the services of the LSJML and authorized funeral companies.

The costs of specialized resources (forensic anthropologist, assistant forensic anthropologist, forensic biologist and operations coordinator) and scientific expertise required for identification are borne by the MPS. Other financial needs relating to exhumations and reburials of children (other specialized human resources, funeral companies chosen by the families, exhumation and burial equipment, etc.) are covered by the SRPNI and have been confirmed in the Government of Québec's 2023 budget.

It should be noted that, in response to family requests, **DNA samples** from willing family members continued to be taken over the past year, in the presence of the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak. These DNA samples, the first of which were taken in September 2022, will be used in cases of exhumation to help identify the children if possible. The samples are sent directly to the LSJML, which stores them for possible exhumations. Some families also request that duplicate samples be kept by Awacak.

Testimonial from Coroner Andrée Kronstrom on the first exhumations

I felt deeply touched to be involved in the exhumation and process of identifying Indigenous children who died away from their families and who were often buried without their loved ones having any certainty of their identity.

The Bureau du coroner is proud to have responded to the call from the SRPNI's Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles). Accompanied by the Bureau du coroner's main partner, the Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale (LSJML), I went to meet with the families during the exhumations. We supported them through the process, answering their questions but, most importantly, providing them with the truth and identifying their loved one. We will continue to actively participate in this quest for truth, made possible by the admirable work of the Direction de soutien aux familles.

M^e Andrée Kronstrom
Coroner
Bureau du coroner

The first two exhumations



Entrance to the Pessamit Cemetery (Côte-Nord). In the background, the tent set up for family gatherings during the first two exhumations carried out under the Act (August-September 2023).

The intensive collaboration over the past two years between the Direction de soutien aux familles, the Bureau du coroner and the LSJML has resulted in the first two child exhumations, carried out between August 30 and September 1, 2023. These exhumations were followed in the subsequent weeks by identification procedures using scientific methods.

The preparation for these exhumations involved meeting with the families prior to, during the three days of and after the exhumation, during the expert identification phase. Meetings have been held regularly with both families to continue the identification process and, when desired and feasible, prepare the children's reburial.

In total, the Direction de soutien aux familles coordinated

and organized eight meetings with the families held between May 26 and November 2, 2023. Awacak and the lawyer working with Awacak for the families attended each of these meetings. Additionally, three days were spent with the families during the exhumations.

In May 2023, a detailed briefing was held between the two families and the experts tasked with the exhumation. Conducted by the Bureau du coroner and the LSJML, the briefing also included the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak and the families' lawyer. One month later, a technical media briefing was held on June 28, 2023, and all partners were present. Its primary objective was to ask journalists to respect the families' privacy and wishes during the upcoming exhumations.

During the exhumations, several other expert partners joined the team. Among them was Jardins commémoratifs Saint-Germain, a funeral home the families chose for its expertise in exhumation. Two archaeology researchers from the Université de Montréal's Department of Anthropology, specializing in ground-penetrating radar surveys, were also present, and their surveys prior to the exhumations helped pinpoint the excavation sites. Finally, the community of Pessamit played an important role in facilitating the exhumations. The local band council, the Conseil des Innus de Pessamit, made its infrastructure, facilities and community development teams available to help set up equipment at the cemetery site. Pessamit public safety teams also monitored the site throughout the operations. In all, between 15 and 20 people were present alongside the two families during the week of the exhumations, depending on the stage of implementation.



Site set-up for the first two exhumations at the Pessamit Cemetery (Côte-Nord, August-September 2023).

During the exhumations, family members were free to move back and forth between the rest tent, set up on the cemetery site to ensure their privacy, and the tent under which the two exhumations were conducted. Each stage of the operation included breaks so the experts could explain elements to the families, and sometimes prayers and moments of reflection for everyone at the site.

Testimonial from Suzanne Marchand, Executive Director of the Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale, on the first exhumations

The Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale is pleased to have been able to lend its team's expertise, at this significant time for the families. We are grateful for the trust they placed in us all through our meetings and the exhumations.

This profound human experience that we shared will forever remain engraved in our memories and in our hearts.

Suzanne Marchand

Chief Executive Director

Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale

Throughout these challenging and emotionally charged days for both the families and the partners, Awacac provided the families with emotional, spiritual and physical support.

At the end of the three days, the two exhumed children were escorted by a procession of families and partners to the outskirts of Pessamit. They were then transported to Montréal for expert identification.

On September 26, 2024, one of the two families received confirmation of their child's identity. Steps are underway to facilitate, at the family's pace, the reburial of this child. Identification analyses for the second family are still ongoing.

Testimonial from a family whose child was exhumed

We'd like to thank the Direction de soutien de familles, Awacac and its lawyers, and everyone else who worked with us to make our brother's exhumation possible: the professionals at the Laboratoire, the Bureau du coroner and the Jardins commémoratifs St-Germain, as well as the georadar experts and the Pessamit public safety teams who were on-site. Thank you also to Minister Ian Lafrenière, who made the Act happen.

Thank you for all the support we received during the search and the exhumation. It was truly liberating.

Thanks to you, we can finally set our minds free.

Family whose child was exhumed in summer 2023

For everyone present, the emotions during these days were indescribable. Rather than trying to put them to words that would undoubtedly fall short, the Direction de soutien aux familles decided to give some of the experts present during this meaningful moment the opportunity to share their experience in their own words.

Testimonial from archaeologist Christian Gates-St-Pierre on the first exhumations

I was invited to join the effort as an archaeologist to locate and exhume the two young children from the community of Pessamit. I was very struck by the team's professionalism. They always placing the needs and wishes of the families first. Throughout, there was an unwavering commitment to transparency, listening, respect and genuine humanity.

But what touched me the most was the families' show of trust and their expression of gratitude. Assisting them in reclaiming their beloved lost children and enabling them to find solace in their grief was undoubtedly the most poignant and fulfilling human experience of my entire career.

That experience will stay with me forever.

Christian Gates St-Pierre
Associate Professor
Université de Montréal

Current requests

As of February 29, 2024, **four new families have initiated proceedings** with Awacak's lawyers and the Direction de soutien aux familles to request the exhumation of their child.

Pending any decisions from the Court, three of these families would like to proceed with identifying their exhumed children. All four families wish to take the children back to their home communities and have them reburied among their families.

Over the past year, several other families assisted by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak have also expressed their intention to initiate proceedings if the conditions at the end of the investigations so permit.

It is important to note that the decision to proceed with a request for the exhumation of a child under the Act does not guarantee that the Court will authorize the exhumation. Obtaining a judgement authorizing exhumation could be particularly challenging for many families whose children are currently buried in communal plots. This is because a request to the Superior Court typically requires sufficient information about the identity of the person to be exhumed, as well as their place of burial. Therefore, to help manage families' expectations and avoid adding to their distress, the Direction de soutien aux familles and its partners—including the Bureau du coroner and the LSJML, upon families' request—consistently inform families of the **limitations inherent to the possible exhumations** (communal plots, disposition of the remains, etc.) as well as **the challenges of identifying** the children (body preservation, available DNA material, etc.).

It is also important to mention that many families have opted not to pursue the process.

Regardless of their decision, families receive support from the Direction de soutien aux familles, Awacak and their partners in the ceremonies and moments of reflection they wish to have, sometimes at burial sites, to collectively foster healing.

Work with religious congregations, parishes and cemeteries

Religious congregations

Over the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles has continued its research with the religious congregations that oversaw specific healthcare or social service institutions during the years of the children's deaths or disappearances.

As of February 29, 2024, the Direction de soutien aux familles had sent a total of 50 requests to religious congregations under the Act (Graph 16).

Testimonial from Le Monastère des Augustines on its involvement in assisting Indigenous families in their search for information about children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution

Le Monastère des Augustines is honoured to support Indigenous families in their search for information about the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or death of their child after being admitted to a healthcare facility.

At the request of the Direction de soutien aux familles of the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit, our archivists have diligently scoured through records, documents, correspondence and photographs from the monastery-hospitals managed by the Augustinian Sisters up until the 1960s.

We are pleased that research to gather information about children from communities such as Mistassini, La Romaine and Manawan, who were treated in Roberval and Québec City in the 1940s and 1950s, has led to the identification of missing children, and thus has brought some comfort to their families.

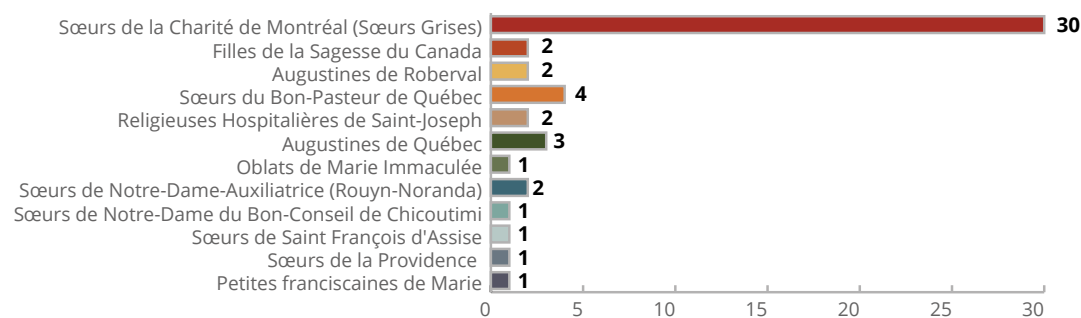
In 1995, the Augustinian Sisters entrusted their archives, buildings and collections to the public by establishing a nonprofit organization to preserve and showcase this legacy. The archivists, the entire Monastère staff, and the Augustinian Sisters are grateful for the trust the families and the Direction de soutien aux familles placed in them in this important dossier.

Sophie Charbonneau
Director of Public Programs and Conservation
Le Monastère des Augustines

Before the Direction de soutien aux familles had contacted some of these congregations, the Regroupement des archivistes religieux continued its collaboration, directing the Direction de soutien aux familles to the appropriate contacts.

Graph 16 below shows the main congregations involved in the research carried out by the Direction de soutien aux familles under the Act :

Graph 16 : Main religious congregations involved in current or future research efforts



In September 2022, the Direction de soutien aux familles went in person to the archives of The Sisters of Charity (the “Grey Nuns” ; Montréal mother house). They were able to study photographic material relating to the Hôtel-Dieu d’Amos hospital and Hôpital Saint-Joseph de La Tuque, sometimes featuring Indigenous children. The Direction de soutien aux familles reported this work to the members of the Monitoring Committee in fall 2022, leading to the establishment of a **working group dedicated to archiving and identifying** the material.

Over the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles has been in contact with the Grey Nuns to discuss the possibility of transferring these photographs to Awacak. This would give the families back a piece of their history, and the people in the photographs could potentially be identified during community events. The congregation has been receptive to this initiative, which was reported to the Monitoring Committee in January 2024. Committee members will continue their deliberations over the coming months.

Research conducted with parishes and cemeteries

Since the start of research efforts under the Act, parishes and cemeteries have played an essential role in identifying the burial locations of children. Since 2021, a total of 230 requests have been submitted to provide families with information about their children’s burial (an increase of almost 115 % since the last report). This distribution is illustrated below :

Table 12 : Main cemeteries involved in the research conducted by the Direction de soutien aux familles

Cemetery	Children’s burials
Cimetière d’Amos (Amos)	27
Cimetière de La Tuque (La Tuque)	37
Cimetière anglican St. Andrew’s de La Tuque (La Tuque)	1
Cimetière St-Pierre (Joliette)	7
Cimetière Mount Hermon (Quebec city)	5

Cemetery	Children's burials
Cimetière Saint-Charles (Québec)	9
Cimetière de Sept-Îles (Sept-Iles)	8
Cimetière de Blanc-Sablon (Blanc-Sablon)	11
Cimetière de Havre-St-Pierre (Havre-Saint-Pierre)	8
Cimetière du Repos Saint-François d'Assise (Montréal)	4
Cimetière East Bolton (Austin)	2
Cimetière Saint-Vincent-de-Paul (Laval)	4
Cimetière de Rouyn-Noranda	1
Cimetière Saint-Louis (Senneterre)	4
Cimetière Saint-Paul (Senneterre)	4
Cimetière anglican de Mashteuiatsh	4
Cimetière catholique de Mashteuiatsh	19
Cimetière de Natashquan	4
Cimetière de Maliotenam	4
Cimetière de Pessamit	4
Cimetière Pine Hill (Magog)	1
Cimetière de Saint-Hubert (Longueuil)	3
Cimetière du Vieux-Fort (Duhamel-Ouest)	2
Cimetière Notre-Dame-de-Belmont (Québec)	1
Cimetière catholique de Saint-Jérôme (Saint-Jérôme)	2
Cimetière Lauredale	3
Cimetière de Baie-St-Paul	1
Cimetière d'Opitciwan	11
Cimetière des Communautés Innues	2
Cimetière de Roberval	8
Cimetière protestant de l'Île-Maligne	1
Cimetière protestant de Grande-Baie	2
Cimetière protestant de Kenogami	2
Arvida Protestant Cemetery	2
Cimetière de Winneway	2
Cimetière de Ville-Marie	4
Cimetière de Lac-Édouard	1
Cimetière de La Romaine	1
Cimetière St-Alphonse (Thetford Mines)	1
Cimetière St-Jacques-Le-Majeur (Barraute)	1
Cimetière St-Marc-de-Figuery	1
Cimetière Veakateri (Kahnawake)	2
Cimetière de Manawan	4
Cimetière Saint-Patrice (Magog)	1
Cimetière de Saint-Augustin (Saint-Augustin)	1
Cimetière des Petites franciscaines de Marie	1
Cimetière des trembles (Montréal)	1
Cimetière de Lac-Simon	1

It should be noted that the figure above represents the breakdown of all requests made by the Direction de soutien aux familles, rather than the outcomes of those requests. These requests have led to the confirmation of place of death for 93 children. Active research continues for cases that have not been conclusively confirmed.

After a place of burial is determined, there are variable amounts of information available from one child to the next. Some cemeteries can provide families with burial or interment certificates, including plot or grave numbers. In other cases, however, only copies of extracts from a parish register confirming the death and parish of interment are available to guide further research.

Testimonial from the managers of Saint-Patrice Cemetery in Magog

One family's request was very important to us.

We promptly conducted searches in our burial records and performed further checks in the cemetery. Our aim was to provide as accurate answers as we could.

We met the family last September. We understood the importance of their request.

We hope that our involvement in this search will help the family find some peace following their visit to our cemetery.

Noëlla Rodrigue, Pierre Lebel Denis and Randy
Managers of Saint-Patrice Cemetery in Magog

Many of the burial certificates we obtained refer to children being buried in **communal graves**. This is notably the case in some cemeteries in Québec City, Montréal, La Tuque and Amos, where such plots seem to be relatively common and are made available to any Quebecer. Burials in such sites raise many questions for families, including concerns about the treatment of their children and possible discrimination. Often challenging to come to terms with and perceived as dehumanizing, this burial method also has major implications for exhumation : any requests for exhumation from families whose children are buried in these plots will be complicated and, in some cases, even impossible.

In recent months, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacac have begun documenting the possibilities and obstacles for exhumation in such situations, particularly in relation to ongoing exhumations. These efforts will continue over the next year.

Research in national archives

In addition to continuing research in the archives of religious congregations, the Direction de soutien aux familles has made it a priority over the past few months to begin research in other major archives (BANQ and federal archives) in keeping with the guidelines announced in the previous annual report.

Collaboration agreement with Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ)

Following preliminary discussions between the Special Advisor and the Curator and Director General of the National Archives that were refocused to address the specific research needs of the families receiving support from the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak, a **collaboration agreement was signed in November 2023** between the SRPNI and BAnQ.

This agreement aims to facilitate research into historical documentation of missing or deceased Indigenous children by funding a coordinator at BAnQ whose task is to provide ongoing research support. They will begin in the coming weeks.

Testimonial from BAnQ on its involvement in assisting Indigenous families in their search for information about children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution

The Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) offers its expertise, archival holdings and network of partners to support Indigenous communities and facilitate the identification of information sources to meet their needs.

Supported by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit, the hiring of a resource for this specific purpose will enable us to better respond to requests for support, thereby facilitating families' research efforts.

In this effort, BAnQ's mission takes on its full meaning : to learn and live better together by supporting the quest for truth.

Hélène Laverdure
Curator and Director General of the National Archives
National Archives Directorate
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec

Concurrently with the signing of this agreement, the Direction de soutien aux familles continued to collaborate with BAnQ in its research, communicating regularly with some of its regional branches to guide its research in the archives.

Requests to Library and Archives Canada

During the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles also submitted its first compiled request to the archives of Library and Archives Canada for the medical records of several children admitted to the federally run Immigration Hospital in Québec City.

Although medical records could not be located, the Direction de soutien aux familles has obtained nearly 1,500 pages of documentation, which is being analyzed for distribution to families, some of whom have already started receiving relevant information.

These various collaborations will be continued and developed over the coming year.

Collaboration in research on children who went missing in residential schools



Commemorative stele on the site of the Saint-Marc-de-Figuery residential school (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, July 2022).

Among the children sought by the Direction de soutien aux familles at their family's request, four died while at a **residential school**.

For the past two years, the Direction de soutien aux familles has been working with research and programs teams at the SRPNI and the Government of Canada for information on the death and disappearance of Indigenous children in residential schools. Over the past year, it has continued to participate in the intergovernmental monitoring committee on residential schools. In certain cases, it has also set up practical and financial collaborative partnerships to enable, for example, the exhumation and reburial of a child in their home community and close to their family.

Over the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles has also followed the work of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools. The Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak attended the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials held September 6–8, 2023, by the Interlocutor in Montréal.

We will continue to work with federal authorities, particularly Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada, to ensure that our research is as complete and relevant as possible with a view to answering families' questions.

Over the next few months, the Direction de soutien aux familles hopes to continue working with the federal government to document the daily lives of the children who died in residential schools. To this end, we hope to develop a better understanding of the archives held by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, as well as federal archives related to residential schools.

Forging the essential partnerships for these inquiries will enable the Direction de soutien aux familles develop a **cross-disciplinary and continuous vision** in its work, ensuring that these children's trajectories are interrelated, not isolated, and thereby easing all families' quest for truth.



Children's shoes placed at the foot of a commemorative plaque in memory of the Indigenous children of the Saint-Marc-de-Figuery residential school (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, July 2022).

Placements and adoptions : Continuing research

Adoption of the children is by far the most recurrent hypothesis put forward by the families when talking with the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak. During our discussions, it became apparent that this hypothesis had long been the sole plausible explanation for many families when clear, explicit and concrete information was lacking for parents about the disappearance or death of their child.

The Sixties Scoop strongly reinforced the families' hypothesis, as it affected many Indigenous people across Canada at the very same time as the disappearance of most of the children currently being searched for under the Act. Several individuals whom we met over the past year have also spoken of relatives who believed they had later seen some of the missing children in other communities or regions or even of coffins presumed to contain the children's remains that were found to be empty when checked by their families. Whether formulated with anger and pain or with a glimmer of hope, the adoption of the children continues to be a prevalent theory in families' search efforts, both in cases where a death cannot be confirmed as well as in those that are better documented.

The previous report highlighted some of the main obstacles to tracing children placed for adoption in crèche or orphanage registers. It reported on Direction de soutien aux familles research into various institutions tasked with the care and adoption of children between 1930 and 1970—mainly crèches operated by religious congregations.

In 2022–2023, six families asked the Direction de soutien aux familles to initiate searches in connection with a child placement or adoption, and an additional family was added in the past year. The children being sought were born between 1952 and 2003; therefore, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak conducted the research and support for one case beyond the scope of the implementation of the Act, as this child was separated from their family after December 31, 1992. At the time of writing this report, the Direction de soutien aux familles was assisting four families with reunion efforts, and had been able to trace the deaths of two children who had been adopted or placed in foster care.

A great deal of work remains to be done around adoption, to document children's placements during the relevant periods, to establish concrete connections with certain institutions or, conversely, to identify any undocumented practices. Such research could involve a monographic approach in communities where testimonies converge towards particular trajectories of children.

In this respect, a number of issues families have raised about their child's trajectory raise concerns about possible discrimination. Whether it is the absence of receiving medical information, the multiple issues surrounding the children's burials or the central questions addressed in the preceding pages regarding the adoption and placement of some of the children, many of the families supported by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak refer to **children who have been taken from them**, rather than to children who have gone missing or died.

Appeal to the Commission d'accès à l'information

As of February 29, 2024, one request for review has been sent to the Commission d'accès à l'information during the period covered by this report. This appeal is currently under review.

Investigations under the implementation of the Act

As of February 29, 2024, no investigation had been launched in connection with research under section 13 of the Act.

The cessation of research

As of February 29, 2024, a total of four inquiries had been considered closed by the Direction de soutien aux familles. However, all of these requests were unable to be pursued due to the same reason : a lack of communication from applicants. Most were referred by a third party and the families did not respond to subsequent invitations. If these applicants wish to initiate research in the coming years, the Direction de soutien aux familles will reactivate their cases. To avoid opening files for new searches before a solid connection is established with applicants, the Direction de soutien aux familles has refined its criteria for dealing with requests.

With regard to the Direction de soutien aux familles's current research efforts under the Act, all files are still open and being processed at the pace desired by families, although some may be nearing completion.

It is the family's decision to stop research carried out under the Act. For some families, the implementation of the Act and associated search may not always be an end in itself but rather a stage or a step. Over the next few weeks, the partners involved in supporting families will be working together to contemplate the "end" of a search, and the different ways of supporting families in this transition.

Handling of complaints

Since the Act came into force on September 1, 2021, an individual may, in accordance with section 19 of the Act, file a complaint in the event that they are dissatisfied with the services they received when seeking information from an institution, organization or religious congregation. To meet these obligations, the SRPNI appointed a complaints officer in 2021.

Since the Act came into force, affected families have been able to submit their complaints to the e mail designated exclusively for filing complaints. The relevant telephone numbers are also available on the web page dedicated to the Act : [Missing and deceased Indigenous children : Support for families | Government of Québec \(quebec.ca\)](#).

In spring 2022, the complaints procedure will also be available online, along with an electronic form for filing a complaint :

- Complaints procedure : [Procedure for the examination of complaints under the Act | Government of Québec \(quebec.ca\)](#) ;
- Form for filing a complaint : [Complaint form, support for the families of missing or dead Indigenous children \(quebec.ca\)](#).

Under the established procedure, the SRPNI undertakes to acknowledge receipt of the request within three working days of its submission and to follow up within a reasonable timeframe, depending on the nature of the actions required. Once the request has been analyzed, the person in charge of handling the complaint intervenes with the institution, organization or religious congregation targeted by the complaint to understand and improve practices, including raising awareness among the relevant parties regarding Indigenous experience.

Although all measures are in place to handle complaints, as of February 29, 2024, no complaint had been filed under the first paragraph of section 19 of the Act.

Finally, it should be remembered that the complaints mechanism instituted by the Act does not replace existing mechanisms within the specific institutions. Families can still file complaints through existing mechanisms and exercise their right to appeal to the Commission d'accès à l'information (review or examination of disagreements).

Fostering healing

The previous report highlighted, at the end of the second year of implementation of the Act, an omnipresent aspect that is central to every stage of the process : the human and emotional side of the entire search process, for both families and partner stakeholders.

The past year has been marked by a dimension intrinsically linked to and highlighted in the preamble to the Act as one of its aims : the healing of families as a way to heal individuals, communities and nations.

Family and collective healing

The previous report highlighted the presence of the appropriate support workers during the results sharing meetings, as desired by the families.

Over the past year, holding **sharing circles** with families who so desire it, particularly at the end of results-sharing meetings, has gradually emerged as another way of collectively addressing the emotions experienced during the communication of research findings.

With the presence of support professionals, Elders or any other person requested by the family, these sessions help bridge the personal nature of the search with a community of support and healing. Awacak could consider implementing these sharing circles more consistently in future cases.

Burial and commemoration sites

Since the Act came into force, information concerning the burial places of children being sought by their families has been regularly uncovered. Such information is certainly among the most delicate to convey to families. Dreaded or expected, welcomed or rejected, it can evoke a wide range of emotions, some of which are linked to the pain of loss and mourning. Over the past few months, several families have asked the Direction de soutien aux familles or Awacak to visit the identified or presumed burial sites of their children to conduct an initial survey, pay their respects and, in two cases in the past year, hold a ceremony there.

Testimonial¹⁷ from Mary Etuangat on the search for her sister Rosie carried out by the Direction de soutien aux familles at her family's request

Dear Florence,

It is not easy to express our many thanks and gratitude to you and your whole staff because, We have found PEACE, we have been grounded.

No longer are wondering or have our minds wandering.

No longer asking questions.

Our mother's face had brightened up and looked much healthier since all these years she thought she was okay and tried to be forgiving. Until we personally went to go see where Rosie was at.

All this experience had a beautiful effect on her and on us, who since childhood heard about Rosie and our parents talking.

Thank you to Daphne, Sherry and team Nunavut.

Thank you to Florence, Dr. Cyr and to the special person who we met at the graveyard, he also worked in the hospital where Rosie had once stayed at. This thought to see him as a caretaker of the cemetery had a strong connection and we were in awe of this.



Baby Rosie's family memorial trip to East Bolton Cemetery (Austin, Eastern Townships, September 2023).



Cross made in Pangnirtung (Nunavut) by Baby Rosie's family, then placed in September 2023 on her burial site in the East Bolton cemetery, Austin, Quebec.



Entrance to the East Bolton Cemetery (Austin, Eastern Townships, September 2023).

17. This is the original version of a testimonial submitted by the family. Its French translation appears in the French version of the report.

We are also thankful to the local hospital, Iqaluit and to the Montreal Children's Hospital who did their best to help Rosie.

I wish families who are in the same situation as we have, find their loved ones.

There, we have closed the door of wondering.

I can say there are beautiful people, available to help and who have so much care for you.

We had experienced this personally.

We as a family have beautiful stories from our trip to go see Rosie in Quebec.

We were treated very well.

We were accepted, we were respected.

Thank you for answering our call for help, bless you one and all.

Mary Qappik Etuangat
Sister of Baby Rosie

Some families have expressed the desire for a tangible marker, such as a headstone or a cross bearing the child's name, to be installed during their visit to the burial site since there may not be a marker or it may have eroded over time. In some cases, when their children have been buried far from their community, families may request financial and logistical support to travel to the burial site.

To help families through these important stages, Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles have begun to explore ways to provide them with the emotional, spiritual, religious, logistical and financial support to meet these needs.

Rituals around exhumation and reburial

While, over the past year, some families requested visits and moments of prayer at the presumed or documented burial sites of their child, it is important to note that a pause for reflection was also observed throughout the first two exhumations in August and September 2023.

The collective nature of these rituals was particularly evident in the uncommon composition of the assembly united in reflection, which included families, supporting organizations and individuals, as well as all the experts overseeing the technical and scientific aspects of the exhumations.



A son holds his mother's hand.

Caring for emotions, relationships and partnerships

For our partners, fostering families' healing means sharing in their experience of suffering and trauma. In addition to the sometimes necessary debriefing between partners at the end of certain meetings, the Direction de soutien aux familles continued its clinical supervision this year to adequately equip its members. Through training sessions and individual or team meetings, each member involved with the families has been able to reflect on the emotional aspects of the support they provide.

At the same time, aiming to nurture the human relationship at the core of the partnership, the first working meeting between the Awacak and Direction de soutien aux familles teams was held on October 5 and 6, 2023. Held in Saint-Sauveur in the Laurentians region, this meeting enabled members of both organizations to meet in a setting that was different from their tours and work with families, thus reinforcing their shared vision of partnership and family support.

This first meeting was characterized by rich discussion, a multitude of ideas, transparency, as well as laughter and sharing. Two major observations emerged : first, the desire to establish meeting protocols and co-sign a joint declaration of commitment and, second, the need to hold these meetings on a regular basis to strengthen collaboration.

Inspired by the strength and courage of families along the way, Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles continue their partnership by nurturing their relationship—one that is essential to healing.



Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and the Direction de soutien aux familles at working days in Saint-Sauveur (Laurentians, October 5–6, 2023). From left to right and top to bottom: Simon Charette (Direction de soutien aux familles), Kim Lagueux Ruperthouse (Awacak), Julie Martel (Direction de soutien aux familles), Françoise Ruperthouse (Awacak), Chantale Awashish (Awacak), Pierre-Paul Niquay (Awacak) / Véronique Laveau (Direction de soutien aux familles), Florence Dupré (Direction de soutien aux familles), Catherine Morin Boulais (Direction de soutien aux familles), Lorianne Trapper (Awacak)

III. PERSPECTIVES IN 2024–2025 : FURTHER SUPPORTING THE FAMILIES

Commemoration and collective memory

Over the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) and Awacak have been working together to help families who wish to organize and carry out ceremonies and gatherings in memory of their missing or deceased children.

In parallel with these developments, the Direction de soutien aux familles has begun work, in collaboration with various provincial and federal departments, to document the public and collective dimensions of commemoration.

This work aims to meet the needs of families wishing to participate in gatherings and other commemorative activities, as well as First Nations and Inuit communities and organizations' needs, by directing them to the appropriate resources. These efforts echo both the preamble to the Act, which stresses the importance of “keep[ing] Quebecers’ collective memory alive” about the disappearances and deaths of Indigenous children, and the ongoing reflections by First Nations communities in Quebec in connection with the commemoration of children who died in residential schools.

Discussions with the Ministère de la culture et des communications du Québec (MCC) and the federal departments and agencies (including Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Parks Canada and Canadian Heritage) responsible for various commemoration programs will therefore continue over the coming months. They should lead to the development of the most comprehensive inventory possible of the needs and funding available for the commemoration of missing or dead Indigenous children, to ensure the dignity of the children and their families, and to keep their memory alive in Quebec.



Baby George's family at a gathering at the Joliette Cemetery in October 2023, accompanied by the Direction de soutien aux familles. From left to right and top to bottom, Baby George's sisters and brother.

Research to support families : Projects to prioritize



Work adorning the entrance hall of the Unamen Shipu health centre (Côte-Nord, October 2022).

Since its founding and the start of research at the request of families, the Direction de soutien aux familles has recognized the importance of carrying out more in-depth research into certain targeted aspects, whether sectoral, thematic or cross-cutting. Over the past two years, this importance has become a necessity : contributing to the families' quest for truth goes beyond establishing a cause of death or a burial site.

Over the course of our intake interviews and follow-up meetings, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak have identified a growing number of issues common to many families searching for a missing child. It also became clear during discussion that developing more detailed knowledge on certain subjects will enhance the support we provide families. The documentation of certain practices, as well as social and health, historical and institutional contexts, was thus considered a priority in the previous annual report and will remain so for the coming year.

With this in mind, the Direction de soutien aux familles has hired a researcher (an anthropologist) in September 2023. Her mandate is to carry out the research that requires time and expertise and,

where necessary, to develop the collaborations required to carry it out. The involvement of university research partners, as well as members of the network of healthcare and social services experts, is essential to providing families with substantiated answers to their questions.

The preliminary analysis of medical histories and causes of death of children covered by the implementation of the Act presented in this report is an initial outcome of these efforts. They will be continued and deepened over the coming year, in collaboration with the network of healthcare and social services experts and other relevant partners. To this end, a comparative historical tool on causes and rates of infant mortality will be developed over the coming months. This tool could be equally useful to the Direction de soutien aux familles in its work with families as it would be to physicians who meet with families to explain medical information.

The Direction de soutien aux familles will also work on developing tools to facilitate a dynamic, cross-cutting analysis of the trajectories of Indigenous children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution. New research partnerships will need to be established for this purpose.



Women performing the makusham dance at the closing ceremony of the results-sharing tour in the community of Pakua Shipi (Côte-Nord) in February 2023.

Over the next year, the Direction de soutien aux familles will prepare additional research to answer the questions families have asked about missing Indigenous children. It will focus on the history of the Quebec healthcare system between 1930 and 1980 and the operations of the hospitals involved in the research.

This research agenda may be adjusted as families' needs evolve along the way. Finally, all research to be conducted by the Direction de soutien aux familles and its partners will adhere to the principles outlined in the First Nations in Quebec and Labrador's Research Protocol (FNQLHSSC 2014) and comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement : Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR 2022).

IV. FOLLOW-UP TO THE 2021–2023 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MONITORING COMMITTEE

Since the Act came into force, the members of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act have formulated five recommendations concerning different aspects of the response to families' needs.

While the Committee's analysis in the initial months led it to consider the needs for archiving and preserving the documentation collected during research, the second year provided an opportunity to revisit the importance of the work regarding exhumation and funding for Awacak.

The following pages report on the implementation of each of these recommendations by the partners involved in the implementation of the Act, as of February 29, 2024.

Recommendation 1 – 2021-2022

"The committee recommends that the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) and Awacak develop and implement a uniform method of archiving the information collected in the identification forms, through which the families request research concerning a child who went missing, and the recordings of meetings with the families, to maintain the confidentiality of the information."

Over the past two years, the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak have been working together to establish secure archiving practices in their respective organizations, as well as data transmission procedures for families who request them.

Since summer 2022, the Direction de soutien aux familles has been working with the officials responsible for personal information protection, archiving and data retention at the Ministère du Conseil exécutif to establish a protocol for the filing, retention and archiving of information and documents collected as part of research carried out at the request of families. These efforts include an analysis of the risks associated with personal information protection, with the aim of implementing the required security measures. These efforts have continued over the past year and are expected to result in the adoption of guidelines in the coming months. Concurrently, the Direction de soutien aux familles has secured its entire data classification network to limit access to essential personnel.

Most families currently receiving support under the Act are jointly assisted in their efforts by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak. Therefore, to minimize the need for transferring information between these two organizations, families may request that both organizations simultaneously receive the information retrieved from certain institutions.

For the transfer of confidential documentation collected during its research, the Direction de soutien aux familles has also obtained its own access to the secure platform of the Ministère du Conseil exécutif. Personalized access to the platform can be created for each relevant partner. As a result, several physicians receive medical files for analysis via their personalized access.

Other secure transfer methods have been put in place for medical documentation, thanks to the coordination under the Act of members of the network of health and social services experts : (1) sending documents securely directly to the hospital archive services, where the security measures put in place are specifically adapted to the nature of these archives ; (2) digital deliveries via secure e-mail addresses (government addresses, institutional addresses, etc.).

As highlighted in the previous report on the implementation of the Act, several measures have been implemented since the Act came into force to ensure uniformity in archiving the information collected, while respecting confidentiality. Despite these efforts, the Direction de soutien aux familles believes that certain data transmission methods still require further refinement and standardization through data protection transfer tools.

Recommendation 2 – 2021-2022

“That the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) and Awacak develop an information management protocol in a spirit of respect for individuals and Indigenous families to manage possible future use of the information obtained in the context of the Act. The protocol must hinge on and abide by the principles of the research protocols developed by the First Nations and the Inuit in Québec.”

During the summer of 2022, Awacak initiated a project with Professor Suzy Basile, Canada Research Chair in Issues Relating to Indigenous Women and Director of the Research Laboratory in Indigenous Women Issues – Mikwatsiw at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) to develop a data retention system for families in line with the research protocols developed by the First Nations and Inuit in Quebec.

As part of these efforts, a collaboration agreement was signed in July 2023, with the aim of “developing, in collaboration with the Awacak, a mechanism for retrieving, classifying and storing data in the latter’s possession.” The appendix includes a “confidentiality commitment form for participation in the collection and/or validation and/or analysis of research data,” a “nomenclature for filing and storing data,” and a new “information and consent form” for collecting data provided by families during Awacak’s intake interviews.

The transfer of data to UQAT from families who have already signed Awacak’s new consent form began in fall 2023. To support and facilitate this transfer from Awacak to UQAT, the Direction de soutien aux familles retransmitted all documentation previously provided during the research process for each family that signed the authorization form. The transfer will continue, with the collaboration of the Direction de soutien aux familles, as families’ agreements are received.

Recommendation 3 – 2021-2022

“That the information (identification forms, documents obtained through access-to-information requests, recordings, and so on) be preserved in keeping with the protocol established and that they not be destroyed.”

Building upon the previous recommendation, which it embodies, the response to this recommendation involves implementing the agreement signed between Awacak and UQAT. This includes aspects related to data retention and archiving with Professor Suzy Basile’s team.

Via the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act, Awacak will conduct regular follow-ups on this implementation over the next year. Additionally, progress will be reported in the upcoming annual report for the Act.

Recommendation 4 – 2022-2023

“That the Government of Québec provide the necessary resources to the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) and Awacak to enable them to evaluate and implement all the forensic, legislative, remote sensing or other possibilities to respond to the requests of parents who wish to exhume their children buried in a communal grave.”

The third year of the Act’s implementation saw the first two exhumations of Indigenous children. In this endeavour, the Direction de soutien aux familles coordinated an expert committee specifically created for the exhumation of Indigenous children. This committee brought together various partners with targeted expertise, including the Bureau du coroner, LSJML, archaeology researchers from the Université de Montréal’s Department of Anthropology specializing in ground-penetrating radar surveys (referred to by Archéo-Mamu), and a funeral company specialized in exhumations.

To ensure the continuity of this vital collaboration for families seeking the exhumation of a child covered by the Act, the SRPNI and the Bureau du coroner signed the Entente concernant l’identification d’enfants autochtones exhumés, an agreement concerning the identification of exhumed Indigenous children. It is designed to meet the concrete needs of families requesting the identification and exhumation of a child and to involve the required expertise.

Meanwhile, the Government of Québec’s budget for 2023–2024 provided the Direction de soutien aux familles with the necessary funding to cover all expenses for the preliminary research (ground surveys, ground-penetrating radar, etc.), the exhumation and the reburial of children in accordance with their families’ wishes. Thus, the two exhumations carried out in summer 2023 were paid for by the Government of Québec.

Finally, over the past year, the Direction de soutien aux familles conducted research for families wishing to know how many children were buried with theirs in certain communal graves, and their disposition. Ongoing research by the Direction de soutien aux familles and Awacak’s lawyers aims to carry out the exhumation of a child buried outside the perimeter of an active cemetery, on land where some of the localization challenges could be similar to those encountered when exhuming children in communal plots or mass graves. The Direction de soutien aux familles has involved various organizations for this research, including the parish and cemetery involved, as well as a historical society, a genealogical society and the BANQ.

These various exploratory research efforts may inform ongoing discussions regarding the exhumation of children buried in communal plots or mass graves.

Recommendation 5 – 2022-2023

“That the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit financially support Awacak to help families to obtain legal and other recourse once the families have received and examined the documents and information that the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) has obtained with respect to their children.”

Following the reception of this recommendation during the drafting of the second annual report in March 2023, validations were carried out with Awacak to ensure that it had the necessary funding. At the time, Awacak confirmed that its financial needs had been met, as stated in the last report.

On November 9, 2023, the SRPNI announced a new grant of \$265,000 for Awacak, in addition to unused funds carried over from the previous year. The funding agreement resulting from this announcement was concluded and signed on November 23, 2023.

The SRPNI will continue to work closely with Awacak and assess its financial needs on an ongoing basis as work progresses over the next year.

CONCLUSION : 2023–2024

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE

MONITORING COMMITTEE

In this report, the members of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act present seven new recommendations, in addition to those made since the Act came into force.

Recommendations 1 et 2 – 2023-2024

After three years of implementation of the *Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died after Being Admitted to an Institution* (the Act), Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière notes that the upper limit of December 31, 1992, prevents some families from fully researching their case because events occurred after this date. The Monitoring Committee recommends :

That the Act be amended, and the deadline eliminated ;

That the Monitoring Committee explore possible options to call for a moratorium on the destruction of medical archives.

Recommendation 3 – 2023-2024

Despite considerable efforts to inform families, communities and the Indigenous community at large about the Act and the services offered by Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and the Direction de soutien aux familles, there is still work to be done to explain how the Act works and the services available to the families affected. Relationships also need to be strengthened with other partners, including the Native Friendship Centres, the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, Quebec Native Women and the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw tribal council. The Monitoring Committee recommends :

That the Government of Québec help ensure the availability of necessary resources to support families and continue the campaign to raise awareness about the Act and the services offered by Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and the Direction de soutien aux familles.

Recommendation 4 – 2023-2024

In the 2022–2023 annual report on the implementation of the Act, the opening remarks of a member of the Monitoring Committee raised questions about legal and even criminal responsibilities regarding the handling of missing children, failures in communication with affected families and several issues related to obtaining informed consent from these families for their children's treatment. These issues warrant serious consideration and input from individuals and the resources necessary to address them. The Monitoring Committee recommends :

That a working sub-committee of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act be formed to examine the legal aspects concerning the cases handled by Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and the Direction de soutien aux familles.

Recommendation 5 – 2023-2024

That the possibility of partnering with Université Laval's sociology observatory be explored to conduct research similar to that carried out between it and the Institut Tshakapesh on the forced displacement and grouping of children in residential schools in Quebec, as well as any other research priorities deemed relevant by the Monitoring Committee.

The main objective of the research project with Université Laval would be to cross-reference and analyze existing and collected personal information and archival data to illustrate and better understand the trajectory of Indigenous children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution.

Recommendation 6 – 2023-2024

That Awacak and the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) harmonize their processes to ensure the archiving, security and confidentiality of the information gathered in the course of their work with families and individuals.

Recommendation 7 – 2023-2024

That the Government of Québec commit to providing the necessary resources to hire an archives technician to join the Awacak team.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : Mandate and list of members of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act

STATEMENT OF MANDATE

Background

On December 9, 2020, the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit (then Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs), Ian Lafrenière, tabled Bill 79, the *Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died after Being Admitted to an Institution*.

The Act seeks to support Indigenous families searching for information on the circumstances surrounding their children's disappearance or death after being admitted to a health and social services institution, bearing in mind the families' distinctive linguistic and cultural traits, and their psychological needs.

Mandate of the Monitoring Committee

Sections 21 and 22 of the Act establish the Monitoring Committee, in the goal of contributing to improving the services offered to the families of Indigenous children who went missing or died, particularly with regard to complaints and concerning progress in processing the requests.

More specifically, the Monitoring Committee has a mandate to :

- monitor work carried out under the Act :
 - by receiving regular progress reports, in French and English, on actions carried out by the Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) of the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit ;
 - by regularly receiving information on the work carried out by Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière and any other organization supporting families ;
 - by identifying, analyzing and proposing to the Direction de soutien aux familles solutions to the challenges encountered ;
- survey and obtain feedback from the individuals and families receiving help from the Direction de soutien aux familles or Awacak on support measures that exist for seeking information, especially regarding the procedure to follow under the Act ;

- analyze the annual report pertaining to the Act;
- formulate any recommendation or submit any advice it deems necessary to the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit concerning the requisite improvements, especially in light of the annual report;
- be present when the annual report is released in a community or at a significant site;
- make public the Monitoring Committee's recommendations and opinions, in French and English, thirty (30) days after they are submitted to the Minister;
- with the financial support of the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit, if necessary, have translated these recommendations into various Indigenous languages.

Composition

The Monitoring Committee coordinator is appointed by the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit.

As of February 29, 2024, the Monitoring Committee comprised the following permanent members :

- Geoffrey Kelley, Coordinator of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act
- Julie Martel, Director, Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles)
- Florence Dupré, Coordinator, Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles)
- Françoise Ruperthouse, Director General, Awacak – Petits êtres de lumière
- Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC)
- Marjolaine Étienne, President, Quebec Native Women
- Annik Gill, Strategic Development Advisor, Regroupement des Centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec
- Raoul Quitich, Assistance Officer for the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program, Council of the Atikamekw Nation
- Ejinagosi (Richard) Kistabish, Anicinape Elder and advisory aid

Observing members (with the right to speak but not to vote) :

- André Albert Morin, Official Opposition Critic for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Quebec Liberal Party
- Manon Massé, Second Opposition Group Co-critic and Critic for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Québec solidaire
- Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, Leader of the Third Opposition Group and Third Opposition Group Critic for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Parti Québécois
- Nicole Anne Vautour, Director of Youth Investigations, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse

Guest members

Individuals or representatives of organizations may be invited on an ad hoc basis to Monitoring Committee meetings at the request of its permanent members to present certain issues and achievements related to the implementation of the Act or to contribute to the Committee's targeted reflection.

Monitoring Committee meetings

The Monitoring Committee will meet three to four times a year as required. The items on the agenda will determine the duration of each meeting.

The individual appointed by the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and Inuit will oversee the coordination of the meetings.

Meetings will take place virtually, using technological platforms (e.g. Teams, Zoom, teleconferencing).

Additional meetings may be convened if necessary.

If simultaneous interpretation services are required, the SRPNI will assume the costs, and the Special Advisor and the communications branch of the Conseil exécutif will ensure logistics.

Role of Monitoring Committee members

Participate actively and collaborate harmoniously and respectfully in the deliberations to :

- build on their expertise and provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the Act ;
- provide the relevant information required to carry out activities ;
- validate the minutes of each meeting ;
- ensure follow-up and reporting on the progress of the work to their respective authorities ;
- participate in the analysis of the annual report submitted pursuant to the Act and make recommendations pertaining to it.

Length of term

The Monitoring Committee is instituted for the entire duration of the implementation of the Act. Its mandate will be reassessed, if necessary, every two years.

Precedence of French

In the event of any discrepancy between the English and French versions, the French version shall prevail.

Note :

This document may be revised according to changes in the mandate. Any change must be agreed upon by the members of the Monitoring Committee on the Carrying Out of the Act and validated by the Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit.

Appendix 2 : Mandate of the Interdepartmental Committee Pertaining to the Act

Background

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) focused on Indigenous children who went missing or died under circumstances unknown to their families after being admitted to a health and social services institution between the 1950s and 1980s.

In response to its final report calling for all the information in its possession concerning these children to be handed over to the families affected, in June 2021, the Government of Québec passed the *Act to Authorize the Communication of Personal Information to the Families of Indigenous Children Who Went Missing or Died after Being Admitted to an Institution* (Act).

In effect since September 1, 2021, the Act is a practical tool to support families humanely and respectfully in their quest for answers concerning their children who died or went missing after being admitted to a health and social services institution, a public agency or a religious congregation.

The Direction de soutien aux familles (Direction de soutien aux familles) was established within the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit to ensure the implementation of the Act. To fulfil its mandate, it collaborates with the relevant Government of Québec departments and bodies assembled on an Interdepartmental Committee.

Mandate of the Interdepartmental Committee

Established in November 2021 and coordinated by the Direction de soutien aux familles of the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit, the Interdepartmental Committee's key mandates are to :

- regularly monitor the implementation of the Act by receiving, at each meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee, a report on the work done by the Direction de soutien aux familles ;
- ensure, through the active participation of each member department and agency, the coherence and relevance of government action for families affected by the Act ;
- collaborate on specific projects aimed at applying the Act, notably by developing relevant practices or exchanging the information necessary for their development ;
- contribute to preparing the annual report on the implementation of the Act and formulate any recommendation or submit any advice concerning the Act to the Direction de soutien aux familles.

Coordination and composition of the Interdepartmental Committee

The Direction de soutien aux familles in the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit coordinates the Interdepartmental Committee. In its capacity as coordinating body, the Direction de soutien aux familles convenes committee meetings, prepares agendas, minutes and any other relevant working documents, and leads the meetings.

The Committee comprises the following government departments and bodies :

- Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit (coordination)
- Québec Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
- Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec
- Directeur de l'état civil
- Québec Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
- Ministère de la Justice
- Ministère de la Sécurité publique
- Bureau du coroner
- Ministère de l'Éducation
- Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur
- Ministère de la Culture et des Communications

When necessary, the Direction de soutien aux familles updates the list of members appended to this mandate.

Replacement of members

The ministries and bodies must inform the Direction de soutien aux familles of any change in their representatives on the Interdepartmental Committee. To this end, they must submit to the Direction de soutien aux familles the contact details of the new representative to ensure the list of members is always up to date.

Meetings of the Interdepartmental Committee

The committee meets a minimum of three times a year during the following periods :

- January-February (monitoring the work and preparing the annual report pertaining to the Act)
- May-June (monitoring the work and defining working guidelines)
- October-November (monitoring the work)

Other meetings can be added as needed.

The agenda will determine the duration of each meeting.

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