

## 'Alarming questions' raised about police treatment of Indigenous people in Thunder Bay, Ont., watchdog says

Public invited to make submissions to review examining police treatment of Indigenous people

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The province's civilian police oversight body has specified what it will look at as it investigates the Thunder Bay Police Service's conduct of policing First Nations people, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) announced Thursday.

The service is currently the subject of an investigation by the OIPRD for the way it handles the deaths of Indigenous people.

- [Thunder Bay, Ont., police face 'systemic review' of Indigenous death investigations](#)
- [Thunder Bay police officer's Facebook post prompts professional standards investigation](#)
- [Thunder Bay police suspend officer who is subject of professional standards investigation](#)

"Alarming questions have been raised about the way the Thunder Bay Police Service investigates the disappearances and deaths of Indigenous people," Independent Police Review Director Gerry McNeilly says in a press release issued Thursday morning.

"Indigenous leaders and community members say that these investigations, and other interactions with police, devalue Indigenous lives, reflect differential treatment and are based on racist attitudes and/or stereotypical preconceptions about the Indigenous community," he said in the release.

The OIPRD says "policies, practices and attitudes regarding missing person and death investigations involving Indigenous Peoples," will be the focus of the probe.

According to the OIPRD, the review will examine:

- Existing policies, practices and attitudes of the Thunder Bay Police Service as they relate specifically to Indigenous missing persons and death investigations, and more generally, to issues around racism-free policing, such as "over-policing" and "under-policing";
- Whether missing persons and death investigations involving Indigenous Peoples are conducted in discriminatory ways;
- The adequacy and effectiveness of existing policies and identified best practices relating to the above issues;
- The adequacy of training and education provided to supervisors and front-line officers relating to the above issues;
- The extent to which compliance with existing policies or identified best practices is monitored and supported;
- The extent to which officers are held accountable for non-compliance;

- The extent to which the service communicates with Indigenous family members, communities and their leaders, engages in community outreach or has specialized liaison units;
- The extent to which complaints about the service's interactions with Indigenous Peoples are inhibited by reprisals or fear of reprisals;
- Whether policies, practices, training, education, oversight and accountability mechanisms, and community outreach should be created, modified or enhanced to prevent discriminatory and ineffective policing, particularly in the context of investigations into the disappearances and deaths of Indigenous Peoples.

News of the investigation comes roughly a year after the drowning death of Stacey DeBungee, which was quickly deemed accidental by Thunder Bay police.

A private investigator, hired by the family, later found [several suspicious circumstances](#), including the use of DeBungee's bank card after his death.

The police review director is also slated to look into [inflammatory Facebook posts from September](#), alleged to come from Thunder Bay police officers.

According to the provincial body, it will consult with Indigenous leaders with respect to its review, and will be informed by [the findings of the inquest](#) into the deaths of seven First Nations students in Thunder Bay.

Thunder Bay Police Chief J.P. Levesque said the city police respects the review director's mandate.

"Our service will cooperate fully in the review process and it is our hope that any recommendations arising from the process will assist us, and other police services in Ontario, to move forward towards meeting the needs of our diverse communities," he was quoted as saying in a news release issued Thursday afternoon.

"We will continue to strive to work towards building a stronger relationship with the Indigenous community that we serve."

The OIPRD said it is inviting written submissions by e-mail or traditional mail about the investigation.

Those submissions are due by January 31, 2017.

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