

# Escalating racism toward Indigenous people 'a real problem' in Thunder Bay: Grand Chief



**Nishinawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler says racism in Thunder Bay is at an all-time high.** *Canadian Press files*



[THE CANADIAN PRESS](#)

July 6, 2017  
4:54 PM EDT

Last Updated  
July 7, 2017  
1:31 PM EDT  
Filed under

**OTTAWA — First Nations leaders met for a second day Thursday to discuss serious concerns about safety of young people in Thunder Bay — a northwestern Ontario city that leads the country in hate crimes reported to police.**

**The decision to meet with federal and provincial officials was made last month, but recent tragedies have magnified its importance, said Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.**

**Those include a recent double homicide involving two Indigenous people in Thunder Bay and the death Tuesday of an Indigenous woman who was injured in January when she was hit by a trailer hitch thrown from a moving car.**

**“This is not the kind of conference that we want to have, but we have to,” Fiddler said in an interview. “I think the issues are too urgent.”**



The family of Barbara Kentner, who was struck in the stomach by a large, metal trailer hitch thrown from a passing vehicle on Jan. 29. She died on Tuesday, more than five months after the incident. *Facebook*

**Barbara Kentner, 34, told police she and her sister were walking in a residential neighbourhood when someone threw the heavy chunk of metal from a vehicle. Her sister Melissa said she heard someone in the vehicle say: “I got one.”**

Fiddler also cited last year’s Ontario inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations high school students, during which witnesses reported having had objects or racial epithets hurled in their direction.

“That’s something I think all of us need to acknowledge ... this is a real problem,” he said. “I think that’s the only way we can begin to come together and address these issues.”

**Last month, amid concerns about local policing expressed by First Nations leaders, Ontario’s chief coroner asked an outside police force to help investigate the deaths of two Indigenous teens.**

- Thunder Bay police investigating double homicide of two First Nations people
- Indigenous woman dies months after being hit with trailer hitch thrown from passing car

**Dr. Dirk Huyer asked York Regional Police to get involved in the investigation of the deaths of 14-year-old Josiah Begg and 17-year-old Tammy Keeash.**

**In June, Statistics Canada reported that most of the police-reported hate incidents in Thunder Bay targeted Indigenous people, accounting for 29 per cent of all anti-Aboriginal hate crimes across Canada in 2015.**

“Young people have told me repeatedly of **walking home and having things flung at them out of cars,**” Thunder Bay MP and Liberal cabinet minister Patty Hajdu **said following the release of the Statistics Canada report.**

“Indigenous women and Indigenous men who have experienced going to a store ... and **when they put their hand out to receive change, the storekeeper will purposely not touch their hand.**”