Did You Know?
National Indigenous History Month 2021
Did You Know? is a series run by the University of Waterloo Indigenous Initiatives Office for the duration of Indigenous History Month 2021. “Did You Know” posts were uploaded weekly on Mondays and Wednesdays, featuring information on various topics pertaining to Indigenous histories in Canada. Please share this resource widely.

INDIAN HOSPITALS IN CANADA: 1920s-1980s
Warning: This document contains details of violence and death, past and present, of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

The history of Indian hospitals in Canada is not as well-known as that of residential schools but is as horrific in both its actions and the implication of those actions.

Health care for Indigenous people, such as it was, was motivated by a number of factors that range from keeping as many patients 'interned' as possible to maintain government funding, to ensure a steady number of subjects for medical and nutritional experiments, and ensure that the European population was protected from exposure to 'Indian tuberculosis'.

Segregated medical treatment for Indigenous patients was also the norm in community hospitals where they were treated in the basement or 'Indian annexes'.

This aspect of Canadian history shows that healthcare for Indigenous Peoples was never a priority and never on par with the care available for Europeans.

Unfair treatment, discrimination, and racism towards Indigenous Peoples continues to exist in the Canadian healthcare system.
When Joyce Echaquan, a 37-year-old Atikamekw woman, began experiencing stomach pains, she checked herself into a hospital in Joliette, Quebec. Echaquan livestreamed herself in her hospital bed screaming and calling for help. But instead of receiving the help she needed, Echaquan faced incredibly racist and insensitive taunts by Quebec health care staff.

Joyce Echaquan passed away on September 28, 2020, shortly after the video was posted.

Echaquan could have been saved if she'd been more closely monitored, an expert witness told the coroner's inquiry in Trois-Rivières, Quebec. (CBC News, 27 May 2021)

Joyce's Principle, a document created by the council of Atikamekw Nation and the Atikamekw Council of Manawan, aims to guarantee that Indigenous people have equitable access to health and social services without discrimination.

Find more resources by browsing the Indigenous History Month resources webpage.