

Wave of suicides roils Canada aboriginal community

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A string of suicides among young people has hit an impoverished aboriginal reserve in remote central Canada, leading to calls Friday for more social services support for native communities.

Five teenagers and a young mother at Pimicikamak Cree Nation have killed themselves in recent weeks and the reserve's leader has said more than 140 people have attempted suicide or had suicidal thoughts in the past three months.

About 100 [young people](#) are on suicide watch at the reserve of 8,000 [people](#), located 500 kilometers (310 miles) north of Winnipeg.

"Indigenous [communities](#) are facing a suicide epidemic. When a member of our community is lost to suicide, particularly a young person, the entire community experiences the repercussions collectively," said Dawn Lavell-Harvard, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

"More robust services are required immediately in our communities to stop these tragedies from re-occurring—that means acknowledging the structural oppression our communities are subjected to and putting forward stronger services now."

Suicide is a serious problem in Canada's aboriginal communities. Government statistics show [suicide](#) rates are five to seven times higher among First Nations youth compared to average young Canadians.

In an interview with the Winnipeg Free Press, reserve acting chief Shirley Robinson blamed the suicides on the community's 80 percent unemployment rate and overcrowding due to a housing shortage.

Officials said the community needed at least six mental health experts to help support the lone qualified therapist serving the reserve, local media reported.

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