10.5: Social Justice and Advocacy

The CNA Code of Ethics supports the principle of social justice, requiring that all peoples, without discrimination, “have the right to live in dignity and freedom and to enjoy the fruits of social progress and should, on their part, contribute to it” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1969, Part 1, Article 1).

Ethical nursing addresses aspects of social justice that are considered essential for the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and populations throughout the world. According to the CNA,

Advocacy refers to the act of supporting or recommending a cause or course of action, undertaken on behalf of persons or issues. It relates to the need to improve systems and societal structures to create greater equity and better health for all. Nurses endeavor, individually and collectively, to advocate for and work toward eliminating social inequities. (CNA, 2017, p. 5)

Nurse leaders working to ensure the health of all, will advocate for the presence of the fundamental resources essential for health, regardless of the dominant social, cultural, or economic system. Fundamental resources required by all people include: peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity (Government of South Australia and World Health Organization, 2017).

It is important to remember that healthy people contribute to the social and economic development of the community or nation. Advocacy for health encourages political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, behavioural, and biological factors that favour health rather than suppress health. The control of factors that determine the individual’s health will support all people to reach their fullest health potential (WHO, 2017).
Essential Learning Activity 10.4.1

Advocating for social justice requires us to look at social inequities, both within Canada and across the world. There are many groups experiencing social inequities within Canada. Indigenous people, for example, have been the victims of colonization throughout the centuries. Only recently have Canadians come to realize the problems created by residential schools.

Please watch Dawn Tisdale’s TedX Talk titled “The Impact of Residential Schools on Aboriginal Healthcare” (13:04).

After you have viewed the video, answer the following questions while looking through the lens of social justice:

1. What impact do you think the residential school system had on Indigenous health?
2. What steps have been taken to resolve health issues arising from the residential school system?
3. What additional steps would you recommend?