

News Release

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Support a national call to action for truth and reconciliation on the impacts of Indian boarding schools by wearing an orange shirt on Sept. 29

(Salem) – [Orange Shirt Day](#) is a day for truth and reconciliation highlighting the effects of the Indian boarding school system. It opens the door for a global conversation about all aspects of the Indian boarding school system which caused Indigenous populations to lose their cultural identities through policies of forced assimilation. It is an opportunity to create meaningful discussion about the legacy of these schools on Indigenous communities.

On Sept. 29, staff at the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) will wear orange to honor the survivors and victims of the federal Indian boarding school system. Orange Shirt Day falls on the final day of the annual ODHS Tribal-State ICWA Conference in Grande Ronde. The conference, held from Sept. 27-29, focuses on training and education related to ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) and ORICWA (Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act).

ODHS' commitment to dismantling all forms of systemic racism is led by reconciliation and collaboration with all Tribal communities within Oregon and is strengthened by our Equity North Star, which is our agency wide vision that leads to a more equitable Oregon for all.

“Orange Shirt Day represents a powerful Indigenous movement throughout the United States and Canada,” said Adam Becenti, ODHS Office of Tribal Affairs Director. “Orange Shirt Day is a call to action and awareness, but more importantly an opportunity to honor the lives taken and those who survived this atrocity.”

“We will be wearing orange to honor the survivors and victims of the Indian boarding school system and to recognize the trauma it caused for generations of Tribal families and children,” said Aprille Flint-Gerner, ODHS Child Welfare Director. “In Oregon, our Child Welfare Division’s [Vision for Transformation](#) commits us to doing the work of dismantling oppressive practices that contribute to disparate and disproportionate outcomes for Tribal children. Our commitment is to repair, improve and move forward in partnership with the Nine Tribes of Oregon.”

According to the [U.S. Department of the Interior’s 2022 investigation report](#), between 1819 and 1969, the federal Indian boarding school system operated more than 400 schools across 37 states or then-territories. During this time thousands of Indigenous children were separated from their families and placed in the school system, many did not survive. The investigation identified marked and unmarked burial sites at approximately 53 different schools across the school system.

The federal Indian boarding school system deployed systematic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies in an attempt to assimilate American Indian and Alaska Native children through education, including but not limited to renaming Tribal children English names; cutting the hair of Tribal children; discouraging or preventing the use of Tribal languages, religions and cultural practices; and organizing children into units to perform military drills.

As early as 1874, a boarding school was built at Warm Springs in Oregon, and others were later constructed at Siletz, Grand Ronde, Klamath, and Umatilla. Today, Chemawa Indian School, located in Salem, Oregon is an accredited high school that serves American Indian and Alaska Native students. Chemawa is the oldest continuously operated off-reservation boarding school in the United States.

For Orange Shirt Day press kit materials and stories from Indigenous Oregonians, go to the [ODHS Tribal Affairs Orange Shirt Day web page](#).

About the ODHS Office Tribal Affairs

[The Office of Tribal Affairs](#) within the ODHS Director’s Office is a team committed to all Oregon Tribal communities thriving mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Tribal Affairs works with all five ODHS programs to create and provide Tribally appropriate programming, services, policies and support. Through Tribal consultation with Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon, ODHS ensures programming, services, and policies meet the needs of Oregon Tribal communities.

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