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CBC British Columbia >

Ottawa pays \$45.6M to lawyers involved in residential school cases

Last Updated: Monday, November 26, 2007 | 10:35 AM ET

[CBC News](#)

More than \$45 million has recently been paid to residential school lawyers — one of the largest legal bills in Canadian history.

According to federal officials, a government cheque for \$45.6 million has been sent to a consortium of lawyers — most of them in Alberta and Ontario — who had been involved in the Indian residential schools class action.

Former students like Roy Sanderson aren't impressed that, in some cases, lawyers are getting paid first.

"That hurts me. Why did they get paid first ... and we never got nothing yet, the survivors, a lot of us?" said Sanderson, who went to a residential school in Saskatchewan in the 1950s.

Over the past two decades, more than 12,000 former students have filed legal claims against the federal government and the churches that ran the schools for much of the 20th century. Many of the claims alleged physical and sexual abuse and said that the schools caused them to lose their language and culture.

Under a \$2-billion compensation plan approved earlier this year, every student who went to school is entitled to \$10,000 plus an extra \$3,000 for each year the student attended.

Sanderson said he didn't benefit much from his education at the school.

"I was stuck in Grade 4 for many, many years for no reason," he said. "They put you in the barns and we used to work. They didn't give you a proper education."

Sanderson is among more than 50,000 former students who have asked for settlement money and are still waiting.

Sanderson's lawyer is Regina-based Tony Merchant, who is not among the group that has been paid. Federal officials said Merchant's legal bill, which will be at least \$25 million, is still under dispute.