



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Widespread Racism Requires System-Wide Response: First Nations Health Authority

“Unacceptable – but unfortunately not uncommon.” That is the response of board chair Colleen Erickson of the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) about allegations of racist behaviour in some BC emergency departments.

BC’s Minister of Health, Adrian Dix announced Friday that the province is investigating allegations that health-care staff in emergency rooms were playing a "game" to guess the blood-alcohol level of Indigenous patients. Minister Dix has appointed Mary-Ellen Turpel-Lafond, a former judge and longtime children's advocate in BC, to investigate the issue and make recommendations to the province.

“We commend the province for its swift response and look forward to supporting the investigation as its scope is determined and carried out,” said Erickson. “We have always been aware of incidents of mistreatment of our people in the health care system - particularly in emergency rooms - but news of such an overt and blatant practice is very unsettling.”

Erickson said First Nations people and health providers across BC and Canada have observed racism and discrimination against Indigenous people in the healthcare system. These experiences can include instances when concerns are discounted, assumptions are made, someone is blamed or belittled, or cultural health practices are disrespected.

“The resulting lack of trust of the health system is a factor in Indigenous people having poorer health outcomes, higher rates of chronic disease, and shorter life expectancy than the non-Indigenous population,” said Erickson.

The interim CEO of the FNHA, Richard Jock, said the organization is working to transform the health system. An important element is ‘hardwiring’ cultural safety and humility into the health system through partnerships at local, regional, provincial and federal levels.

In 2015, the FNHA, Ministry of Health, and all the health authorities in the province signed the *Declaration of Commitment to Cultural Safety and Humility in Health Services Delivery for First Nations and Aboriginal People in BC*. Since then, all 23 health regulators in BC also signed a declaration of commitment, making BC health professionals the first in Canada to pledge their commitment to making the health system more culturally safe for First Nations and Indigenous people. Additional Declarations of Commitment have been signed by Providence Health Care, Doctors of BC, the BC Coroners Service, Emergency Management BC, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, among others.



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

The Declaration recognizes that cultural safety and humility are essential dimensions of quality and safety and only a sustained and genuine commitment to action from senior leadership paired with a concrete action plan will lead to the change needed.

“We have commitment at the leadership level,” said Jock. “Perhaps this incident will ignite the momentum to speed and spread this work so that every member of the health system delivers culturally safe care.”