

Zero Tolerance of Racism Basic First Step to Ensure Equal Access to Health Care for First Nations people in BC

First Nations Health Governance Pillars respond to Addressing Racism Review report

November 30, 2020 | Coast Salish Territory – Today, the First Nations Health Council, Health Authority and Health Directors Association expressed their shared goal of equal access to health care for First Nations people and a health system experience free from racism, in response to release of the Addressing Racism Review report, *In Plain Sight*. The Addressing Racism Review report was released by BC Minister of Health Adrian Dix and Independent Reviewer Hon. Dr. M.E. Turpel-Lafond (Aki-Kwe).

First, we acknowledge and honour the courage of the thousands of First Nations people and health workers who shared their stories for this Review. Their voices are vital to painting a picture of the barriers First Nations face in accessing health care in BC. Racism and prejudice are proven to result in poor health care for our people. Racism in health care causes substandard care, unequal access, creates stigma and harm, and in some cases death. For First Nations – and all humans who are labelled in negative ways – good intentions to do better are useless. The 2012 Consensus paper from our Chiefs and leaders noted that significant systemic change requires shifts in deep-seated attitudes, behaviours and mindsets.

Second, we expect our partners to stand with us today in declaring zero tolerance of racism and commit to holding the people and systems perpetuating racism in health care accountable. The individual experiences outlined in this report – stories of people dying in hospital beds or sick at home because they're too afraid to get help – are unacceptable. While this review was underway, we continued to hear stories of people experiencing racism when accessing health care – even during the dual public health emergencies of the COVID-19 pandemic and the opioid crisis.

Third, we will take time to review the full report with Canada and the province of BC as our tripartite partners, and BC's Minister Dix who called for this review. We must strengthen the results of our joint efforts to align with First Nations interests in health governance, Bill-41, social determinants of health and Nation-rebuilding. The 7 Directives given to us by Chiefs and leaders tell us that culturally-safe approaches are best when they are Community-driven and Nation-based. This approach will help to realize our shared vision of *Healthy, Self-Determining and Vibrant BC First Nations Children, Families and Communities*.

QUOTES:

Charlene Belleau, Chair, First Nations Health Council

"This investigation reminds us of the daily, lived experience for First Nations in BC as they access health care. Our made-in-BC health governance structure comes from the wisdom and leadership of our Chiefs and leaders and is grounded in a Community-based, Nation-driven approach, implemented in our regions. The time for others to decide what's good for Indigenous people is over. Our shared goal of equal access to health care requires each health partner to be accountable to the other for their actions to change First Nations peoples' lived experiences with the BC health system are free from racism."

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Colleen Erickson, Chair, First Nations Health Authority Board

"This report on anti-Indigenous racism tragically shows that the system has a long way to go to uphold its commitment to quality care for our people. As we begin this journey, we need to hold each other accountable "to do our best" to be part of a health and wellness system that meets the needs of First Nations people. The FNHA Board of Directors is committed to working with our partners to make the necessary improvements across the BC health system. As well, we have been and will continue to make changes within FNHA to better support First Nations people and communities in addressing the issues outlined in this report and other challenges such as the opioid and COVID-19 crises."

Richard Jock, I/CEO, First Nations Health Authority

"The FNHA is committed to evolving its approach to supporting First Nations communities and nations and forging new ways of addressing racism within each region. In many ways, this juncture is just the beginning and we look forward to tackling the work and bringing key issues through our engagement pathway as we move forward."

Keith Marshall, President, First Nation Health Directors Association

"First Nation Health Directors are the voice of the community, working to transform and decolonize the health care system in BC – an essential step to creating a health care experience free of racism for First Nations people. In response to today's Addressing Racism Review report, Health Directors will continue to deliver health and wellness services that are closer to home and that affirm First Nations cultures, rights and identities. To ensure that effective change is implemented in the health care system, we are committed to working with our pillar and Tripartite partners to offer technical advice on solutions that embed First Nations culture and traditions into health and wellness services -- actions we know improves health outcomes for First Nations people."

Mental Health and Wellness. Publication of this Review may be a triggering event for individuals.

- **Cultural and counselling supports:** available to all First Nations people free of charge from the Kackaamin Family Development Centre and Tsow-Tun-Le-Lum Treatment Centre. Individuals can call toll-free 1-888-403-3123 for an initial consultation.
- **Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS):** at 1-800-721-0066 or 604-985-4464 to access the following cultural supports: Sadie McPhee, Gertie Pierre or Yvonne Rigby Jones. Emotional mental health and counselling services will be accessible from the IRSSS Resolution Health Support Workers.
- **The KUU-US Crisis Line Society:** operates a 24-hour provincial Aboriginal crisis line for adults and Elders at 250-723-4050, children and youth at 250-723-2040. Toll-free 1-800-588-8717.

About the BC First Nations Health Governance Structure: The First Nations health structure belongs to First Nations in BC. Its beginnings start with the signing of the Transformative Change Accord to address health disparities between First Nations and other residents in BC by the First Nations Health Council, the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada. Our success is rooted in a core set of values, our guiding Seven Directives given to us by BC First Nations, and our Shared Vision Statement and collective goal of "Healthy, Self-Determining and Vibrant BC First Nations Children, Families and Communities." The structure includes: 1) the First Nations Health Council (FNHC), created in 2006 and re-structured in 2010, as a provincial-level



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political and advocacy organization with a regionally-appointed 15-member Council; 2) technical advice and capacity development from the First Nations Health Directors Association (FNHDA) which was formally created in 2010; and 3) the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), formed in 2013, which provides health service delivery and associated partnership and leadership functions. The FNHA, FNHC and FNHDA receive direction from community leadership and Nations from the five regions of the province through community engagement sessions. The Tripartite Committee on First Nations Health is the forum for aligning programming and planning efforts between the FNHA, BC Health Authorities, the BC Ministry of Health, and Health Canada Partners.