



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

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**First Nations Health Authority**  
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**Canada Health Infoway**

## **Telehealth Expansion Project to Benefit BC First Nations**

**Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC)** – BC First Nations will soon have improved access to health and wellness services through expanded use of telehealth, announced the First Nations Health Authority, BC Ministry of Health, and Canada Health Infoway. Telehealth is the use of communication technologies, such as videoconferencing, to deliver health, wellness and educational services from a distance. Peripheral devices such as exam cameras, stethoscopes, portable ultrasound machines and ophthalmoscopes can be attached to videoconferencing units to enhance clinical sessions.

"This project is an excellent opportunity to showcase our Tripartite partnerships working together to contribute greatly to the health of British Columbia First Nations, Aboriginal peoples and their families," said Minister of Health Terry Lake. "Telehealth technology will give patients access to high-quality health care without having to spend hours travelling to see specialists."

The First Nations Telehealth Expansion Project will follow a community-driven process to work with First Nations Health Services Organizations across the province to deploy telehealth equipment and implement telehealth services. Ongoing training and support from the First Nations Health Authority, in partnership with communities and provincial health authorities, will help ensure telehealth services are effective, sustainable, and meet community health and wellness needs. The multi-million dollar project includes a \$4.5 million investment from Canada Health Infoway, the federally-funded, not-for-profit organization investing in electronic health information solutions in Canada.

"A key goal in this process is that we leave no community behind. The application of emerging technology and the requisite training will bring new services and professionals into First Nations health centres across this province and will help to level the field for First Nations in remote communities," said Joe Gallagher, CEO of the First Nations Health Authority.

Not only will the expanded telehealth services help decrease the burden of travel and provide access to services that currently may not exist or are limited for BC First Nations, it will also build community capacity, help drive patient-centric care and foster strong working relationships between communities and external partners.

Bypassing barriers such as distance and geography, these telehealth deployments will improve access, timeliness, quality and convenience of health, wellness and educational services for communities across the province. The First Nations Telehealth Expansion Project was initiated out of the 2006 Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan, a 10-year plan to close the socio-economic gaps between First Nations and other British Columbians. The First Nations Telehealth Expansion Project is the result of action item number 23 of the plan, to 'create a fully integrated clinical telehealth network.'

Initial telehealth programs supported by the First Nations Health Authority and partners have already proven promising by using innovative approaches to better meet the health needs of BC First Nations communities. Communities such as Takla Lake and others in Northern BC now have consistent access to a primary care physician based out of the Fraser Valley, while psychiatry, psychology and wound care services are successfully being delivered to Bella Bella's community health centre by providers in Vancouver.

"By bridging the distance between patients in remote communities and the clinicians who provide the care they need, access to essential health services is vastly improved with telehealth," said Richard Alvarez, President and CEO, Canada Health Infoway. "Investments in telehealth are saving Canadians some 50 million kilometres of travel each year, and we applaud the First Nations Health Authority and the BC Ministry of Health for further eliminating travel as a barrier to care."

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The First Nations Health Authority, the BC Ministry of Health, and Canada Health Infoway are pleased to be a part of this important next step in improving access to telehealth services for BC First Nations. The official kickoff date for the project was September 10, 2013. Stay up-to-date on all the latest First Nations Telehealth Expansion Project news at [www.fnha.ca](http://www.fnha.ca).

**Background Documents :**

[The Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan \(2006\)](#)

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