



**Interior Health**  
Every person matters



**First Nations Health Authority**  
Health through wellness

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## **IH, FNHA, First Nations leaders sign health-care declaration**

Interior Health, First Nations Health Authority, and First Nations leaders from the Cariboo have signed a Declaration of Commitment to embed a culture of safety and humility, starting with hospital and community services in Williams Lake.

Four representatives from the two health authorities and 13 First Nations and Aboriginal leaders from communities in and around Williams Lake signed the commitment document on the first of a two-day Cultural Safety and Humility Forum, held at the Xat'sull (Soda Creek) First Nation on May 3-4.

“This is an important step toward ensuring quality and safety is an integral part of our IH programs and services. We are committed to making change for Aboriginal patients. It won't happen in a day, but it is a priority,” said IH President and Chief Executive Officer Chris Mazurkewich.

The Declaration of Commitment sets out the guiding principles of cultural safety, including identifying opportunities together; engaging in open and honest dialogue; raising concerns without fear of reprisal; and embedding cultural safety and humility in Cariboo Memorial Hospital and Community Health Services.

The signing took place after hearing powerful stories from First Nations community members who had culturally unsafe experiences with health-care providers and the system itself.

The forum was proposed in response to concerns from the Xat'sull First Nation over the treatment of one of their Elders. The Elder's son gave life to the Declaration of Commitment when he shared his mother's experience of what he called racism and neglect within the health care system.

Another community member and his wife recounted their son's escalating mental health crisis and lack of support from the health and justice system. Both speakers agreed to share their stories in hopes that no other family will suffer similar experiences.

“I want to honour the courage of the families who have shared their stories. While it can be painful, being heard is the first step towards addressing these issues. We encourage more First Nations families to share their stories in the hope this care doesn't have to happen within our health system,” said FNHA Chief Executive Officer Joe Gallagher. “This work together with our communities and Interior Health partners creates an excellent opportunity for all of us to do our part to change the narrative of this story. It is a chance for all of us to listen and learn on this journey of cultural safety and humility.”

Xat'sull Chief Donna Dixon called on all parties to take the Declaration of Commitment seriously and to work for the betterment of each community. She reminded the health authorities to include First Nations in their work.

“We want to be part of change and transformation. We want a bigger say in health-care services in our community. After all, no one knows the needs of our communities better than we do.”

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Interior Health Aboriginal Health Director Brad Anderson described the Declaration as groundbreaking with all parties taking positive action in response to a negative situation.

“Interior Health needs to continually listen and partner with our Aboriginal partners so we can learn and provide culturally appropriate care.”

Copies of the Declaration of Commitment will be posted in highly visible locations at IH health sites in the Cariboo.

“It is our expectation that all our First Nations patients will feel comfortable coming to any Interior Health site and be treated in a culturally appropriate manner,” said Mazurkewich.

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**Photo cutline:** Cariboo area First Nations, Interior Health, First Nations Health Authority representatives hold personal commitments for cultural safety at the conclusion of the Cultural Safety and Humility Forum, held at the Xat’sull (Soda Creek) First Nation on May 3-4.

**Media, for information:**

Susan Duncan, Communications Consultant, Interior Health  
250-314-2100 Ext. 3749

First Nations Health Authority  
[Media@fnha.ca](mailto:Media@fnha.ca) | 604-831-4898