

August 20, 2014

## **Collaborative Northern First Nations Health and Wellness Plan Released**

The Northern First Nations Health Partnership Committee is pleased to release *Implementing Our Health and Wellness Plan: An Overview*. This document summarizes a comprehensive plan that was developed with the guidance and direction of Northern First Nations community leadership over the past year. It was endorsed by the Northern Health Board, and received its final approval from Northern Chiefs at their First Nations Health Council Regional Caucus meeting in April 2014.

*Implementing Our Health and Wellness Plan: An Overview* is meant to communicate the complex work of transforming the health system for Northern First Nations. The broad themes in which the goals are grouped are: programs and services, operations and infrastructure, managing information, and measuring status and success. Within these themes are clustered 14 goals that relate to: developing cultural competency and safety, improving accessibility of services, supporting mental wellness, developing collaborative communications activities, and supporting a locally representative health workforce, to name a few. From these goals, specific objectives and implementation activities were identified.

"This partnership with Northern Health has demonstrated that the North is a leader in advancing strategies that will serve to improve the health status for Northern First Nations people," said Warner Adam, First Nations Health Council Northern Regional Caucus Representative. "Our job collectively is to close the health gap that exists between First Nations and the rest of BC citizens. Part of the strategy includes innovation and thinking outside the current medical system and structures."

The Plan also highlights four cross-cutting themes to be taken into account within all goals. They are factors related to: urban/away from home, regional rural and remoteness, social determinants of health, and traditional approaches and practices. In some cases, specific strategies will be developed to ensure attention is given to these cross-cutting themes. In addition, the Committee identified four goals as working priorities for the 2014 year: cultural competency, primary health care, public and population health, and mental wellness and substance use.

"Working collaboratively with First Nations health providers and communities is important to help improve the health of Northern First Nations people," said Margo Greenwood, Northern Health's Vice-President of Aboriginal Health. "Northern Health recognizes health services have to be delivered in a culturally appropriate and safe manner, and this plan identifies specific goals to achieve this objective."

The Northern First Nations Health Partnership Committee was established to implement the goals of the *Northern Partnership Accord*, which was signed in May 2012 by the First Nations Health Council Northern Regional Health Caucus, the (then *interim*) First Nations Health Authority, and Northern Health. This historic Accord opens new doors for cooperation and planning to improve health outcomes for Northern First Nations (see [Media Release, May 2012](#)).

“It has been an absolute honour to be a part of this work supporting the growing partnership between our communities and partners at Northern Health. This is a historic time in First Nations health with communities taking ownership of their health, their health authority, and moving their priorities forward,” said Nicole Cross, Northern Regional Director with the First Nations Health Authority. “Building on the years of work of our political leadership through the FNHC it is very exciting for us all to be in a place where we can begin to roll up our sleeves and address the health priorities of our Northern communities collaboratively.”

Over 35% of the First Nations population in BC lives in the Northern Region. First Nations in Northern BC face distinct health service challenges with many remote communities spread out over a vast area. The ongoing partnership between Northern Health, the First Nations Health Authority, and the First Nations Health Council is creating new opportunities and finding solutions to the diverse challenges related to health service delivery while acknowledging the wider social determinants that impact health and wellness.

The [First Nations Health Authority](#) (FNHA) is the first province-wide health authority of its kind in Canada. In 2013, the FNHA assumed the programs, services, and responsibilities formerly handled by Health Canada's First Nations Inuit Health Branch Pacific Region. Our vision is to transform the health and well-being of BC's First Nations and Aboriginal people by dramatically changing healthcare for the better.

The [First Nations Health Council](#) (FNHC) is the political and advocacy arm of the First Nations Health Governance Structure in BC that also includes the FNHA and First Nations Health Directors Association. The Northern FNHC Regional Health Caucus is composed of and represents Northern First Nations and serves as the regional planning and engagement forum for First Nations health in the North.

[Northern Health](#) is one of five provincial health authorities in the province of BC. It is divided into three Health Service Delivery Areas: Northeast, Northern Interior, and Northwest, similar to the three sub-regions the Northern Caucus has organized around. Northern Health employs over 7,000 people to provide health services to 300,000 people over an area of 600,000 square kilometers.

The Northern First Nations Health Partnership Committee includes representation from Northern Health, the FNHC, FNHA, and Northern First Nations. The Committee was struck shortly after the signing of the Northern Partnership Accord and began meeting in September 2012. Brief [Communiqués](#) summarize the Committee meetings and are available on the Northern Health website.

**Background Documents:**

[Northern Partnership Accord](#)

[Tripartite First Nations Health Plan](#)