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FNHA and UBC establish chair to prevent cancer and improve wellbeing

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and the University of British Columbia have created a faculty position dedicated to improving cancer outcomes and overall wellness among First Nations and Indigenous people.

The chair will focus on the impact of cancer on the health and wellness journey of First Nations and their families. It will take a holistic approach to developing strategies to prevent and address cancer, acknowledging how colonization, racism, marginalization and poverty have led to the current disparity in health outcomes.

“The chair is an advancement of the work that continues to be achieved through the unprecedented collaboration amongst BC First Nations to take control of their health and wellness. It will look at cancer through a First Nations lens of Health and Wellness and bring together the best of both First Nations and Western medicine approaches,” said Joe Gallagher, chief executive officer, FNHA. “The FNHA looks forward to partnering with UBC on this chair as an initial step to creating a broader collaborative relationship to address First Nations health and wellness in the spirit of reconciliation.”

The impact of colonization has interrupted First Nations health and wellness and has contributed to poor overall health among First Nations and Indigenous people in B.C. compared to the general population. The new First Nations Health Authority Chair in Cancer and Wellness at UBC aims to address these issues within the healthcare system and will be supported by a \$1.5-million contribution from the FNHA, with matching funds from UBC. A search process for the first chairperson is now underway.

“First Nations and Indigenous people should have access to culturally sensitive medical practices that promote wellbeing and address their needs,” said UBC President Santa Ono. “I am thrilled UBC can play a part in these efforts thanks to the funding made available through this partnership with the First Nations Health Authority.”

As a researcher, the chair will collect and analyze epidemiological data from First Nations communities, create systems for health monitoring and chronicle relevant oral traditions and community practices. The chair also will provide training and mentorship to faculty, students and staff and promote provincial and national partnerships to advance First Nations and Indigenous health.

“The establishment of this chair to focus on Indigenous wellness and prevention is a great step in the direction of respecting holistic views of health and wellness held by First Nations individuals and communities,” said Johnna Sparrow-Crawford, a breast cancer survivor and member of the Musqueam. “Drawing on all parts of our beliefs is critically important because it’s all tied



together—mental, physical and spiritual. I think that we absolutely need to blend the two worlds together in prevention and treatment of cancer for our people—it’s a win-win situation.”

The chair will be based in both the UBC faculty of medicine's school of population and public health and the FNHA, whose offices are in North Vancouver, the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people. At UBC, the chair will work closely with the university's Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Health, which was created in 2014 to improve recruitment and retention of Indigenous students into the health professions, develop curricula addressing Indigenous health concerns, and further research into Indigenous health.

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