

Assembly of First Nations

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ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
July 14-15-16, 2026, Ottawa, ON

Resolution no. 49/2026

TITLE: Support for the Funding and Implementation of the *Honouring our Strengths Framework, 2nd Edition*

SUBJECT: Health, Education

MOVED BY: Chief Michael Yellowback, Manto Sipi Cree Nation, MB

SECONDED BY: Chief Tamara Young, Pictou Landing First Nations, NS

DECISION Approved by the AFN Executive Committee by consensus.

WHEREAS:

A. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) states:

- i. Article 7(1): Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person.
- ii. Article 23: Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.
- iii. Article 24(2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

B. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action state that:

- i. 18: We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the healthcare rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

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- C. The Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) address the ongoing crisis of violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit/LGBTQQIA persons across Canada, including calls “upon all governments”:
- i. [7.1]: We call upon all governments and health service providers to recognize that Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, including 2SLGBTQQIA people – are the experts in caring for and healing themselves, and that health and wellness services are most effective when they are designed and delivered by the Indigenous Peoples they are supposed to serve, in a manner consistent with and grounded in the practices, world views, cultures, languages, and values of the diverse Inuit, Métis, and First Nations communities they serve.
- D. Supported by Resolution 60/2010, *Ratification of Renewed Framework for the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program and Youth Solvent Addiction Program*, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), along with Health Canada and the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (now Thunderbird Partnership Foundation), released *Honouring our Strengths (HOS): A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in Canada* in 2011.
- E. AFN Resolution 60/2023, *Measures to Address the Impacts of the Opioid Crisis*, directs the AFN to call on Indigenous Services Canada to ensure that enhanced, flexible funding be accessible to all First Nations who wish to implement the HOS Framework and to work with relevant First Nations Mental Wellness organizations that would help them address their substance use needs.
- F. Since its release in 2011, the HOS Framework has shifted the focus of substance use support from deficits to strengths; emphasized the need for culture-as-foundation community-based care; made clear the importance of Indigenous Knowledge in healing; and supported the integration of mental wellness and substance use care.
- G. The substance use health landscape has changed dramatically since 2011. Substance use has moved from prescription drugs to an unregulated and highly toxic drug supply, contaminated with substances such as the potent opioid, fentanyl.
- H. Opioids and other contaminated drugs, such as methamphetamine and benzodiazepines, are killing and harming First Nations at an alarming rate. For example, opioid-related deaths for First Nations in Ontario tripled between 2019 and 2022; in 2022, in Ontario, First Nations were dying at a rate nine times higher than for non-First Nations; and in British Columbia (BC), the death rate for First Nations was 6.7 times higher than for other BC residents – these are the largest gaps since the public health emergency was declared in 2016.
- I. First Nations across Canada continue to experience disproportionate rates of toxic drug poisonings, overdose deaths, and substance use related harms. The worsening drug crisis drove development of the HOS Framework 2nd edition, including: a greater understanding of complex trauma and the role it plays in substance use; making the language used more contemporary and less stigmatizing; the use of the most recent knowledge and evidence, particularly in harm reduction and pharmacological approaches; addressing anti-Indigenous racism; and shining a light on the need for housing and infrastructure along with wrap-around services that integrate the social determinants of health.
- J. Thunderbird Partnership Foundation has called on the government to modernize the current funding formula and implement fair and equitable salaries for addictions workers of the National Native Alcohol and Drug

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Abuse Program, the National Youth Solvent Abuse Program and community-based substance use programs. The Government has not responded to this call. First Nations mental wellness and substance use health workers face significant wage disparities, earning nearly 45% less than their provincial counterparts.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:

1. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to call on the Government of Canada, in partnership with First Nations, to implement a sustainable and equitable funding that advances the full implementation of Honoring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Support Wellness and Substance Use Health Among First Nations People in Canada (2nd Edition) (Honouring Our Strengths Framework), including the following:
 - a. Investments in workforce development, community-based programming, infrastructure, and wrap-around support, and
 - b. Equitable compensation and wage parity with comparable provincial and territorial substance use health positions for First Nations employees to advances equity in services and programs.
2. Support in principle the Honouring Our Strengths Framework (2nd Edition) as a policy framework to support an expanded work continuum of care and equitable funding for the National Native Alcohol and Drug Program, the National Youth Solvent Abuse Program Treatment Centers, and First Nations community-based programming.
3. Direct the AFN to advocate to federal, provincial, and territorial governments to support the full implementation of *Honouring Our Strengths Framework* (2nd edition).
4. Direct the AFN to call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to adequately resource First Nations governments, Tribal Councils and other related organizations to provide a full continuum of wellness and substance use care in First Nations communities, ensuring access to culturally safe and effective services for community members.

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