



Assembly of First Nations First Nations – First Ministers' Meeting Day of Ceremony



Sunday, October 25, 2026 • 7:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. ET • 111 Sussex Drive, Ottawa

Protocols for Traditional First Nations Gatherings and Ceremonies

Background and Context

The First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting (FNFMM) represents an historic opportunity to celebrate and share beliefs and values at the highest levels. For First Nations, ceremony is an integral part of relating with the world and so it becomes a part of meetings, proceedings within First Nations laws, as well as spiritual endeavours. While First Nations do not have an interest in converting others, the central nature of ceremony in their lives makes it part of any interaction between First Nations and their neighbours. Of course, due to the influence of the many different landscapes across the country, the beliefs and protocols of First Nations cultures are as diverse as the territories themselves, and ceremony can vary widely in terms of items used, the actions within, and the meaning of symbols and totems.

Ceremony is an expression of First Nations highest values and philosophies. Ceremony is an expression of purpose. It is an expression of worldview and how a people believe the world works and how we conduct ourselves within it and relate to it. Although all First Nations have differences in beliefs and ceremony, the idea that handing down our cultures, our stories and our ceremonies to our children, so our nations can walk on into history and the future, is our highest purpose.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) would like to acknowledge the importance of this occasion. During the Day of Ceremony for the FNFMM, First Ministers will take part in ceremonies that their government, only a few generations ago, had banned.

The AFN lifts up those First Nation families, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers who protected our ceremonies and cultures through these dark periods. The AFN expresses gratitude to those who carried on culture and ceremony while under threat. It also acknowledges those First Nations who have lost their cultures and access to ceremony due to this push to destroy First Nations' values, philosophies, languages, and nations.

During the Day of Ceremony, Canadian leaders will take part in First Nations' ceremony. It must be emphasized what this says about Canadians and their feelings and commitment to reconciliation. The AFN gives much thanks to these leaders, who represent the many different Canadians within their regions, for their willingness to take part, to share, and to seek a better understanding.



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Protocol

There is no single list of protocols that applies to all First Nations ceremonies. What follows is a very general list of protocols when attending the Day of Ceremony at the First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting. Elders and Knowledge Keepers will generally provide direction to participants as required.

- Ceremonies are alcohol and drug free. Ceremony attendees should refrain from alcohol or drugs for a minimum of 4 days prior.
- No talking, laughing, or interrupting when others are speaking.
- Have positive thoughts and prayers.
- If bringing children, teach them the traditional protocols and keep them from running around or disrupting.
- When smudging, do not wear anything reflective (jewelry, glasses, artificial items, etc.)
- During feasts, only take what you will eat. No food is to be thrown away.
- Before participating in a ceremony, seek advice of the spiritual advisors for protocols (i.e., is tobacco the appropriate offering?).
- During the ceremony, those who identify as women should wear long dresses and 2-Spirit or gender diverse peoples are encouraged to also wear long dresses if it fit within their gender identity.
- Respect when the Elder or Knowledge Keeper states that there be no pictures or audio-visual recording of a ceremony or parts of a ceremony.
- Only appropriate offerings can be put into the sacred fire. The Elder or Knowledge Keeper will advise or, if in doubt, there will be helpers on site.
- Persons on their "Moon Time" (Menstrual Cycle) are invited to ceremony and can be present to view the various ceremonies but are asked to refrain from actively participating in the Ceremonies, including the Pipe Ceremony and Smudging. They are also asked to refrain from handling, touching, or sitting near ceremonial objects (drums, rattles, eagle staffs), medicines (sweet grass, tobacco), or bundles (pipes).
- When in doubt, ask for advice on appropriate protocols.