

Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
September 3-4-5, 2025, Winnipeg, MB

Resolution no. 13/2025

TITLE:	National Review of Traditional Healer Program and NIHB Transportation Policy
SUBJECT:	Health, Traditional Healing, Medical Transportation
MOVED BY:	Chief Derek Nepinak, Minegozibe Anishinabe First Nation, MB
SECONDED BY:	Andre Bear, Proxy, Little Black Bear First Nation, SK
DECISION	Carried; 5 Opposition; 5 Abstention

WHEREAS:

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

- i. Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.
- ii. Article 19: States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.
- iii. Article 24(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.
- iv. 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 the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.
- v. Article 31(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic

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resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

B. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action states:

- i. Call to Action #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 health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.
- ii. Call to Action #22: We call upon those can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.

C. The First Nations principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession), assert that First Nations have the right to own, control, access and possess information about their nations, which is fundamental to First Nations Inherent right to self-determination and data sovereignty.

D. The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum framework states in section 6.1 that culture is foundational to wellbeing of First Nations individuals, and in section 6.1.1 urges that "Government bodies at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels must work with communities to ensure their distinct circumstances are understood and incorporated into programming and policy development; programs and policies must reflect the needs and strengths of local First Nations communities."

E. In Dr. Amy Bombay's research paper *Parents and/or grandparents attendance at Residential School and cultural related factors: Associations with mental and substance use among First Nations adults living off-reserve* highlights that participation in cultural practices, including traditional ceremonies, plays a crucial role in promoting mental health and well-being amongst Indigenous populations.

F. Joyce's Principle affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to equitable access to health and social services without discrimination, and to receive healthcare that respects cultural identity, traditions, and wholistic understandings of health.

G. In 2017-18, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) Non-Insured Health Benefits program introduced Traditional Healer Services Funding under the Mental Health Counselling Benefits and amended the Medical Transportation Benefits to support access to Traditional Healer.

H. The Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) national review changes regarding Traditional Healer Services and/or Medical Transportation Benefits retained culturally unsafe policies, such as:

- i. Imposition of one hour time limits for one-on-one appointments with traditional healers, which reflects colonial mindsets and disregards Indigenous understandings of healing by a traditional healer.

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- ii. Only individuals with a medical condition verified by Western authorities can benefit from traditional healing practices, which is a form of whitewashing that imposes colonial standards on Indigenous healing and undermines autonomy.
- iii. Individuals are limited for medical transportation to a “nearest provider” despite their specific cultural needs and practices.
- iv. Exceptions to the NIHB policies that are not rooted in understanding of how traditional healing occurs, and that do not respect the diversity of ceremonies and cultural protocols across and within regions.

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

1. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to advocate for the permanency and expansion of Indigenous Services Canada’s (ISC) First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB), traditional healer funding, including for individuals with allergies who get misdiagnosed in emergencies.
2. Direct the AFN to collaborate with ISC FNIHB and its NIHB Joint Review Committee, along with the AFN Knowledge Keepers Council, to complete a national review and reform of the NIHB’s Medical Transportation policy and the traditional healing program, to overhaul current policies that perpetuate cultural harm and restrict access to First Nations traditional healing in a culturally safe manner, and assert the rights of First Nations to determine their own traditional healers and traditional healing practices according to their own distinct and unique First Nation’s culture.

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