
Assembly of First Nations

55 Metcalfe Street, Suite 1600
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L5
Telephone: 613-241-6789 Fax: 613-241-5808
www.afn.ca



Assemblée des Premières Nations

55, rue Metcalfe, Suite 1600
Ottawa (Ontario) K1P 6L5
Téléphone: 613-241-6789 Télécopieur: 613-241-5808
www.afn.ca

**ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
JULY 11, 12, & 13, 2023; HALIFAX, NS**

Resolution no. 60/2023

TITLE: Measures to Address the Impacts of the Opioid Crisis

SUBJECT: Health

MOVED BY: Chief Rachel Manitowabi, Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation, ON

SECONDED BY: David Pratt, proxy, James Smith Cree Nation, SK

DECISION Carried; 1 abstention, 1 opposed

WHEREAS:

- A. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) states:
- i. Article 7: Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person.
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. Article 40: Indigenous peoples have the right to access to and prompt decision through just and fair procedures for the resolution of conflicts and disputes with States or other parties, as well as to effective remedies for all infringements of their individual and collective rights. Such a decision shall give due consideration to the customs, traditions, rules and legal systems of the indigenous peoples concerned and international human rights.
- B. Canada continues to experience an unregulated drug toxicity crisis primarily involving opioids. Between January 2016 and June 2022, there were a total of 32,632 apparent opioid toxicity deaths between. A national study of opioid poisoning-related hospitalizations revealed higher rates among people with lower levels of

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 13th day of July 2023 in Halifax, Nova Scotia

JOANNA BERNARD, INTERIM NATIONAL CHIEF

60- 2023
Page 1 of 5

income and education, people who were unemployed or out of the labour force, Indigenous Peoples, people living in lone-parent households, and people who spend more than 50% of their income on housing.

- C. In 2011, 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. As the Framework is meant to address all substance use issues, the Health Sector is working with Indigenous Services Canada on follow up work to the recommendations from this framework. This will help guide further action with the framework itself and how it could support the AFN's Opioid Strategy.
- D. AFN Resolution 82/2016, Development of a First Nations Opioid Strategy, directed the Chiefs' Committee on Health to create a First Nations specific action plan to address the opioid crisis.
- E. In response the First Nations Specific Opioid strategy was released in 2019 and has since been shared with all First Nations across Canada. The AFN also hosted a dialogue session on the Opioid Strategy at the 2019 Annual General Assembly in Fredericton, NB. Participants in the dialogue session highlighted priority areas such as: community outreach, Naloxone use, how members in urban areas are affected, and the need to take a social determinants of health approach.
- F. AFN Resolution 89/2018, *Response to the Ongoing Opioid and Methamphetamine Crisis*, directs the AFN to:
 - i. Call on Indigenous Services Canada to commit immediate sustainable, predictable, and long- term funding for First Nations to:
 - ii. Support the implementation of recommended actions identified in the First Nations Specific Opioid Strategy (Opioid Strategy);
 - iii. Expand on/ or develop the recommendations and actions identified in the Opioid Strategy to address the use of non -prescribed drugs in First Nations;
 - iv. Expand on/ or develop the recommendations and actions identified in the Opioid Strategy to address the use of methamphetamines and other illicit drugs in First Nations;
 - v. Support First Nations in addressing the social determinants of health that contribute to the issues of addictions in First Nations;
 - vi. Support First Nations in building capacity to for early intervention and prevention training that looks beyond the western medical models and utilizes traditional First Nations based methods;
 - vii. Ensure First Nations can continue to practice traditional healing and medicinal approaches to support their well-being; and

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 13th day of July 2023 in Halifax, Nova Scotia



- viii. Support the AFN, in partnership with First Nations mental wellness organizations, to host a forum on mental wellness and addictions that will examine responses to opioid and methamphetamine addictions.
- G. AFN Resolution 109/2019, *First Nations Healing Approaches to the Opioid Crisis*, directs the AFN to Call on Indigenous Services Canada and Health Canada to fulfill their fiduciary obligation to fully support and finance First Nations wholistic approaches to healing to address the opioid crisis.
- H. The AFN's 2023 Pre-Budget Submission called on Canada to invest \$1.3 billion over five years for the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) to help First Nations address their substance use needs.
- I. Despite representing just 2.6% of the total population, in 2017 Indigenous Peoples accounted for 10% of overdose deaths. Indigenous women are 8 times more likely to have a nonfatal overdose and five times more likely to have a fatal overdose than non-Indigenous women.
- J. Yukon First Nations have been devastatingly impacted. In March 2023, Yukon Chief Coroner Heather Jones reported 25 deaths last year attributed to toxic substances, 20 of which involved opioids in our Yukon territorial population of about 43,000 people. On a per capita basis, that rate is worse than in B.C., which had the country's highest death toll last year with 2272 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths. Of the 25 deaths from toxic drugs reported last year, 17 or about two-thirds identified as First Nations, The Yukon Bureau of Statistics pegs the territory's overall population as 22.3 percent Indigenous.
- K. In 2016, Canada released the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy a public-health focused approach, that outlines a framework for evidence-based actions to reduce the harms associated with substance use in Canada which includes four pillars: prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement.
- L. A Public Safety Canada Law Enforcement Roundtable in 2018 concluded there are not enough resources to do integrated police work in Indigenous communities. There is limited enforcement capacity to address the opioid crisis among other issues plaguing Indigenous communities. Recommendations included:
- i. Increasing the availability of treatment-on-demand,
 - ii. Building law enforcement capacity to facilitate access to these services,
 - iii. Allocating more resources to do integrated police work in Indigenous communities, and,
 - iv. Ensuring individuals with living or lived experience are a part of the conversation around opioids.
- M. The medical journal the Lancet reported in an opinion piece in March 2023 that by available indicators, even after a decade, the effective strategies required to effectively curb and reverse the opioid death crisis in Canada remain largely absent. Moreover, evolving characteristics have added new challenges.

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 13th day of July 2023 in Halifax, Nova Scotia



- N. If policymakers sincerely intend to revert the overdose death-epidemic, systematic risk population-wide prevention and 'vector-control' strategies targeting the core causes of overdose deaths ought to be deployed. This means no less than providing as many as possible of all at-risk individuals with the safe, predictable, pharmaceutical-grade substances that will effectively keep them from continued use of and exposure to illicit toxic drug supply.
- O. Responding to the opioid and drug crisis in communities may require increased access to First Nations policing services, access to restorative justice, healing lodges, and other required measures as identified by First Nations.

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

- 1. Call on the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to undertake advocacy and provide political support First Nations who wish to bring civil law litigation against those trafficking and responsible for the loss of life in our First Nations to ensure reparations for this new genocide can be provided to assist families in their healing and First Nations to have the capacity to support measures to address the opioid crisis.
- 2. Call on the AFN to request the federal government to:
 - a. Support First Nations in their efforts to ensure policing as an essential service;
 - b. Provide enhanced support for the RCMP to develop culturally-relevant and trauma-informed supports to support relationships with First Nation governments and their citizens where directed by the First Nation;
 - c. Provide immediate resources for any interested First Nations, including Yukon First Nations to create, implement, and maintain community safety officer programs;
 - d. Ensure First Nations governments who wish to provide safe and reliable access to predictable, pharmaceutical-grade substances are able to do so in exercise of their inherent and Treaty rights; and
 - e. Provide funding and support for ongoing advisory committees on opioid addiction prevention and harm reduction, and for law enforcement and health care providers that will include committee representatives with living or lived experience.
- 3. Direct the AFN to call on Indigenous Services Canada to provide updates on recommendations from Honouring Our Strengths (HOS) Framework and the AFN's Opioid Strategy and that any work in updating First Nations on

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 13th day of July 2023 in Halifax, Nova Scotia



JOANNA BERNARD, INTERIM NATIONAL CHIEF

60 – 2023
Page 4 of 5

the recommendations must address identified gaps and ensure that the HOS and Opioid Strategy are relevant to the needs of First Nations.

4. Direct the AFN to call on ISC to ensure that enhanced flexible funding be accessible to all First Nations who wish to implement HOS Framework and Opioid Strategy and to work with relevant First Nations Mental Wellness organizations that would help them address their substance use needs.

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 13th day of July 2023 in Halifax, Nova Scotia



JOANNA BERNARD, INTERIM NATIONAL CHIEF

60 – 2023
Page 5 of 5