



# Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly 2024

December 3-5, 2024 • Rogers Centre Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario

## Assembly of First Nations Special Chief's Assembly Update on Panel 13 Report Recommendations

### Background

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Resolution 13/2020, titled "*Becoming A Role Model in Ending Sexual Orientation and Gender-Based Discrimination Within the Assembly of First Nations*," was passed by First Nations-in-Assembly at the AFN Annual General Assembly (AGA) in December 2020. This resolution established the imperative for an independent review aimed at assessing and combating systemic gender- and sexual orientation-based discrimination within the AFN. The primary objective was to eradicate various forms of violence, including sexualized violence and bullying. In response, a three-member independent Panel was designated to investigate and provide actionable recommendations, culminating in a final report presented at the July 2023 AGA.

### Training Efforts

AFN has made strides in enhancing the knowledge and skills of its directors and employees. All AFN Directors are required to complete a comprehensive training program titled "Human Resources Training for Leaders: From Hire to Retirement." This training encompassed various topics aligned with the goals of Panel 13, including:

- Understanding Gender and Sexual Orientation Discrimination
- Building a Respectful Workplace: Human Rights, Harassment, and Violence Prevention
- Fairness, Consistency, Honesty, and Integrity in Leadership
- The Duty to Accommodate: Rights and Responsibilities
- Proactive Strategies for Addressing Workplace Issues
- Understanding the Complaint Process and Investigation Procedures

Additionally, in May of 2024, two HR staff members attended a training session in Winnipeg titled "Human Resources in an Era of Reconciliation & Decolonization," which covered critical topics such as psychological safety in the workplace, lateral kindness, and trauma-informed leadership.

### Mental Wellness Initiatives

The support services offered by the Mental Health Support Counsellor (MHSC) have seen an increase in utilization, with more staff participating in both one-time consultations and formal counseling sessions. Our MHSC has completed specialized training in Body-Oriented Trauma Counselling Strategies in 2024, focusing on key areas such as:



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- How Trauma Is Stored in the Body
- Stabilization and Restoring Connection to the Present
- Strategies for Transforming Trauma
- Integration and Meaning Making

To further enhance mental wellness support, data is now being gathered confidentially, enabling AFN to identify key patterns and issues affecting staff and address them promptly. The MHSC has also attended AFN Assemblies to provide mental wellness resources to participants and AFN employees. Additionally, they engage in clinical supervision to uphold high service delivery standards and actively seek further training opportunities.

## Health Benefits for AFN Staff

On April 9, 2024, the AFN HR team participated in the National Benefit Administrator Education Session, where discussions focused on crucial topics impacting staff benefits. Key sessions included:

- **Mental Health:** An overview of available mental health supports and best practices for addressing mental health in workplace conversations
- **Women's Health:** Insights into women's health issues affecting the workforce, with a focus on how benefits can support employees
- A meeting is scheduled with AFN's insurance broker "Clarke Financial Planning & Insurance Services" on December 5, 2024, to discuss proposed changes to the benefit plan aimed at enhancing support for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Proposed enhancements include:
  - Increasing the allotment for psychologist/psychotherapist services
  - Expanding coverage for women's health, including fertility treatments, pregnancy-related care, and menopause support
  - Introducing Gender Affirmation Coverage, which encompasses gender affirmation care not typically covered by provincial health plans, including vocal coaching, hair removal, counseling, and surgeries

## Accessibility Initiatives

In compliance with the Accessible Canada Act (ACA), AFN is committed to preparing and publishing accessibility plans, progress reports, and feedback processes aimed at achieving a barrier-free Canada by 2040, specifically pertaining to Human Resources documents. The ACA focuses on the proactive identification, removal, and prevention of barriers to accessibility across seven priority areas, including employment. AFN aims to proactively make all documents (employment agreements, policies, forms, etc.) accessible, minimizing the need for unique accessibility requests. The AFN has also revised its policies and procedures manual to utilize clear and concise language.



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## Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC)

The JHSC meets on a regular basis to discuss and address workplace health and safety matters. All members have completed the basic training required for their roles; however, some members have taken additional training specifically focused on violence and harassment prevention. The remaining members are scheduled to attend this specialized training to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how to effectively address and prevent violence and harassment in the workplace. This ongoing commitment to training underscores the committee's dedication to fostering a safe and healthy work environment for all AFN employees.

## Policy Revisions

In accordance with the recommendations from the Panel 13 Report, AFN has undertaken a thorough review and revision of the HR policy manual to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and best practices. HR has prepared drafts of the new policies, which include but are not limited to enhancements to the Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Policy, updates to the Workplace Accommodation Policy, improvements to the Return-to-Work Policy, and revisions to the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Policy to promote a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable work environment.

These draft policies have been shared with the Financial Management Board (FMB) as a final step for review. The FMB's mandate has been expanded to support First Nations entities not only with financial policies but also with HR policies. They are currently reviewing our updated policy templates and are expected to provide feedback by early 2025.

## Workplan and Steering Committee Update

The Workplan established in response to the Panel 13 Report remains a crucial framework for implementing the recommended changes within the AFN.

The Steering Committee will meet following the 2024 SCA, at which time it will provide guidance and oversight for the implementation of the Workplan. The committee's focus will be on maintaining momentum around the recommendations, ensuring continued collaboration among AFN Directors and HR professionals, and fostering inclusivity as it works towards creating a more equitable workplace.

## Navigating Funding Restraints

While the AFN is committed to implementing the recommendations outlined in the Panel 13 Report, various initiatives have not yet been fully realized due to funding constraints. The comprehensive training programs and resources recommended, particularly those tailored to the unique structure and Indigeneity of the AFN, involve significant costs related to consultant fees, development of custom training modules, and ongoing training for all employees. Such mandatory trainings recommended in the Panel 13 Report are:



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- anti-discrimination and harassment;
- equity, diversity, and inclusion; cultural humility, emotional intelligence, and building resilience;
- psychological safety;
- trauma-informed leadership and governance;
- healing complex PTSD;
- intergenerational trauma; and,
- institutional trauma through ceremony.

The financial investment required to create and deliver these Indigenous-specific training programs is substantial, encompassing needs assessments, collaboration with Indigenous experts, and the continuous evaluation and improvement of training materials.

By considering alternative approaches, AFN can continue to work towards fulfilling the recommendations of the Panel 13 Report in a financially sustainable manner, ensuring that the organization can uphold its commitment to creating a respectful, inclusive, and equitable workplace for all members.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the AFN continues to build on the foundational work established by the Panel 13 Report, actively addressing systemic gender- and sexual orientation-based discrimination within the organization. Through comprehensive training initiatives, enhanced mental wellness support, and proactive health benefits tailored to the diverse needs of staff, AFN demonstrates its commitment to fostering a respectful and equitable workplace. Furthermore, the ongoing efforts to revise HR policies in alignment with best practices and the principles of the Accessible Canada Act underline AFN's dedication to creating an inclusive environment for all employees. As we move forward, the AFN remains focused on implementing these vital changes and will continue to seek opportunities for growth and improvement, ensuring that all members feel valued and supported in their roles.