
Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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**ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
DECEMBER 8 & 9, 2020, OTTAWA, ON**

Resolution no. 03/2020

TITLE:	Addressing Priority Concerns and Needs of First Nations Around COVID-19
SUBJECT:	Health
MOVED BY:	Chief Andrea Paul, Pictou Landing First Nation, NS
SECONDED BY:	Chief Karen Batson, Pine Creek First Nation, MB
DECISION:	Carried; 1 abstention

WHEREAS:

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

- i. 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.
- ii. Article 21 (1): Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and restraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
- iii. Article 21 (2): States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities; and,
- 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.

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- B.** The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing systemic barriers to Indigenous wellbeing, while continuing to create new challenges to the rights and safety of First Nations in Canada.
- C.** The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) COVID-19 National Task Force (C-19 Task Force) was established by the AFN Executive Committee to ensure that First Nations' unique needs were addressed during the pandemic through engaging in dialogue with experts, leadership and First Nations to develop advocacy tools and to provide recommended actions.
- D.** Rural and remote First Nations face additional barriers due to isolation, limitations on modes of transportation, challenges with access to food and supplies, digital connectivity and their capacity to respond to an outbreak.
- E.** Indigenous Peoples are facing increased human rights challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including increased rates of domestic and gender-based violence and reduced or halted support from in-person resources such as shelters and safe-injection sites. Mental health and addictions/substance use issues have risen since the start of the pandemic. Beyond that, the unintended consequences of lockdowns and community security, as well as public health measures and isolation protocols, have yet to be fully understood.
- F.** First Nations, particularly those that are remote, are challenged to obtain Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), adequate COVID-19 case information, widespread rapid-testing kits, culturally safe contact tracing, and proper screening methods to prevent travelers from compromising the health of their Elders and community members.
- G.** First Nations residing in urban areas and away from their First Nations must be supported throughout the pandemic and post-pandemic stages. Support must be extended to address the systemic issues faced by First Nations who must be not left behind simply through the act of leaving their nations as they face their own challenges accessing appropriate services and care. First Nations make up a disproportionate amount of Canada's homeless populations.
- H.** While First Nations have requested government action and progress on their priority needs and concerns, including requests for improved government communications, data access, funding increases, respect for Aboriginal Title and Rights, addressing racial discrimination, and administrative and/or service support, they have received inconsistent and uneven aid, resources, and funding from Canada.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Chiefs-in-Assembly:

- 1.** Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to urge the Government of Canada to rectify any inequities in their efforts to aid and support First Nations during the pandemic and to address the social injustice, economic insecurity and priority issues continuing to confront and challenge First Nations, including, but not limited to:

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funding to support safe and high-quality education; mental wellness and addictions services and supports; gender-based violence supports; shelters; healthcare resources and infrastructure.

2. Direct the AFN to urge the Government of Canada to create effective mechanisms to hear from and respond to First Nation communities and organizations about their recommendations and most pressing concerns and ensure their involvement in pandemic related decisions, including future vaccine prioritization.
3. Direct the AFN call upon Canada and the provinces and territories to respect the jurisdiction and autonomy of First Nations in their responses to the pandemic and to take immediate action to implement effective mechanisms for information sharing and data dissemination that will ensure Nations are informed of the number COVID-19 cases in their proximate communities and can respond appropriately and effectively.
4. Direct the AFN to support building First Nations' capacities to serve their citizens, regardless of residency, by working with like-minded organizations, including urban Indigenous organizations that have a mandate from First Nations to provide services, to continue advancing the needs and requests of First Nations to the Government of Canada and calling for informed and organized support, funding, and resources.
5. Direct Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and other federal departments to ensure that First Nations residing in urban areas and away from their First Nations are provided supports during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond and to build capacity for First Nations to meet the needs of all their citizens, including persons with disabilities.
6. Direct the AFN COVID-19 National Task Force to provide on-going support to the AFN Executive Committee for the duration of the pandemic to support the mitigation of impacts of COVID-19 on First Nations.
7. Ensure that all federal and provincial responses respect First Nations inherent and Treaty rights, such as the 'famine and pestilence' and 'medicine chest' clauses included in many of the Numbered Treaties.

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