



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
Special Chiefs Assembly

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

Ottawa is located on the unceded unsundered Territory of the Algonquin People.

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa (Ontario)

Ottawa est située sur le territoire non cédé et non abandonné du peuple algonquin.



First Nations Health

History

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) continues to push for transformative change through sustainable, adequate funding, capacity building, and improved relationships to support First Nations-led healthcare services and programs. Underpinning this approach is the recognition of inherent First Nations and Treaty Rights to health. AFN resolutions passed by First Nations-in-Assembly mandate Health Sector work. The Chiefs Committee on Health (CCOH), the First Nations Health Technicians Network, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) all provide further guidance to the AFN Health Sector related to this critical work.

First Nations' health and wellness continue to be compromised by deficits across the social determinants of health, evident in poverty, overcrowded housing, and a piecemeal approach to health services and programming. In national and regional dialogues, First Nations have articulated that true health and wellness systems are strengths-based, rooted in cultures, guided by First Nations themselves, and include the Treaty Rights to health as foundations to move towards resilience and growth.

AFN's recent advocacy

The proposed distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation has been a key file for the AFN. Resolution 16/2023, Distinctions-Based Indigenous Health Legislation, provides a mandate for the assembly to continue to collaborate with the federal government on developing health legislation, provided the legislation is consistent with UNDRIP and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples principles; that Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada are part of the legislative process (given the need to recognize the Treaty Rights to Health); and that the work is led by a newly established Leadership Table, mainly consisting of the CCOH members. The AFN continues to provide analysis and updates for First Nations to keep them informed on the process, and meeting with federal government representatives to help guide the federal work on this file. The AFN continues to hear concerns from across the regions regarding the health legislation process, with the short timeline for development, the lack of funds for regional engagement, lack of recognition of the Treaty Rights to Health, and lack of clarity on what areas the legislation will attempt to address being the most common heard concerns.

AFN Resolution 10/2018, *Resources for Engagement on Distinct First Nations Accessibility Legislation*, directs the AFN to work with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to secure resources to develop distinct First Nations accessibility legislation resulting from the introduction of the Accessible Canada Act in 2019. The AFN submitted the *Advancing Accessibility in First Nations on Reserve* final report to ESDC on October 20, 2023, and is advocating for ongoing funding from ESDC for First Nations and the regions to become accessible. The AFN continues to undertake polls to get a pulse on the status of accessibility and disability in First Nations to inform elements of a distinct First Nations accessibility framework and Canada's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and the National Autism Strategy (NAS).



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
Special Chiefs Assembly

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

Ottawa is located on the unceded unsurrendered Territory of the Algonquin People.

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa (Ontario)

Ottawa est située sur le territoire non cédé et non abandonné du peuple algonquin.



First Nations clients, leadership, and service providers continue to encounter challenges with the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program, as identified by NIHB Navigators (representing all regions), and the 2022 Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Report 6: *Moving Towards Improving the Health of Indigenous Peoples in Canada: Accessibility and Administration of the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program*. Resolution 61/2022, *Reforming Non-Insured Health Benefits Travel Policies*, directs the AFN to continue the NIHB Joint Review and to engage First Nations in isolated, northern, and remote communities to fully comprehend the barriers to equitable health care. The AFN will continue to work with and advocate for First Nations to address NIHB program challenges through advocacy tables, such as the NIHB Navigators, NIHB-AFN Joint Review Steering Committee, and other partnerships with aligned health priorities.

Other key advocacy areas include mental health wellness and substance misuse—ensuring First Nations perspectives are central and there is a renewed focus on strengths-based and land-based healing—elimination of tuberculosis, anti-Indigenous racism in the health care system, COVID-19 recovery, digital health services, data sovereignty, and addressing the social determinants of health.

Next Steps

The AFN will prioritize several engagement processes with First Nations over the coming months. These processes include:

- Working with First Nations regions and Indigenous Services Canada to determine the process for dispersing the Indigenous Health Equity Fund (\$2 billion over ten years) funding.
- Developing policy recommendations for the Government of Canada on a wholistic long-term and continuing care framework (by reforming the Assisted Living and First Nations and Inuit Home and Community Care Programs).
- Review and strategize the future of the AFN-NIHB Joint Review Steering Committee with feedback from First Nations health representatives.
- Garner First Nations' perspectives and priorities regarding accessibility through the recently established First Nations Accessibility Hub, as well as through polls conducted.
- Co-drafting of distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation, pending new potential timelines and changes to process.

Finally, the AFN will be working with the Chiefs Committee on Health and other First Nations representatives to advocate for significant investments in First Nations health funding in Budget 2024 as part of the Pre-Budget Submissions process. This work will include supporting AFN leadership in meeting with federal government representatives and officials to articulate targeted funding needs that are essential to improve health outcomes for First Nations.

Contact:

Andrew Bisson, directeur, Santé,
abisson@afn.ca