



ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
July 9, 10, 11, 2024, Montreal, QC

Resolution no. 58/2024

TITLE: A National Strategy on Animal Care and Control in First Nations

SUBJECT: Health, Safety

MOVED BY: Chief Kelly Wolfe, Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, SK

SECONDED BY: Chief Lorie Whitecalf, Sweetgrass First Nation, SK

DECISION Approved by the AFN Executive Committee by consensus

WHEREAS:

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

- i. Article 7(1): Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person.
- ii. Article 20(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
- iii. 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 retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
- iv. Article 23: Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

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- v. Article 35: Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the responsibilities of individuals to their communities.
 - vi. Article 39: Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.
- B.** The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) 2024 Annual General Assembly's focus is Strengthening our Relations. The wellbeing of dog and cat relations is inextricably tied to the wellbeing of First Nations Peoples. Indigenous knowledge has honoured that interdependence for generations.
- C.** Anthropologist and Indigenous culture scholar Courtney Townsend explains that the commonly used expression by Indigenous peoples – 'all my relations' – is an example of this: "It acknowledges one's relations to all living and non-living things, ancestors and future generations unconfined from the perception of time." Recently, this concept has emerged in western medicine as One Health—that animals, humans and the environment must work together for the health of all.
- D.** When communities do not have resources to care for their humans, they have even less ability to look after their dogs and cats. Without access to veterinary services and animal care and control services, dog and cat populations get out of control. This imbalance can lead to an increase in dog attack and bite incidents for residents, an increase in human/wildlife conflict risks, and spread of disease. Many children, youth, adults, and elders report not feeling safe walking around their own community.
- E.** National statistics make it very clear that action is needed:
- i. On-reserve dog bite incidents are 20-200 times above those in the rest of Canada;
 - ii. Children ages 5 to 9 years are most commonly bitten by a dog;
 - iii. Adults are most commonly bitten on the hands and young children on the face and neck;
 - iv. It is estimated that there are one to two fatalities in Canada from dog attacks yearly;
 - v. Of the 28 fatalities between 1990 and 2007, 24 of them were children under 12;
 - vi. Out-of-control populations of cats and dogs can quickly lead to increases in human/wildlife conflict potential resulting in negative consequences for all; and
 - vii. Unwanted dogs and cats may get sick and spread deadly diseases like Parvo Virus that can affect wolf populations, increase human/wildlife conflict potential, and otherwise negatively impact community residents.
- F.** The *Indian Act* subsection 81(1) provides the authority for band councils to make by-laws to:
- i. (a) provide for the health of residents on the reserve and to prevent the spreading of contagious and infectious disease; and
 - ii. (e) protect against and prevention of trespass by cattle and other domestic animals, the establishment of pounds, the appointment of pound-keepers, the regulation of their duties and the provision for fees and charges for their services.

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- G.** Under the *Indian Act* section 73, the Governor in Council may make regulations to prevent, mitigate and control the spread of diseases on reserves, whether or not the diseases are infectious or communicable.
- H.** There is a need to explore the intersection of First Nations worldviews and relations with domesticated animals to develop a national strategy for First Nations to build an animal care and control regime to maintain the health of First Nations citizens and prevent the spread of infectious diseases like rabies.

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

- 1.** Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to seek funding to establish a national task force, mandated to develop a national strategy for First Nations to build an animal care and control regime to maintain the health of First Nations citizens and prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- 2.** Direct the AFN Task Force on Animal Care and Control to develop a tool kit on by-law development, community-based safety initiatives, best practices, protocols and promising interventions for First Nations, including potential resources and links to regional organizations that can support community-based initiatives.
- 3.** Direct the AFN to advocate that the federal government adopt relevant aspects of the national strategy on First Nations care and control, including the development of supporting regulations under the *Indian Act* that are consistent with the minimum standards established by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

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