



## What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

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The AFN Health Sector continues to push for transformative change through sustainable funding, capacity building and improving 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 Chiefs-in-Assembly mandate the work of the Health Sector. The Chiefs Committee on Health, the First Nations Health Technicians Network, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) all guide the AFN Health Sector in this critical work.

First Nations health outcomes continue to be compromised by deficits across the social determinants of health, evident in poverty, overcrowded housing, food insecurity, and a piecemeal approach to health services and programming. Many of these factors have been further compromised by the pandemic. In national and regional dialogues, First Nations have articulated that true health and wellness systems are strengths-based, rooted in cultures, and include the Treaty right to health as foundations to move towards resilience and growth.

While COVID-19 required urgent attention, the AFN's Health Sector has several priority areas. One of those priorities is health legislation, as mandated by Resolution 18/2021, *Supporting First Nations Participation in Dialogue on Health Legislation*. The federal government recently released an updated timeline of winter 2024 for health legislation. The AFN Health Sector will continue to work with the federal government to clarify what co-development means, and advocate for the appropriate resources to ensure First Nations have adequate opportunity to provide direction on the proposed legislation.

The AFN Health Sector is also collaborating with partners to address systemic racism in the healthcare system. Anti-Indigenous racism discussions have been taking place since October 2020 and the Health Sector will continue to advocate for health services that are equitable and culturally safe. Through this work, the Government of Canada has allocated resources to develop cultural safety programs and the implementation of Joyce's Principle in the federal healthcare system.

The AFN Health Sector works with regional partners and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) on Digital Health policy and collaborative models through regular meetings and development of frameworks and recommendations. The Health Sector continues to ensure proper engagement occurs with rights holders around the potential transformation of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB).



**SECTOR UPDATE**  
**SOCIAL BRANCH: HEALTH SECTOR**  
**ISSUE: FIRST NATIONS HEALTH**  
July 2022

The Health Sector raises awareness of the unique needs of First Nations persons with disabilities. The AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly have passed several resolutions on accessibility/disability, including AFN Resolution 98/2017, *Distinct First Nations Accessibility Legislation*, directing the AFN to work with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to develop distinct First Nations accessibility legislation by and for First Nations. Virtual regional discussions were held earlier this year to discuss key options for *A Distinct First Nations Accessibility Regime*.

A Seven Generations Continuum of Care Forum was held May 10-12, which highlighted an approach to health care that moves away from program-based, siloed activities and towards a model that embraces our cultures and wellness goals, with a vision that ensures the health, social and economic wellbeing of First Nations persons as they age and their care needs change. We will continue to promote this modified approach, with plans to hold a national dialogue on long-term care reform.

Other initiatives and action include:

- With guidance from mental wellness partners, the AFN Health Sector promotes the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework as the foundation to relieve legacy and emerging mental wellness challenges. Substance misuse, life-promotion, prescription drug use, and inter-generational residential school recovery requires First Nations healing pathways.
- First Nations experience significant operational irritants related to the NIHB program due to inadequate coverage, lack of timely access, inconsistent adjudication of claims and burdensome administrative processes. The NIHB Joint Review Process is a mechanism for First Nations representatives, AFN, and First Nations and Inuit Health Branch to jointly review NIHB benefits with the purpose of implementing program enhancements.
- The Health Sector continues to support the work of the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM). developing an AFN Resolution with NACM and continuing to support their efforts to bring birthing closer to home for First Nations.

### **How has the AFN's recent advocacy affected this area?**

The AFN continues to advocate for progress on First Nations' priorities and initiatives, including increased funds to support First Nations in areas such as mental wellness supports, long-term care reform, food security and accessibility capacity support.

The AFN Health Sector continues to advocate for improved, robust food systems and food



SECTOR UPDATE  
**SOCIAL BRANCH: HEALTH SECTOR**  
**ISSUE: FIRST NATIONS HEALTH**  
July 2022

sovereignty and has collaborated with the AFN Environment, Social, and Economic Development Sectors on First Nations food systems, climate change and food sovereignty.

The NIHB Joint Review Steering Committee (JRSC) is currently working towards completing the Medical Transportation Benefit Review which will be followed by a review of general Administrative and Operational Irritants. It is critical that NIHB be responsive to First Nations' needs.

The AFN's efforts to strengthen engagement with First Nations leadership, administrators, delivery and service providers is ongoing. This includes outreach through the distribution of several reports and analysis, meeting with key stakeholders, along with widespread use of social media. National dialogue on accessibility and disability rights, Seven Generations Continuum of Care, COVID-19 prevention and supports, among others were coordinated.

### Where do we hope to go in the future?

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The AFN Health Sector will continue to collaborate with First Nations partners in supporting health and wellbeing transformation for First Nations in areas including, but not limited to:

- Monitor NIHB irritants, in order to provide adequate benefits and services to First Nations. The AFN-FNIHB NIHB Joint Review will continue to support actions on NIHB transformation.
- Define and scope the Seven Generations Continuum of Care to support life cycle resilience.
- Develop strengths-based and culture informed tools to support First Nations mental wellness healing from pandemic distress
- Provide analysis and priorities on AFN mandated legislative opportunities such as the Distinctions-Based Health Legislation roadmap
- Monitor federal investments that aim to support First Nations health transformation through budget 2022.