

Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
September 3-4-5, 2025, Winnipeg, MB

Resolution no. 14/2025

TITLE:	Reforming the NIHB Program to Ensure Equitable, Accessible and Culturally Safe Healthcare
SUBJECT:	Health
MOVED BY:	Chief Derek Nepinak, Minegozibe Anishinabe First Nation, MB
SECONDED BY:	Andre Bear, Proxy, Little Black Bear First Nation, SK
DECISION	Carried; 5 Opposition; 5 Abstention

WHEREAS:

- A. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) states:
- Article 24(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals' also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.
 - 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.
- B. Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Resolution 05/20, *Principle for the elimination of racism and discrimination in the services provided to First Nations*, calls on Canada to recognize Joyce's Principle (2020) which aims to guarantee to all Indigenous people the right of equitable access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services, as well as the right to enjoy the best possible physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.
- C. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, including specific Calls 18 through 23 related to health, emphasize the need to address health inequities and ensure First Nations access to the same quality of health care as other Canadians.

Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 5th day of September, 2025 in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Cindy Woodhouse

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- D. The Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program is administratively complex and fragmented which requires clients to navigate multiple federal and territorial/provincial systems to access essential health services.
- E. Indigenous clients often face delays or denials when seeking approval for medically necessary services, medications, or medical supplies under the NIHB program.
- F. The lack of centralization and coordination in the NIHB program leads to inconsistent access, confusion, and barriers to care for First Nations citizens, particularly in remote and northern communities.
- G. The reimbursement rates for NIHB-covered services and travel are outdated and do not reflect current market rates or the true cost of accessing services, especially in northern and remote communities.
- H. Indigenous patients are often forced to pay out-of-pocket or forgo necessary treatment due to denied claims, insufficient coverage, or lack of transportation and lodging support.
- I. The current NIHB travel policy does not adequately support equitable access to care for rural and northern Indigenous people, who must travel long distances for basic health services, including the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and other Yukon First Nations.
- J. Inconsistent application of travel and escort policies across regions creates inequities in health access for Indigenous people.
- K. First Nations clients face significant administrative burden due to overlapping responsibilities and gaps between federal NIHB programming and territorial/provincial health systems.
- L. The federal NIHB program is not sufficiently responsive to the unique cultural, geographic, and community health needs of Indigenous Peoples.
- M. The deficiencies and systemic barriers within the NIHB program contribute to worsening health disparities and undermine the rights of Indigenous Peoples to equitable and timely healthcare.

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

1. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to call upon Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to immediately undertake reform of the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program working in collaboration with First Nations governments, with the goal of being culturally safe, equitable, and responsive to the unique needs of First Nations citizens, particularly in the remote, isolated, and northern regions.
2. Direct the AFN to urge the federal government to implement a centralized, streamlined, and transparent NIHB system that reduces administrative burdens, eliminates delays and denials, and ensures timely access to medically necessary health services, medications, and medical supplies and equipment.
3. Direct the AFN to advocate for increased, sustainable funding and modernize the NIHB policies (i.e., updated reimbursement and travel policies) to reflect the real costs and current market realities incurred, specifically by the remote, isolated, and northern regions.

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4. Direct the AFN to urge the federal government to co-develop a First Nations-led NIHB governance model, grounded by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Joyce's Principle, and the Truth and Reconciliations Calls to Action, to ensure full partnership and decision-making authority, and to uphold Indigenous rights to equitable and accessible health care.

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