

Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
December 2-3-4, 2025, Ottawa, ON

Resolution no. 77/2025

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| TITLE: | Support for First Nations Healthcare Workers |
| SUBJECT: | Health |
| MOVED BY: | Chief Ira McArthur, Pheasant Rump First Nation, SK |
| SECONDED BY: | Chief Sylvia Weenie, Stoney Knoll 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) recognizes the right of Indigenous Peoples to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to access without discrimination all social and health services (Articles 21, 23, and 24).
- B. First Nations across Canada hold an Inherent and Treaty Right to health, recognized and grounded in Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and reflected in Treaties 1–11, which obligate the Crown to provide health supports and services.
- C. The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action 18-24 provide a roadmap on actions that will improve health, including cultural safety training, recruitment, and retention of Indigenous healthcare workers.
- D. Several humanitarian laws and international instruments protect the human rights of healthcare workers, including but not limited to, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, among others.
- E. First Nations in all regions continue to experience severe health disparities compared to the general population, linked to chronic underfunding, systemic racism in healthcare systems, and inequitable federal policy approaches.
- F. First Nations communities across Canada are facing a national health –human resources crisis, including instability in funding, a lack of federal investment, high turnover rates, recruitment challenges, and limited access to trained health professionals.
- G. Health workers on-reserve experience high burnout and turnover due to chronic underfunding by Indigenous Services Canada, a situation mirrored nationally in First Nations communities across every region.

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- H. These workforce shortages directly impact the delivery of culturally safe essential health services to First Nations, including primary care, chronic disease management, maternal and infant health supports, mental health services public health programs, emergency response and distinct First Nations disability services delivered by First Nations for First Nations. There is a noticeable gap in research concerning the current state of health human resources in First Nations communities, and their perspectives.

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) and the Government of Canada to immediately address the national First Nations health human resource crisis by increasing recruitment and retention investments for First Nations health clinics and community health programs.
2. Call upon ISC to implement national recruitment incentives, to increase the number of First Nations Doctors, Physician Assistants, Registered Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Advanced Practice Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses, Midwives, and Doulas working in First Nations communities, through initiatives that include but are not limited to:
 - a. Scholarships;
 - b. Wage enhancements;
 - c. Relocation and housing supports;
 - d. Mentorship programs;
 - e. Community-based training pathways and incentives; and
 - f. A culturally safe accessibility/disability trained workforce, by First Nations for First Nations.
3. Direct the AFN to advocate for a national First Nations Health Workforce Strategy, co-developed with First Nations, that includes sustainable funding for salaries, housing, safe working conditions, travel supports, continuing education, and improved pathways to practice in remote, northern, and rural First Nations.
4. Demand that ISC and relevant research entities conduct a comprehensive national First Nations Health Workforce Environmental Scan, in partnership with First Nations, to identify critical shortages, training gaps, regional disparities, infrastructure barriers, and the root causes of turnover within First Nations health systems.
5. Call upon the Government of Canada to make meaningful, long-term investments to support retention and workplace wellness for First Nations health staff, including mental health supports, flexible funding models, and infrastructure investments.
6. Direct the AFN to advocate for federal investments and policies arising from this work to uphold First Nations self-determination, community-based decision-making, and Treaty and Inherent Rights to health.

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