

March 20th, 2017

Dear Respected Chiefs and Leaders,

As representatives to the First Nations Health Council (FNHC), we are pleased to share this update on recent developments related to the work of the FNHC.

New Partnership with Canada:

The federal government has established an ambitious agenda for change. The federal government has committed to a renewed Nation-to-Nation relationship with Indigenous peoples on the issues that matter most – issues like housing, employment, health, community safety and policing, child welfare, and education. These commitments come as the result of many years of advocacy and calls to action by our leaders. These commitments are the acknowledgement that the status quo is no longer acceptable and that we will accept nothing less than transformative change in our communities.

On February 14, 2017, the FNHC and the Minister of INAC signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) to engage First Nations in BC on ways to improve outcomes for First Nation children, youth and families. This agreement is about engagement. This agreement is about creating forums for First Nations to engage in direct dialogue with INAC on services for First Nation children and families.

To be clear, the FNHC is not negotiating the jurisdiction or transfer of services with Canada and BC. In May 2011, BC Chiefs endorsed 7 Directives to guide the work of the FNHC. As per Directive 6, the FNHC must be without prejudice to First Nations interests. This means the FNHC will never impact on Aboriginal title and rights or the treaty rights of First Nations, and is without prejudice to First Nations interests with respect to any self-government agreements or court proceedings. As members of the FNHC, each of us come from a First Nation. Each of us understand the significance and purpose of this directive. The FNHC exercises due diligence and care to ensure that we do not prejudice First Nations interests.

This agreement presents a pathway for reform. It stands as a commitment to engage in a process that is Community-Driven and Nation-Based, ensuring each Nation has the time, capacity and resources to fully contribute. It is a commitment to engage in a way that is comprehensive, inclusive and community-led, ensuring First Nations are full and equal partners in the development of new policy, structures and programs in BC. It provides a path for First Nations to engage in direct dialogue with INAC on needed investments in capacity and community-based prevention services. It ensures each Nation can advocate for resources to design systems of care that advance their own vision, traditions and values.

Mandate of the First Nations Health Council:

As one of the four entities established by BC First Nations to improve health outcomes, the FNHC is a 15 member political and advocacy body that is appointed by and accountable to

Chiefs in each Region. In May 2011, Chiefs endorsed Resolution 2011-01 to establish the new health governance structure. Chiefs called upon the FNHC to provide political leadership in the implementation of the tripartite health plans and agreements, to politically oversee the transfer of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) to the new First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), and to make progress on the social determinants of health.

The FNHA has entered its third year of operation and is now setting the stage for the transformation of health programs and services in full partnership with First Nations. With transfer complete, the FNHC is shifting its focus to fulfill its mandate to make progress on the social determinants of health. As per Resolution 2011-01, the FNHC is mandated to develop relationships and alliances with other First Nations organizations, provincial Ministries and federal Departments to achieve progress on the social determinants of health.

A key directive for the FNHC is to foster meaningful collaboration and partnership to achieve progress on the social determinants of health. This directive acknowledges that no single authority, agency or organization has the capacity to meet the needs of First Nations children and families. We must find ways of working together. The FNHC has engaged other First Nations organizations to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

In October 2015, the FNHC and FNLC agreed to work together on the social determinants of health. The FNHC and FNLC acknowledged that each entity has a responsibility to advocate and to improve outcomes for First Nation children, youth and families. While each entity has distinct governance structures and mandates, the FNHC and FNLC will work together to ensure unity in our advocacy and maintaining a high standard for engaging each Nation on strategic direction.

Next Steps:

In the fall of last year, provincial Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers from the Ministries of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Education, Advanced Education, Justice and Public Safety engaged each Regional Caucus on issues impacting the health and wellness of our people. In many cases, this was the first time senior decision-makers from the Government of BC heard directly from First Nations Chiefs, health leads and service providers. These sessions were constructive with clear recommendations to improve the systems that serve our people.

On February 21, 2017, the Government of BC made public its Budget and Ministry Service Plans for the year ahead. A key feature of the [MOU between BC and the FNHC](#) signed in March 2016 was the commitment for provincial Ministries to include the input and recommendations of the Nations in Ministry Service Plans starting in 2017/18. We are pleased to report that each of the Ministries that participated in the Regional Caucus have included new commitments to improve outcomes for First Nations children, youth and families. New commitments include:

- Ministry of Children and Family Development to provide resources and direct supports to families and communities to ensure that children and youth have every opportunity to safely remain at home with their families

- Ministry of Children and Family Development to focus on seeking permanent living arrangements outside the child welfare system with a focused effort on improving permanency planning and cultural connections for Indigenous children and youth already in care
- Ministries of Justice and Public Safety to improve access to services in rural and remote communities with a stronger focus on community-based prevention initiatives and alternate dispute resolution.
- A government-wide approach to address mental health and wellness and substance use.

This represents a new way of working. For the first time, BC First Nations were meaningfully involved in the planning of the provincial government. While more change is needed, this is an example of how we can bring conversations closer to home and influence the change we wish to see.

As we look ahead to the Regional Caucuses in the spring, we want to support a similar dialogue between First Nations and the federal government.

In Closing:

First Nations in BC are diverse. Each of our Nations is at different stages on their journeys of self-determination. Each of our Nations has distinct visions, perspectives and priorities when it comes to reforming the systems that currently serve our children and families. The current situation is complex. While we are diverse, we all agree that First Nations are best positioned to provide for the safety and wellbeing of their children and families. While each of our Nations will pursue its own path, we are united by a shared vision of healthy, self-determining and vibrant First Nation children, families and communities. It is our hope that we can come together as Nations to share our expertise and bring the best of our thinking to the table as we break the cycle and reclaim the wellbeing of our children, families and communities.

In Wellness,

				
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