

First Nations & Cancer: *an emerging crisis*

Presentation to the Canadian
Partnership Against Cancer
March 2009



Contact:

Melanie Morningstar mmorningstar@afn.ca

Tracy Tarnowski ttarnowski@afn.ca

Overview



- Key Facts on First Nations
- Cancer situation for First Nations
- Access to cancer control
- Improvements
- Priorities

Who are we?



- largest of 3 constitutionally recognized aboriginal groups in Canada
- Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national organization representing First Nations in Canada
- includes nearly one million citizens in 633 First Nation communities, as well as rural and urban areas
- 62% live on-reserve and 38% away from the reserve



First Nation Population

- over 50% are under the age of 23
- population growing nearly 3 times the Canadian rate
- 60% of communities have less than 500 residents
- 60% of communities are remote
- more than 60 languages

About AFN



- Chiefs-in-Assembly
- Executive Committee
 - National Chief, 10 Regional Chiefs, Chairs of 3 Councils (Elders, Women, Youth)
 - Regional Chiefs have portfolios on key issues
- AFN Secretariat
 - Executive Committee and staff
- Chiefs Committee on Health (CCOH)
- National First Nations Health Technicians Network (NFNHTN)

First Nations & Health Care



- primary care and public health program/service funding from Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB)
- secondary and tertiary levels of care from provinces/territories in facilities located outside these communities
- First Nations governments exercise some jurisdiction in health service delivery
- federal Non-Insured Health Benefits for drugs, medical supplies, medical travel coverage



Cancer Situation for First Nations

- difficult to determine
- very little research specific to First Nations
- existing studies indicate cancer incidence rising faster in First Nations than general population
- cancer is 3rd leading cause of death among aboriginal people in Canada
- cancer is the #1 cause of death in some First Nations



Cancer Situation-Key Risk Factors

- The key risk factors that affect FNs are the same for any population.
 - 60% smoke, inadequate physical activity, high obesity rates, diabetes, limited intake/access to affordable fresh foods
- FNs are particularly vulnerable to these risk factors because of the following socio-economic conditions
 - Lifestyle
- Socio-economic
 - low income, high unemployment, lack of education, poor housing conditions, inadequate drinking water, poverty
- Life expectancy is lower for First Nations

Access to Cancer Control



- 2006 – AFN invited to provide feedback to the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control
- 2007 – AFN coordinated strategic workplans through regional submissions

Access to Cancer Control- Regional Feedback



3 priority areas emerged:

1. need for accurate and complete information
2. focus on patients and equitable access
3. population based screening and prevention

Access to Cancer Control – Canadian Cancer Community



- Many stakeholders, cancer site organizations, population groups
- Opportunities for collaboration, partnerships, linkages
- Strategic partnerships at regional and national levels to better serve individual First Nation patients and their families

Improvements



- AFN now has two dedicated individuals assigned to the First Nations cancer file
- Attend CPAC Advisory Council meetings
- Attend Canadian Cancer Action Network Members Council meetings
- CPAC and FNIHB work currently underway

Considerations



- federal government has fiduciary responsibility to ensure primary health needs of First Nations
- cancer is a looming crisis in First Nation communities and we need to prepare
- must respect First Nation principles of OCAP (ownership, control, access, possession) for research involving First Nations
- A window of opportunity exists today to gain greater control over cancer in First Nations by vigorously implementing prevention and early detection measures (Turner, 2009).



Key Priorities for AFN

- raise the profile of cancer
- gain better perspective of First Nations cancer landscape and needs
- build relationships with key cancer organizations and encourage First Nation participation
- bring First Nations patient voice to all tables



Key Priorities for AFN (con't)

- build strong linkages and develop First Nations cancer contact networks at the regional and community levels (survivors, patients, health professionals, researchers, etc...)
- strengthen capacity at regional level to deal with cancer issues for First Nations
- educate others on First Nations and cancer concerns

Final Thoughts...



- *AFN is determined to effectively bring cancer issues to the forefront to effect policy change that will reduce the number of First Nations cancer cases, enhance the quality of life for First Nations citizens affected by cancer, and lessen the likelihood of First Nations citizens dying from cancer.*

Thank you



Assembly of First Nations

473 Albert Street, Suite 810
Ottawa, ON K1R 5B4

Telephone: 613-241-6789

Toll-Free: 1-866-869-6789

Fax: 613-241-5808

Website: www.afn.ca