



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

As part of its mandate to support First Nations' mental wellness, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Health Sector commissioned a report on the Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program. The report coalesces recommendations from three key reports: the AFN's *Healing Beyond 2021*, the First Peoples Wellness Circle's *Comprehensive Needs Assessment*, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's *Survivor's Perspective*. The report was released on September 30, 2020, to coincide with Orange Shirt Day which is meant to educate people and promote awareness about the Indian Residential School System. The Health Sector continues to advocate for a more permanent version of the support program. The report can be found on our website.¹

With its focus on improving First Nations' public health, the AFN's Health Sector, along with the AFN's Communications Department, has created and supported the development and dissemination of fact sheets, radio announcements, videos and social media related to COVID-19 for First Nations audiences. The current phase of the pandemic has focused on developing and disseminating fact-based information on the COVID-19 vaccines to support uptake in First Nations communities. The fact sheets and other documents were produced for posting to the AFN's COVID-19 website and social media. Additionally, the Health Sector convenes on calls with the Chiefs Committee on Health.

Acting as a liaison, the AFN continues to foster effective communication between Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Navigators and First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB), which has been an essential part of supporting client needs during this time. The AFN Health Sector works with FNIHB and partners to carry out document reviews including Oral Health, Continuum of Care, nominations for 2020 Nursing Excellence Awards, Nursing Now report, and the State of the World Nursing report. There is ongoing development of planning activities for the 7 Generations Continuum of Care, including a shared discussion paper on developing the Continuum. The Sector will continue to support Nursing Now Global and Canada activities from a COVID-19 perspective.

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

¹ [Indian-Residential-Schools-Resolution-Health-Support-Program-Continuation-Report-FINAL.pdf \(afn.ca\)](#)

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occurs with rights holders around the potential transformation of FNIHB. The Sector continues to advance the priorities within *Honouring Promises* and the First Nations Health Transformation Agenda.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has been raising awareness of the needs of First Nations persons with disabilities (FNPWD) and facilitating discussions on creating greater access. 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. An essential element has been to gather the views of FNPWD and First Nations governments to develop a distinct First Nations accessibility legislation framework. This dialogue relates to parallel developments on Bill C-81, the *Accessible Canada Act* (Act), which received Royal Assent in June 2019. The Act aims to benefit all persons, with a particular focus on persons with disabilities through areas such as: employment, the built environment (i.e., physical infrastructure such as office buildings, homes, public facilities, etc.), information/communication technologies, procurement of goods and services, transportation, and design of programs and services. While the Act applies to groups under federal responsibility and includes government departments and federally funded entities, among others, the Act does not reference First Nations overall and the unique legal and historic relationship between First Nations and the Crown. Unlike other federally regulated entities, First Nations hold constitutionally protected inherent and Treaty rights that may be impacted by the *Accessible Canada Act*.

Other initiatives and action include:

- The First Nations Digital Health Advisory committee met to discuss increasing investments into Digital Health in First Nations communities.
- Work with partners is underway focusing on mapping out the process of developing a National Life Promotion/Suicide Prevention Strategy. The work will be divided into 3 phases that includes a scoping review, key informant interviews, and the development of a national strategy. Taking a lifespan approach, the strategy will highlight life promotion skills and activities centred on resiliency.
- As announced in Budget 2021, the Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program will receive status quo funding. Advocating for a more permanent version of the support program will be one of the core workplan items for the mental wellness file 2021-2022.

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- The Health Sector continues to support the work of the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM) and continues to support them in efforts to increase awareness of and funding for, in order to bring birthing closer to home.
- The Health Sector continues to support the Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) through the CPS First Nations/Inuit/Metis Health Committee, as well as the through the Planning Committee for the Internal Meeting on Indigenous Child's Health (IMICH). This virtual conference will be held September 10-11, 2021.
- The Government of Canada has publicly committed to expediting the work of co-developing distinctions-based Health Legislation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, as well as distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategies and work 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.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the government of Canada workflow and priorities. However, the AFN continues to advocate for progress on First Nations priorities and initiatives, including increased funds to support First Nations during this unprecedented time in areas such as food security and mental health supports.

The AFN Health Sector continues to advocate for improved, robust food systems and food sovereignty and has collaborated with the AFN Environment, Social, and Economic Development Sectors in the area of First Nations food systems to assist in preparation of a Submission for the UN Food Systems Summit in September 2021.

Along with partners, the AFN's Health Sector is in the process of developing a national strategy on Life Promotion/Suicide Prevention.

The AFN Health Sector continues to support the development of research knowledge surrounding the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental wellness of frontline workers in First Nations communities.

In partnership with the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), a working group with AFN Health representatives is being formed to work towards examining the relationship between cannabis and mental wellness among First Nations.

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Currently, the NIHB Joint Review Steering Committee (JRSC) is working towards completing the Medical Transportation Benefit Review which will be followed by a review of general Administrative and Operational Irritants.

The Health Sector continues to promote cultural safety and is working with the Legal Sector on a Cannabis Fact Sheet. The Sector also collaborates with the Social Development Sector on issues such as Midwifery, Child Welfare and Fathering in Early Childhood Development programs. The sector participates in weekly/bi-monthly meetings with the Food Security Indigenous Working Group, and in bi-monthly calls with the Food Security ISC program officer.

The AFN's efforts to strengthen engagement with FNPWD, First Nations leadership, administrators, delivery and service providers and others continues. This includes outreach through the distribution of several reports and surveys and professionally broadcasted interactive/accessible webinars continue to raise awareness, along with widespread use of social media. Several national interactive workshops on accessibility and disability rights and inclusion in climate action, infrastructure, health, housing, and Jordan's Principle, among others were coordinated. On March 30, 2021, a virtual discussion was held with First Nations Knowledge Keepers and FNPWD to receive direction on next steps in support of developing a distinct First Nations accessibility legislative framework. In recent years, an increase in accessibility/disability related resolutions endorsed by Chiefs-in-Assembly have been passed, including AFN Resolution 38/2018, *Ensuring Accessibility at the Assembly of First Nations*.

Where do we hope to go in the future?

The AFN Health Sector will continue to collaborate with First Nations Partners in supporting the health and wellbeing of First Nations in areas including, but not limited to: Mental Wellness, Pandemic Response and Recovery, Public Health, Family Wellness, NIHB and Distinctions Based Health Legislation. The AFN has included an accessibility/disability lens as part of the AFN COVID-19 Working Group's national survey and consideration is being given to developing an AFN COVID-19 accessibility/disability survey.

Upcoming Events

June 28-29, 2021: Anti-Indigenous Racism in the Health Care System National Forum hosted by Indigenous Services Canada

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The AFN is planning regional virtual discussions in efforts to guide the development of a draft First Nations accessibility framework for leadership approvals, including engagement on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD).

November 2021 – the AFN Health Sector is planning a National Virtual Health Forum focusing on the Seven Generations Continuum of Care.