



COVID-19 VIRTUAL FORUM 2021

SHARING LESSONS LEARNED AND SUPPORTING
A NEW PATH FORWARD

LE FORUM VIRTUEL SUR LA COVID-19 2021

PARTAGER LES LEÇONS APPRISSES ET SOUTENIR UNE
NOUVELLE VOIE À SUIVRE

Dear Delegates

On behalf of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the AFN Executive Committee, and the AFN COVID-19 Task Force, it is my pleasure to welcome all participants to the 2021 COVID-19 Virtual Forum, hosted virtually in Ottawa, on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation.

We gather to build on our commitment to support resilience for our citizens affected by COVID-19, regardless of where they reside. We continue to make strides through meaningful partnerships with the federal government and First Nations organizations, including securing investments into each region to address health and social disparities exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic in our communities.

We strive to ensure that our citizens can access COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccines and that leadership can implement community-driven strategies to respond to challenges from the pandemic.

We continue to work with urban Indigenous partners to strengthen response systems that serve our peoples in towns and cities, to ensure they have accessible and credible information on how to protect themselves and each other.

This work is anchored in Resolution 03/2020: Addressing Priority Concerns and Needs of First Nations Around COVID-19, passed at the Annual General Assembly in December 2020. We will continue to engage with First Nations and reach out to urban Indigenous service providers to develop relevant strategies that safeguard service delivery. Our work with federal partners helps to identify strategies that address growing substance use, mental wellness, and domestic violence that have been exacerbated by isolation and physical distancing measures. Our goal is to leave no one behind and to protect our most vulnerable.

We need to collectively acknowledge that the pandemic has had tremendous effects on our lives, especially on our mental wellness, which for some has re-triggered collective and individual events of the past. I applaud our Knowledge Keepers who uphold access to traditional healing and ceremonies. Our cultural foundations are good medicine for our bodies and spirit. Health care providers and mental wellness workers are community champions. Increasing capacity at the community level can mitigate health and social consequences illuminated by the pandemic.



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As we enter the fourth wave of the pandemic, I encourage all First Nations citizens to follow public health protocols: wearing masks and physical distancing at large gatherings, combined with frequent hand washing, to limit the spread of the virus. I also encourage you to learn about the vaccines available to you and your family and make the choice to protect yourself and those around you. I look forward to hearing from you to hear your perspective on how we can work towards a Healing Path Forward, together.

We must work together to discover innovative solutions that confirm First Nations self-determination in these most important areas. I wish you the best in the days ahead as you share your vision and knowledge in shaping this path for our future generations.

Ninanaskamon!

Wishing you Peace beyond all understanding,

National Chief RoseAnne Archibald