



# Assistant Deputy Minister Newsletter

Indigenous Health Division  
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## New Year greetings from the Assistant Deputy Minister



Welcome to the first newsletter of 2025! As we begin this new year, I am excited to share the first issue of the year with updates from the Indigenous Health Division. Our work continues to focus on uplifting the voices and health perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples across Alberta, and we are looking forward to the progress we will make together this year.

In this edition, we will look back at the important developments from December and share a glimpse of exciting work on the horizon in the months to come.

We appreciate your continued collaboration with us as we continue to build strong partnerships and make important strides in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit health in 2025 and beyond.

### Addressing Indigenous-specific racism in health care

The Indigenous Health Division held 11 in-person sessions and 36 virtual sessions during fall 2024 to gather feedback for the Indigenous anti-racism action plan and a culture and trauma training toolkit. These sessions, which concluded in December 2024, engaged with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leadership, patients, service providers (including Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health), and regulatory colleges.

To enable broad participation, an online survey was made available during the fall for those unable to attend the sessions. In total, the sessions and survey process engaged over 350 individuals, who shared their personal health care experiences, valuable insights about the meaning of cultural safety, and recommendations to improve care for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Alberta.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated and provided valuable feedback through the sessions and surveys. Your input has been instrumental in helping shape meaningful actions aimed at improving health care for all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, families and individuals. We encourage you to stay tuned for future updates, including a 'what we heard' report, which will highlight the key themes and recommendations shared during the engagement process.

### Indigenous MAPS recommendation implementation updates

The Indigenous Health Division continues to make progress on the recommendations put forth from the [Honouring Our Roots: Growing together towards a culturally safe, wholistic primary health care system for Indigenous Peoples](#) report.

The Indigenous Primary Health Care Implementation Advisory Panel (Implementation Advisory Panel) was appointed by the Minister in December 2023 and completed its work in December 2024. Over the past year, the panel has met 24 times to identify and address health concerns for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

The progress from these meetings will be reflected in an updated version of [The Way Forward](#) report which will outline a clear path to progressing each recommendation from the *Honouring Our Roots* report. *The Way Forward* will exist as a living document that will continue to evolve, and we look forward to releasing an update in the upcoming newsletters.

### Indigenous Patient Safety Advocate and Investigator

In October we welcomed Tony Cardinal as the Indigenous Patient Safety Investigator and Advocate. Mr. Cardinal is a member of the Goodfish Lake Cree Nation located in northern Alberta and is using his knowledge and lived

experience to create a pathway for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples and communities to share concerns related to receiving health care services.

Mr. Cardinal has stated, “As an Indigenous man ... I deeply understand the challenges of sharing my story without prejudice.” He added, “My hope is to create a safe and inclusive space for open dialogue, free from bias and discrimination, where each Indigenous voice is valued and truly heard.”

This important appointment reflects government’s ongoing dedication to strengthening relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, and we look forward to the positive impact this role will have.

Concerns regarding experiences in receiving health care can be submitted by emailing [info@albertahealthadvocates.ca](mailto:info@albertahealthadvocates.ca) or by calling the Health Advocate line at 780-422-0695. You can read more about the Indigenous Patient Safety Investigator and Advocate [in the news release](#) and on [alberta.ca](http://alberta.ca).

## Indigenous Innovation Fund update

The Indigenous Innovation Fund continues to support innovative projects aimed at improving health outcomes for Indigenous communities in Alberta. The final intake of applications, which ran from June 17 to November 15, 2024, received 42 applications from multiple Indigenous organizations and communities.

Currently, grant applications from this intake are under review. We look forward to notifying all applicants via email as soon as we are able. Stay tuned for updates on the selected projects as the fund continues to drive positive change in Indigenous health care.

## Showcase your vision of Indigenous health care through an art contest

The Indigenous Health Division invites First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists of all ages and experience levels to participate in an Art Contest that highlights cultural values, traditions, and perspectives on health care. Selected artworks will be featured in our Indigenous Health Division documents, website and other communications to foster respect for Indigenous cultural heritage.

Submissions in all artistic mediums are welcome, accompanied by a brief description of the artist and explanation of the significance of the artwork. Please note that a signed Photo Release Form must be submitted for your entry to be considered. The deadline for submissions is **February 28, 2024**.

For more information on the Art Contest guidelines and submissions, or to obtain a Photo Release Form, please email [IndigenousHealth@gov.ab.ca](mailto:IndigenousHealth@gov.ab.ca). If you prefer to send a physical item, mail it to:

Indigenous Health Division

Alberta Health  
TELUS House, 26th Floor  
10020 100 St NW  
Edmonton AB T5J 0N3



This is a unique opportunity to amplify Indigenous voices and contribute to a culturally respectful and inclusive health care system in Alberta. Spread the word within your network!

## Supporting Indigenous communities with health data access

Alberta Health has a team in the Strategic Policy and Performance Division that works with First Nations and Métis partners directly to help them access population health data. Data are available for topics like rates of specific illnesses, reasons for hospital visits, or types of medications commonly dispensed. The Alberta Health

team can also provide analytical support to help communities use the data to tell their own data stories. A good example of the type of data provided can be found in the [First Nation health status report](#).

If you would like more information about health data access, please email Health Analytics at [health.analyticsrequests@gov.ab.ca](mailto:health.analyticsrequests@gov.ab.ca).

## **Combatting Trafficking in Persons Grant**

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services announced new measures to combat human trafficking on December 13, 2024. Up to \$5.5 million in funding is now available under Alberta's Combatting Trafficking in Persons Grant to support initiatives focused on preventing human trafficking, safeguarding vulnerable groups, and empowering survivors to rebuild their lives.

The grant prioritizes projects that align with the goals and priorities of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, including those working to address the impacts of human trafficking. Indigenous-led initiatives, including those from Tribal Councils, First Nations, and Metis Settlements, are encouraged to apply. These projects may focus on culturally relevant prevention strategies, support services, and empowerment programs designed to the unique needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and 2S+ individuals. The government emphasizes collaboration to ensure that affected communities receive the necessary resources to combat trafficking and promote healing.

For more information on how to apply for the Combatting Trafficking in Persons Grant, please visit this [webpage](#). If you have any questions, you can connect with the Anti-Human Trafficking Initiatives unit through email at [humantrafficking@gov.ab.ca](mailto:humantrafficking@gov.ab.ca)

[Empowering survivors of human trafficking | Alberta.ca](#)

## **Alberta's approach to homelessness: empowering Indigenous-led organizations**

Alberta is taking decisive action to address homelessness, with a focus on empowering First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to lead and benefit from support initiatives. The government is prioritizing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit-led organizations to ensure services are safe and rooted in culture.

As part of its updated homelessness strategy, Alberta's government is streamlining grants to directly fund front-line service providers. Chief Cody Thomas of the Enoch Cree Nation emphasized, "When funding for emergency shelters and housing is meant to support Indigenous Peoples, it should be delivered by Indigenous-operated organizations. These funds will allow our Indigenous-led organizations to deliver services that are not only effective but are also rooted in the cultural understanding and traditions of our communities."

In the 2024-2025 budget, \$210 million will be invested, including \$116 million for homeless shelter operations and \$101.5 million for local programs designed to transition people out of homelessness and into stable housing linked with appropriate supports.

This significant investment and shift in strategy reflects Alberta's commitment to work with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and service providers to create inclusive, culturally respectful, and effective homelessness support.

[Updating Alberta's approach to homelessness | alberta.ca](#)

## Trilateral meeting with Health Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, First Nations Chiefs, Metis Settlements General Council, Métis Nation of Alberta and Alberta Health

Trilateral meetings took place on January 9, 2024, between First Nations leaders, Metis Settlements General Council, and Metis Settlements Health Board Committee, and the Métis Nation of Alberta leadership with the ministers of Health Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, and Alberta Health.

The purpose of these meetings was to discuss and address the health priorities and needs of First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta, foster collaboration between First Nation and Métis leaders, federal and provincial ministers, and health officials, and review and discuss the progress and future plans for improving health services and health equity for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Alberta.

Topics discussed included enhancing access to culturally safe primary health care services, strengthening health services and data collection, Elder care needs, recruiting and retaining health care professionals, ensuring equitable health care services, understanding the legal and political context of the Métis Nation of Alberta and its representation of Métis communities, and addressing feedback and priorities raised by First Nation and Métis leaders. Stay tuned for future updates regarding the trilateral meeting.

### Provide your input on health system refocusing in Alberta

System refocusing updates are available online at [Lead the way | Alberta.ca](#) where you can find reports, information, and the link to subscribe to the [refocusing newsletter](#). You will also find the latest ways to share your feedback online and in-person, including a link to register for in-person public engagement sessions beginning in January 2025. These sessions will explore actions taken based on the feedback received in previous sessions, including the Indigenous Information Gathering Sessions. Your feedback will continue to guide the design and implementation of the refocused health care system.



### Solstice and Closing Remarks

With the Winter Solstice upon us, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples may take this time to rest and replenish their spirits, minds, and bodies. The shortest day of the year marks a special time for reflection and reconnection - a chance to gather with loved ones and appreciate the stillness of the season.

As winter settles in, the animals will also rest, pausing in nature's cycle. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities come together to share stories and teachings that highlight the connection between the solstice and the constellations in the sky, celebrating its deep cultural significance. It is not just a moment to pause but an opportunity to reflect on our place in the world. If you find yourself outdoors, take a moment to plant your feet firmly on the earth, breathe in the cold crisp winter air, and reflect on your connection to the land around you. This season invites us to honor the past, celebrate the present, and prepare for the journey ahead.

The Indigenous Health Division has also taken time to reflect and recharge and enter this new season with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment. As we look to the new year, we look forward to strengthening our connections and deepening our understanding, so we can continue to collaborate meaningfully with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across Alberta.



#### Contact Information

If there are any current matters you would like to receive updates on, please reach out to us directly.

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Assistant Deputy Minister Newsletter | January 2025