
Assistant Deputy Minister Newsletter

Indigenous Health Division
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The logo for Alberta Health, featuring the word "Alberta" in a stylized, handwritten font with a small "Health" in a smaller sans-serif font to its right, all in a light blue color.

Greetings from the Assistant Deputy Minister

I am pleased to share the second issue of the Indigenous Health Division newsletter for 2026, highlighting important developments across Alberta. In this issue, you'll find updates on community visits, work underway to strengthen Indigenous patient navigation, engagement related to Indigenous hair cutting in health facilities, and opportunities for communities to shape emerging health initiatives, including heart health planning and climate-related health research.

We also share new resources, upcoming events, and tools to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals, families, and communities. I hope these updates keep you informed of the work underway, and the meaningful progress being made through partnership.

National Indigenous Languages Day

Observed next month on March 31, National Indigenous Languages Day, celebrates the diversity of Indigenous languages in Canada and the rich history that comes with them. Language is a crucial tool to carry on the culture, perspectives, and values of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Alberta. This day serves as a time to reflect on and celebrate the importance of exposure to and learning of Indigenous languages.

The Indigenous Health Division looks forward to celebrating this day; recognizing the importance and history of Indigenous languages is another opportunity to continue to foster trusting relationships with communities and respect the important traditions within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Alberta.

Indigenous health updates

Visiting communities

Planning is underway for this year's community visits across the spring, summer, and fall, providing opportunities to strengthen partnerships and support community health.

In January, ADM Lisa Higgerty attended the Indigenous and Primary Care Summit in Yellowknife. ADM Higgerty also joined the Premier and Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services at the annual Protocol Agreement meeting with the Stoney Nakoda - Tsuut'ina Tribal Council along with Chiefs and representatives from Bearspaw First Nation, Chiniki First Nation, Goodstone First Nation, and Tsuut'ina First Nation.

ADM Higgerty also joined the State of Local Emergency Taskforce Winter Gathering, a community-led effort addressing the mental health and addiction crisis within Athabasca Tribal Council communities. The taskforce brings together health professionals, community members, and representatives appointed by Chiefs and Councils to coordinate supports and strengthen community wellness.

Alongside Deputy Minister Matt Torigian, ADM Higgerty toured the Indigenous Wellness Clinic at the University of Alberta, which offers culturally informed primary health care including family medicine, chronic disease management, reproductive and sexual health, palliative care, and mental health and addiction services.

On January 30th, ADM Higgerty hosted a quarterly meeting of the First Nations Health Director Advisory Committee. At this meeting, Anthony Cardinal presented on his role as the Indigenous Patient Safety Investigator and Advocate. Additionally, the Committee is currently conducting a review of how it can be the most effective engagement opportunity for First Nation Health Directors. If you are First Nations Health Director who would like to provide input and/or complete an active survey, please contact IndigenousCommunityEngagement@gov.ab.ca for more information.

This February, ADM Higgerty will visit the Bigstone Clinic in Edmonton to learn about urban health priorities and explore ways to support better health outcomes. Planning is also underway for visits to:

- Little Red River Cree Nation
- Tall Cree First Nation
- High Level Native Friendship Centre
- High Level Northwest Health Centre
- Fort Vermillion St. Theresa General Hospital

In the coming months, ADM Higgerty will also visit Siksika Nation, Elbow River Healing Lodge, Tipimso Lodge, and Fort Chipewyan. More details will appear in the April 2026 ADM newsletter.

Strengthening Indigenous patient navigation across Alberta's health system

The Indigenous Patient Navigator Community of Practice has expanded to include Navigators who work throughout the circle of care to improve collaboration, strengthen relationships, and support smoother care transitions for Indigenous patients. The first system-wide Community of Practice meeting was held on January 15, 2026. [Indigenous Patient Navigators](#) are also completing standardized training through Saint Elizabeth Health Care between January and March 2026, with 108 participants enrolled.

Commencing engagement: Indigenous hair cutting in health care facilities

The Indigenous Health Division (IHD) is currently engaging with health care stakeholders to discuss Indigenous hair cutting in primary and acute care settings. This work follows reports of Indigenous patients having their hair cut or handled improperly while receiving care in health facilities.

To ensure next steps are informed by Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and community priorities, we will be reaching out to community partners to discuss experiences, concerns, and cultural considerations related to the cutting and handling of Indigenous hair. If you or someone you know has experienced improper hair cutting or handling while attending a health care facility or would like to share thoughts to help guide future directions, please contact Melita Avdagovska, Acting Executive Director for IHD's Policy and Planning Branch, at Melita.Avdagovska@gov.ab.ca.

Ask the advocate featuring Tony Cardinal

How does the Indigenous Patient Safety Investigator and Advocate collaborate with other organizations or government agencies that support Indigenous health?

 **Tony Cardinal:** “I work alongside Indigenous health organizations, community programs, and government agencies across Alberta to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community members in navigating the health care system. Through these partnerships, my role helps ensure communities have access to culturally safe care, practical resources, and guidance, while also bringing Indigenous voices into decisions that affect health and well-being.”

Are there any resources or tools available for First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities to better understand the health care system and their rights within it?

 **Tony Cardinal:** “In Alberta, there are several resources to help First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities better understand the health care system and their rights. The [Indigenous Support Line](#) provides a confidential way to ask questions and access guidance, while the Indigenous Patient Navigator Program connects individuals with culturally safe care and community supports. The [Alberta Indigenous Virtual Care Clinic](#) offers virtual appointments and practical tools to prepare for medical visits. Community-based programs across the province also provide holistic health and wellness support. These resources ensure Indigenous patients and families can navigate the system with confidence and access the care they need.”

Stay tuned for our next issue of Ask the Advocate! If there is something you'd like to ask Tony about his role, please submit your questions to IndigenousHealth@gov.ab.ca. Concerns regarding experiences in receiving health care can be submitted by emailing info@albertahealthadvocates.ca or by calling the Health Advocate line at [780-422-1812](tel:780-422-1812). You can read more about the Indigenous Patient Safety Investigator and Advocate on [alberta.ca](#).

Mental Health and Addiction Wisdom Council

Alberta's government has established the [Mental Health and Addiction Wisdom Council](#) to strengthen First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leadership within the [Alberta Recovery Model](#). The council provides a collaborative space where Indigenous partners and government can work together to ensure Indigenous knowledge, lived experience, and community priorities that meaningfully shape mental health and addiction strategies.

Through the Alberta Recovery Model, the province is investing \$180 million to build five recovery communities with First Nations and the Métis Nation of Alberta, and nearly \$7 million in 2025–26 for culturally safe, community-based programs. The Wisdom Council will help identify impacts and opportunities across compassionate intervention, mental health initiatives, and addiction treatment, providing recommendations to improve access to culturally appropriate services.

Council members draw on professional expertise, lived experience, and community knowledge to identify gaps, inform policy, recommend community driven solutions, and support Indigenous led, healing entered approaches. This work is vital, as Indigenous peoples represent less than seven per cent of Alberta's population but about 20 per cent of opioid related deaths.

The council, comprised of Elders, Chiefs, community leaders, and government officials met for the first time on December 3 and 4, 2025, and will operate for one year. It will guide initiatives across intervention, mental health, and addiction treatment while advancing culturally grounded approaches. A full list of members is available [here](#).

The council will deliver its formal recommendations to the Minister by March 2027.

Health news in Alberta

- [Enhancing aqua therapy at the Glenrose](#)
- [Alberta appoints chief medical officer of health](#)
- [New health system dashboard launched](#)
- [Advancing children's health care](#)



Connect to community resources

Aboriginal Alert

[Aboriginal Alert](#) is an Indigenous-led, non-profit organization dedicated to helping First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families find their missing loved ones by sharing information quickly and widely. Through its national platform, families can publish missing-person reports that are immediately distributed to members within a 100-kilometre radius and amplified on the organization's website and [social media channels](#).

Launched in 2017 in response to the growing number of missing and murdered Indigenous People in Canada, Aboriginal Alert was created to fill the gap left by the absence of a centralized alert system. Since then, it has expanded to include an email alerting network, an auto missing poster generator and a tool for tracking missing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit across the country.

The organization also provides safety resources, risk-awareness materials and a growing network of Community Champions who support outreach, share alerts and help strengthen community-based responses. Aboriginal Alert continues to build partnerships that encourage organizations to take action on this important work.

Caring for our Hearts initiative – University of Health Foundation

Heart disease is one of the leading causes of death in Alberta. It affects everyday life, from staying well to getting care to living well after treatment. Caring for our Hearts is a province-wide initiative to shape Alberta's next heart health strategy, led by the University Hospital Foundation in collaboration with Primary Care Alberta and Acute Care Alberta. This initiative focuses on improving prevention, access to care, and recovery so everyone in Alberta can live longer, healthier lives. Your voice is valued and invited:

- Join a virtual session to share what's working, what isn't, and what needs to change. Reach out to Shanzeh Hasan at shanzeh.hasan@givetouhf.ca with your full name, position and preferred email. Note that space is limited.
- Complete the public survey and share it with your community: [Heart Health in Alberta: Your Voice Matters – Fill out form.](#)

Thank you for helping shape the future of heart health in Alberta. Questions? Please contact Shanzeh Hasan at shanzeh.hasan@givetouhf.ca.

Indigenous-led climate action: Assessing land changes and the links to health

The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH), in partnership with Whitefish Lake First Nation #128 (Treaty Six Territory), has developed fact sheets exploring how land changes affect health, habitats, and access to traditional medicines, as well as the potential environmental and health impacts of a proposed Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) project. Click this link for the fact sheets: [Indigenous-Led Climate Action: Fact Sheets](#)

Fireweed Project abortion aftercare kits

The Fireweed Project provides aftercare kits offering comfort, care, and culturally relevant support to Indigenous people in Canada who have had, or are about to have, an abortion. Kits include Indigenous-specific items to promote healing and well-being. Learn more about the Fireweed Project and order a kit here: [Fireweed Project](#).



Indigenous data access

Primary and Preventative Health Services works directly with First Nations and Métis partners to help them access health data on topics like illness rates, hospital visits and medication use. They also offer analytical support to help communities tell their own data stories, such as the [First Nation health status report](#).

For more information, email Health Analytics at health.analyticsrequests@gov.ab.ca.



Recipe of the month – Wyatt's chocolate pie

Ingredients

Sugar	1.5 cups
Salt	good pinch (no more than 0.5 tsp)
Cornstarch	3 tbsp
Egg yolks	3, beaten
Milk	3 cups
Butter	1 tbsp (or go off vibes)
Vanilla	vibes
Baking chocolate	2 squares, or to taste (it doesn't need much to be chocolaty)
Pie crust	(I use the mini crusts from the store)
Whipping cream	a small carton

Steps

1. Bake pie crusts according to recipe or instructions
2. In a saucepan, whisk sugar, salt, cornstarch, and yolks, until well mixed.
3. Add milk and mix well, again.
4. Over medium-low, heat mix constantly until mixture thickens, quickly take off heat. This will make a pudding; you're going for the consistency of a pudding cup!

If you over-heat the pudding at this stage, it'll turn lumpy and may taste a little eggier, but it's not a big deal. You can try whisking vigorously to break it up a bit.

5. While still hot, fold vanilla, butter, and chocolate. These ingredients are just for taste, so add as little or as much as you want!
You can get creative here with the kind of flavours you want! Just replace chocolate or vanilla with your new flavours.
6. Pour into (cool) pie crust and set in a fridge to cool.
7. When ready to serve, whisk whipping cream until soft peaks form in a mixing bowl. If you prefer a stiff whipped cream, continue whisking until hard peaks form.
8. Apply whipped cream from step 7 to the cooled chocolate pie and serve!

This is a forgiving dish; you really can't go too wrong with it! Go wild with your flavours! Mint, almond, fruit? Yes!

For an extra special treat, you can split the pudding between steps 4 and 5, add chocolate to one half and peanut butter to the other half (butter and vanilla to both). Then layer the peanut butter and chocolate puddings in the pie crust(s) for a peanut butter cup pie! You can also skip the pie crust and put the pudding in a glass, perhaps martini glasses or thrifted teacups.

Closing remarks

As we look ahead, we will continue working alongside community partners to advance First Nations, Métis and Inuit health priorities and celebrate the diverse cultural perspectives that strengthen communities. Your engagement and collaboration are invaluable, and we appreciate the opportunity to share updates and progress with you. We look forward to continuing this journey together.

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



Contact Information

Lisa Higgerty, Assistant Deputy Minister, Indigenous Health Division

IndigenousHealth@gov.ab.ca

780-427-2711