

Understanding Tripartite

Introduction

The Tripartite First Nations Health process is multifaceted and complex. Since it truly is a process -- with agreements and sub-agreements being negotiated in the coming months.

The Tripartite First Nations Health Plan, signed in 2007 by the federal, provincial and First Nations partners, is currently one of the most important initiatives in BC Region.

Gathering Wisdom IV, the annual forum of BC First Nations on health, took place from May 24-26 in Richmond, BC. During the forum, First Nations in BC passed a resolution to assume greater control and decision-making over their health and wellness. An overwhelming majority of the Chiefs and representatives present (87% in attendance) voted to endorse the signing of the Tripartite Framework Agreement on First Nation Health Governance. The provincial government has also approved the signing of the Agreement. Federal government approval is now pending.

1. Why a BC Tripartite First Nations Health Plan?

- The Tripartite First Nations Health Plan (the Plan) was signed by Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council in June, 2007. The signing marked an agreement by the three parties to: improve the health and well-being of First Nations, and close the significant gaps in health between First Nations and other British Columbians.
- The Plan places British Columbia in the forefront in terms of cutting-edge initiatives to improve First Nations health in Canada.
- Among other things, the Plan committed the three partners to negotiating a new health governance structure for First Nations in BC.
- The new governance structure will give First Nations people greater control over the design and delivery of their own health care - health care that is community-based and culturally sensitive.
- One way of looking at the new governance structure is that it is an extension of the work First Nation Inuit Health-BC Region has been doing for

the last 20 years - that is, progressively transferring control of health services to First Nations communities.

- Another major benefit of The Plan and, in particular the new governance structure, is a commitment to build stronger relationships and better coordination between First Nations health programs and services and those of the province.

2. What roles will First Nations and Health Canada play if a final Framework Agreement is signed by the three parties?

- First Nations will determine and define their health needs, and design, deliver and evaluate health programs to meet needs at the community, regional and provincial levels and throughout the health system in BC. This will be accomplished through a new First Nations Health Governance Framework that will include a new First Nations Health Authority.

- If the Framework Agreement is signed, Health Canada's role in designing and delivering programs and services to First Nations in BC would be transferred to the First Nations Health Authority.

- The First Nations Health Authority would also collaborate closely with the BC Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities to coordinate health programs and services.

- Health Canada would still have a role as funder and governance partner in an ongoing tripartite partnership. In addition, Health Canada will continue to be an active participant in the implementation of the First Nations health agenda in BC, working with BC First Nations and the Province of BC to realize the vision of the TFNHP through the ongoing contribution of knowledge, advice, expertise and support.

3. What effects will the transfer of operations to a First Nations Health Authority have on BC Region?

- If the Framework Agreement and sub-agreements are signed by all parties, the responsibility for designing and delivery of health programs for First Nations will officially begin transferring to a First Nations Health Authority. This transfer will take place over approximately two years.

4. Where are we in the process?

- Significant progress has been made in implementing the TFNHP. The parties have become more accountable and responsive to one another for the successful implementation of their shared commitments. Each partner has done considerable internal work to be a better participant in the partnership, and has made improvements in support of the successful implementation of their political agreements.
- Following the signing of the Tripartite First Nations Health Plan in 2007, work has progressed on two important fronts: health actions and governance.
- The three partners have increased their collaboration in a number of health areas, with growing success. For example, the tripartite response to the H1N1 Pandemic resulted in BC First Nations having a higher vaccination rate than the general population.
- On the governance front, a Basis Agreement (an Agreement-in-Principle) was initialled in July of 2010. This was followed by negotiations among the three partners on a legally-binding Framework Agreement.
- On May 26, 2011, at the Gathering Wisdom IV forum, participating First Nations voted 87% in support of the mandate to proceed, including the signing of the Framework Agreement.
- The BC Minister of Health has also indicated that he has the authority to sign the Framework Agreement.
- With the First Nations and the provincial government ready to sign the Framework Agreement, only federal government approval is pending. It is anticipated that a federal decision will be taken this summer or early in the fall.

5. If the Framework Agreement is signed, how would the transition period be handled?

- It is anticipated that the transition will take place within two years of the signing of the Framework Agreement by the parties.
- The focus will be on designing and implementing a smooth transition that avoids disruption in the health services and benefits delivered to First Nations in BC.

6. What will be the organizational structure of the First Nations Health Authority? Will it operate like other Regional Health Authorities?

The structure and function of the new First Nations Health Authority will be determined over time through engagement and dialogue with BC First Nations governance and communities as well as key partners, including First Nation & Inuit Health staff. The draft Framework Agreement on health governance, the Tripartite First Nations Health Plan, existing First Nation & Inuit Health programs and services and the vision of BC First Nations will all inform the structure of the First Nations Health Authority.