

ELDERS DECLARATION

PRESENTED, RATIFIED AND VALIDATED AT THE TREATIES 6, 7 & 8

ELDERS ADVISORY MEETING HELD IN MORLEY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER 22-23, 2016

Elders from Treaties 6, 7 & 8 have participated in the Elders Advisory to reflect on the effects of historical trauma and the path towards wholistic healing for Indigenous Peoples across the Treaty territories of the province of Alberta.

While we acknowledge that we hold different belief systems, a common sense of history binds us while stories and songs, oral traditions, natural laws, lived experiences, inherited knowledge and wisdom build bridges among us.

Our hearts and spirits rest on our kinship with one another and with all beings of the earth, the universe and the cosmos.

Food sovereignty is central to the original spirit and intent of our Treaties and the continued survival of our peoples.

If Environment is Life, then we are a part of it. The critical situation of climate change and the ongoing desecration of Mother Earth through industrial and extractives developments cannot continue. We must conserve Mother Earth for future generations.

We are connected to and responsible for those who are here, those who are yet to come and those who have been. We are connected with our Creator. Our authority flows from these sources. They set the nature, direction and pace of action.

As Elder Advisors, we will set our priorities, move it forward and monitor and measure its progress. Our collective minds and hearts hereby declare the following:

We, the Elders Advisory, believe in self-determination in health care and we honor traditional wisdoms and practices. We will work to provide the inclusion and availability of traditional practice within all communities including mainstream health care systems while strongly advocating for and safeguarding cultural practices and intellectual property shared at the table.

We note that culture is one of the underlying pillars of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which both the federal and provincial governments of Canada and Alberta have endorsed.

Article 3 of the UN Declaration states that by virtue of their right to self-determination, Indigenous Peoples may freely pursue their cultural development. The UN Declaration addresses the tangible heritage, traditions and customs (Art.11); the spiritual and religious

traditions and customs of Indigenous cultures (Art.12); their intangible heritage (Art.13); and their right to uphold the dignity and diversity of their cultures and language, in relation to education and public information (Arts. 14 and 15). Article 31 of the UN Declaration states that:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. Indigenous peoples also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

We commit to ensure cultural competency for both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous health care providers, and will uphold traditional values of mutual respect & honor, harmony, kindness & caring, wisdom, knowledge sharing, generosity, loyalty, trust and humility.

The Elders Advisory intends to operate in accordance with the customs, protocols and our natural laws in parallel with western principles of law in carrying out such responsibilities, deliberations, meetings and communications in order to achieve culturally appropriate outcomes.

The Elders Advisory will work towards achieving an ethical space for cultural safety and cultural competency. We understand the challenges we face in the process of reconciliation between written cultures and oral cultures, and we will address the challenge of cultural translation both in theory and through our oral practices, ceremonies, songs and stories.

We will promote a culturally safe healthcare framework and publicly recognize the rights of our peoples, *inter alia*, those included in the following articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Article 21

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, *inter alia*, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 22

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.
2. States shall take measure, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

Article 23

Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

Article 24

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.
2. Indigenous individuals have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

We understand that provision of culturally safe care is in alignment with the Treaties; the Canadian Constitution; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action; human rights; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other relevant international instruments.

Treaties are understood as international agreements within the United Nations system. They have been affirmed throughout UN standard setting instruments described above. Our Treaties were preceded by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which recognized our rights, sovereignty and lands. Entering into Treaty with the Crown affirmed our principles and natural laws as they governed the Treaty making process and negotiations, as well as informing the true spirit and intent of Treaty – as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and rivers flow. In accordance with the medicine chest clause and the famine and pestilence clause, we call on Health Canada to be the payer of first resort.

We recall the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 94 Calls to Action, setting out a roadmap for reconciliation in Canada and in the regions of Treaties 6, 7 & 8 and understand that this informs our work as we move forward. We understand the 94 Calls to Action as a

whole, representing not just Calls to Action on Health, but also Calls to Action on Health Determinants. In this regard, we urge all First Nations, and all levels of government in Canada and the province of Alberta to implement all the Calls to Action. We call on all levels of government to focus on human resources development to support this implementation. We also urge the promotion of education as a tool and a solution from both the traditional and mainstream/western perspective.

We understand that many of the crises we face as First Nations stems from poverty in all its forms – economic, social and cultural. The work and contributions we provide as an Elders Advisory, will acknowledge and mitigate poverty, in all its forms, both in our First Nations communities as well as in towns and cities. In that regard, we emphasize that in order to achieve the highest attainable standard of health for First Nations and overcome poverty, the Canadian and Alberta governments must be bound to fully implement our Treaties, the TRC Calls to Action and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We recognize the sensory perception of each individual that triggers past trauma and its effects, including abuse in all its forms, power and control, loss of youth from years of trauma and intergenerational impacts.

We emphasize the central role of forgiveness and healing in our path forward as First Nations and commit to reviving our cultural, spiritual and healing practices, with particular consideration of the important role of spiritual first aid from trauma and its effects.

We the Elders believe strongly that the First Nations children and youth form the main pillar of our work and our contributions. As such, we call on all governments to fully implement Jordan's Principle for the benefit of our families, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Finally, we the Elders state the following principles as a pillar of this Declaration:

1. The Earth is our Mother, "Care for Her";
2. Honour all your relations;
3. Open your heart and soul to our Creator;
4. All life is sacred, treat all beings with respect;
5. Take only what is needed from Mother Earth, not more;
6. Do what needs to be done for only the good of all;
7. Give constant thanks to the Great Spirit for each day;
8. Speak the truth;
9. Follow the rhythms of nature;
10. Enjoy life's journey and leave no tracks.

Nanaskomon, Mussi Cho, Isniyes, Iiyini tsip, Thank you!

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The following Elders/Knowledge Keepers contributed through Indigenous knowledge and protocols to the content of this Declaration

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Joe Whitehead Sr. – Muskwa

Margaret Runner – Dixon

