



## Elders Advisory Committee

Alberta Mental Health & Addictions Subcommittee of Health Co-Management

Collaborative Mental Health Care Conference  
Calgary, Alberta  
June 19, 2015

health co-management secretariat  
[www.hcsm.ca](http://www.hcsm.ca)

## Overview

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## Context

- Health Co-Management (HCOM) is an agreement between First Nation signatories and the Minister of Health that was formed to be a proactive mechanism to improve health outcomes for First Nations in Alberta. It aims to increase the participation of First Nations in assessing, analyzing, and managing programs and services funded and/or offered by FNIHB Alberta Region.
- There are 6 subcommittees that report to the Health Co-Management Committee. **One of these subcommittees is the Mental Health and Addictions Subcommittee.**
- The Elders Advisory supports the work of the Mental Health and Addictions Subcommittee.
- Although the co-management structure is primarily comprised of First Nation representatives, the structure remains a Western structure – one that does not adequately represent First Nation culture, traditions or language.



## History

During the development of the regional prescription drug misuse strategy, the Mental Health and Addictions Subcommittee recognized that a missing element in the project was the incorporation of First Nation culture.

As a result of the advice and guidance from First Nation Elders on the development of the *Spirit of Healing: Alberta First Nations Conquering Prescription Drug Misuse Strategy*, the subcommittee determined that in order for any project/programming to be viable, traditions and culture need to be the foundation.

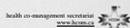


## Commitment

In August 2013 the sub-committee formally decided to support the creation of an Elders Advisory and funding was allocated. The 3 Lead Elders from the prescription drug strategy development would be appointed as the Lead Elders for the larger advisory group.

The Treaty area processes were respected to appoint 6 additional Elders from each of Treaty 6, 7 and 8.

In 2014 the first Elders Advisory meeting was held with the sub-committee to discuss purpose and to commence the drafting of the terms of reference.



## Purpose

The Elders Advisory advises and works collaboratively with the Mental Health and Addictions Sub-Committee of Health Co-Management on all issues concerning the mental health and well-being of First Nations' Peoples and communities by:

- providing advice, guidance and recommendations on the strategic direction of the subcommittee including First Nation language, knowledge, tradition, cultures, spiritual values, protocols and ceremonies;
- using the advisory's collective wisdom and knowledge to support the appropriate implementation of the vision and mission of the sub-committee.
- collaborating, communicating and participating with other sub-committees and working groups that provide mental health and addictions supports.



## Priorities

To date the Elders Advisory have advised and made recommendations on:

- the development of a cultural competency curriculum;
- the development of a mental health and addictions informational brochure;
- how to culturally launch the *Spirit of Healing: Alberta First Nations Conquering Prescription Drug Misuse strategy*;
- transition of the current Elders Advisory structure to a regional model which provides broader support.

One Elder now participates at each Mental Health and Addictions Subcommittee meeting to provide direct advice and recommendations at the time of decision making.



## Why it's important

### Ethical Space

The Elders Advisory and the Mental Health & Addictions Sub-Committee acknowledge the differences between Indigenous and Western ways of collaborating. Both groups demonstrate a continued commitment to navigating these differences in order to improve the wellbeing of First Nations in Alberta.

### Cultural Safety

Cultural safety occurs along a continuum of learning. It begins with cultural awareness, moves along to cultural competency, and then to cultural safety. **Cultural competency** requires full and active involvement of the Elders. Movement toward cultural safety cannot occur without Elder teachings.



## In Practise

### *Spirit of Healing: Alberta First Nations Conquering Prescription Drug Misuse*



- The initial Elders Gathering was to ensure work was grounded in First Nation culture.
- The gathering started with ceremony launch the process.
- The Elders went through a visioning process to come to the name *Spirit of Healing: Alberta First Nations Conquering Prescription Drug Misuse*
- The Elders provided advice and guidance on use of traditional healing approaches and medicines and on identifying health mentors and supports for community members.



## In Practise

### *Spirit of Healing: Alberta First Nations Conquering Prescription Drug Misuse*

- The gathering ended in ceremony to validate the data collected and was followed by a traditional feast to celebrate the launching of this significant initiative.
- The contracted consultant worked closely with the 3 Lead Elders throughout the community engagement process. Involvement of the Elders provided cultural validation for the process.
- First Nation communities readily embraced the strategy and community implementation has begun in 13 First Nations and 2 Tribal Councils.
- In May 2015 a ceremony was conducted by the Elders Advisory to launch the strategy and bless activities for the upcoming year.



*Spirit of Healing: Alberta First Nations Conquering Prescription Drug Misuse Website:*

[www.abfnspiritofhealing.com](http://www.abfnspiritofhealing.com)



Questions?

