

Carrier Sekani Family Services – Leadership Forum Declaration on HIV/AIDS in the North.

June 2, 2005

1. We, First Nation peoples in Northern British Columbia, First Nation's bands & organizations, federal, provincial and municipal governments gather in Prince George, BC from June 1 to the 2nd, 2005 at the Leadership Forum to educate, develop and address the growing crisis of HIV/AIDS in First Nation communities.
2. Extremely alarmed about the new infections of HIV within the northern First Nation communities within the last 5 years and how it impacts the lives and communities of First Nation peoples. HIV affects not only the individual's life but the well being of children, Elders, their family and the whole community.
3. Recognizing that the effects of colonization and residential schools have left First Nation peoples vulnerable and affected by the disassociation of family ties and systems, removal of children and placement into foster care, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug misuse, loss of language and cultural identity, education and traditional values. These losses have led First Nation peoples exposed to HIV/AIDS
4. Recognizing that poverty, underdevelopment and illiteracy are among the principal contributing factors to the spread of HIV/AIDS, and noting with grave concern that HIV/AIDS is compounding poverty and is now reversing or impeding development in First Nations communities, and should therefore be addressed in an expedient manner.
5. Emphasizing the important role of cultural, family, ethical and religious factors in the prevention of the epidemic and in treatment, care and support, taking into account the particularities of each First Nation community as well as the importance of respecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
6. Acknowledging that prevention of HIV infection must be the mainstay of the individual First Nation communities, regional, provincial and national response to the epidemic, and that prevention, care, support and treatment for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are mutually reinforcing elements of an effective response and must be integrated in a comprehensive approach to combat the epidemic.
7. Recognizing that care, support and treatment can contribute to effective prevention through an increased acceptance of voluntary and confidential counseling and testing, and by keeping people living with HIV/AIDS, and vulnerable groups in close contact with health-care systems and facilitating their access to information, counseling and preventive supplies.

8. Recognizing that access to medication in the context of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS is one of the fundamental elements to achieve progressively the full realization of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
9. Strongly believe that Northern British Columbia needs to have a strategic plan that is sustainable in the north to heed the epidemic of HIV/AIDS with the northern First Nation communities.
10. Noting that existing funding in Northern British Columbia is not adequate in reaching all First Nation communities. Comprehensive planning and increased funding is needed in order to educate and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS within these communities.
11. Recognizing that First Nation communities can not tolerate further stigmatization and that to keep silence will only burden First Nation peoples more. First Nation peoples are mobile from city to Indian reserve communities in order to meet their needs (i.e.: medical, employment and social needs); acknowledging this as a major route of infection to reserves is needed to reinforce the need to have further funding and programs within northern reserves and towns.
12. Noting further that stigma, silence, discrimination and denial, as well as a lack of confidentiality, undermine prevention, care and treatment efforts and increase the impact of the epidemic on individuals, families, communities and nations and must also be addressed.
13. Encouraging the development of regional approaches and plans to address HIV/AIDS.
14. Encouraging and supporting local, provincial and national organizations to expand and strengthens regional partnerships, coalitions and networks.
15. Recognizing the fundamental importance of strengthening individual First Nation communities, regional, provincial and national capacities to address and effectively combat HIV/AIDS and that this will require increased and sustained human, financial and technical resources through strengthened national action and cooperation and increased regional, sub-regional and international cooperation.
16. Urging and supporting individual First Nation communities, regional organizations and partners to be actively involved in addressing the crisis; intensify regional, sub-regional and interregional cooperation and coordination; and develop regional strategies and responses in support of expanded country level efforts.

A collaborative effort of the above statements is needed to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. To integrate HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment and support and impact mitigation priorities into the mainstream of development planning, including in poverty eradication strategies, national budget allocations and sectoral development plans. By signing this declaration we acknowledge that if First Nation peoples are to combat this illness a commitment from chiefs, municipal, provincial and federal governments need to respond immediately to the growing crisis of HIV/AIDS through immediate funding, education, compassion and understanding.