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Fraser Salish Nations and Fraser Health Authority sign landmark partnership accord

VANCOUVER – Recognizing that First Nations must have more say in their own health, the Fraser Salish Nations and the Fraser Health Authority today signed a Partnership Accord aimed at making significant progress in improving the health of First Nations in the region.

This Partnership Accord is the first health agreement of its kind in the province - one between a regional health authority and one of the regional caucuses that have been formed by the First Nations Health Society to work with health partners to improve First Nations health.

The Accord allows for more shared decision-making between both parties and increased First Nations participation in decisions about health services for First Nations and other Aboriginal people in the Fraser region.

“This agreement signals an important change, and the way ahead for how health services will be delivered to First Nations not only in the Fraser Region, but throughout British Columbia. If health outcomes are to improve for First Nations in our province, then we must work in partnership to make progress,” said Grand Chief Doug Kelly of the Sto:lo Tribal Council.

The Accord was signed by Fraser Health and the Fraser Salish Regional Caucus, who provide political and technical leadership to the Salish Nations. The Caucus has representatives on the First Nation Health Council, a provincial body which is tasked with creating a First Nations Health Authority – the first of its kind in Canada - in collaboration with federal and provincial partners. (The First Nations Health Society is the business arm of the First Nations Health Council.)

“Fraser Health is committed to working collaboratively with the Fraser Salish Regional Caucus to improve Aboriginal health services delivered within the Fraser region. This partnership will assist First Nations communities in governing their own health initiatives to improve the lives and the health of the people in First Nations communities,” said Dr. Nigel Murray, president and chief executive officer of Fraser health.

One of the key commitments in the Partnership Accord is the establishment of an Aboriginal Health Steering Committee, which will serve as a forum for joint efforts on First Nations and Aboriginal health priorities, policies, budgets and services in the Fraser Region.

The Accord calls for improvements in service delivery through more collaboration between Fraser Health and First Nations Health Centres in the region, and work with community health leaders to develop more culturally appropriate health strategies.

“When we work together with mutual respect, guided by a plan that will specify initiatives and milestones, there is no doubt that we can see change in First Nations health outcomes in this region,” said Chief Maureen Chapman, representative for the Sto:lo Nation Chiefs Council.

There are 32 First Nations communities in the Fraser Salish region of various sizes, including small and isolated communities. The needs of the communities vary significantly, as does the capability of each community to engage with Fraser Health. The Accord specifies that no community should be forced into region-wide health strategies but that no community should be left behind.
“Our approach to health and well-being is, more than anything, community-based. First Nations and Aboriginal peoples have a good understanding of their health challenges and goals, and this partnership with Fraser Health will help us reach those goals sooner,” said Chief Willie Charlie, representative for the independent Fraser Salish communities.

The Partnership Accord builds on a number of provincial and regional documents, including the Tripartite First Nations Health Plan, signed by First Nations leaders, the Province of British Columbia and Health Canada in June of 2007. In addition to specifying a range of health actions, the Tripartite Plan also called for a new First Nations health governance structure in BC. The latter was achieved this year through the signing of an agreement that will see the design and delivery of health services for BC First Nations transferred from Health Canada to a First Nations Health Authority.

Fraser Health provides a wide range of integrated health services to the largest and fastest growing population in B.C. The health authority is committed to improving the health of the population and the quality of life of more than 1.6 million people living in communities from Burnaby to White Rock to Hope.

A copy of the Partnership Accord is available at: [www.fnhc.ca](http://www.fnhc.ca)

A backgrounder follows.

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