

Launch of the B.C. First Nations Health Plan

Premier Gordon Campbell

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Check Against Delivery

Thank you all for inviting me here to be with you today. I want to start by thanking the Coast Salish people for welcoming us to their traditional territories. I want to thank the elders who are in attendance, and I want to thank the delegates and the chiefs as well.

I believe congratulations are also in order to Regional Chief, Shawn Atleo, who has been re-elected as the Regional Chief for the Assembly of First Nations. Shawn, I want to say congratulations to you and thank you for the service that you've given both to the AFN and to the people of British Columbia over the last number of years.

I also would like to acknowledge Mavis Erickson who ran in the election, for her willingness to stand for election and take on the responsibility of leadership. I know that there are onerous responsibilities faced by the leadership of First Nation's communities across British Columbia. They ask people to stand forward and to help them move, as my friend Grand Chief Stuart Philip has said, "out of the shadows of the past, into the future." This is a challenging time.

I believe that I have been very fortunate, as has my government, to be able to work with the First Nations Leadership Council, who join us today and who've worked so hard over the last year on building a new relationship and truly leading the province forward. I want to say thank you to Grand Chief Ed John, Chief Judith Sayers, Dave Porter, Grand Chief Stuart Philip, Chief Robert Shintah, and Chief Linda Price for their leadership because it is their leadership that is helping forge a pathway to the future that we all can take pride in and we all can look to with a sense of confidence. So thank you very much for your leadership. I appreciate it.

If I may today, I'd like to just take a moment to acknowledge the passing of Dr. Frank Calder. I've just returned from a trip to Asia and, sadly, was unable to attend the service for Dr. Calder. But I think it is clear how profound and important an impact he had, and continues to have, on our province. I believe that his contribution was both lasting and positive. We're a better province because of his life's work, and we are lessened by his loss. We are all heirs to his legacy.

And I hope he felt that over the last number of months, and, indeed, over the last number of years, that the seeds that he helped to sow have finally taken root in British Columbia and are starting to bear the fruits of positive action and opportunity for First Nations people across our province. I'm sure that he would look down and say there is still much to be done, but I think all of us can recognize the contribution that he made by his life's work and his action. I wanted to acknowledge that here today.

There is indeed still much to be done, but this week we mark the first anniversary of an exceptional meeting that took place last year in Kelowna where we brought together national leaders, premiers from provinces and territories, the federal government, and first nations, Inuit, and Métis leadership from across the country. We undertook at that time, to lay out a plan that would close the gaps between Aboriginal people and other Canadians.

Today in the Parliament they will be debating a resolution with regard to the Quebecois and the important contribution that they have made to our country. I have urged the Prime Minister to work with Aboriginal leaders to develop a similar motion that offers positive affirmation of the Aboriginal people and their cultures and what they have done to help define Canada in the past and in the future.

I would hope that we can all openly embrace our Aboriginal, French, English, and multicultural heritages with resolve and with understanding, to strengthen our country, to provide more opportunities for the young people that call themselves Canadians, and to set an example for the rest of the world.

In the last year, since the meetings that we had with first ministers, we have seen some significant steps: the new education accord was signed in June; the repatriation of the Haisla totem pole; the opening of a new cultural centre for the Osoyoos Indian Band; the resources provided for the completion of a cultural centre at Haida Gwaii; and the initialling of the final agreement with the Lheidli T'enneh people – the first that has been established under the B.C. Treaty Commission.

And last summer, as Shawn Atleo has pointed out, I was given the honour of being given an Ahousaht name: Chamatook. It means: he who is able to do the right thing and bring harmony.

I hope that over the last year our First Nation's leadership in British Columbia have not felt that it was necessary to push too hard, but, as Chief Atleo pointed out at the time that the name was bestowed, the name I was given carries with it the intent to push me in the right direction for First Nations people.

I want to say that I feel very fortunate to have been a premier at a time where the leadership that First Nations provided has been clear-sighted, has been confident, has been focused, and has always put the interests of the future and the next generations at the centre of its agenda. I recognize that whatever progress we have made, in many ways, has demanded far more of First Nations' leadership than it has of us in government.

It's not easy to set aside the past, but because of the direction of the First Nations Leadership Council, because of the wisdom and the leadership of the National Chief, Phil Fontaine, I believe we have made progress over the last year since we signed the historic transformative change accord with the federal government, the First Nations Leadership Council and the Province of British Columbia. The transformative change accord sets out

our commitment to work together to close the gaps in economic opportunity, education, housing, and health. In the past year we have made some progress.

We saw the new education agreement signed, and that will be a valuable step in improving outcomes for First Nations' children. That legislation has now been introduced into the federal parliament.

We have seen two more AIPs signed and the final agreement with the Lheidli T'enneh, as well as the implementation of the new relationship trust.

B.C.'s new housing strategy will see 2,600 housing units transferred from the federal government to the Aboriginal Housing Management Association.

On the health gap, I want to encourage all members of First Nations from across the province to participate in the conversation on health, which was launched this fall. While First Nations face some particular health challenges, the issues being discussed in the conversation are vital to all British Columbians.

And today we are taking another important step in closing the health gap. I am pleased to announce that we are releasing the new First Nations Health Plan. It has been built on the work and the foundation that was laid by First Nations health directors in B.C. and by the national Assembly of First Nations. It's been developed in partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council.

It sets out actions and this government's commitments in the transformative change accord. It contains 29 specific actions that the province will work with First Nations on so that we can close the health gap in B.C.

They include: B.C.'s provincial health officer, who will appoint an Aboriginal physician to advise and report on Aboriginal health issues. A component of the ActNow BC program will be targeted specifically to Aboriginal communities to promote health lifestyle choices that will complement our actions to ban junk food in schools for all our children and ban smoking in public places.

An Aboriginal mental health and addiction services plan will be developed that includes healing circles, cultural camps, and counselling programs. We will improve access to primary care services in Aboriginal health and healing centres, and we will improve programs to help manage chronic conditions, like diabetes.

We are confronted by a national epidemic in diabetes, but we also recognize that First Nations and Aboriginal people have an even greater challenge in terms of diabetes in the years ahead.

The targets of our plan are ambitious. We intend to see by 2015, the life expectancy gap cut from the 7.5 years that we see today, to less than three years. We expect a 50 per cent

reduction in the gap in youth suicide rates, a 50 per cent reduction in the gap in infant mortality, and a 33 per cent in the prevalence of diabetes.

We're also going to work on increasing the number of First Nations physicians and other health care professionals.

We are making progress in many of these areas, but there is a great deal of work to be done. For example, the suicide rate for Aboriginal rate has dropped by almost half over the last decade, but today it is still over twice that of other British Columbians. The infant mortality rate is less than half of what it was in the early 1990s, but it is still slightly higher than that for non-Aboriginals. There is much more to be done. This plan will help us get there.

In 2004 there was a first ministers' conference held in Ottawa to discuss health, specifically Aboriginal health. The point was made by the medical health officer for British Columbia that, with concerted action, with comprehensive action, with cohesive action, we could close all of the health gaps over the next ten years.

Our goal is to do just that. It will require each of us to carry out our activities in the spirit of common purpose and common intent.

Along with this plan that we've established in the province of British Columbia, we will also be signing a new memorandum-of-understanding today with the First Nations Leadership Council and the government of Canada.

The memorandum-of-understanding will further build on the B.C. First Nations Health Plan. It outlines four areas of specific collaboration: first, governance, relationships and accountability; second, health promotion, and disease and injury prevention. A critical part of any health plan about the future, is to try and reduce the incidence of disease and critical injuries. Third, it focuses on health services: how they're provided and where they're provided. And fourth, it focuses on performance tracking of how we are doing.

As we set a plan for the next ten years, it's important for us to measure our progress over that time. Tomorrow there will be a special aboriginal health conference where we have premiers and ministers from across the country coming to follow-up on the commitments that we made last November.

This memorandum-of-understanding represents a willingness of all three partners to act in closing the health gap. As we bring together our colleagues from across the county — Aboriginal leadership, provincial and territorial leadership, and federal leadership — we will discuss how we can build the momentum for change that is currently taking place.

I want to specifically thank the Assembly of First Nations for your support and all that you have done as we reach out to accomplish the goals that we have laid for ourselves.

I recognize that we have a long way to go. I recognize that there are days when the journey will feel like we haven't really made very much progress at all.

But I can say with sincerity, that this is a journey that I hope we continue to share with your people in the years ahead. This is a journey where you will be the pathfinders to the future, where your leadership will be the critical component that will ensure that we succeed to build healthier communities, to build a healthier province, and, in every sense, to build a better country for all of us to live in.

Thank you very much.