

First Nations and Provincial Health Officer Sign COVID-19 Information Sharing Agreements

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA (February 9, 2021) – A coalition of First Nations and BC's Provincial Health Officer have negotiated and are signing information sharing agreements that provide more detailed information about COVID-19 case numbers in nearby communities, and will enable the nations to make more informed decisions on safety measures, and provide risk guidance to their members.

The agreements' preamble makes clear that the nations do not view them as providing completely satisfactory disclosure, and they believe systemic change must still occur in BC's healthcare system, including establishing new structures and protocols that support sufficient and timely information sharing with Indigenous governments during emergencies, with consideration to the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond's November 2020 report, *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care*.

Under the terms of the agreements, the Provincial Health Officer will provide the Heiltsuk Nation, Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council Member Nations, and Tsilhqot'in National Government with frequent reports listing the number of COVID-19 cases in proximate communities, and certain thresholds must be met before the nations can disclose the number of cases in a community in their public risk statements.

"This hard-fought agreement improves our access to COVID-19 proximate case information in the middle of a pandemic," said Marilyn Slett, Chief Councillor of the Heiltsuk Nation. "With more detailed and timely information, we can offer improved risk assessments and guidance to our community members."

"COVID cases are still on the rise in BC and vaccination rollouts have been slow due to supply issues," said Judith Sayers, President of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. "This information is vital to First Nations, particularly in light of the new variants that are appearing in the province."

"I recognize that Indigenous communities in British Columbia have been seriously and negatively impacted by historical epidemics," said Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry. "My office is sharing information in the spirit of reconciliation, to realize self-governance and self-determination, and to ensure an effective public health response to COVID-19."

Copies of signed agreements to date are available here:

<http://www.heiltsuknation.ca/agreements/>

<https://nuuchahnulth.org/welcome>

<https://www.tsilhqotin.ca/documents/>

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