

# Wisdom Council

## 2020-21 Annual Report





## Message from Alberta Health Services President & CEO



*Dr. Verna Yiu, AHS CEO*

The 2020-21 year was like no other we've experienced and the support of the Wisdom Council has never been more important or more appreciated. Your support this year has been tremendous. Your words of encouragement and guidance have been so important both for our organization, our frontline staff, and our leadership. Thank you.

I realize that virtual meetings were the norm during the global pandemic and that creates different challenges, both with technology and with relationship building. You have been very patient and have continued to provide important advice and input into critical work at AHS. In particular, your advice to establish a 1-800 patient concern line dedicated to Indigenous people is one that is forging ahead. Work is well underway to launch this phone line and we believe it will make a big difference by creating a safe place for Indigenous people and to bring their concerns forward. AHS is committed to cultural safety for all and we need the input of all Albertans to understand where we have gaps and then your advice on how we address them.

We recently released the AHS Anti-Racism Position Statement to Albertans. The input of the Wisdom Council into this important document was invaluable and, again, I thank you. This milestone is particularly personal and important to me, as many of you know, and I can't say enough how much I have appreciated the sage advice and the prayers of all Wisdom Council members.

It is an honor and privilege for AHS to have your guidance and advice over the past many years and especially over the past 19 months. Please stay well and safe and all the best for the coming year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Verna Yiu  
President and CEO, AHS



## Message from the Chair, Wisdom Council

This past year has reminded us once again of our resilience and strength in the face of adversity. It has been an unprecedented year due to COVID 19 pandemic. We witnessed our Indigenous communities come together and rally to combat COVID 19 with assistance from the federal and provincial health supports.



*Casey Eagle Speaker,  
Wisdom Council Chair*

We witnessed lockdowns and our people being put in isolation to protect our Elders, children and the vulnerable. We were not able to gather in kinship or ceremony which is integral to our life. Some of us had to learn to use technology to continue work and meetings. Business continued as usual, but we lost the connectedness that is essential to being truly present in mind, body and spirit. My hope is for everyone in the province to get the vaccine so, we can look forward to the gatherings, powwows, feasts, and ceremonies that are an essential part of who we are as Indigenous peoples. I commend those communities that did their best to have all members vaccinated.

Dr. Verna Yiu, President and CEO for Alberta Health Services (AHS), continues to lead with determination and grace for Indigenous and all Albertans. Thank you to AHS executives, physicians, nurses, and all health service staff who provided care and continue to care for those affected by COVID-19.

The Wisdom Council continued to meet virtually beginning in February 2020 to maintain communication, and to provide supports during this challenging time to continue improving health outcomes for the Indigenous, Métis and Inuit people we serve.

We look forward to continuing this journey of partnership and representation with AHS on behalf of all Indigenous people of Alberta. We continue to hold our Indigenous people and AHS in our prayers.

In Spirit of Health and ReconciliAction (Reconciliation),

Casey Eagle Speaker (Sorrel Horse, Kainai Nation)  
Chair, Wisdom Council



## Who we are

The Wisdom Council (HAC) is comprised of up to 17 members who represent the Indigenous people of Alberta. Visit us online for a full list of our [membership](#).



**Left to Right Back Row:** Cheryl Sheldon, Noreen McAteer, Connie Morin, Cassandra Ayoungman, Danika Little Child (former member), Emil Durocher (Elder Advisor, Indigenous Health Program) Donna Fayant, Calvin Badger, Meeka Otway

**Front Row:** Casey Eagle Speaker, Wally Sinclair, Frank Daniels (former member), Beatrice Little Mustache, Paul Daniels, Adelaide (Dolly) Creighton

**Missing:** Charles Weasel Head, Carola Cunningham, Patsy Campbell



# Highlights



## Presentations

- Provincial Indigenous Health Hub (PIHH)
- Update on Indigenous Cancer Strategy
- Wellspring Edmonton & Northern AB Cancer Support Program & Services
- Improving Patient Concerns & Experience: Quality Improvement
- AHS Anti-Racism Position Statement



## Participation

- Naming of the Provincial Indigenous Wellness Core
- Definition of Elder
- Provided guidance to AHS Anti-Racism Advisory Group re: Anti-Racism Position Statement
- Provided guidance to the Indigenous Cancer Strategy



## Engagement

- ZOOM virtual sessions



# Key achievements of 2020-21

## **Naming of Provincial Indigenous Health HUB (PIHH):**

In July 2020, AHS announced the amalgamation of the Indigenous Health Program and Indigenous Health Strategic Clinical Network. PIHH would also align with the new provincial program structures of Addictions & Mental Health and Senior's Health.

The Wisdom Council recommended the name Indigenous Wellness Core. Casey Eagle Speaker explained 'core' as our way of being, our way of doing. Everything has a core; the sacred tree of life is the core. Our spiritual core represents the essence of our being. The word relates to our being, mentally, spiritually, emotionally and physically.

This name represents our mission to build a place that supports Indigenous wellness, connectedness, innovation and vision into the future. It supports and strengthens innovation, quality improvement, standardization and customization to reflect the diversity among Indigenous peoples and Nations in Alberta.

## **Wisdom Council 3-Year Commitments:**

In December 2019, the WC developed 3-year commitments to provide direction in addressing the four areas identified below:

1. AHS Indigenous Health Commitments: A Roadmap to Wellness
2. Communication
3. Cultural Safety and Protocols
4. Relationship Building

The 3-Year commitments provide focus and a foundation to work within over the next three years with direct links to the AHS IH Commitments. The commitment's link to system navigation and patient relations and action planning to support the Antiracism Statement.

## **Indigenous Patient Concerns and Experiences:**

The Wisdom Council requested a 1-800 number be made accessible for Indigenous patients and family members experiencing challenges such as racism in the AHS health care system. This number will provide access to support for navigation needs and concerns once operational. Steps include exploring a resolution process that will instill trust in Indigenous people when accessing health care services.

## **Definition of "Elder":**

Wisdom Council began a discussion on defining an 'Elder' in March 2021. After several meetings, the following was decided by Wisdom Council to represent the true meaning of 'Elder':

Honouring diversity of language amongst Indigenous cultures means a precise description of an Elder isn't available. We must seek to understand how each community describes their Recognized Elders.

Through Indigenous ways, Recognized Elders are held in high esteem and recognized by the members of the community as persons with knowledge and wisdom who guide their communities in:

- life and culture
- wisdom
- experience
- vision
- values
- compassion

They are Keepers (Knowledge Keepers) of stories, ceremonies, spiritual teachings, and medicines.

## A look ahead

The Wisdom Council continues to provide guidance and recommendations on the development and implementation of culturally appropriate and innovative health service delivery for Indigenous Peoples.

The Wisdom Council will continue to provide guidance to increase cultural competency to improve access to culturally competent care for the Indigenous people of Alberta.

The Wisdom Council will continue to provide feedback and advice to AHS to improve health care service delivery and integration of services for Indigenous people.

### Saying farewell



Danika Littlechild departed from the Wisdom Council in December 2019. Danika accepted a position at Carleton University as an assistant professor in the Department of Law and Legal Studies. A Pendleton blanket and plaque were presented to her, along with a prayer wishing her success on her journey.

*“If you want to go fast you go alone, if you want to go further you do it together. We are going to walk this together. AHS is one leg and the other is Wisdom Council and together we move forward”*

**Casey Eagle Speaker** - Chair-Wisdom Council



Advisory Councils act in an advisory capacity to Alberta Health Services (AHS) as we share feedback with AHS leadership from our communities about health services. We hold public meetings at locations throughout our geography and participate in engagement activities that further contribute to health services in Alberta.

## Get involved

You can make a difference to the health and well-being of your family, friends, neighbours and community by sharing your thoughts and ideas with AHS. You can get involved by:

- Attending an upcoming meeting. Agendas and notices are posted on the Advisory Council webpage: [ahs.ca/advisorycouncils](https://ahs.ca/advisorycouncils).
- Delivering a presentation at a Council meeting on a health area of interest.
- Providing input on various healthcare topics online, at [Together4Health](#).
- Applying to [become a member](#). Members are appointed for three-year terms.

## Learn more

Visit [ahs.ca/advisorycouncils](https://ahs.ca/advisorycouncils)

✉ [community.engagement@ahs.ca](mailto:community.engagement@ahs.ca)

☎ 1.877.275.8830

Check us out on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) or by searching AHS Advisory Councils.

