



Advocating for Our Youth and the Future Generations

*Ontario Joint Gathering Indigenous Services
Canada*

November 5-7, 2024

Toronto, ON





Who We Are:

- The OFNYPC received our mandate through Chiefs of Ontario Resolution: 03/04 on November 19, 2003. Comprised representatives from Political Territorial Organizations:
- Anishinabek Nation: Pierre Debassige, Terra Roy
- Nishnawbe Aski Nation: Teyha Quachegan, Ramon Kataquapit
- Grand Council Treaty #3: Kieran Davis & Geryt Seymour
- Association of Iroquois and Allied Nations: Hanna Sewell & Dakota Cornelius
- Independent First Nations: Carter Carpenter & Jade Soney
- Six Nations: Dakota Sabourin

Goal:

- The OFNYPC works collaboratively to raise awareness for Youth Concerns across Ontario and from our respective regions



Current Challenges Facing Ontario First Nations Youth Cont.

1. Mental Health and Addictions Crisis

First Nation communities often face disproportionately high rates of suicide or overdose, which can be linked to the cumulative impacts of historical trauma, systemic inequities, underfunding and ongoing discrimination. This is not merely a mental health issue in isolation but is tied to broader social determinants like poverty, lack of access to healthcare, and loss of cultural identity.

2. Socio-economic Health Inequities (Culturally Appropriate)

First Nation communities experience vast socio-economic health disparities due to historical and ongoing inequities, often compounded by limited access to culturally appropriate healthcare. Traditional healing and wellness practices that could be beneficial are frequently not incorporated into mainstream healthcare, leading to a disconnect in care delivery.



3. Racism and Discrimination within Systems with Policies That Fail First Nations Peoples

Many systems (healthcare, justice, education) have policies and structures that systematically disadvantage First Nations people. These frameworks often overlook or disregard First Nations knowledge, needs, and lived experiences, creating an environment where discriminatory practices perpetuate poor outcomes.

4. Unregulated Nervous Systems (constant fight or flight) exacerbating mental health crisis in First Nation Communities

Many First Nation individuals and communities live in a state of chronic stress, with their nervous systems in a constant state of hypervigilance or "fight-or-flight." This prolonged stress response is a physical manifestation of both personal and community-wide trauma, leading to long-term health implications. No direct access to land/culture practices or unhealthy surrounding environment can add into the stress of First Nation youth.

5. Intergenerational Trauma from Cultural Genocide

The impacts of colonization and forced assimilation practices like residential schooling have been passed down through generations. The trauma experienced by previous generations continues to affect subsequent ones, creating cycles of pain and disconnection from culture and identity.



What's Not Working

- **Formula-Based Funding**

The standard funding models often do not address the specific needs of Indigenous communities, as they rely on rigid, one-size-fits-all formulas. Such models fail to recognize the unique social, cultural, and geographical challenges, resulting in underfunding and inadequacy of services that don't reach their intended goals.

- NHIIB approval systems (therapy, medications and medical interventions prescribed by professionals)



What Ontario First Nations Youth Need

1. True Prevention Programs / Crisis Prevention Programs

Effective prevention programs should be tailored to First Nations contexts, respecting cultural practices and addressing root causes of mental health issues and community crises. True prevention goes beyond crisis management and requires proactive support systems and early intervention.

- OFNYPC Stories from your roots programming
- Thunderbird Partnership training

2. Food Sovereignty and Environment (Land Back)

Food sovereignty is critical for health, autonomy, and cultural preservation. Returning land to First Nations communities (Land Back) allows for sustainable land use, traditional farming, and food systems that can support health, cultural practices, and environmental stewardship. Indigenous communities often act as stewards of their lands, advocating for protection against industrial activities that degrade natural resources. Ensuring environmental protection supports not only the health of these communities but also the sustainability of biodiversity and ecosystems.



4. Language Revitalization to Support Community Connection

Language is integral to cultural identity. Revitalizing Indigenous languages fosters stronger connections to cultural roots, supports mental well-being, and reinforces community bonds. Language programs need dedicated resources and integration within broader community efforts.

5. Adequate, Affordable Housing and Water Resource

Safe housing and clean water are basic human rights that remain unfulfilled for many First Nation communities. Addressing these needs is fundamental to health, safety, and quality of life, and requires substantial infrastructure investment.

6. Peer led groups, active participation from youth in all sectors

Youth need to see other youth doing well, being supported and uplifted by community and government programming to adequately meet the needs of first nation youth.



What Ontario First Nations Youth Need

7. Appropriate Aftercare Treatment Programs for Health, Social, and Justice Needs

For lasting impact, aftercare programs should offer ongoing support. These programs must be culturally sensitive and focus on reintegration, healing, and long-term stability. The programs in health care, social and justice supporting First Nation youth must be gender inclusive and address accessibility needs they may have. Health services that are accessible, land-based, and age-appropriate promote physical, mental, and spiritual health. For example, programs designed for elders versus youth need to reflect age-specific needs, incorporating traditional knowledge with Western practices where appropriate.

8. First Nations Data Collection and Storage

Effective data collection is essential for understanding community needs, tracking health outcomes, and advocating for appropriate funding. Indigenous-led data sovereignty allows communities to collect, manage, and interpret their data, ensuring that information is used to benefit the communities themselves.



CONCLUSION

- Addressing these interconnected issues requires shifting from reactive crisis responses to proactive trauma-informed healing services and community-driven solutions that drive preventative services
- This includes acknowledging First Nations self-determination and investing in culturally grounded prevention programs and “Safe NIHB Health Officials for our Youth.
- Restructuring funding streams and systems to create sustainable, equitable, and timely support for First Nations communities in Ontario to adequately support the youth internal and external from community.



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