

CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks

CAAN Newsletter

Through empowerment, education, and community.

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NEW YEAR, NEW UPDATES!



As we enter the new year and winter solstice, we reflect on our achievements and growth we experienced at our organization this last quarter. Our collected efforts continue to be rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, advocacy, education, empowerment, strengthening relationships, and collaboration with Indigenous communities and members/partners; we look forward to a year filled with continued innovation and meaningful change. The January newsletter serves as an opportunity to celebrate our team's progress, and share exciting news for 2025!

WELCOMING OUR NEW INDIGENOUS BOARD MEMBERS

Margaret Kísikâw Pîyesîs, CEO/Okimâw

We are excited to announce the addition of new members to our Board of Directors, individuals who bring a wealth of experience, commitment, and cultural knowledge to our work. As an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to addressing the unique challenges faced by Indigenous communities living with HIV, HCV, & Women, we recognize the importance of having leadership that reflects the values, traditions, and experiences of our people.

Our new board members are dedicated advocates and leaders within their communities, and we are confident that their perspectives will help guide our organization in the work ahead. Their voices will be instrumental in shaping our strategies, advocating for equitable health policies, and ensuring that our programs continue to meet the needs of Indigenous people across the land called Canada.

We acknowledge the importance of cultural humility and learning in our work, and with these new additions to our board, we are further strengthening our commitment to Indigenous self-determination, health, and well-being. Together, we will continue to fight against stigma, raise awareness, and work towards creating a healthier, more inclusive future for all.

Please join us in welcoming our new board members. We are excited to embark on this journey together as we continue to support and uplift our communities. Board members can be seen on the www.caan.ca website.



CELEBRATING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF THE GLOWS INDIGENOUS HEALTH GRANT

Tawnya Crowshoe, Indigenous Health Program Manager

We are thrilled to announce the successful recipients of the second year of the GLOWS Indigenous Health Grant! These outstanding organizations and projects were selected for their alignment with the grant's core mission: addressing HIV and viral hepatitis in Indigenous communities through innovative, culturally relevant initiatives.



This year's recipients will focus on one of the key areas critical to health equity and community well-being, including:

- **Education:** Building awareness of HIV and viral hepatitis symptoms, drivers of transmission, and available care and treatments. Their efforts will provide Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate health information and services that improve screening and diagnosis.
- **Peer Support and Navigation:** Enhancing access to care through services that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. By fostering safe and supportive environments, these initiatives help Indigenous people navigate care settings and remain engaged in their health journeys.
- **Holistic Care:** Enabling healing through tools and services that combine treatment medications and traditional medicines. These approaches address the physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs of Indigenous people affected by HIV and viral hepatitis.
- **Capacity Building:** Supporting Indigenous-led organizations to strengthen staff skills, infrastructure, and administrative capabilities. These efforts aim to sustain and expand the delivery of HIV and viral hepatitis services while fostering community-based leadership.

We are proud to support these impactful projects as they contribute to a healthier, more equitable future for Indigenous communities. Stay connected with us for updates on their remarkable work and the positive change it inspires.

Stay tuned for updates on the incredible work being done by these leaders in Indigenous health. Together, we are making strides toward a healthier future for all.

WARRIOR SOCIETIES AND MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Leona Quewezance, Visionary Director of Indigenous Practices

Dear CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks Membership:

As the new Visionary Director of Indigenous Practices at CAAN Communities Alliances & Networks, it has been an incredible journey so far, and we are committed to building effective communication and connections, fostering collaboration, and amplifying Indigenous voices. To widen our reach, we have been working diligently to increase our membership and enhance our collective impact. Together we are laying the groundwork for a brighter future for our people and future generations to come.

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS TO JOIN THE WARRIOR SOCIETY COMMITTEES!

We are currently seeking committed individuals to join the Warrior Societies:

Indigenous People Living with HIV and/or AIDS – 7 seats available.

Indigenous People Living with or have lived with Hepatitis C - 7 seats available.

Voices of Women on a Healing Journey – 7 seats available.

If you are interested in serving one of these councils, we encourage you to apply! Send the Warrior Society Application Form (available on www.caan.ca), along with your cover letter and resume to info@caan.ca. Once the Warrior Society seats are filled, we will have quarterly meetings virtually and one face-to-face meeting during the Summit

Building a Strong Membership

Our membership is at the heart of CAAN. We create meaningful change through our voices, experiences, and dedication. Enhancing and strengthening our membership is essential to grow our membership and we need your support to continue this important work. We want to thank our membership for their contributions throughout the year and look forward to expanding our member portal on the website to enhance member experience!



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE!

Membership is open to those who share our vision of empowering Indigenous communities. If you are interested in becoming a member of CAAN please visit www.caan.ca click on the membership portal for more details.



STAFF UPDATES



Chris Walker, Senior Policy Analyst

Early in 2024, in my position as the Senior Policy Analyst at CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks, I engaged in a series of important activities that included leadership meetings at Brew Creek, policy development for both Elder and IIF Policies, as well as standard operating procedure (SOP) development with the Indigenous Leadership Policy Manager, Trevor. Notable events included attending webinars on advances in new tuberculosis (TB) and a conference on

congenital syphilis in Ottawa. During this time, I also reviewed drafts for Gathering Wisdom and the International Strategic Plan, provided feedback on CAAN's strategic plan, and assisted with proposal

writing. Other responsibilities included taking meeting notes, my performance review, as well as participating in a CATIE course on Hepatitis C testing and diagnosis.

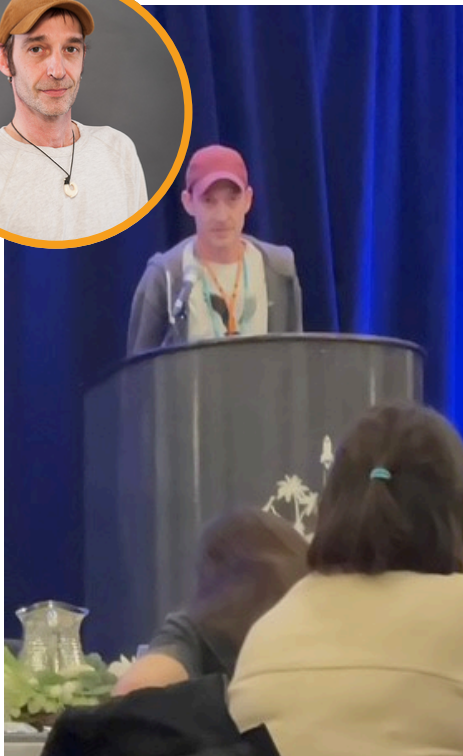
The month of May involved numerous meetings with Margaret, Trevor, and Hany. I also attended webinars, took a vacation, and reviewed the Indigenous Identity work of the HIV Legal Network. Additionally, I reviewed proposals, and helped develop SOPs. Other activities included working on letters to be sent to National Indigenous Organizations (NIO) as well as reviewing the Intersecting Pandemics work.

In June, I participated in a sunrise ceremony and various leadership and visioning meetings in Moose Jaw. I began engaging more in international work, preparing for the IIPCHA and AIDS 2024 conferences as well as assisting in developing resource materials for the IIPCHA conference. A significant part of this work involved strategic planning and deliberative dialogue for the AIDS 2024 conference. I reviewed CAAN's International Strategic Plan, conducted literature reviews, drafted concept notes for the Robert Carr Fund, and provided feedback on organizational policies.

July continued with international work and conference preparations as well as reviewing and updating membership brochures, assisting with various reports, and providing feedback on organizational policies. In August, I reviewed course materials for potential onboarding policies as well as attended the IIPCHA and AIDS 2024 conferences in Munich. In Munich, I helped facilitate discussions, panels, and hosted the Indigenous networking zones with my colleagues. A lot of great relationships were formed during that trip and CAAN's international work appeared to really pick up steam as other organizations, major international organizations, took note of CAAN's role as an international Indigenous leader in the Global Fund and others. As such, work really picked up in that specific area as our Global Team worked together on various grants, policy briefs, as well as other funding opportunities.

September included developing a TRC statement, drafting briefing notes on an STBBI-TB strategy, as well as planning for IAAD/W meetings and conferences. During this time, I also reviewed and edited various reports, drafted consultation guides for the UNDRIP/UNDA Action Plan, as well as continued to engage in leadership and strategic planning meetings. During October, I continued to work on the UNDRIP/UNDA Action Plan, drafted media releases, consultation guides, and exit surveys, as well as collaborated on writing guides and SOP development. Regular participation in Leadership and Global Team meetings occurred throughout as well as facilitation of various project meetings with key stakeholders.

In November, my focus shifted primarily to strategic planning and global engagement, advancing CAAN's work with the Global Fund, as well as strategizing and facilitating parliamentary events. While conducting this work, I still reviewed projects, proposals, and organizational strategies, as well as continued to collaborate with advocacy groups and key stakeholders, especially regarding getting the 200 unused GeneXpert community testing machines back out into our communities to help address rising rates of HIV and other comorbidities. In my role as Senior Policy Analyst, I have really enjoyed working with my amazing colleagues and membership as well as our contractors and allies to advance CAAN's goals, in hopes of contributing to better health outcomes and well-being of First peoples nationally and globally. Our collective work across policy development, international collaboration, and strategic planning has truly been a source of inspiration and motivation as I continue learning about allyship.



PROGRAMS

Patrick Brownlee, Programs Manager

Hey CAANer's,

Hoping everyone's transition from Summer to Fall and now Winter was easy, I always have a difficult time with the changing of the warmer months to colder. Here's hoping that the warmer months are right around the corner and Winter does not decide to stay with us for too long.

In September 2024, the Programs Team had the opportunity to meet at CAAN's head office in Fort Qu'Appelle, SK. This gathering was an invaluable chance to connect face-to-face. Discussions about supporting each other's work, CAAN's strategic plan Wapinew Akine (Seeing Collectively) as well as some team building exercises to round out the meeting. The team was able to spend time with CAAN's Elder in-residence, Betty McKenna, who offered teachings about the 7 Stones. Thank Elder Betty for your wise words and for sharing your knowledge with us.

I was also able to attend two significant conferences that were crucial to our ongoing efforts to support Indigenous communities in health and wellness. The first was the CBRC's 2SLGBTQII+ Summit held in Vancouver, which featured powerful presentations and speakers. This event provided an opportunity to engage with new ideas and perspectives while expanding the dialogue on sexual health, especially for Indigenous 2SLGBTQII+ individuals, who often face unique challenges in accessing care.

The second event was the Kimamow Atoskanow Foundation's Sexual Health Conference in Alberta. At this conference, front-line workers shared their insights into the struggles that Indigenous individuals in Alberta are experiencing regarding sexual health, especially from a rural perspective. The conversations were rich with stories of resilience and the need for more targeted support for Indigenous communities. These discussions highlighted the importance of integrating cultural sensitivity into health care and creating spaces where Indigenous voices are not only heard but amplified.

Hoping everyone had a safe and happy holiday season and are looking forward to longer warmer days ahead.

Cassie Hill, Gender-Based Inequity Framework Coordinator

The Gender-Based Violence Framework has been named the **Guiding Our Spirits project** but will be updated to include an Indigenous title – leaning towards **Katatyente:ri (meaning understanding self)**. As this training is Haudenosaunee-based, we thought including a title from the language would be appropriate. The training is a T4T model – train the trainer. Upon completing the training, participants receive materials (as they are wise practices) to return to their communities to meet their specific needs in implementing gender-based violence prevention strategies. The framework revolves around the growth of a tree and is based around the idea that we are all continuously learning and growing – even if we fall off that tree, we can rejoin when we are ready by travelling up the roots. As well, throughout the training, we look at the rings of the tree and how those rings are to protect the self at the centre.

In the summer, we took the training internationally and had the opportunity to present part of our training at AIDS 2024 in Germany. We presented both in the Global Village and the Canada Pavillion. We connected with people from around the world and heard about their communities experiences with gender-based violence. It was an experience that provided much insight to how our training could be a wise practice, not just for our Indigenous communities here, but around the world.



Since Spring, we have undergone many changes to the program one being the length, materials/resources, and addition supports. This training has been updated to be a full two-day training, designed to be in person with the manual having both videos and written texts for participants to view. Each section of our training is grounded in traditional stories – starting with the Haudenosaunee Creation Story and finishing with Richard Wagemese ‘The Raven’. Traditional stories serve to remind us of our connections to each other, Mother Earth and the rest of the nature, and spiritual, worlds. For this training, the stories also provide comfort and safety while having difficult conversations about the violence within our communities and spaces.

New sections to the training include sections on Gender-Based violence's impact on youth, Gender-Based violence found in online spaces, and many more for us to explore with participants of the training. Workbooks have been created to follow the content of the training, as well to include colouring pages and activity pages. The Knowledge Bundles will include USB sticks (that will have copies of the material), Safety Keychains, medicine bag-making kits, soaps, a Self-Care Bear, and many other self-care materials.

In January, we will be having our first full session of the training. The training will be delivered to our Boards and Leadership Team. After which, we expect a few changes/updates to be made and then be ready to move our training to our Members and communities.

Brandi Bilodeau, Campaign & Logistics Coordinator



Hello, everyone! My name is Brandi Bilodeau, and I am the Campaign & Logistics Coordinator with CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks. As we approach the end of the year, I wanted to share a few highlights from the past few months.

In September, I had the privilege of travelling to the Head Office in Saskatchewan for the program's team meeting. This gathering was an opportunity to discuss our strategic plan, and we were fortunate to have a guest speaker join us to offer valuable insights. One of the most memorable experiences during this meeting was when our Okimaw (Margaret Kisikaw Piyesis) led us on a medicine-picking walk. It was an incredibly meaningful cultural experience that I am deeply grateful for, and it reminded me of the strength and resilience of Indigenous traditions.

Over the last quarter, my work has been focused on preparing for the 2024 Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week's (IAAD/W) Parliamentary Breakfast. In collaboration with the planning committee, we began meeting bi-weekly, ramping up to weekly meetings as the event date approached. As part of our campaign, we put out calls for submissions to sponsor other Indigenous organizations hosting IAAD/W events in their communities. CAAN was proud to sponsor two organizations: Ka Ni Kanichihk, who hosted a pipe ceremony and feast, and The DUDES Club, who organized a Medicine Wheel teaching and lunch. Each of these events received an honorarium of \$500.

The Parliamentary Breakfast, which took place on Tuesday, December 3rd, was another significant milestone. Our themes this year were: **YES, we CAAN! End Stigma**, **YES, we CAAN! End Gender-Based Violence**, and **YES, we CAAN! Welcome Our Relatives Home**. The event saw an amazing turnout, with inspiring speakers and guests, including MP Jenica Atwin, MP Arielle Kayabaga, MP Heather McPherson, and MP Anita Vandenberg, who spoke on behalf of Honorable Ahmed Hussen. We were also honoured to have Dr. Theresa Tam, Dr. Tom Wong, and MPs from all parties in attendance. The event began with an opening performance by Inuit Qulliq Lighter, Janice Oolayou, and was concluded with a closing song from Inuit drummer, Timotee Erkloo. The Parliamentary Breakfast was a heartwarming and impactful occasion, with much-needed dialogue around the pressing issues facing Indigenous communities.



Additionally, CAAN partnered with several incredible organizations, including OAHAS, PASAN, HIV Legal Network, and 2-Spirited People of First Nations, to co-host an IAAD/W event in Toronto on December 4th. This event focused on the intersectionality of Indigenous peoples, HIV, the prison system, and the experiences of Two-Spirit and trans people. The event featured two panels, guest speakers, community drumming, and refreshments. The panels included individuals with lived experience in the prison system, who shared their struggles and successes in accessing proper healthcare while incarcerated. It was a powerful and enlightening event that highlighted critical issues in our communities.

It has been an incredible quarter filled with growth, collaboration, and meaningful experiences. As we look ahead to 2025, I am excited about the work we will continue to do together. Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement

Sianna Bulman, Indigenous Research Coordinator: I'm Indigenous, I'm Ready Project



Taanishi,

My name is Sianna Bulman, and I am the Indigenous Research Project Coordinator with CAAN. This fall, we have continued to make progress in supporting Indigenous communities and advancing health initiatives, particularly through the integration of HIV self-testing technology. Here is a look at some of our key accomplishments, ongoing efforts, and future plans.

Key Highlights

- **Strategic Milestones:**
 - Finalized the I'm Indigenous and I'm Ready report and presented it to CAAN leadership, partner organizations, and the communities involved.
 - Met with Tri-Cycle and REACH Nexus to discuss the Canadian launch of the Talking Stick App.
 - Engaged in discussions with U=U and REACH Nexus to implement U=U programming in Canada
- **Community Engagement:**
 - Participated in meaningful and informative events, including the CBRC Summit in Vancouver, and the Kimamow Atoskanow Foundation Sexual Wellness Event.
 - Supported health-focused gatherings like the Keeping Our Fires Event. Contributed to an HIV self-testing information session with the Cold Lake Native Friendship Centre and the HIV self-testing rollout in Kingsclear First Nation.
- **Resource and Program Development:**
 - Made progress on creating a syphilis resource tailored for Indigenous women of childbearing age in partnership with CATIE.
 - Strengthened relationships with Friendship Centres, Inuit, Métis, and Northern communities, laying the groundwork for future sustainable health initiatives.

Ongoing Initiatives

Our ongoing efforts remain focused on:

- Developing training plans for communities and organizations, including the Warrior Society and CAAN Membership.
- Sustaining HIV self-testing programs through strategic planning and community partnerships.

Upcoming Events

I am excited about several upcoming gatherings that will further CAAN's mission, including:

- Ka Ni Kanichihk Kokum's Event
- Labrador Friendship Centre Event
- Manitoba Harm Reduction Conference

This season's accomplishments highlight the power of collaboration and our steadfast commitment to health equity and cultural connection. Together, we are fostering impactful change and building healthier, stronger communities.

Maarsii for your continued support,



Tash Dingwell, Promising Practices Coordinator for the Keeping Our Fires Project



The Keeping Our Fires Project's main objective is to work collaboratively with organizations across the land to increase their capacity to provide stigma-free and culturally safe care for Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs). In June, I attended a Sunrise Ceremony in Moose Jaw, SK with our leadership team, partners, and Elder Betty McKenna to put in an offering on behalf of our team and project. We have worked with 5 participating organizations from the Prairies, Atlantic, and Central regions. In August, our participants have attended our two-day training workshop on the Community Readiness Model and how to use the model and tools to conduct environmental scans in collaboration with their community members to discover their community's readiness level, as well as existing gaps/barriers and strengths within their community.

In October, I invited all participants to a gathering with the support of Elder James Quatell and guest speaker, Ireland Moore from the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal. Ireland Moore was a project participant last fiscal year, and they got to share their organization's journey on the project and the accomplishments in their community. Participants had the opportunity to share case studies from their community and with the help of CAAN, brainstorm how to navigate raising awareness and having meaningful conversations around STBBIs with community members. Later on in the gathering, all attendees had the opportunity to discuss best practices to address STBBIs and related stigma, prevention, harm reduction, trauma-informed care, person-centred care, and the linkage between colonization and STBBIs.

In November, our project participants moved forward with their strategy implementation and brainstorming a resource that would benefit their community members and reflect their way of knowing and doing. This month, we will be submitting our draft resources to be reviewed by our committees, have them translated into different languages, and provided to contractors to have them professionally developed. We look forward to distributing these resources to communities by the end of the fiscal year and having them accessible on CAAN's website.



Keeping Our Fires Project Onboarding

Are you passionate about improving health and wellness in Indigenous communities? Do you want to strengthen your capacity to provide culturally-safe and stigma-free STBBI services? Do you want to create a resource with CAAN?

The Keeping Our Fires Project is looking for dedicated organizations to join our team! Together, we work will together to utilize best evidence-based practices to take ownership and address Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs).

Contact Promising Practices Coordinator, Tash Dingwell at tashd@caan.ca to learn more and apply.

RESEARCH



Angie Carriere, Mobilizing STBBI Research Coordinator

I have transitioned to the Mobilizing STBBIs Project. We are currently building our team and preparing to share and mobilize meaningful research findings within Indigenous communities and to inspire positive change through informed policies that promote healing and reconciliation. I am currently wrapping up my previous project, *I'm Indigenous and I'm Ready*. It was successfully completed in four communities across Turtle Island. We have gained valuable insights that will inform future initiatives. Our findings underscore the importance of tailoring our initiatives specifically for the youth age group, as they represent a critical transition period in their lives where choices about sexual health and safety are being made. The final report can be found on our website at www.caan.ca



CAAN'S ADVOCACY REPORT - DECEMBER 2023

December 2024 marked an impactful month for CAAN, with significant advocacy efforts, events, and media attention surrounding Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week. This report highlights key initiatives in partnership with First Lake Solutions, such as a meeting with Federal Health Minister Mark Holland, hosting the Parliamentary Breakfast, and media coverage on the challenges and advancements addressing HIV in Indigenous communities across Canada.

Meeting with Health Minister, Mark Holland on the STBBI Strategy

During CAAN's visit to Ottawa for Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week, the primary focus for CAAN and First Lake Solutions was the leader meeting with Margaret Kísikâw Pîyesîs (Okimâw of CAAN) and Federal Health Minister Mark Holland. This meeting took place on December 3, and other attendees included Minister Holland's staff, Trevor Stratton (CAAN's Indigenous Leadership Policy Manager), and Rob Leforte (President of First Lake Solutions).

Margaret spoke on the rising diagnoses of HIV/AIDS and the need for significant funding from the federal government to implement an Indigenous-led ending-STBBI strategy. Margaret and Trevor discussed CAAN's recommended solutions leading up to Margaret asking for Minister Holland to support and advocate for this funding on behalf of CAAN and broader Indigenous communities at risk of contracting HIV, TB, HCV, and other STBBIs. The conversation between Margaret and Minister Holland was engaged and effective. Future reports will provide updates on the next steps that follow this meeting.

Parliamentary Breakfast

First Lake Solutions supported CAAN with the government relations aspect of the Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week Parliamentary Breakfast, which was also hosted on December 3. First Lake Solutions connected CAAN with MP Jenica Atwin (the Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Services) who agreed to host the breakfast.

Social Media

First Lake Solutions prepared social media content creation and facilitation for CAAN's social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, for Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week and CAAN's related activities, like the Parliamentary Breakfast while in Ottawa.

Political Developments in December

- While in session in December, the House of Commons remained in partisan gridlock in a privilege motion, also called a filibuster, meaning legislative activity did not move through the House.
- The House rose on December 17 and was scheduled to return January 27. This is no longer occurring as Governor General Mary Simon has granted Prime Minister Trudeau permission to prorogue Parliament until March 24.
- Chrystia Freeland, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, announced her resignation on the morning of December 16 in a letter to the PM that was shared publicly. In the letter, she explains she resigned because the PM asked her to step down after four years as Finance Minister offering her another portfolio, this is widely considered a demotion.
- Chrystia Freeland was PM Trudeau's closest political partner, and this triggered the renewal of public calls from Liberal MP's for the PM to resign as party leader.
- Moving into January, PM Trudeau announced his resignation on January 6, 2025, sending the Liberal party into a leadership contest and pausing Parliament via proroguing until March 24, 2025. First Lake is closely monitoring this situation as it develops and will continue to provide CAAN with updates and suggested next steps.
- The polls continue to reflect the Conservatives leading at a 98 per cent probability of winning a majority if an election were to be called, a 7 per cent increase from the 91 per cent reported in November. More information can be found [here](#).

MEDIA COVERAGE FROM INDIGENOUS AIDS DAY/WEEK



HIV rates in Alberta are up 73%, nearly doubled since 2019

Sunday marks World AIDS Day and doctors, researchers, and community advocates are raising the alarm over the significant rise in HIV rates across Canada, including Alberta.

CTVNews / Jan 7



Fewer people worldwide are getting HIV — so why are rates going up in Canada? | CBC News

Substantial progress has been made in fighting HIV/AIDS globally and more people with the disease are living longer thanks to advances in treatment, but a new study from The Lancet HIV medical journal sugges...

CBC / Dec 2, 2024



Manitoba HIV diagnoses up 130%: HIV program - Winnipeg

New HIV diagnoses in Manitoba have increased 130 per cent in two years, according to data from the Manitoba HIV Program.

Global News / Dec 2, 2024



Saskatchewan struggles to stem highest HIV rate in Canada as cases rise across the country

Care providers and medical experts in the province have long raised the alarm about growing rates of HIV, but they have been unable to curtail the disease's spread

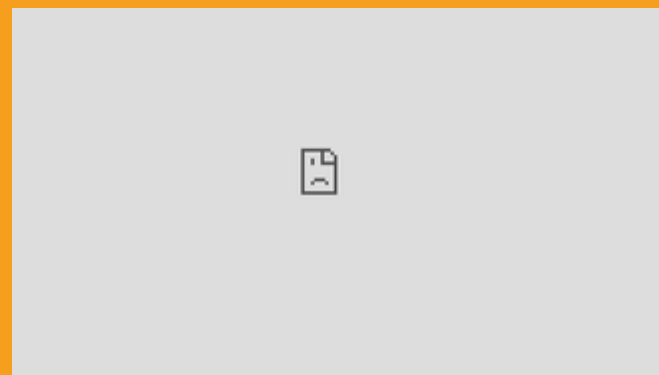
The Globe and Mail / Nov 30, 2024



HIV cases surge in Quebec, experts call for increased access to prevention and support

HIV cases in Quebec have increased compared to previous years. According to Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ), 917 cases of HIV were recorded in 2022.

CTVNews / Jan 7



UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNPFII)



In April 2024, CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks (CAAN) staff and Consulting Team (Margaret Kîsikâw Pîyesîs, Emily Carson, Celeste McKay, and Trevor Stratton) and three Indigenous leaders (Denise Lambert, Norma Rabbitskin, and Leta Kingfisher) specializing in research, health, and birthing attended the 2024 United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) at the UN headquarters in New York.

UNPFII focused on “Enhancing Indigenous People’s rights to self-determination,” with emphasis on Indigenous youth’s role in supporting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Indigenous leaders, policymakers, and advocates gathered to discuss cultural rights, economic development, and health challenges.

A central theme was promoting Indigenous governance systems, autonomy, and participation in global policy decisions. The forum also explored the intersection of Indigenous rights and the green economy, particularly the impact of extractive industries on Indigenous communities. It provides a platform for Indigenous voices to influence global health policies.

The inclusion of Indigenous people living with HIV is essential for addressing the global HIV epidemic in a culturally appropriate way. Indigenous leadership is crucial for creating effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies that reflect their unique experiences. There’s a growing focus on Indigenous-led responses, emphasizing self-determined healthcare, traditional healing, and reducing HIV-related stigma.

Interventions

Speaking on behalf of CAAN, Okimâw Margaret Kîsikâw Pîyesîs, made two oral interventions during the second week of the forum. The first intervention highlighted the importance of Indigenous Peoples leading the design and implementation of measures to improve their health. She stated, “Generic health responses designed and implemented without regard for the distinct histories, circumstances and needs of Indigenous Peoples do not work.” CAAN’s intervention called on the Permanent Forum to convene an Expert Group Meeting led by Indigenous Peoples focusing on developing a Global Action Plan to address HIV, HepC, sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) more broadly, as well as Tuberculosis (TB). Additional recommendations highlighted in the intervention included a call for Elders to be involved in every part of the creation of policies and programmes around health and gender-based violence.

The second intervention noted that the CEDAW’s General Recommendation does not consider the specific rights concern of transwomen, or other women who belong to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. She explained that Indigenous Persons who identify as Two-Spirit or LGBTQIA+ face many distinct challenges in relation to the impact and legacies of colonization, including being at greater risk for contracting HIV, HCV, STBBIs, TB, malaria, as well as preventing from exercising cultural practices that are integral to achieving good health. Our intervention commended both the Expert Mechanism and the Special Rapporteur



for the attention they have given to the specific human rights concerns of the Two Spirit or LGBTQIA+ community.

UN Final Report Excerpts

CAAN played a key role in shaping the UN’s final report by contributing language that emphasized the need for Canada and the United States to enhance health initiatives targeting Indigenous communities.

“The Permanent Forum urges Canada and the United States to fund, expand, and improve initiatives to end the epidemics that affect Indigenous Peoples, including the alarming rates of HIV, hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted infections, especially among women, youth, persons with disabilities, and gender-diverse and two-spirit persons.”

“The Permanent Forum recognizes the urgent need to increase commitment to the health of Indigenous women globally, as their health needs are often underserved and they lack culturally appropriate care, partly due to the criminalization of traditional childbirth practices. The Forum urges Member States and United Nations entities to collaborate in developing programs and allocating funds that prioritize the health of, and midwifery services for, Indigenous women; and in increasing visibility regarding the health situation of Indigenous women through more disaggregated data. The Forum calls for the revision of discriminatory laws affecting Indigenous women. The Forum invites WHO, UNFPA, and UNICEF to partner in identifying and documenting good practices of culturally appropriate health interventions, including supporting Indigenous women and girls in exercising their sexual and reproductive rights. The Forum requests that these entities compile a comprehensive progress report to be submitted at the 2025 session of the Forum.”

Next Steps for the Future

CAAN’s leadership and guests discussed future engagement strategies with the UN Permanent Forums on Indigenous Issues.

Key ideas included:

- Creating a healing space for leaders to decompress from the institutional trauma associated with the UN process, which would require a nearby location and support from other organizations.
- A smudging space on the grounds for participants.
- Collaborating with the Native Centre in NYC to host a side meeting and suggest topics for side meetings including birthing, HIV, holistic data collection, and healing.
- Meeting with UNAIDS, the Global Fund, and representatives from the governments of Canada and the USA, including community leadership.

To learn more about CAAN’s involvement at UNPFII, please visit caan.ca to read *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2024: Report on CAAN’s Involvement*.

