

# Wisdom Council

## 2021-22 Annual Report

(July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022)





## Message from Alberta Health Services President & CEO



*Mauro Chies*

As the President & CEO (Interim) for Alberta Health Services (AHS), it is a pleasure to work with the Wisdom Council (WC). Their support and guidance are an asset as AHS strives for better health outcomes for Indigenous people.

On behalf of the AHS Executive, we extend our gratitude for the Wisdom Council's willingness to continue to meet virtually and continue advising AHS.

We must continue to work together toward raising the standard of healthcare for the Indigenous peoples of Alberta. I look forward to learning, listening, and understanding the needs of Indigenous people and working with the Wisdom Council in the spirit of reconciliACTION.

Sincerely,

Mauro Chies,  
Interim Vice President & CEO, AHS

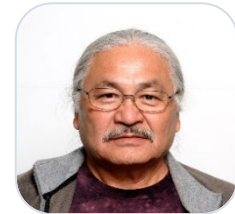


Members of the Wisdom Council joined members of the Health and Provincial Advisory Councils in May 2022 at the Annual Spring Forum – held in-person for the first time since 2019.

*Top L-R: Lorraine Meneen (AHS Coordinator), Calvin Badger  
Bottom L-R: Noreen McAteer, Cheryl Sheldon, Connie Morin*



## Message from the Chair, Wisdom Council



*Casey Eagle Speaker*

In 2021-2022 we continued to experience challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, within Alberta Health Services and the entire province of Alberta. We know of the many losses the province experienced, as these losses were also felt in Indigenous communities. Many of us lost family members and friends, which impacted our lives. At this time, I would like to express condolences to all those who have lost someone to COVID-19, on behalf of the Wisdom Council.

Throughout the past year, the Wisdom Council and Elder Circle continued to provide advice and guidance to AHS on several different areas addressing racism, cancer care and screening, suicide prevention, Alberta surgical patient pathways, the AHS COVID-19 Critical Triage Protocol, Indigenous patient experience in Emergency Departments, AHS policy development, and the creation of a 1-800 Indigenous Health line to be piloted in the North Zone. We also supported AHS by addressing the definition of the term Elder to better support AHS service planning. The Wisdom Council continued to meet virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On behalf of the Wisdom Council, we express our gratitude to Wally Sinclair, who served as co-chair for nine years with passion and commitment to the Indigenous peoples of Alberta. Wally will now be a member of the Elder's Circle in the Wisdom Council. We have a new co-chair, Cheryl Sheldon, from Northern Alberta who has vast experience and knowledge of the challenges that Northerners contend with and is a wonderful representative.

The Wisdom Council began a recruitment campaign for five vacant seats. We hope to have these seats filled by representative voices of Indigenous peoples sometime in the fall of 2022.

On behalf of the Wisdom Council, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to Dr. Verna Yiu for her exceptional leadership and commitment to improving health services for the Indigenous peoples of Alberta.

She led with heart and compassion, not to mention a steely resolve during the COVID-19 pandemic, where she demonstrated her main focus was the health and recovery of the people of Alberta. Dr. Verna Yiu will be greatly missed. She was a faithful ally for the Indigenous peoples of Alberta, and we thank her for this. We wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

We would also like to thank Dr. Kathryn Todd – Vice President, Provincial Clinical Excellence/AHS. We appreciated Dr. Todd's support to the Wisdom Council. Her willingness to listen and find common ground in addressing the challenges of Indigenous health issues in Alberta allowed the Wisdom Council to stay focused on providing the best advice and guidance to AHS. The Council will surely miss her warmth and generosity.

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



## Who we are

The Wisdom Council is comprised of up to 15 members who represent the Indigenous People of Alberta. Visit us online for a complete list of our [membership](#).



*Top L-R: 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 Ottway  
Bottom L-R: 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*



*Wally Sinclair and Calvin Badger enjoying an Advisory Council Forum presentation. May 2022.*



# Highlights

## Presentations and Engagement

- **AHS Diversity and Inclusion, Human Resources** presented on the AHS Anti-Racism Position Statement. Visit the [link](#) for more information.
- **Wellspring Edmonton & Northern Alberta – Cancer Support Programs & Services:** requested guidance on including Indigenous community voices as it expands into Northern Alberta.
- **Walking Together project and Traditional Healing discussion in Cancer Care:** Cancer Care Alberta provided an overview of their discussions on introducing Indigenous traditional medicines into cancer care treatment.
- **AHS Critical Care Triage Protocols** (adult and pediatric): a planned and pre-determined province-wide approach to guide AHS's response, should the demand for life-sustaining, critical care support become more significant than available resources.
- **Emergency Department Strategic Clinical Network:** Quality of Emergency Care for First Nations Members in Alberta. This published research study was presented as information regarding experiences of First Nations peoples in Emergency Departments.
- **Indigenous Patient Concerns & Experience:** 1-800 line. This initiative will assist Indigenous peoples in navigating the healthcare system when experiencing challenges. This pilot project will be directly tied to Health Link when it goes live in May 2022.
- **Living Hope: Sharing Wisdom about Suicide Prevention:** Representatives from the City of Edmonton and the Canadian Mental Health Association shared their suicide prevention program in Edmonton.
- **Alberta Lung Cancer Screening Initiative.** This is a 2-year project funded through AHS and the Canadian Partnership against cancer to screen and test high-risk Albertans for lung Cancer.
- **Alberta Surgical Initiative: Specialty Access Bundle:** the specialty access bundle will provide a patient pathway to those involved with surgeries in Alberta.
- **Definition of an “Elder”** The Wisdom Council led a discussion focused on creating a definition of the role of an Elder for AHS.



# Key Priorities of 2021-22

## Indigenous Patient Concerns and Experiences: 1-800 support line:

In 2020-21, the Wisdom Council (WC) requested a 1-800 number be created for Indigenous patients and family members experiencing challenges within the AHS healthcare system. This was a combined effort with contributions from various departments across AHS:

- Indigenous Wellness Core (IWC)
- Innovation, Evidence, and Impact-Benefits Realization
- Engagement & Patient Experiences
- Human Resources
- Communications
- Design Lab
- Health Link
- Patient Relations
- North Zone, Population, Public and Indigenous Health

The 1-800 line was piloted in the North Zone in May 2022.

## Addressing Systemic Racism:

The Wisdom Council has been addressing systemic racism in the healthcare system since its inception in 2012. The AHS Cultural Competency and Sensitivity and Learning Program, offered to all AHS staff, is one example of an outcome associated with this discussion.

Diversity and Inclusion, a department with AHS Human Resources, led a discussion on racism with the Wisdom Council to discuss AHS' plan to develop an Anti-Racism Position Statement. The [AHS Anti-Racism Position Statement](#) was created to acknowledge the impacts of racism and a commitment to action. This position statement brings a consistent and comprehensive approach to AHS anti-racism activities and will help the workforce better understand its role in addressing racism.

The Wisdom Council stressed that there needs to be a focus on addressing racism stringently and proactively to create a culturally safe environment for the Indigenous peoples entirely; all levels of AHS need to hear about the experiences of Indigenous peoples. The acceptance of all people is to be modeled from the top-down as it will take everyone in AHS to address systemic racism. It was recommended to have AHS Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members work alongside one another to create relationships and an understanding of Indigenous peoples and culture.

## National Indigenous Peoples Celebrations:

A month of virtual celebrations for National Indigenous Peoples Day in June 2021 was a huge success. There were numerous stories, songs, and workshops shared throughout the celebrations. The theme for the virtual celebration was "Celebrating Resiliency through Reconciliation. In late May 2021, the recovery of 215 unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School coincided with the National Indigenous Peoples Celebrations in June. The impact of this discovery was felt throughout Alberta, Canada, and the rest of the world. The WC Co-Chair shared his personal experiences in Residential School. It was a very impactful and powerful story to the numerous online participants. Many of the participants who heard the story left with a desire to learn more about Indigenous peoples and culture.

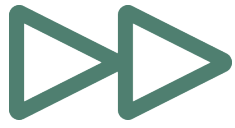
## Definition of "Elder"

The Wisdom Council began to discuss the role of an Elder in order to assist AHS operations as it pertains to cultural and spiritual support. Through discussions, it was soon realized the term Elder means many things and requires many considerations. Honouring the diversity of language amongst Indigenous cultures means a precise description of an Elder is not available. It was felt that there needs to be an understanding of how each community describes their recognized Elders. After several attempts, the following was decided by Wisdom Council to represent the meaning of Elder:

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 Alberta Health Services to improve health care service delivery and integration of services for Indigenous People.



*The Wisdom Council has provided guidance and support to AHS since 2012. The members provide direction to AHS on the creation of safe, responsive health care for Indigenous peoples in Alberta. A quote I cherish from our co-chair, Casey Eagle Speaker, is to remind AHS that “Creating relationships has to move at the speed of trust” and “Building trust is essential as we continue this journey*

**Val Austen-Wiebe**

Senior Program Officer, Indigenous Wellness Core, AHS



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 in the health and well-being of your family, friends, neighbors, ours, 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](#).

## Learn more

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

✉ [wisdomcouncil@ahs.ca](mailto:wisdomcouncil@ahs.ca)

☎ 1.877.275.8830

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

