

# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



## A Communiqué from National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo

December 1, 2010

*The Assembly of First Nations issues regular updates on the National Chief's activities and work underway at the national office. More information can be found on the AFN's website at [www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca).*

### **ABORIGINAL AIDS AWARENESS WEEK – December 1-5, 2010**

Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week will be marked December 1-5. On December 1st Aboriginal leaders, Elders, youth, government representatives, service providers and Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS will gather in Regina, SK for the launch of important events relating to sexual health.

The launch, hosted by the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS network (CAAN) and the All Nations Hope AIDS network, is themed "Respect & Honour equals Healthy Mother, Healthy Child". Speakers and panellists will focus on the challenges and opportunities of Aboriginal women and youth in relation to universal access to health based on human rights. Information and discussions will help draw attention to discrimination, ignorance and stigma in First Nation and Aboriginal communities, raising awareness of the need to respect and honour our people so they can have better access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

Aboriginal people are overrepresented among those who test positive for HIV/AIDS in Canada and of those who test positive, 48.8% are women, and 32.6% are youth. Of the new HIV infections in 2008, the estimated proportion attributed to intravenous drug use (IDU) was 66% among Aboriginal people, compared to 17% in the Canadian population. Additionally, First Nation youth between the ages of 14 and 24 have much higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI) compared to the rest of the population. This is primarily due to the lack of culturally appropriate information, lack of access to services and vulnerability to other health risks.

First Nation leadership across Canada are committed to building the health infrastructure required to better ensure access to hospitals, medical equipment, as well as training for nurses and doctors. First Nations and all Canadians play a role in promoting safe and supportive environments for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The AFN works collaboratively with a number of government departments and organizations to ensure that First Nations are involved in developing and implementing public education and prevention materials. We support the work of the International Indigenous Working Group on HIV/AIDS and we plan to endorse the Vienna Declaration, which calls for international drug policy reform to stop the criminalization of illicit drug users (which is helping fuel the HIV epidemic) and to remove barriers to effective HIV prevention, treatment and care.

Additionally, the AFN has partnered with the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) to distribute a HIV prevention campaign developed by Aboriginal youth. *Aboriginal Youth Get The Facts* puts into words and pictures their thoughts on HIV, illustrating three key messages: the importance of getting tested for HIV; the need to break the silence on sex, drug use and HIV in Aboriginal communities; and the need for condoms and other forms of HIV prevention

The AFN National Youth Council has produced videos on sexual health promotion which are currently posted at [www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca) and the AFN Youtube site. The Youth Council has also been collaborating with a number of organizations to continue to raise public awareness and ensure First Nations have access to adequate materials, information and programming. The short videos tell the stories of the realities and perspectives of First Nation youth, addressing different themes of gender balancing & healthy relationships, STI & HIV testing, two-spiritedness, sexual violence, sexual harassment, cultural & traditional roles, and safe sex.

As National Chief, I am proud to support these and other important efforts and commend the many young people in taking an important lead in these efforts.

On behalf of the Assembly of First Nations and our national executive, I commend the courage of all Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDs, their supporters, friends and families and the frontline workers, leadership and community members. It's time for Canada to step up for all Indigenous peoples living with HIV/AIDS. Discrimination, ignorance and stigma must be swept aside so that our people can receive adequate and culturally appropriate health care in their communities and in places where they must travel to receive care and support.

With Canada's recent endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the AFN will continue to advocate for these and other principles of the Declaration to be upheld.

---

Assembly of First Nations, 473 Albert Street, Suite 810, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 5B4  
Toll-free: 1-866-869-6789 Fax: (613) 241-5808 [www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca)