



## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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### BCAFN acknowledges World Mental Health Day 2021

**(Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC)** – BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) acknowledges World Mental Health Day and calls for governments to mobilize and intensify their efforts to support First Nations concerns and activities regarding mental health. Mounting challenges including, poverty, homelessness, COVID-19 pandemic, residential schools, systemic racism in healthcare, policing and justice systems, MMIWG2S, climate change and more, are having major impacts on First Nations' mental and physical health.

“Grief holds its grip continuously on First Nations families and communities. Ongoing colonial policies and government actions over decades have reshaped First Nations' realities, and for each of us, it has been very painful and traumatizing. Multigenerational trauma has resulted in mental distress expressed through higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide and substance use,” states Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “In recent years, we have become increasingly alarmed at the rates in which First Nations are disproportionately represented in overdose deaths in BC.”

The gap between demand for mental health services and resources remains substantial and access to quality mental health services for First Nations remains sparse and sporadic. Stigma, discrimination, and human rights abuses of people with mental health conditions remain widespread and impacts the accessibility of these services.

It is critical that First Nations be significantly and extensively involved in the development of mental health services and their delivery; for First Nations – investments are needed in First Nations governments. Too often funding streams go to provincial, federal or third-party initiatives and programs which are mismanaged and do not reach the people who need help most.

The rights of First Nations living with mental health conditions can be protected and promoted through mental health legislation, policy, development of affordable, quality community-based mental health services and the involvement of First Nations with lived experience.

“In addition, we must push back against laws and policies that target people who are struggling. Canada faces a national crisis in Indigenous homelessness, and they face the highest levels of poverty and deaths due to toxic drugs. First Nations people died at 5.3 times the rate of other BC residents in 2020, up from 3.9 times in 2019. Awareness, concern, and compassion are vital qualities that are too often absent in today's leaders, many of whom dismiss the complexity and historical roots of mental health illnesses and access to treatments. It is time to provide quality and sufficient mental health care for everybody and tackle the problem of stigma from mental health issues,” continued the Regional Chief.

#### Supporting links:

WHO: World Mental Health Day 2021: <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-mental-health-day/2021>

FNHA: Overdose prevention & harm reduction: <https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/overdose-information>