



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Indian Residential Schools

GATHERING AND CEREMONY – LESSONS LEARNED FROM COMMUNITIES

First Nations across British Columbia (BC) are being impacted by the recent and ongoing findings of remains at former Indian Residential School (IRS) sites. The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) acknowledges the re-traumatizing effects of these findings on survivors, family members and their loved ones.

As your partner in health and wellness, the FNHA is working to support communities who need additional support during this challenging time. We acknowledge that communities may wish to hold ceremony and healing gatherings both at home and on the grounds of former IRS sites. The coming together of neighbours and communities can lift up spirits and promote healing.

This resource provides information on wise practices and lessons learned from First Nations communities who have been responding to requests for ceremony and site visits to honour loved ones related to the finding of remains in or near their territory:

COMMUNICATING PROCESSES

Consider developing and sharing a standard letter outlining your community's processes and protocols for communities or Nations requesting ceremony and site visits. Consider including:

- information about the community's approach as guardians of the remains;
- the process and protocols for requesting ceremony at the site including who is responsible for the financial costs;
- information on security and safeguards; and
- guidance on how public health orders will be managed.

SHARING PROTOCOLS

Consider developing short resources, such as one-page 'guide sheets', alongside longer communication to share your community's protocols for requesting, booking and holding a ceremony on site. This could include your community's protocols around visitors:

- bringing medicines;
- organizing mental health and cultural supports;
- using technology such as recording or pictures;
- leaving nothing behind; and
- adhering to public health recommendations.

MANAGING REQUESTS

Consider managing external requests through a streamlined approach such as:

- setting up an email address specific to IRS requests, or designating a single contact to receive all requests;
- ensuring individuals serving as the first point of contact feel comfortable and have the necessary emotional and other supports. Consider rotating this responsibility;
- designating a media lead to support any external enquiries;
- drafting key messages for leadership and media leads regarding the position of the community and any action from the public you are advising;
- using standardized form(s) to be completed by the group/community requesting to visit the site;
- considering the need for confidentiality and authorization agreements for those visiting the site;
- using an events calendar to track events each month; and
- designating a process for receiving donations.

PROVIDING INFORMATION ON TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL, MENTAL HEALTH AND CRISIS SUPPORTS

Including information such as crisis lines or available on-site supports can help individuals dealing with the impacts of the IRS findings. To access supports:

- visit FNHA's website for resources and fact sheets, or
- email IRSneeds@fnha.ca for more information on mental health resources or other available IRS supports.

GATHERING SAFELY DURING COVID-19

Public health supports are available to help with gathering safely, such as:

- Community Service Covid-19 Supplies such as hand sanitizer and non-medical masks (as supplies allow);
- FNHA Environmental Health Officers who can review community safety plans related to gatherings; and
- information, resources and supports specific to COVID-19:
<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/communicable-disease-control/coronavirus>



for more information or community requests for IRS or public health supports, please email:
IRSneeds@fnha.ca