



Media Advisory

NAHO's loss is a blow to Aboriginal health

APRIL 13, 2012, OTTAWA — In light of the pending closure of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is calling on the Government of Canada to provide Canadians with an alternative body possessing a robust governance structure to continue the work of this critical research hub and resource.

Addressing substance abuse, addictions, suicide, high rates of diabetes and infectious diseases require a foundational and dedicated base of knowledge from which communities can draw. This is what NAHO provides. Given the diversity of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples and the complex factors that perpetuate chronic illnesses, success in Aboriginal health is predicated on a continuous and stable entity such as NAHO. Dismantling it and diffusing funds is not the answer.

"The state of Aboriginal health is a national embarrassment and leadership is needed now more than ever," said Thomas Dignan, MD, chair of the Royal College's Aboriginal Health Advisory Committee. "Organizational struggles aside, NAHO played an important role in advancing aboriginal health research."

Formed in 2000, NAHO provided a common research base for First Nations, Inuit and Métis health. The not-for-profit organization also helped deliver support programs for communities nationwide. NAHO will close its doors after its funding was cut by Health Canada. Notably, the 2012 budget also included new funding for aboriginal health, nursing and housing.

While the Royal College applauds the federal government in stating that it will protect frontline health care services and continue to make "major investments" in aboriginal health, nursing and research, NAHO's closure creates a noticeable information, resource and program vacuum that will be hard to fill; its work may be beyond the already stretched capacities facing Aboriginal communities.

"NAHO provided a central repository for Aboriginal health research, which is vital to advancing population health," says Royal College President Louis Hugo Francescutti, MD, PhD, FRCPC. "A new structure must assume this role moving forward. Injuries within our Aboriginal communities are at alarming epidemic proportions, meaningful solutions need to be found today, not tomorrow or next year."

The Government of Canada must continue to show leadership and commitment to the health and well-being of aboriginal peoples by dedicating long-term funding to an organization devoted to advancing research, scholarship and providing resources to improve health outcomes for aboriginal peoples.

“Our organization has made advancing the health of vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal Peoples, a strategic priority,” says CEO Andrew Padmos, MD, FRCPC. “We hope that the federal government and health care stakeholders commit to ensuring that NAHO’s research legacy is sustained and that improving Aboriginal health remains a national priority, both now and in the years ahead.”

As a national, non-profit organization, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada speaks for more than 44,000 medical and surgical specialists and resident physicians. The Royal College oversees the medical education of specialists and, as such, advocates for the best health and the best care for all Canadians.

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