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# ANNOUNCING THE START OF THE 'GATHERING NEWS'

FIRST ISSUE - OCTOBER 1, 2023

From now on THE GATHERING NEWS is where all the  
Elders Gathering information can be found.  
It will answer most if not all event questions!

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## THE 2024 ANNUAL ELDERS GATHERING

DATES: AUGUST 13-14, 2024

LOCATION: The Vancouver Convention Centre, East Building

\*Aug. 12 is for registration check-in only by Group Leaders

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# BCECCS GRATITUDE LIST

Support Fee from Sept. 01, 2023– August 31, 2024

Your support is much appreciated for the provincial elders office!

## LEVELS OF SUPPORT

\$15,000 - Thunderbird

\$5,000 - Killer Whale

\$1,500 - Eagle

\$1,000 – Salmon

\$750 – Frog

\$500 – Sisiutl

\$250 - Hummingbird

### Thunderbird Level - \$15,000

1.

### Hummingbird Level—\$250

1. Dzawada'enuxw First Nation

### Killer Whale Level - \$5,000

1.

### Eagle Level - \$1,500

1.

### SALMON LEVEL - \$1,000

1.

### FROG LEVEL - \$750

1.

### SISIUTL LEVEL - \$500

1.

### **Disclaimer:**

Health articles, etc. are provided as a courtesy and neither the BC Elders Communication Center Society's Board Members or anyone working on its behalf mean this information to be used to replace your doctor's and other professional's advice. You should contact your family physician or health care worker for all health care matters. Info is provided in the Elders Voice for your reference only. And opinions contained in this publication are not those of Donna Stirling

## **THE ORANGE SHIRT SOCIETY FROM ORANGESHIRTSOCIETY.ORG**

**Commemorating the residential school experience, witnessing and honouring the healing journey of the survivors and their families. Every child matters.**

**At OSS, we believe you can support Reconciliation every day in many ways.**

### **ABOUT ORANGE SHIRT SOCIETY**

**In 2015, the Orange Shirt Society was formed to create awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of Indian Residential Schools with the purpose of supporting Indian Residential School Reconciliation and promoting the truth that EVERY CHILD MATTERS.**

**The Orange Shirt Society is a non-profit organization based in Williams Lake, BC where Orange Shirt Day was first honored in 2013.**

**In 2015, the Society was formed to create awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of Indian Residential Schools with the purpose of supporting Indian Residential School Reconciliation and promoting the truth that EVERY CHILD MATTERS.**

### **HOW DO WE DO IT?**

**Our team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and Board members work year-round to lead, support and promote Truth and Reconciliation events, learning resources and activities including the Orange Jersey project and the Orange Shirt Legacy Fund.**

**The Orange Shirt Society was formed in Williams Lake by the founders of Orange Shirt Day to encourage and support communities to recognize Orange Shirt Day and to support reconciliation events and activities. Our goal is to create awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of Indian Residential Schools through Orange Shirt Day activities, and to promote the concept of “Every Child Matters”.**

**To contact Orange Shirt Society in Williams Lake, BC email: [info@orangeshirtday.org](mailto:info@orangeshirtday.org)**

**We gratefully acknowledge that Orange Shirt Society is located on the unceded traditional lands of the T'exelcenc, or Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN), a member of the Secwepemc Nation (Shuswap people) located in the central interior of British Columbia.**

## **NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION FROM CANADA.CA**

Each year, September 30 marks the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The day honours the children who never returned home and Survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process.

This federal statutory holiday was created through legislative amendments made by Parliament.

### **WEAR ORANGE**

Both the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day take place on September 30.

Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led grassroots commemorative day intended to raise awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of “Every Child Matters”. The orange shirt is a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations.

On September 30, we encourage all Canadians to wear orange to honour the thousands of Survivors of residential schools.

### **Commemorating the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**

Across the country, you can find open to public local activities organized to commemorate the history and legacy of residential schools. Here are a few examples.

To find more local events, we invite you to search online or contact the Indigenous organizations from your province.

#### **illuminating Parliament Hill**

To commemorate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and to honour the Survivors, their families and communities, buildings across Canada will be illuminated in orange from September 30 at 7:00 pm to sunrise October 1. This will include federal buildings such as the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill.

#### **Remembering The Children: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation 2023**

APTN and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation present Remembering The Children: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation 2023, a 90-minute commemorative gathering. The multilingual event will be broadcast live from Parliament Hill, starting at 12 h 30 pm (ET) on APTN. Consult APTN’s September 30 programming.

#### **Truth and Reconciliation Week**

This bilingual educational program is open to all schools across Canada. All sessions will be held virtually, allowing classroom participation from across the country and the involvement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. From September 25-30, 2023, registration is required.

## **Reports Of Tinnitus After Covid-19 Vaccination, More Studies Needed To Determine Link By Bruce Y. Lee Senior Contributor for Forbes.com**

Imagine having the sound, “eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee” constantly ringing in your ear or ears. That’s what tinnitus can be like. And with a Facebook group called “Tinnitus and Hearing Loss/Impairment after COVID vaccination” having over 3.9K members, one question that’s gotten the ears of people over the past couple years is whether tinnitus can be a side effect of Covid-19 vaccines.

Tinnitus is the sensation of ringing or other noises in either or both of your ears, assuming that you don’t have more than two ears. Tinnitus is specifically when there’s no such external sound that others can hear. So standing next to an answering machine that keeps repeating, “leave a message after the beeeeeeeep” or a person who’s constantly yelling, “eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee,” wouldn’t count as tinnitus. Tinnitus is not an uncommon problem, in general, affecting an estimated 15 to 20 percent of people, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Searching PubMed for “tinnitus” and “Covid-19 vaccine” does yield a handful of case reports, studies, and reviews of the literature, such as one published in the Annals of Medicine and Surgery in March 2022 and another published in the European Review Medical and Pharmacological Sciences in June 2022. One of the studies was a review of medical charts at a otology and otolaryngology practice at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducted by Doris Lin, MD, and Anne Morgan Selleck, MD, both of whom are Assistant Professors of Otolaryngology there. They published this study in the American Journal of Otolaryngology, which is a respectable, peer-reviewed journal focusing on, you guessed it, otolaryngology, which is the medical specialty covering the ears, nose, and throat. This chart review found that out of 1254 patients, 16 patients suffering tinnitus after the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 mRNA vaccine, seven after receiving the Moderna Covid-19 mRNA vaccine, and four patients after receiving the Janssen vaccine. These aren’t huge numbers and the publication did say that “A correlation cannot be proven with this retrospective study with such few cases.” So, essentially you can say, “Few” about the findings of this study.

There was another similar study conducted at an otolaryngology clinic at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center by Stephen Leong, Bing M. Teh, MBBS, and Ana H. Kim, MD, the last of whom is an Associate Professor at Columbia University. This study was also published in the American Journal of Otolaryngology. The research team found that of 500 patients screened, 61 patients (14.5 %) reported one or more ear or hearing-related symptoms within four weeks of vaccination, including 21 (5.0 %) with hearing loss, 26 (6.2 %) with tinnitus, 33 (7.9 %) with dizziness, and 19 (4.5 %) with vertigo. Now the frequency of patients reporting hearing loss was comparable to that of the general population, so it is not completely clear how many of those cases may have been due specifically to vaccination against Covid-19. If you said, “Few,” to the 1254-patient study, the same would apply to this 500-patient study.

That’s why it’s not super surprising that the CDC has indicated that there is no evidence detailing a link between Covid-19 vaccines and tinnitus, as NBC News’s Erika Edwards reported here:

But, and that’s a big but one cannot lie, just because studies so far have not shown a clear correlation between Covid-19 vaccination and getting tinnitus doesn’t necessarily mean that a link doesn’t exist. The studies to date have been limited. The experiences in single or a few clinics are not enough to rule out a possible correlation. That could be like going out to your backyard, noticing no rhinoceroses and then concluding that rhinoceroses don’t exist.

Instead, firmer conclusions can be drawn only after something has been studied across a broader swathe of the population. Plus, you can't simply discount the experiences of people who are insisting that they developed tinnitus after Covid-19 vaccination as, "Oh, you're just hearing things."

It is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility that Covid-19 vaccination could lead to tinnitus. As you've probably heard by now, the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Janssen vaccines are designed to get your cells to produce the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) spike proteins. These spike proteins are then supposed to get your immune systems to effectively say, "What is that, that doesn't smell like teen spirit," and to generate an immune response to the spike protein. That immune response may vary among different people. For some, it could potentially cause inflammation in different parts of the body, including various nerves and blood vessels. Such inflammation if around hearing-related parts of the body could possibly result in hearing issues. Whether this is a possible ear-y effect remains to be seen.

Another possibility is what's called "molecular mimicry," which may sound like a party game that Jimmy Fallon would play on The Tonight Show. Instead, it's more like when you are in a dark dance club, briefly see someone you like, notice that the person is wearing a red outfit, spend the entire night chasing after someone with a red outfit, and then realizing in the end that it's not the person whom you first saw. "Molecular mimicry" is when a normal part of your body is similar enough to the spike protein that your immune system mistakes that body part for something to react against. There haven't been enough studies to rule in or out this possibility for Covid-19 vaccination.

A third possibility is whether something in the vaccine itself is directly reacting with cells in, or leading to and from, the ear. The vaccines actually have fewer ingredients than a lot of things that people put in their mouths every day, like Cheez Whiz, many breakfast bars, and many types of frozen waffles. So it would be helpful to see if any of the ingredients in the vaccine can react with ear and other hearing-related cells.

Then there's the fact that your ears are connected to the rest of your head, at least they should be. There can be a close interplay between what you are thinking and feeling and tinnitus. The authors of the Columbia University study did point out that the incidence of tinnitus may have increased in general since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. That could be because of Covid-19 itself, which can play havoc with your senses such as taste and smell. That may also be because tinnitus can be associated with stress, depression, and stress-induced problems like teeth-grinding and TMJ (temporomandibular joint) syndrome. And, news flash for many folks, the past few years have been kind of stressful. There certainly have been concerns about Covid-19. But also, many politicians have continued to raise a fuss about random issues like what Big Bird is saying, sort of like a bunch of cats stuck in Spanx.

A number of other conditions unrelated to Covid-19 vaccines can cause tinnitus. These include age-related hearing loss (presbycusis), exposure to loud noises, other medications such as erythromycin, Ménière's disease, TMJ, foreign objects lodged in your ear, excessive earwax (cerumen), allergies, an acoustic neuroma, other growths, anemia, atherosclerosis, and high blood pressure. So if you do develop tinnitus, don't automatically assume that it's caused by the Covid-19 vaccine. For example, you may want to first check if a hot dog happens to be lodged in your ear. Of course, timing is everything in life. While developing tinnitus could always be a coincidence, if the symptoms emerged shortly after getting vaccinated, it does raise the question of whether vaccination was indeed the culprit. It's not yet clear how many of these tinnitus cases may have occurred after Covid-19 vaccination. It's also difficult to tell how long such symptoms have tended to persist. Covid-19 vaccination has only been around since 2020, which may be a lot of Scaramucis but not necessarily long enough to study how long tinnitus may last—again that's assuming that there may be a link to Covid-19 vaccines.

Searching the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), which is co-sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) did yield 18,709 reports of people suffering tinnitus after getting the Covid-19 vaccines as of April 14. The problem, though, is that anyone can submit a claimed adverse event to VAERS without providing any real supporting evidence or verification. And there's is evidence that anti-vaxxers have been treating VAERS like the insides of a bathroom stall, writing all kinds of random stuff on it. So you've got to take anything on VAERS with a fan-pack full of salt.

There also isn't clear consensus on how to manage such cases. Doctors have tried corticosteroids, which can suppress the immune reaction. But will that, in turn, reduce the protective effect that the Covid-19 vaccine is supposed to bring?

There are other possible approaches raised by the Annals of Medicine and Surgery review article such as counseling, tinnitus retraining therapy, sound therapy, auditory perceptual training, sodium channel blockers, anti-depressants, anti-convulsants, benzodiazepines, and other medications. But more research is needed to determine what approach may be most effective, again assuming that there is a link between Covid-19 vaccination and tinnitus.

What you are hearing is a common refrain: there needs to be more and more in-depth studies looking at the possible link between Covid-19 vaccines and tinnitus. Further studies need to be broader and use a wider variety of methodologies that cover larger swathes of the population. And the studies can't be simply conducted by manufacturers like Pfizer and Moderna. That would be like asking Elon Musk whether Twitter is being operated well or Jared Leto whether you should watch the movie Morbius versus bury your head in a vat of popcorn. Vaccine manufacturers kind of have a vested interest in their products looking good.

At the same time, vaccine manufacturers should release all of their clinical trial data to the scientific community. That's ALL of the data in ALL CAPS. These manufacturers did receive considerable funding and support from the federal government, which ultimately is supported by taxpayer money. So, it shouldn't be too much of an ask for independent scientists to be able to review all of the data.

One of the challenges throughout this pandemic has been separating the noise from anti-vaxxers from real questions about the Covid-19 vaccines. There's been an earful of unfounded conspiracy theories, such as that vaccines are being used to depopulate the world, control people, or turn people into 5G receivers, Magnetos, or refrigerator doors. At the same time, the Covid-19 vaccines have not been perfect. The efficacies of the Covid-19 vaccines have not been as high as initially reported. They do bring some risk of side effects, ranging from feeling kind of poopy after vaccination to different possible allergic or autoimmune reactions to inflammation of the heart. Fortunately, the more severe side effects to date have appeared to be rather rare. By contrast, study after study has shown that getting Covid-19 can bring a host of problems ranging from long Covid to that little thing called death. Thus, so far, the risks of getting Covid-19 seem to far outweigh the risks of getting vaccinated.

This doesn't mean that there shouldn't be more independent research into possible Covid-19 vaccine side effects. There have been enough credible reports of tinnitus after Covid-19 vaccination to merit further ongoing investigation. It's unlikely that people who clearly state that they are pro-vaccine will claim just for the heck of it that they've been hearing something like a dog whistle after getting vaccinated. That would be quite a dog whistle claim that just wouldn't ring right. So this tinnitus issue should be taken seriously. The question is how many people are hearing what those suffering hearing issues have to say.

## **NATIONAL POST**

### **'Do whatever it takes' First Nations doctor has different way of thinking about addiction**

**While Dr. Esther Tailfeathers talks about prevention, harm reduction and treatment, she understands how enforcement fits into the addictions strategy**

**Author of the article: Donna Kennedy-Glans, Special to National Post**

**Published May 21, 2023**

**Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, a First Nations physician who lives and works on the Blood reserve near Cardston in southern Alberta, has a reputation for implementing a “do whatever it takes” approach to chronic addiction, as long as it’s done with compassion.**

**She’s not an ideologue, neither exclusively pitching harm reduction via free drugs for addicts nor law-and-order measures via forced treatment. Esther has a personal story that creates the conditions for her to think differently about addiction.**

**“Our community had bootleggers way back when I was a little girl,” she shares during an interview.**

**“There were bootleggers because alcohol was prohibited on reserve and all of our communities were poor. So how do you make money on reserve without a job? You become a bootlegger... I grew up driving my dad, at the age of 12 years old, because he was so hung over, and he needed a cure. We had an old truck and my brother and I would drive my dad to the bootlegger and he’d pick up a bottle of gin in those old green jugs.”**

**Fast forward 50 years, Esther explains, and people on reserve started selling their prescription opioids like Tylenol 3 with codeine to addicts, to pay for groceries. And today, drug dealers from the city plug into the already existing pill market on reserve and sell them something more lucrative and more deadly.**

**In her reserve community of 13,000, they are losing 170 people a year to overdoses. Over 400 children on the Blood reserve are in care; families are overwhelmed caring for the children of parents lost to addiction. Esther expects First Nations leaders will soon call for a provincial state of emergency. This doctor is no stranger to crisis; she’s also worked on the frontlines in the emergency department on the Blackfoot Reservation in Montana, in the northern Alberta community of Fort Chipewyan, and on relief missions to Haiti she organized after the 2010 earthquake.**

**Esther has an insane work schedule and I’m grateful when she carves out some time to talk. It’s 8 p.m. on a Monday and she’s just home from an anti-drug rally in her neighbourhood when we speak on the phone. Kids as young as four and five carry hand-made signs and chant anti-drug slogans. “Four children — ranging in age from four to 10 years old — who had just lost their mother to an overdose last weekend, walked with us,” Esther says, sadly.**

**Dogs are barking in the background as we speak. I’m more distracted by their barking than Esther is; this 62-year-old doctor is laser-focused and impatient. “I think we need a national (drug) policy and not just a provincial policy. But because our politics are so polarized, we’re probably not going to get there,” she laments.**

**“In that amount of time (it would take for the feds to set a national drug policy), we’re going to see a more complicated drug picture, more violent crimes related to drug use or drugs,” she predicts. “We’re going to see more sex trade workers on the street, more young girls being taken advantage of because of their addiction, and we’re going to see how it impacts society as a whole.”**



Meantime, she's not waiting for direction from even the most well-meaning politicians. The Blood reserve was the first community to distribute naloxone to every household and teach families how to deal with opioid overdoses. It's the first and perhaps only reserve in Canada with its own detox centre. And Esther leans heavily into Indigenous traditions; not just sweat lodges and ceremonial drumming, but inviting recovered addicts into sacred traditions like the Blackfoot's Brave Dog Society.

Esther is living at the epicentre of an acute addictions crisis and to respond, she's refining a continuum of care that is culturally appropriate and community-driven. There is intensive education about illicit drugs, and a police unit on reserve is dedicated to fentanyl response. The addicted are treated with a matrix of strategies that can include harm reduction, outpatient care, medically supported detox and longer term recovery. On-reserve approaches to housing, child support, employment and education have been redesigned to reflect the impacts of addiction.

It's hardly surprising that a physician wants to talk about prevention, harm reduction and treatment. But Esther understands how enforcement fits into the addictions strategy; she's not seeking to defund the police and she's not denying there are times when court-ordered treatment plans are the answer. Innocents are getting hurt: "At one time people could turn away from it, but they can't now because it's right in front of us and it involves everyone," Esther says. "The risk is that you are going to be in a situation at the transit station or your child will."

In Alberta, the United Conservative Party is advocating bold legislation to allow family members, physicians, psychologists and police to petition a judge to issue a treatment order. What does Esther think about this mandated approach? "If we are going to do drug court and mandatory treatment," Esther responds, "it needs to be aligned with what really works for people, not what we think is going to work for them." Some First Nations people are resistant to authority figures telling them what to do, so mandating treatment isn't going to work for everyone.

And what about the pitfalls of harm reduction? Esther objects to a narrow view of harm reduction as just a way to give drugs to addicts. "We do harm reduction every day in our lives, buckling up our seat belts, almost everything in the medical world is harm reduction," Esther explains. "Whether you call it harm reduction, or first response, or saving lives, it means making people aware that you can't enable a dead body," she continues. "You need to give them a chance at recovery."

Esther knows what works and what doesn't work in her neighbourhood, because she's trying everything to create the conditions for addicts to survive detox and say, "I don't want to live like this any more." It's an epiphany she's looking for.

She knows it's possible. Her father stopped drinking almost 40 years ago, after a judge intervened.

## **ORANGE SHIRT DAY** **September 30**

**Wear an orange shirt to honour the children who  
Survived the Indian Residential Schools  
And to remember those who didn't.**

# **New First Nations Veterans Monument**

by Marius Auer

Posted May 9, 2022

The Nicola Valley First Nations Veterans (NVFNV) have been working for 19 years to educate and engage local communities on the often unrecognized sacrifices made by First Nations veterans, and their new monument project hopes to commemorate those whose service went unacknowledged.

**“We want recognition of our Nicola Valley First Nations veterans. Many of them volunteered at a young age, some of them weren’t even old enough to sign up, but they did it,” said Carol Holmes of Upper Nicola Band, member of NVFNV.**

NVFNV’s new monument project looks to replace their current boulder monument, the creation of which heralded the inception of the community group. Made of granite, the new monument will be built on an acre of land in the Shulus community. It will be inscribed with the names of the local First Nations veterans who served, and the site will feature a ceremonial fire pit and benches.

The organization came to be in 2003, when veterans Percy Jackson of Shackan and Richard Jackson, Jr. of Lower Nicola Indian Band (LNIB) together recognized the need to honour and recognize the First Nations veterans of the Nicola Valley. The two searched for a large boulder, eventually finding one and moving it to Shulus where it became the organization’s first monument project. Four plaques were placed on the boulder, representing World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

**“We’re ensuring that the history of our First Nations veterans serving and supporting our country is known by all Canadians, and by other settlers too,” added Holmes.**

The NVFNV have taken on projects to advance this goal in the past, such as their collaboration with the Last Post Fund’s Indigenous Veterans Initiative. Funding through this initiative has allowed Holmes and her fellow members to place over 20 military markers honouring Indigenous veterans.

**“We want to continue the legacy of our veterans in our communities and in our families, making sure our children and grandchildren know the history of the people that served. We have quite a number of families that information hasn’t been passed on. Part of this project is collecting those stories. We’d like to put them into a book too.”**

The veterans hope to continue collecting and disseminating these local stories of bravery and courage in serving the country, with many local First Nations serving throughout the country's history. At least two First Nations veterans residing in the valley have been killed in action. Those who did return were often mistreated, and given far less support and recognition than their non-Indigenous counterparts, if any.

Education is a key component of the NVFNV's mission, often coordinating veterans to attend local schools and institutions, as well as being involved in the Nicola Valley's annual Remembrance Day ceremonies. Moving forward, they hope to continue raising awareness, as well as funds for their new monument.

"We take Visa, Mastercard, debit, pennies," joked Richard Jackson Jr, member of the NVFNV. "Come to our information meeting on the 18th, 6pm at the Shulus Arbor, it will be a great event."

In addition to raising funds for the project through local initiatives such as these, the NVFNV have received \$50,000 in funding from Veterans Affairs Canada, but they still remain short of the total estimated project cost of \$127,000. During their April 22 meeting, the veterans received \$5000 towards the project from Merritt's Legion.

"There is still a real disconnect between First Nations veterans and how they work with the Legion and how we can assist. The veterans came back and it was you're over here, and you're over there. So bringing us together and letting people know what the Legion does and how we can support veterans. That's not been there," said Arlene Johnston, president of Merritt's Royal Canadian Legion Branch 96.

"This is really important. It's the first chance in the six years that I've been involved with the Legion that we've had to come together."

Those looking to support the project can share their own or family's stories of serving, attend the information events, and donate to the monument's progress through the LNIB office, with a notation it is for the Nicola Valley First Nations Veterans.

For more information, contact Carol Holmes at 250-378-7809 from the Merritt Herald

**'EVERY CHILD MATTERS'  
RECOGNIZE ORANGE SHIRT DAY  
AND  
THE NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION**

## Former justice minister pays surprise visit to AFN assembly, lambastes Liberals' UNDRIP action plan

By Fraser Needham for APTN National News

Jul 14, 2023

Former attorney general Jody Wilson-Raybould made a guest appearance at the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) summer meeting in Halifax on Thursday, where she took the opportunity to blast the Trudeau government on its United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) action plan.

"They – many of the people in positions of power – still do not get it," she said in a roughly 40-minute speech to delegates.

"I have told many stories of sitting around with government colleagues and speaking about the recognition of Indigenous rights and the implementation of treaties and how to make transformative change to support self-determination including self-government – and it was like I was from a different planet."

Wilson-Raybould was unceremoniously dumped from the Liberal caucus and party in 2019 after she spoke out against the Trudeau government and its handling of the SNC-Lavalin affair.

Since then she has written three books about her time in politics and her name is now being circulated as a potential candidate to replace recently deposed AFN national chief RoseAnne Archibald.

Wilson-Raybould was Canada's first Indigenous justice minister.

B.C. is also in the process of implementing its own UNDRIP action plan where Terry Teegee, the AFN regional chief for the province, said things are going more smoothly compared to Ottawa.

He said part of the reason for this is First Nations are able to deal much more easily with a smaller provincial government as opposed to the massive bureaucracy in the nation's capital.

"We're four years into implementing our action plan for B.C. and I think the partnership there is good," Teegee said. "There has been some progress with Sec. 6 and Sec. 7 agreements. Also, amendments made to a number (pieces of) legislation in British Columbia.

"I think for British Columbia – I suppose for the bureaucrats that are there – it is going to be a bit easier."

In an interview with APTN News after her speech, Wilson-Raybould said the Liberals UNDRIP action plan lacks teeth. She said it will be up to Indigenous people to lobby the government hard for substantive changes.

"The UNDA legislation as it's written on its face and the action plan do not contain the practical mechanisms that are required to implement or to operationalize the articles of the declaration," she said.

"On the ground, in communities, we need to be realistic, we need to be practical, we need to develop those mechanisms. I called for that when I was minister of justice, the Prime Minister stood up in the House of Commons in 2018, committed to it, and the government hasn't done that yet."

Teegee agreed it will be an uphill battle to make Ottawa's action plan meaningful.

"I think it's going to be very challenging in terms of aligning many of these colonial laws that were based in genocide, that were genocidal, in ways, to align with UNDRIP and really acknowledge implementing our ability to govern ourselves," he added.

David Lametti, the MP who replaced Wilson-Raybould as justice minister, also addressed the assembly. He said he believes the action plan is flexible enough to meet the varied needs of all Indigenous people.

"The action plan itself is something we use as a process to work together, and we can address questions like redress through the basic principles that are articulated in the action plan itself," he said.

"So again, I'm optimistic that this will be transformational in a number of ways." Thursday was the final day of the assembly. AFN said 1,430 people participated by attending in person and online.

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## Proposed Indigenous Services spending cuts spark concern

**'The status quo ... is discrimination in a lot of cases,' says Cindy Blackstock**

**Brett Forester · CBC News · Posted: Aug 25, 2023**

Advocates are concerned after the Indigenous Services minister confirmed her department is eyeing spending cuts, telling reporters in Charlottetown she plans to target bureaucratic bloat, not direct service delivery.

Minister Patty Hajdu was initially vague when asked at a cabinet retreat in P.E.I. earlier this week about her approach to the Liberal government's cost cutting but when pressed, she said Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) will seek the same level of cuts as other departments.

"We're going through the exercise," said Hajdu. "Every minister is expected to look for savings. For me, the red line is anything that affects the quality of life for First Nations people."

Asked again if that was her advice to cabinet or a personal commitment to the public, Hajdu said it was the latter. "That's my commitment to First Nations people, and it's the work that the deputy [minister] is doing through the lens of ensuring that service delivery won't be impacted," she said.

The Métis National Council said the budget cuts were "disappointing" to hear about. President Cassidy Caron expressed concern Métis interests will continue to come second to those of non-Indigenous people, considering this year's budget lacked new Métis-specific money.

"These funding cuts are inconsistent with the spirit and intent of reconciliation and the nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship with the Métis Nation," said Caron in a written statement to CBC News.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, said on-reserve services like water, education and housing are already chronically underfunded, so promising not to cut them means people will just keep getting less.

"The status quo is not that good," said Blackstock, adding that she would prefer a pledge not just to maintain services, but significantly improve them.

Blackstock and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) filed a human rights complaint in 2007, alleging the underfunding of child and family services on reserves was racially discriminatory.

The complaint helped deliver a monumental \$23-billion proposed class-action settlement and billions more for reform to programs like Jordan's Principle, which ensures First Nations kids can swiftly access essential products and services.

But a review of ISC's public departmental plan for this year shows Jordan's Principle is among a slate of programs set to lose money and staff as cash from past budgets runs out — or "sunsets."

ISC forecasts an estimated spending drop from \$23.6 billion in 2022-2023 and \$39.6 billion in 2023-2024 (which includes the \$23 billion child welfare settlement) to \$16.9 billion in 2024-2025 and then to \$16 billion by 2025-26.

ISC also plans to dump more than 1,000 full-time workers, from 7,070 this year to 5,907 in two years, the plan says, unless some programs are topped up.

Programs set to lose some combination of staff or money include the Inuit Child First Initiative, mental health and wellness, implementation of child and family services legislation and Indigenous community infrastructure, among others.

"Decisions on the renewal of the sunset initiatives will be taken in future budgets and reflected in future estimates," the plan says.

This leaves Blackstock with "serious concerns," saying Canada is legally obliged to properly fund child and family services to stamp out systemic discrimination confirmed in the complaint.

"Our case should be a big red flag for the government, because, to me, this case exemplifies one of the biggest public policy failures in Canadian history."

She said Ottawa could have fixed the program decades ago for much less money, but didn't, deciding instead to keep knowingly underfunding it, risking litigation and even lives. The Canadian government should strive for equality in other areas too so history doesn't repeat, she added.

"That's a lesson that they have to learn," Blackstock said.

"They're at a point now where they're going to be making that choice again."

The AFN's former national chief RoseAnne Archibald, who was ousted earlier this summer, had slammed this year's budget and [accused the government of perpetuating a cycle of poverty](#) by intentionally underfunding First Nations.

The group, now led by an interim national chief, declined to comment on the planned spending cuts. CBC News also reached out to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami but a spokesperson was unavailable for an interview this week.

## ICBC

In May 2023, ICBC Road Safety Coordinator, Joanne Bergman, travelled throughout Haida Gwaii to convey a variety of road safety messages over a four-day period. The local RCMP were able to assist in the planning of this trip and helped make it the success it was.

Road safety speaker, Markita Kaulius, also accompanied Joanne on this visit. In 2011, Markita's 22 year-old daughter, Cassandra, was coming home from coaching a softball game in Surrey when she was t-boned and killed by an impaired driver. Markita shares her personal experience with students and others to demonstrate what families and communities go through when a loved one is killed by an impaired driver

Markita started her speaking tour by presenting to high school students at Gudangaay Tlaats'gaa Naay Secondary School. She then travelled to Daajing Giids, where she spoke to the students at Gidgalang Kuuyas Naay Secondary School. Teachers and students were appreciative of the opportunity to hear such a compelling story being delivered in person.

The next evening, ICBC Road Safety partnered with the local RCMP to host a community dinner in Skidegate, where Markita delivered her story to residents of the community and surrounding area. Later that evening, with the assistance of Islands Wellness Society, the residents were also treated to a presentation about proper child seat installation and ensuring children are in the right seat for their age and size.

Near the end of the four-day visit, Joanne assisted the local RCMP to conduct a bike rodeo at Agnes L. Mathers Elementary School in Sandspit. The bike rodeo began with a safety presentation by RCMP members where students learned about safety gear, hand signals and more. The students then put their skills to the test riding through the marked course and practicing safe cycling.



Submitted by Joanne Bergman, ICBC Road Safety and Community Coordinator for Haida Gwaii. Feel free to reach out to Joanne at [joanne.bergman@icbc.com](mailto:joanne.bergman@icbc.com) or (604) 583-8611 for anything she can assist with.

## **Elders Voice Submission**

### **Pedestrian Safety Campaign**

**With shorter daylight hours and changing weather, there is a notable increase in pedestrian fatalities on B.C. roads. The number of pedestrian involved crashes nearly doubles from October to January, with almost half of all pedestrian fatalities occurring in this timeframe. That's why we're launching our Pedestrian Safety campaign this October.**

**For drivers, we emphasize the need for heightened awareness around transit stops, crosswalks, and intersections. By eliminating distractions and slowing down, drivers are more likely to see pedestrians. Pedestrians, too, can contribute to their safety by establishing eye contact with drivers, remaining vigilant at intersections, wearing light coloured and reflective clothing, and using designated crosswalks.**

### **New Driver Licensing Community Liaison position**

**We recognize the unique challenges Indigenous customers face when accessing driver licensing services. To help address these concerns, we developed a new Driver Licensing community liaison role to assist Indigenous customers with their licensing inquiries. As part of our commitment to Indigenous employment, we are actively seeking Indigenous individuals to fill this dedicated position.**

**As we begin the recruitment process, Mike Rispin, a member of the Driver Licensing team, has stepped in to help establish the role. With his experience in working with remote Indigenous communities, Mike is uniquely positioned to cultivate relationships and address barriers. Mike will work closely with Joanne Stone-Campbell and Jessica Hiebert Faria – the newly-formed Indigenous Relations team to support the role's success. Feel free to reach out to Mike at [mike.rispin@icbc.com](mailto:mike.rispin@icbc.com).**

**Lastly, we express our heartfelt appreciation for having us at the annual Elders Gathering this summer. It was an honor to participate in such a meaningful event and engage with the community.**

**Thank you for your support and partnership as we collectively work towards safer roads and stronger communities. If you have any questions or need more information about road safety in your community, feel free to reach out directly to ICBC's Manager of Road Safety Program Delivery: Clay Steiro (604) 786-3548**



## THE WITNESS BLANKET

SHARE THIS STORY

AUGUST 8, 2023

Calgary Public Library is hosting The Witness Blanket, a large-scale art installation created by master carver Carey Newman or Hayalthkin'game (Ha-yalth-kingeme).

The art piece is located on Level 4 of Central Library in the Simmons-Harvie Community Living Room, at the north end of the building. The piece is on loan from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

The Witness Blanket — a symbol of resilience and Reconciliation — is inspired by the motifs in woven blankets and made up of hundreds of items reclaimed from Residential Schools, churches, government buildings, and traditional and cultural structures from across Canada.

Each piece included in the installation holds deep historical and emotional significance, representing the experiences of Indigenous children who attended Residential Schools, as well as the ongoing impact on their families and communities.

Libraries have a responsibility to share the true history of what happened at Residential Schools and the ongoing, intergenerational trauma they caused, in response to the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report and the City of Calgary's White Goose Flying Report.

Art pieces like the Witness Blanket provide an opportunity for all community members to learn and further their journey of Truth and Reconciliation. This blanket invites you to bear witness — through survivors telling their stories and each one of us taking responsibility for the future and participating in the Reconciliation process.

In a video message on [witnessblanket.ca](http://witnessblanket.ca), artist Carey Newman explains, "In the oral traditions of my ancestors, a witness has an important role. To ensure that things are not forgotten, a witness watches, listens, and then remembers and shares with others what they have learned."

The Witness Blanket will be on display at Central Library until mid-October. An opening event will be held on August 14 starting at 10:00 am. All community members are welcome to attend.

To learn more about The Witness Blanket and the stories of the objects included in the piece, visit [witnessblanket.ca](http://witnessblanket.ca).

## **A B.C. study gave 50 homeless people \$7,500 each. Here's what they spent it on.**

by Lisa Steacy CTVNEWSVANCOUVER.CA

A new B.C.-based study undercuts the persistent stereotype that homeless people can't be trusted with cash, according to the lead researcher who says it also highlights a different way to respond to the crisis.

Dr. Jiaying Zhao, an associate professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia, was part of a team that gave 50 homeless people in Vancouver \$7,500 and then followed them for a year. (opens in a new tab)

The jumping-off point, Zhao said, was a survey in which respondents estimated that if homeless people were given this amount of money, they would spend four times more than their non-homeless counterparts on so-called "temptation goods."

"People in general don't trust those in homelessness. We think that when we give homeless people money they're going to squander it on drugs and alcohol. That's a deeply ingrained distrust and I think it's unfair and it's not true," Zhao told CTV News.

This distrust – along with stereotypes about who becomes homeless, how and why – is partly why there is widespread resistance to the idea of a potential policy solution that would provide no-strings-attached payments.

"The cash transfer is such a no-brainer. But nobody is willing to try it," Zhao said, explaining why she felt so strongly that it was important to do this particular study of spending.

"We spend billions in a year to manage homelessness and that investment is not getting good returns, because the homelessness crisis is only growing."

So what did the research show?

"When we talk to these people, they know exactly what they need to do to get back to housing and they just don't have the money," Zhao said.

"They did not spend more money on alcohol or drugs, contrary to what people believe, and instead they spent the money on rent, food, housing, transit, furniture, a used car, clothes. It's entirely the opposite of what people think they're going to do with the money."

The participants who were given cash were compared with 65 homeless people who did not get the payment. Those who got the payment did not spend more money on "temptation goods," spent 99 fewer days homeless, increased their savings and spent less time in shelters which "saved society" \$777 per person, according to a news release from UBC.

The study did not include people who are street-entrenched or who have serious addictions or mental health issues, Zhao noted, adding people who fit that criteria do not make up the majority of homeless people.

**"Homeless people are not that different from us. Something terrible happened and they had nothing to fall back on," she said, citing eviction or the loss of a job due to illness or accident as some examples of how people lose their housing and struggle to find somewhere else to live – particularly in a rental market like Vancouver where prices are sky-high and vacancy rates are low.**

**The exclusion of people who are most visible and often described as the "hardest to house" is something Zhao says is a weakness of the study, because it means there is no data on how or whether cash transfers would be similarly effective for this population, nor is there any evidence about how they would spend the money if it was provided.**

**"We don't know, there's no evidence, and this is something to consider," she says.**

**Still, Zhao says having data on how people who did get the money actually spent it is something she thinks will help counteract stereotypes, increase empathy and potentially get skeptics and the public on board with the idea of providing cash transfers.**

**Now that the study is complete, the plan is to replicate it and expand it to other cities in Canada and the U.S.**

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## **First Nations People Say devastation from B.C. wildfires threaten cultural identity**

### **Fires affecting access to traditional foods, medicines**

**Jackie McKay · CBC News · Posted: Sep 06, 2023**

Most of Mike McKenzie's summers were spent hunting moose and deer out of his family's camp near his community of Skeetchestn, near Kamloops, B.C.

But it's been a long time since McKenzie has done this.

"It's too dangerous," said McKenzie, about record-breaking heat and longer, more intense fire seasons.

McKenzie has been displaced from his traditional territory since 2017, when the Elephant Hill wildfire burned nearly 192,000 hectares of Secwepemc land. Four years later the community was hit again by the Sparks Lake wildfire that burned about 68,500 hectares.

This year another series of wildfires has devastated the interior of B.C., disrupting fishing and hunting practices for many First Nations.

"When you're facing this kind of heat, it gets very nerve-racking to go out there and actually hunt and do all the work you got to do knowing that a big fire could take out your camp or you could have to evacuate," said McKenzie.

He said what used to be thick lush forest with creeks and waterfalls is now bare with blackened rocks and trees.

"I knew every rock, every road, every tree, every corner, everywhere you could possibly be," said McKenzie, about the land near his community before the fires.

"It looks completely different."

McKenzie was the former fire chief of Skeetchestn, and said he worries about living in the interior B.C. now.

"We're looking at an extinction of our ways if we can't access hunting, fishing, because ... the way that we live starts to change and we start to become dependent on grocery stores," said McKenzie.

McKenzie is also worried about how this year's wildfires will impact salmon runs into Shuswap, which are important food sources and are of cultural significance to the Secwepemc Nation.

## **River impacts affect salmon**

Wildfires can impact watersheds, posing a threat to salmon populations, according to Jonathan Moore, a biology professor at Simon Fraser University and lead on the Salmon Watershed Lab.

"Wildfires, especially severe wildfires, can have negative consequences to salmon populations," said Moore.

One of the main impacts to salmon from wildfires, according to Moore, is the loss of trees along riverbanks that provided shade to rivers and creeks, leading to warmer water temperatures. The other is an increase in sediment and mudslides into water systems that can smother eggs and change habitat.

"Those are sort of large-scale, watershed-level changes that can erode the capacity of systems to be productive for salmon for a long time," said Moore.

Surveying the watershed areas for risks to the salmon population would be the first step to knowing how fires in the Okanagan and Shuswap will affect salmon, said Moore.

He said there is a need for government and First Nations leadership to talk about wildfire and forestry management to protect watersheds. "There is sort of our ability to control the trajectories of these watersheds even in the era of climate change, even in the era of wildfire," said Moore.

## **Traditional medicines and foods affected**

Skwlāx te Secwepemcúlecw, a community about 56 kilometres east of Kamloops, was also devastated by the Bush Creek East wildfire in August.

Kukpi7 (Chief) James Tomma lost his home in the blaze, and several of his family members also lost their homes. Tomma said 34 structures were lost in the fire, displacing about 80 people of the approximate 350 community members.

"[The fire] impacted a lot of places where people go for traditional harvesting [of] medicines and foods," said Tomma. Tomma said he comes from a family of hunters and gatherers, and hunting is part of keeping his people's culture and identity alive.

"A lot of these places are gone and we'll probably not see a recovery during my lifetime," said Tomma. Tomma said it is heartbreaking to think about animals that weren't able to escape the wildfires, and that his community will have to wait and see how the fire will impact the salmon population.

## **Fed government apologizes to Williams Lake First Nation for illegal settlement of its lands**

F.N. had received \$135M settlement in 2022, after legal fight over illegal occupation of village site

Akshay Kulkarni · CBC News · Posted: Sep 10, 2023

The federal government issued an official apology to the Williams Lake First Nation, located in central B.C., a year after a \$135-million settlement was reached over illegal settlement of its village lands.

Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Gary Anandasangaree issued the apology, on behalf of the government, at a Sunday event outside the First Nation's band office.

It came after an emotional speech — mostly delivered in the Secwépemc language — from First Nation Elder Amy Sandy.

"This day's coming from all the work that our elders have done in the past," she said. "I put my hands up to everyone who's helped out with this."

Chris Wycotte, the director of self-government and elected councillor for the nation, oversaw the entire legal process over 30 years. He described how the illegal settlement deprived his people of homes and connection to their culture.

"We had nothing, not even one acre," he said.

Anandasangaree said the federal government was committed to addressing the harms of colonization.

"The dispossession and forced separation of Williams Lake lands has had profound impacts on you," the minister said, addressing dozens of nation members in attendance. "The government of Canada accepts responsibility for this historic injustice, and expresses its deepest regret and sincere apology."

The apology came nearly 165 years after the settlement began in 1859, according to the First Nation, in the land now known as the City of Williams Lake.

Then-chief William — for whom the First Nation, city and nearby lake are all named — gave permission to a settler to build a cabin within village lands. The colonial government subsequently set aside some of that land for an Indian reserve.

By 1861, however, most of the village lands had been taken by white settlers. That drove many of the First Nation members to nearby hills, with little land and no opportunity to cultivate crops.

**"In 1879, Chief William wrote that our people were threatened by starvation because 'the land on which my people lived for 500 years was taken by a white man,'" reads an information sheet from the nation.**

**At the Sunday event, Williams Lake chief Willie Sellars said that the apology showed that reconciliation was "not a buzzword" in the nation.**

**In 1994, the First Nation launched a legal battle over the illegal settlement — following Wycotte's discovery of some documents in Victoria's provincial archives.**

**A total of 4,000 pages of evidence was available to the First Nation, including Chief William's letters to the federal government describing his nation's plight.**

**The First Nation advanced the claim through a process called the Indian Claims Commission, and then the Specific Claims Tribunal. In 2014, the tribunal ruled Canada breached its obligations to the First Nation by allowing it to be unlawfully evicted from its traditional lands.**

**However, Canada appealed the decision as the legal dispute continued for another four years before the country's highest court affirmed the tribunal's ruling in 2018, sparking three years of negotiations toward a settlement for damages.**

**Last year, a \$135-million settlement was reached — close to the maximum of \$150 million that could have been awarded.**

**The settlement's terms were ratified by the nation's members shortly after. Under the terms of the settlement, elders are eligible for a one-time payment of \$25,000, with each adult member of the band getting \$1,500 per year.**

**Funds were also placed into a trust for those under 18 in the nation, with Sellars saying it has free rein to use the settlement money for programs, services and capital projects.**

**"This claim is a precedent-setting claim, where pre-Confederation claims can go through the courts now," Wycotte said. "We kicked the door down on this one."**

**"All the First Nations across Canada can rely on our claim to take a similar type of claim to court."**

# George Gordon First Nation man wins lifetime achievement award

By Jeanelle Mandes for Global News

September 21, 2023

Robert (Bob) Pratt is referred to as a sensei as he retains an extensive wealth of knowledge regarding water.

“He’s a very knowledgeable man,” said Richard Akan, a member of the Saskatchewan First Nations Water Association (SFNWA).

“When we’ve got problems, we just give him a call and he can figure it out for us ... he’s really reliable and he’s (at work) just about every day.”

For over 35 years, Pratt has worked as the water operator for the George Gordon First Nation (GGFN). He first worked in the boiler room at the Gordon’s Indian Residential School and worked with a small plant that supplied water to the residents.

Over the years, Pratt took training to further his knowledge of running a water plant.

With devotion for his community, Pratt introduced the Sapphire Integrated Biological Reverse Osmosis Membrane (SIBROM) water treatment which he says is “the way to go.”

“Every First Nation in the south has no actual long-term supply of water,” he said. “Reserves were pushed back to where the land was no good for anything. There was no water, just bushes and sloughs. But we have deep wells now.”

Pratt and his team met with Dr. Hans Peterson, a man who was known to provide water treatment solutions to communities with the poorest quality raw water source. Since 2004, the GGFN runs good quality water to over 250 households without the use of water cisterns where water is usually hauled by trucks.

Pratt said it is not an 8-to-5 job as everyone depends on water daily and the work is an everyday commitment. But he wishes there was more proper funding for water operators on First Nation communities.

“All First Nations have the same problem, it’s the lack of proper funding,” said Pratt. “The operators are there because they’re dedicated to their communities. It’s not for the money they pay you. First Nations are the lowest paid operators in Saskatchewan.”

The will to ensure his community had clean water straight to their taps has been Pratt’s goal. With that dedication, others have taken notice including a fellow colleague who nominated him for a SFNWA lifetime achievement award.

“In my mind, I thought (he) was a good fit ... to give to Bob because he’s been in this business for so long,” said Akan. “He’s really deserving of it.”

Pratt has been a water systems operator since 1988 and plans to retire after GGFN receives their new water plant.

**BC ELDERS  
COMMUNICATION  
CENTER SOCIETY**

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**Student from Dogwood Elementary School  
[Iwagami.weebly.com](http://Iwagami.weebly.com) Surrey, BC.**

**I am not a Number**

**I am not a number  
The dark figure backlit by the sun  
The nightmares began  
Make sure to rub the brown off  
Please don't hurt me  
Hot coals  
I blew gently on the red welt  
I wanted to scream  
Now I felt as if a part of me was dying  
We cant have you messing with the outside world  
The tiny spark of safety died  
You'll never take them  
I've thought about you everyday  
Why are we treated so cruelly?  
Why must I change?**

**LEO - The Boss (July 23 - Aug 22) Very organized. Need order in their lives - like being in control. Like boundaries. Tend to take over everything. Bossy. Like to help others. Social and outgoing. Extroverted. Generous, warm-hearted. Sensitive. Creative energy. Full of themselves. Loving. Doing the right thing is important to Leos. Attractive.**

**ANNUAL BC ELDERS GATHERING INFO CORNER**

**DATES: THE 2024 ANNUAL ELDERS GATHERING  
WILL BE AUGUST 13-14, 2024**

**August 12th - early check-in for Group Leaders only**

**PLACE: Vancouver Convention Centre, East Building**