

**Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council  
5001 Mission Road  
PO Box 1383  
Port Alberni, BC V9Y 7M2**

**Attention: Judith Sayers, President; Les Doiron, Vice-President; Florence Wylie, Executive Director**

*Delivered via email*

**November 15, 2024**

On behalf of British Columbia's Naturopathic Doctors, we commend the recent decision by the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council (NTC) to declare a state of emergency for all 14 First Nations on Vancouver Island due to the mental health and toxic drug crisis. The crisis of mental health and toxic drug continues to rage. Lives remain at risk and people continue to die needlessly. Moreover, Indigenous people in BC (and across Canada) experience significant disparities in health care access. These include barriers such as discrimination, lack of culturally appropriate services, and geographic isolation, all of which contribute to poorer health outcomes compared to non-Indigenous populations. These disparities highlight the need for improved access to primary health care that is focused on the needs of Indigenous communities,

Naturopathic medicine has been regulated under BC legislation since 1936 and presently Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) are regulated under the College of Complementary Health Professionals of BC (CCHPBC). There are over 800 licensed NDs practising in British Columbia. BC NDs have the most extensive scope of practice for naturopathic doctors in Canada including, the ability to diagnose as well as prescribe pharmaceuticals, the ability to administer vaccinations in children over five years old, order blood tests and provide mental health and addictions care.

Over the last several years, the province has made investments in treatment and harm reduction options for those who use substances. Additional treatment beds and a model of harm reduction that centralizes 'recovery' have been some of the hallmarks of the provincial strategy. While treatment is of course an important option, this model does not account for the varied and complex etiologies of substance use disorder. It fails to address the root cause for addiction and does not necessarily ensure that people can receive care within their communities. Community care is essential in ensuring culturally safe and accessible health services. Culturally safe care provided by a health professional who can provide care within their community and empower the individual through a supportive and holistic approach leads to better outcomes.

BC's NDs recognize that solutions to the toxic drug and mental health crisis will be neither quick nor easy, but that the more providers who are empowered to help will bring about better outcomes. NDs treat patients across the province holistically using an approach that focuses on intersectionality – a lens that considers health from a variety of factors including race, class, income, education, age, ability, sexual orientation, immigration status, ethnicity, indigeneity, and geography. The reasons for substance use disorder are complex and driven from a variety of factors, and NDs provide a fulsome approach to care that is built on an open, trusted relationship.

By focusing on holistic and non-judgmental care, NDs can offer a broad range of supports to those who use substances. which includes alternative treatments for chronic pain, often a root cause of addiction for many, as well as support and care in mental health including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. This non-judgmental supportive lifestyle management can help those who use substances by managing the stressors and underlying factors that may lead to substance use. It is important to note that fear of judgement often keeps people from seeking treatment and removing barriers means accepting that not all patients are finding or comfortable seeking medical attention in conventional settings. Moreover, given we know that stigma against those who use substances is the norm rather than the exception, ensuring that a provider is trusted and 'safe' for an individual is important in terms of outcomes.

BC's naturopathic doctors stand at the ready to work with Indigenous communities to help combat the devastating impacts of the concurrent toxic drug and mental health crisis. We are committed to supporting Indigenous communities in addressing the dual crises of mental health and addictions.

We honour and respect Indigenous ways of healing and cultural traditions that are essential for fostering holistic health approaches that recognize the deep connection between culture, spirituality, and well-being. This respect helps ensure that Indigenous knowledge systems are valued and integrated into health care, promoting healing and wellness within communities. By working together, we can make a meaningful impact and save lives.

We look forward to discussing how we can collaborate and contribute to this important cause and will welcome further conversation with you on this matter at your convenience.

Best Regards,



Dr. Vanessa Lindsay, ND Board Chair