

First Nations Environmental Health Innovation Network
Interim Mini-Constitution, Mission, and Goals
Effective February 2008 – March 2009

Background on Network Partners and Formation of the Network

The First Nations Environmental Health Innovation Network (FNEHIN) has been in development since 2005 among a group of interested individuals representing various federal/national organizations working on different aspects of human and environmental health and First Nations in Canada. These individuals formed a Working Group in 2005, with some changes in membership in 2007. The Working Group appointed Dr. Laurie Chan to act as Champion, and the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health was designated as the Secretariat. With the successful proposal for operating funds to the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada, the Working Group became the Steering Committee in 2007, and all Partners contributed in-kind support for the first year of operation.

Partners and Steering Committee

- The Assembly of First Nations
- The First Nation Centre of National Aboriginal Health Organization
- The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources
- The Canadian Water Network
- BC Leadership Chair in Aboriginal Environmental Chair
- Public Health Agency Canada - Foodborne, Waterborne & Zoonotic Infections Division
- The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health
- The National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health
- The Environmental Research Division, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada (Funding Partner)

Secretariat

The Secretariat for the First Nations Environmental Health Innovation Network is hosted by the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health and the BC Leadership Chair for Aboriginal Environmental Health at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, British Columbia.

The role of the Secretariat is to:

- Host the administration function for FNEHIN;
- Employ appropriate staff to carry out the responsibilities of the network and ensure project deliverables are met;
- Coordinate the meetings of the Steering Committee and report accordingly on the progress of the project;
- Ensure financial accountability and transparency through the appropriate use of project funds to meet project deliverables;

The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA) is one of six national collaborating centres established by the Public Health Agency of Canada to renew and strengthen public health in this country.¹

Guiding Principles

- *Respect for Partner Mandates:* FNEHIN is a neutral organization that respects the distinct mandates of the Partner organizations and seeks to enhance the Partner's abilities to fulfill those mandates. Partners will collectively focus on the goal of improving the overall health and well-being of First Nations.
- *Accountability to First Nations Communities:* In the effort to contribute to the overall improvement of First Nations' health and well-being, FNEHIN and its Partners will plan for and ensure accountability to First Nations communities across Canada.
- *Coordinated and Cooperative Efforts:* FNEHIN will work to ensure that its work does not duplicate that of the Partner organizations, nor compete for limited resources with First Nations communities and organizations to fulfill similar objectives. FNEHIN will work with Partner organizations and other interested parties to coordinate existing resources more efficiently to facilitate the bridging of gaps between First Nations communities and environmental health researchers.
- *Neutrality:* FNEHIN will respect the range of existing and future environmental health research, and not take positions on the quality of any research. Instead, FNEHIN will seek to better disseminate research findings and promote new research partnerships to assist First Nations communities in informed decision making on environmental health issues that affect them.

Accountability Principles

- *Interim Accountability to Funding Agency:* FNEHIN is currently supported by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada for its operating costs develops. This funding is governed by a Contribution Agreement, with appropriate accounting and reporting measures in place. This funding will support the development of FNEHIN including its long-term governance and funding plan.
- *Accountability to First Nations Communities:* In developing a long-term governance model, FNEHIN will emphasize accountability to First Nations communities at the national, regional, and local levels. First Nations representatives will hold key positions in the future governance of the network.
- *Accountability to Network Partners:* In the development stage of the network (2007-2009) the FNEHIN staff and secretariat will report on the activities and progress of the network to the Partners and their representatives on the Steering Committee who will act as interim directors.

¹ For an overview of the work of the National Collaborating Centres, please go to: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/php-
psp/pdf/brief_overview.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/php-
psp/pdf/brief_overview.pdf)

Mission and Purpose

There are three major dimensions to FNEHIN's role:

1. Access Point (where communities can obtain information and support);
 2. Synthesis of Knowledge
 3. Mobilization of Knowledge
- To focus on knowledge translation, and adapting information for relevancy to communities, funders and practitioners at the community level.
 - To focus on the human health impacts of environmental conditions, not general ecosystem or plant or animal health impacts.
 - To facilitate exchange between researchers and communities: researchers bring information from the literature, and communities bring information from their own experience, and the exchange and interaction will bring forth the appropriate research questions and needs.
 - To leave a legacy, a platform that will provide First Nations with the knowledge they may require to address their environmental health issues.
 - To assist First Nations communities in making informed decisions enabled by environmental health research.
 - To build trust and interest more researchers to work with First Nations on environmental health issues.
 - To develop a code of ethics and standards for environmental health research in First Nations communities.
 - To inform researchers of appropriate and sensitive data collection and how data can be used to create information for positive intervention and improved health outcomes in First Nations communities.
 - To support new researchers – facilitate career development, appreciate the importance of community buy-in, and influence the current academic system to accept ways beyond publication in primary journals to advance research careers.
 - To identify knowledge gaps and develop a research agenda.
 - To accept the qualifications of traditional knowledge holders.
 - To contribute to the definition of specific indicators for First Nations Environmental Health based on research outcomes.
 - To promote the understanding of relationships between health status, health determinants and health outcomes, within an environmental context.

To implement this mission and purpose, the FNEHIN staff and Partners will collaborate to formulate specific objectives and deliverables each year.

Long-Term Governance Planning for FNEHIN

This document is intended to provide parameters for the operation of FNEHIN, the role of the Partners, the Secretariat and the funding agency in the interim and founding phase of the development of the network. Thus, the intent is that this document will be superseded by an official constitution in the coming years.

Year Two (2008-2009) will see the development of a governance plan for the network that will further formalize the roles of the Partners, and build appropriate mechanisms for partnership,

membership, and governance. The Secretariat (FNEHIN staff) will draft this governance plan for approval by the Partners.