

## **Blanket Ceremony strengthens culturally safe partnership between FNHA and BC Health Regulators**

Representatives of the regulatory bodies that govern 23 different health professions in BC came together with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) to participate in a Blanket Ceremony earlier this month.

Led by Elder Leonard George (Səlilwətaʔ First Nation), the ceremony was the next step in the partnership journey that began when [BC's health regulators signed onto the Declaration of Commitment to Cultural Safety and Humility](#) in March 2017.

Coming together in ceremony was important to honour the commitments made by our 23 new partners and begin cultural safety work in a good way, explained Leonard, who has been FNHA's Elder Advisor since before [Transfer](#).

Health providers such as nurses, doctors, dentists, [and many others](#) who are represented by BC's health regulators play a vital role in shaping the healthcare experiences of BC First Nations. A commitment to [cultural safety and humility](#) by these professions is a critical part of creating an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe receiving health care.

### **Blanket Ceremony: Laying the foundation for a strong relationship**

Leonard opened by sharing a song and the [First Nations perspective of health and wellness](#). He emphasized the importance of physical, spiritual, emotional and mental aspects of health.

"It's an honour to be with you here today, on behalf of all the Nations in BC that have mandated the FNHA to deliver health for First Nations people," said Leonard. "We are here to lay the foundation for healthy communities in BC with our traditional spiritual guidance...to ensure that wholistic wellness is put back in the roots of our people."

Four witnesses were tasked to carry the knowledge of the day forward: Gabriel George (Səlilwətaʔ First Nation; Leonard's son), Janene Erickson (Nak'azdli First Nation; FNHA Manager, CEO Office), Donald Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services, College of Licensed Practical Nurses) and Carmel Wiseman (Deputy Registrar, College of Dental Surgeons).

Each of the health regulators were sung into the room by Gabriel and Leonard. As they stood in a half circle, helpers Shayla Jacobs (Squamish Nation; Ancestral Name Sumkwaht; FNHA Vancouver Regional Team), Jennifer Lynn Smith (Wuikinuxv and Campbell River; FNHA Vancouver Regional Team), Katie Skelton (Anishinabe from Wikwemikong & Wahnapiatae; FNHA CEO Office), and Janelle Tom (Squamish Nation; [Vancouver Coastal Living Marker](#); FNHA CEO Office) blanketed and wrapped each representative. Blankets carry important meaning in many other BC First Nations cultures. Among Səlilwətaʔ people they represent wealth, nobility and reciprocity.

"Our Elder here, he is covering you with his love. Your heart is covered and your mind is covered. The job you have is not easy – protecting the public interest, making sure that the public is going to be okay, knowing that lives are at stake. These blankets honour you but also help you in your work, to help you have a strong heart and strong mind, and an open heart and open mind," said Gabriel.

When each regulator had received a blanket, FNHA staff in attendance joined Leonard and Gabriel in singing the Coast Salish Anthem. Witnesses were recognized and shared their observations of the day.

“In today’s ceremony what stood out for me were the values of respect and spirituality. The Elder spoke to us about respecting yourself first, and then the universe will push that back to you,” said Donald.

### **On a journey towards cultural safety**

After the ceremony, those gathered discussed the commitments made and the journey ahead to support cultural safety in their professions.

“Every regulator, every provider needs to be a part of this. It is complex, there isn’t one solution. We have to think about things not from our perspective, but from the prospective patient and their view of health, sickness...their historical experiences,” said Jerome Marburg, Registrar and CEO of the College of Dental Surgeons.

The work ahead includes implementing and sustaining change with members of each of the 23 health professions represented. This Fall, regulated health providers will convene a gathering with BC First Nations health leaders to identify further opportunities for embedding cultural safety and humility into their health practice.

“Cultural safety, cultural humility – it isn’t a tick box, it isn’t just one training. It is a journey and a partnership. It is about creating a new relationship between the health system and First Nations,” said FNHA CEO Joe Gallagher (Tla’amin Nation).

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***Did you know?*** BC’s health regulators are not the only health leaders to have made this pledge to cultural safety and humility. In July 2015, the BC Minister of Health and CEOs from each of BC’s six health authorities [signed on](#) as well.



*Elder Leonard George (Səlilwətaʔ First Nation) speaks to BC’s Health Regulators during a FNHA Blanket Ceremony held at the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia on Coast Salish Territory, May 11, 2017*

## Blanket Ceremony with 23 BC Health Regulators-FIN



FNHA representatives Sumkwaht Shayla Jacobs (Squamish Nation; FNHA Vancouver Regional Team), Jennifer Lynn Smith (Wuikinuxv and Campbell River; FNHA Vancouver Regional Team), Katie Skelton (Anishinabe from Wikwemikong & Wahnapiatae; FNHA CEO Office), wrap Connie Chong from College of Opticians as other BC Health Regulators wait their turn during a FNHA Blanket Ceremony held at the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia on Coast Salish Territory, May 11, 2017



*Eighteen of BC's Health Regulators wear blankets and head wraps during a FNHA Blanket Ceremony held at the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia on Coast Salish Territory, May 11, 2017*