

COUNCIL TRAVEL REPORT



WHAT: Chiefs of Ontario - 18th Annual Health Forum

WHEN: Feb. 25 - 27, 2025

WHERE: Toronto, ON

WHO: Chief Tesha Rourke

WHY: The 18th Annual Health Forum centered on Intergenerational Health: Empowering the Well-Being of Our Children, Youth, and Families. This event served as a platform to engage with key stakeholders, exchange knowledge on Indigenous health initiatives, and collaborate on strategies to enhance health outcomes within First Nations communities.

- RESULTS:**
- Support IFN Youth Representatives in sharing their harm reduction campaign within the Akwesasne community.
 - Follow up with ISC and Department of Health to ensure funding and resources are accessible for community health programs.
 - Explore partnerships to expand culturally grounded mental health support in schools and community health centers.





COUNCIL TRAVEL REPORT

For Immediate Release:

Enniskó:wa/March 5, 2025

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO 18TH ANNUAL HEALTH FORUM ***CHIEF TESHA ROURKE***

Tsi Snaihne District Chief Tesha Rourke recently attended the Chiefs of Ontario's 18th Annual Health Forum in Toronto, Ontario, which focused on which focused on intergenerational health and strengthening the well-being of children, youth, and families. This forum, held from February 25-27, provided an opportunity to engage with key stakeholders, share knowledge on Indigenous health initiatives, and collaborate on strategies to improve health outcomes for First Nations communities.

Chief Rourke was joined by Kawehno:ke District Chief Lacey Pierce, representing Akwesasne in discussions on harm reduction, culturally grounded health programming, and community wellness.

BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARIES:

Mino-Bimaadiziwin School Wellness Program:

Explored how holistic mental health programming is being integrated into schools to support the well-being of Indigenous youth. Discussed the importance of culturally rooted curricula that incorporate traditional knowledge, storytelling, and community mentorship. Learned about strategies for enhancing emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health in education settings.

Sahatiha'hara':ne Detox Center, Land-Based Healing & Traditional Medicine:

Attended a presentation by three MCA programs—Sahatiha'hara':ne Detox Center, Land-Based Healing, and Traditional Medicine — which showcased their unique approaches to healing, recovery, and wellness. As a Health Portfolio holder, I attended to support their efforts and learn more about their impactful work. Each program emphasized the importance of land-based healing, cultural teachings, and holistic support in addressing mental health and substance recovery. They highlighted the use of smudging, saunas, feasts, and traditional medicines as essential components of healing, offering an alternative to Western counseling through seers, ceremonies, and mentorship. A particularly moving moment was participating in a comb ceremony, a symbolic act of removing pain and restoring balance. This session reinforced the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge and traditions into health services, ensuring culturally grounded, community-driven care for Akwesasne members.

To All My Relatives Harm Reduction Campaign:



Connected with Independent First Nations (IFN) Youth Representatives, who are leading the charge in youth-centered harm reduction initiatives. Learned about the development of a Harm Reduction Toolkit aimed at reducing stigma, promoting safe practices, and fostering peer support. Discussed ways to bring their social media campaign and outreach efforts to Akwesasne to empower local youth with life-saving information.

NETWORKING & COLLABORATION:

- Exchanged contacts with IFN Youth Representatives to support their Harm Reduction Toolkit and discuss opportunities for them to present their "To All My Relatives" campaign in Akwesasne.
- Met with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) officials to discuss the Health Equity Fund, ensuring funding is allocated to address critical health needs in Indigenous communities. Exchanged contacts and will follow up with the Department of Health to align efforts on health equity initiatives.

RECOGNITION & REFLECTIONS:

I just wanted to take a moment to recognize the amazing individuals who shared their knowledge, experiences, and passion for their work. A huge shoutout goes to Brandon [David], Bonnie [Bradley], and DJ [Danforth] — your dedication and commitment to your programs are truly inspiring. You make us all proud. After listening to your presentations, I felt like my spirit was soaring, like I was on cloud nine. The energy, the stories, and the impact of your work left me feeling hopeful, empowered, and deeply moved. I hope that everyone in the room felt the same way because moments like these remind us why we do what we do. Nia:wen for sharing your wisdom and for continuing to make a difference!

KEY TAKEAWAYS & NEXT STEPS:

- Support IFN Youth Representatives in sharing their harm reduction campaign within the Akwesasne community.
- Follow up with ISC and Department of Health to ensure funding and resources are accessible for community health programs.
- Explore partnerships to expand culturally grounded mental health support in schools and community health centers.