



NAHO Bulletin

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NAHO's new Executive Director determined to make a difference

By Melanie Ferris

"I want to make a difference," explained Bernice Downey when asked about why she accepted the role of the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) new Executive Director.

NAHO's Board of Directors appointed a task group of their peers to search for a new Executive Director when Richard Jock left to join the Assembly of First Nations. After a comprehensive, demanding two-and-a-half hour process of interviewing the short-listed candidates, Vice-Chairperson Maureen Chapman delighted staff by announcing Downey had been chosen as the new Executive Director.

Many NAHO staff members were already familiar with Downey through her work in the Policy Research Unit which supported NAHO's object 4, the focus of which is to help Aboriginal people get involved in health-care careers.

Downey has worked on the front line of health care for many years. As a registered nurse, she worked in both the United States and Canada. Although she worked in many different fields of nursing, Downey has a special interest in mental health and violence against women.

Downey was also the Executive Director of the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada (A.N.A.C.) from 1999 to 2003. This non-profit organization gave Downey the opportunity to further develop her leadership skills.



Executive Director Bernice Downey.

"I've often been called upon to take a leadership role in my work," Downey said. As well as learning to lead an organization, Downey became a strong advocate for Aboriginal health and Aboriginal nurses.

While she was at A.N.A.C., it and other Aboriginal organizations worked to create NAHO. When NAHO was created in 2000, Downey was asked to be the interim Chairperson of NAHO's first Board of Directors. She held the position until the board was formally appointed and the selection process for a Chairperson took place.

Downey was also a member of NAHO's Health Policy, Capacity Building and Public Education Priority Advisory Committee that provided recommendations on policies to NAHO.

In February 2003, Downey began working for NAHO as a Policy Analyst.

As well as her many professional interests, Downey has been busy raising her daughter and pursuing educational goals. She plans to pursue her Master's degree in Nursing. Downey's academic work aims to

bring more Aboriginal Peoples into nursing. Although Downey believes that her formal academic work will help make a difference, she also saw the learning opportunities available through leading an organization such as NAHO.

While she admits her studies will have to take a back seat, she still plans to attend university part-time to get her Master's degree. "I feel quite honoured they (the selection committee) decided I should be the Executive Director... I think it is also a message that you can do both," she explained.

Downey's role as Executive Director began on March 8, which was International Women's Day. This fact did not go unnoticed by Downey. With the demands of a busy career, family and school, it is clear that Downey is a woman determined to make a difference. She explained her determination stems from her mother.

"One of my role models is my mother. She's always had a thirst for knowledge herself and she was the one who encouraged me to be a nurse," Downey said.

Her mother told her that if she became a nurse, she would be respected and would be able to travel. Downey remembered her mother as someone who went after what she wanted and wasn't afraid to use her voice.

"When she has something to say, she speaks up."

The role of Executive Director will require Downey to use both her voice and her listening skills. She said one of the things she looks forward to most in her new position is listening to all staff and learning about their work. "It is important to encourage and acknowledge staff in their work."

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Indigenous peoples from around the world discuss biological diversity

By James Lamouche

The island of Borneo in the South China Sea is considered part of one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the world. It is also the home to diverse Indigenous cultures. Borneo was a fitting host for the meeting of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) held Feb. 6 to 8.

The IIFB brought together Indigenous peoples from around the world to share information and prepare strategies for the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).



Members of the Policy Research Unit visited a village of Indigenous people called the Kaduzan. This village in the South China Sea gave visitors a tour of their traditional medicine garden, fish ponds, high mountain rice plots, and primary school. This is a photo of a herb garden in the village.



NAHO Bulletin

The National Aboriginal Health Organization, an Aboriginal-designed and -controlled body, will influence and advance the health and well-being of Aboriginal Peoples through carrying out knowledge-based strategies.

The *NAHO Bulletin* is an electronic publication produced monthly to provide readers with an update of the activities of NAHO and its First Nations, Ajunnginiq and Métis Centres.

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More than 125 people from many different cultures, ecosystems and continents attended the forum. Information was shared on the activities of their communities, organizations and peoples to ensure the voices of Indigenous peoples are heard in United Nations' (UN) processes such as the CBD.

Roberta Stout and James Lamouche, Policy Analysts with the Policy Research Unit, attended this forum to further the work of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO). NAHO works to protect and promote traditional healing practices and Indigenous knowledge.

"NAHO's goals for these meetings was to gather information and to support and facilitate the discussions of Indigenous Peoples on these issues. I believe we were successful in doing these things," Lamouche stated.

The CBD has been called the "Convention for all life on Earth." It is one of the most complicated and broad treaties ever created. Many different and complex issues are dealt with by the CBD. In many cases, these issues have a direct impact on the lives of Indigenous peoples. One example of these complex issues is accessing genetic

resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from using these resources. During the IIFB, access and benefit sharing was the source of many discussions, statements, debates, and tensions.

For many Indigenous peoples, discussions by the UN and other international bodies are viewed with caution. For others, international treaties such as the CBD are seen as an opportunity to address the control that corporations and governments have over the lives and cultures of Indigenous peoples.

Despite these diverse opinions and positions, a number of statements to governments were prepared by the IIFB. These statements included positions on issues such as access and benefit sharing, inland water ecosystems, protected areas, protecting traditional knowledge systems, marine and coastal ecosystems, forestry, agricultural biodiversity, and others.

Along with the intense and involved work during the IIFB, there was a visit to a local village of Indigenous people called the Kaduzan.

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FNC wins its first research grant

By Valerie Gideon and Effie Panousos

The First Nations Centre (FNC) was happy to hear that its grant application to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research with James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson was accepted in February. The FNC is among the first non-university to get such a grant.

"Not without its trials and tribulations," joked Valerie Gideon, Director of the FNC, "but a strong, dedicated team can make anything work."

The successful research proposal is called "First Nations Conceptual Frameworks and Applied Models on Ethics, Privacy and Consent in Health Research and Information."

"While the title may seem complex, the project is designed to be straightforward and useful for First Nations leaders, communities and health providers," Senior Policy Analyst Effie Panousos explained.

"Right now, we know that First Nations jurisdiction and control over health research and information is not generally recognized by other governments. This, in addition to the lack of needed and ap-

propriate resources, have served as obstacles for First Nations in their development of policies in these areas," said Panousos, who is also leading the project.

Panousos elaborated, "However, despite these obstacles, we know there are many First Nations communities that are developing policies on collecting, using, protecting, and disclosing their health data, research and information. This project will identify and articulate emerging First Nations conceptual frameworks, culturally-relevant and responsive models and capacity issues and requirements for First Nations ethics, privacy and consent in health research and information."

To achieve these research objectives, Henderson and the FNC will review literature and hold five dialogue circles and 15 interviews with First Nations across Canada. Results will be shared with all First Nations communities; health facilities; friendship centres; and national and regional research, health and leadership organizations.

"We are privileged to benefit from the collaboration with Dr. Henderson (PhD)," Gideon said.

Henderson is the Director of Research of the Native Law Centre, College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan. A Chickasaw, born to the Bear Clan of the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne Tribe in Oklahoma, Henderson is one of the first American Indians to receive a Juris Doctorate from Harvard Law School. In Canada, he has served as a leading constitutional advisor for the Assembly of First Nations and the Mik'maw Nation. He is also a noted human rights lawyer.

Also notable during February is the FNC's work on analyzing new developments that impact First Nations health research and information. Check out new health issues information sheets on the FNC's website. These information sheets

are on Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Data Initiative, the 2004 *Speech From The Throne*, the new Health Protection Legislative Renewal, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples' Urban Aboriginal Youth report, the *Access To Information Act*, and the *Privacy Act*.

As well, the FNC held three health information and research training workshops with First Nations community health providers and youth in Dartmouth, N.S., and at the National Training Gathering hosted by the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation in Saskatoon, Sask.

Upcoming in March is the National Roundtable on Health Protection Legislative Renewal with First Nations hosted by the FNC on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations and supported by Health Canada's Health Products and Food Branch on March 26 in Ottawa.

New Executive Director

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Downey is also excited to begin working with NAHO's Board of Directors as they prepare for the renewal phase. "It's been an interesting journey to see how NAHO has evolved."

She went on to say that her next priority is to begin "advancing the work of the board to develop and implement the next phase of NAHO's work." With her combination of determination, knowledge and expertise, it is clear that NAHO is an organization that will continue to grow and contribute to the health and well-being of Aboriginal Peoples.



James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson



Exploring issues affecting Inuit

By Mark Buell

Ajungniq Centre Director Tracy O'Hearn recently returned from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. O'Hearn was attending the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on behalf of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) Canada from Feb. 9 to 20.

The CBD is an international agreement to protect land, plants, animals, and resources in the face of development and commercialization. The COP is the highest decision-making body of the convention.

"The issues discussed at the meeting in Malaysia are important for Inuit because many Inuit live off the land and have a close relationship with the environment," O'Hearn said.

"Inuit also live in a fragile and relatively small ecosystem. They rely on plants and animals for survival. But the environment around them is being threatened by industrial and other activities."

Before attending the COP, O'Hearn met with representatives of the ICC (Canada) and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) to discuss Inuit issues and priorities as they relate to the CBD.

Attendance at meetings such as these inform ongoing national Inuit discussions on issues related to protecting Inuit traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights.

Policy Analyst and Liaison and Communications Officer Mark Buell attended a symposium on Feb. 27 called Populations in Transition: Health of Circumpolar Indigenous Peoples. The symposium was held at the University of Toronto and examined issues such as dietary changes, the mental health of chil-

dren, environmental contaminants, and the impact of a changing economy. Participants came from around the world, including Canada, United States, Russia, Finland, and Norway.

"It is very important for the Ajungniq Centre to participate in events like this," Buell said. "It gives us a chance to learn about what research is going on in the North and to find out new information that is just emerging about the health of Indigenous peoples in the circumpolar world."

Buell also took part in a council meeting for the Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health (CSCH) on Feb. 26. The society is a charitable organization that provides a forum for researchers and Indigenous organizations to discuss health research and research priorities. Buell is the treasurer for the CSCH. The Ajungniq Centre has been providing secretariat support for the society since September 2003.

From Feb. 16 to 18, Executive Assistant Sipporah Enuaraq attended the Annual General Meeting of Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association in Yellowknife.

"I greatly appreciated the opportunity to observe this enlightening event," Enuaraq said.

"One of the highlights of the meeting was the traditional feast hosted by the Inuit community in Yellowknife."

Pauktuutit is the national non-profit association representing all Inuit women in Canada. Its mandate is to foster a greater awareness of the needs of Inuit women and to encourage their participation in community, regional and national concerns in relation to social, cultural and economic development.

On Feb. 23 and 24, representatives from

the four national organizations with responsibilities for Inuit health (National Inuit Youth Council, Pauktuutit, ITK, and the Ajungniq Centre) met in Ottawa to discuss ways to better work together. This meeting, called the Meeting of the Minds II, was a follow-up to the first Meeting of the Minds held in December 2002. A number of recommendations were made at the first meeting. The need for a second meeting was identified to find ways to put those recommendations in place.

In February, the Ajungniq Centre began sending out copies of the report from the Arctic Forum, an event hosted by the National Aboriginal Health Organization in Yellowknife in May 2003. The report, produced in English and Inuktitut, captures the excitement and quality of the information shared at the forum. If you haven't received your copy yet, please e-mail Buell at mbuell@naho.ca to be put on the centre's mailing list.

The Ajungniq Centre is sending out a report called "Ajungniq Centre Regional Health Workshops." The report is a synthesis of a series of workshops the centre held in northern communities in 2002. The purpose of these workshops was to meet with people from each Inuit region to gather ideas and input directly from community members about their perceptions of health, their health needs and how the centre can best work with the regions to improve the health of Inuit. To get a copy of the report, please e-mail Buell at mbuell@naho.ca.

On a final note, the staff at the Ajungniq Centre would like to congratulate all of the athletes who took part in the 2004 Arctic Winter Games in Fort McMurray, Alta.



Successfully meeting the challenges of teleworking

By Michael Fisher

It was a busy month of meetings for the Métis Centre during February. Officers attended the Métis Centre Governing Committee's quarterly meeting in Edmonton Feb. 6 and 7. A week later, they were east-bound to meet up with centre administrative staff for an intensive week-long planning session in Ottawa, Feb. 16 to 20.

One challenge for the Métis Centre is keeping close ties with co-workers in different area codes and time zones. At present, only three staff members work in Ottawa—Executive Assistant Vanessa Stevens, Administrative Assistant Winona Tenasco and Research and Policy Officer Linda Sullivan. All other staff work from virtual offices at remote service locations in the western provinces. In the winter months, staff work in three time zones from Ottawa to Vancouver.

“Working with a decentralized staff has its challenges. Overcoming them requires co-ordination and team work,” Métis Centre Director Lois Edge said. “Decentralized does not mean de-personalized—to function successfully requires Métis Centre staff working together as a fluid and inter-connected unit adapting to an ever-changing environment.”

Conceived by the Métis Centre Governing Committee, the concept of virtual offices at remote service locations is intended to better meet the needs of Métis communities who are struggling with a basic lack of health infrastructure. The population health status of Métis is generally considered poorer than that of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

“Having staff throughout western Canada, where the majority of Métis live, keeps us close to the issues we’re working to address and keeps us motivated,” Edge explained. “At the same time, we’re very much a part of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO). We have the opportunity to work collaboratively with NAHO units and the First Nations and Ajunnginiq Centres, which gives



Métis Centre staff in Ottawa. Back row, from left: Communications Officer Lori Villebrun, Executive Assistant Vanessa Stevens, Research and Policy Officer Michael Fisher, and Community Liaison Officer Ken Drury. In front from left: Métis Centre Governing Committee Chairperson France Picotte, Director Lois Edge and Administrative Assistant Winona Tenasco.

us a much broader perspective and understanding of Aboriginal health and Metis-specific population health information, research and policy.”

For the teleworking staff, face-to-face meetings tend to be significant occasions. At the Edmonton meeting, NAHO Chairperson Dr. Judith Bartlett was present as a special guest. She shared her expertise as a Métis health professional and researcher. The main goal of the meeting was to tie up loose ends and share ideas to prepare for the work in the upcoming fiscal year.

The Ottawa meeting was the first time several Métis Centre staff had the opportunity to meet in person, including Sullivan, who started working in Ottawa on March 22. As well, staff had a rare opportunity to meet with colleagues from across NAHO, who gave updates on the noteworthy initiatives of all of the other centres and units.

All in all, centre staff agree that teleworking allows the Métis Centre to be more effective in working to build capacity towards improving the health and wellness of Métis in Canada.

Upcoming Events

National Aboriginal Achievement Awards

April 4

Calgary, Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium

The awards will be broadcast on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network at a later date.

Collaborative Policy Development for Aboriginal Peoples Conference

April 27 to 30

Edmonton, Coast Terrace Inn

This conference looks at how government and Aboriginal Peoples can work together to ensure the most appropriate policies are put in place to support key initiatives. For more information, e-mail info@iqpc.com or call (416) 542-1818.

Indigenous peoples

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This village opened their community to IIFB participants. A tour was taken of their traditional medicine garden, fish ponds, high mountain rice plots, and primary school. The tour was a welcome break from the abstract negotiations. It reminded delegates of the very real problems Indigenous peoples face around the world. The feast and celebrations that followed were also a much needed reminder of the strengths and solutions in all communities.

Following the IIFB, the seventh meeting of the COP was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from Feb. 9 to 20. The COP is the highest decision-making body of the CBD. Stout and Lamouche also attended this meeting to gather information on the CBD and on activities of Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world as well as to support the participation of the Canadian Indigenous Biodiversity Network, the IIFB and the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network in this process.

Discussions took place on many issues including protected areas, how to use the environment in a sustainable way, accessing genetic resources, and sharing their benefits. Other discussions focused on bio-piracy, intellectual property rights, patenting of life forms, inland water systems, coastal and marine ecosystems, and protecting traditional knowledge systems.

"Biopiracy is a concern of Indigenous peoples around the world. The appropriation of our knowledge of plants, animals and the environment is a direct threat to the systems and cultures that created that knowledge in the first place," Lamouche noted.

"Corporations and governments tend to care more about the commercial applications and access to our knowledge of the medicines than they do about protecting the cultures that brought that knowledge into being. It is our responsibility as Aboriginal Peoples to strengthen our own systems of culture and knowledge as our best defense against these forces."

The activities and decisions made at these meetings have a direct impact on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada because of their close connection to the land and territories. Aboriginal healing practices and traditions are inextricably linked to the environment. Any threat to these environments is a direct threat to the knowledge, cultures and lives of Aboriginal Peoples.

For more information on the CBD or COP, e-mail Lamouche at jlamouche@naho.ca. Information on the CBD is on the Internet at <http://www.biodiv.org>, <http://www.bco.ec.gc.ca> or <http://www.issd.ca>.



One family's rice plot and fruit trees in a Kaduzan village in the South China Sea.

Call for Presentations

The National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) is holding its second national conference in Winnipeg in November 2004.

The conference gives health practitioners and Aboriginal people the opportunity to share information about health research and community success stories/best practices.

As part of the conference, there will be training workshops based on the theme "Sharing Knowledge: Aboriginal Paths to Health."

NAHO is looking for presenters who can share their research, new models, innovative programs and/or services with conference delegates.

Presentations should be one or two days in length and should fit within one of the three following paths:

1. People Paths – Acquiring the Necessary Human Resources;
2. Breaking New Ground; and
3. Traditional Paths.

To have your workshop considered for this conference, please visit NAHO's website at <http://www.naho.ca> for guidelines, criteria, as well as a submission form. The deadline for submissions is May 14, 2004.

Monthly Reflection

"Live each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each."

Henry David Thoreau