



# NAHO Bulletin

January 2006

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## Message from the Chair

### Greetings and Happy New Year to All!

As 2005 has drawn to a close, we would like to take this opportunity to look back at this successful year with many achievements that advanced the National Aboriginal Health Organization's vision of improving Aboriginal health in Canada.

We celebrated a significant milestone in March 2005, when the National Aboriginal Health Organization completed its first mandate. We are now focusing on our strategic direction for the next five years, and we look forward to continuing our activities to better the health of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada during 2006 and beyond.

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The Blueprint for Aboriginal Health released at the First Ministers' Meeting in November 2005 represents a promising step toward addressing the health disparities among Aboriginal Peoples. The Blueprint is a 10-year "roadmap" to guide the Government of Canada in working with provinces, territories, First Nations, Inuit and Métis in closing the gap in Aboriginal health outcomes. NAHO looks forward to continuing its work towards informing others in the Blueprint implementation phase.

NAHO and its Ajunniginig (Inuit), First Nations and Métis Centres remain committed to identifying and meeting the unique needs and aspirations of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. These three centres — along with the Policy and Research Unit, National Aboriginal Role Model Program, Canadian Health Network Project team and Information Centre on Aboriginal Health — marked many achievements throughout 2005, which we invite you to read about in this special "Year in Review" edition of the NAHO Bulletin.

The year 2006 promises to be an exciting time for us. NAHO's Board of Directors

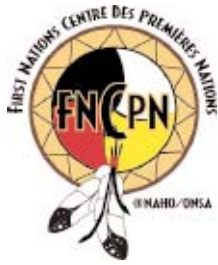


and staff remain committed to working with our current and future partners in our shared goal to better the health of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples.

We extend our sincere wishes for a healthy and prosperous New Year!

**Yours in good health,**

**Noreen McAteer**  
**Chairperson, NAHO Board of Directors**



# First Nations Centre

220 Laurier Ave. W., Suite 1200

Ottawa, ON K1P 5Z9

Telephone: (613) 237-9462, ext. 500 • Toll-free: 1-877-602-4445

Fax: (613) 237-1810

Web site: [www.naho.ca/fnc](http://www.naho.ca/fnc) • e-mail: [fnc@naho.ca](mailto:fnc@naho.ca)

## FNC sets its goals for 2006

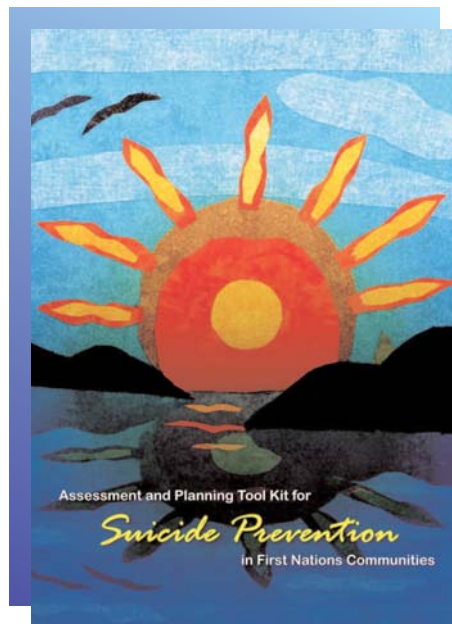
Over the past months, the National Aboriginal Health Organization's First Nations Centre (FNC) has taken progressive steps in many key areas, and it anticipates using this progress to attain its ambitious 2006 work plan goals.

"Our restructuring has contributed to the FNC's ability to tackle the upcoming year with confidence," says Donna Lyons, FNC Director. "Our new work plan will showcase our ability to feed into the national/regional- and community-based processes in the area of First Nations health. It will also highlight our capacity to produce quality, informative pieces of work."

Lyons was hired as FNC Director in February and quickly set to work building upon the Centre's capacity. Adding a Communications Officer, a Finance Officer and two Policy Analysts has increased the staff to 12. At the same time, the FNC has actively participated in the move toward the individual autonomy of the three Centres of Excellence (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) — as reflected within the National Aboriginal Health Organization's new overall mandate.

Since its creation, the FNC has produced quality First Nations health products. Among them are toolkits aimed at building capacity and providing valuable information and knowledge to First Nations communities. These have been produced each year on various topics including *Privacy Issues*, *Health Surveillance*, *Research* and *Ethics in Health Research*.

During 2005, the FNC produced and distributed an additional three toolkits: the *Health Careers*, *Sacred Ways of Life: Traditional Knowledge* and *Planning and Assessing Suicide Prevention in First Nations Communities* toolkits have been sent to all First Nations communities and friendship centres across Canada. The FNC plans to disseminate at least three products nationally during 2006.



*The Assessing Suicide Prevention in First Nations Communities Toolkit was distributed to all First Nations communities and friendship centres across the country.*

The FNC's work has been met with appreciation from across the country. The Centre continues to receive information requests from First Nations schools, community health fair organizers, First Nations organizations hosting conferences or training, and First Nations communities.

"We want our information to reach as many of our people as we can," says Lyons. "To this end, the Centre has taken a proactive approach to increase the availability of information to the public. In addition to mailing out hard copies of the tool kits, the FNC has made its resources available electronically — both on our website and on CDs — to be given out at events and upon request."

The FNC expects 2006 to be a productive year and welcomes input from First Nations. "Feedback and suggestions from community members are a significant part of our processes," says Lyons. "When we send out information, we encourage people to let us know how we can build on the material to fit their needs — all comments are welcome."

For more information, please contact

Colleen Toulouse,

First Nations Centre

Communications Officer, at

[ctoulouse@naho.ca](mailto:ctoulouse@naho.ca) or

1-877-602-4445, extension 500.

# Top five New Year's resolutions

With a New Year upon us, people everywhere are making resolutions. Based on new results from the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS), we recommend that you may want to consider adding one or more of the following five resolutions this year:

- Lose weight;
- Quit smoking;
- Exercise more;

- Eat a healthier diet; and
- Spend more time with family, friends and Elders and participate in your traditions — whatever they are— during this upcoming year.

Released in November, the RHS results provide a clearer picture on the health of First Nations children, youth and adults. The RHS provides information to be used to support decision-making, planning, programming and advocacy with the ultimate goal of improving First Nations health.

## RHS' top five resolutions and why we're proposing them

### 1

#### Lose Weight

- More than half (58%) of children (aged under 11) were either overweight (22%) or obese (36%) according to international body mass index standards.
- About four in ten (42%) First Nations youth (12–17 years old) are overweight (28%) or obese (14%).
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) First Nations adults (18+ years old) are considered either overweight (37%) obese (31%) or morbidly obese (5%). Most adults with diabetes are classified as obese.
- About one in five First Nations adults (20%, age-adjusted) had diabetes. Among those 55 years and older, the proportion is more than one in three (36.4%).
- Obese adults were less likely than others to be in "very good" or "excellent" health and were more likely to have chronic health conditions.
- Losing weight decreases your risk of diabetes and other health conditions.

### 2

#### Quit Smoking

- Among 15- to 17-year-olds, First Nations smoking rates are three to four times the Canadian rates for boys (47% vs. 13%) and girls (61% vs. 15%).
- Nearly three in five (59%) First Nations adults smoke either daily (46%) occasionally (13%).
- Non-smokers were more likely to consider themselves to be in balance physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.
- Smoking is less common among older First Nations adults.
- Quitting smoking has been shown to reduce the risk of a variety of health conditions.

### 3

#### Exercise more

- Half (50%) of First Nations children aged 3 to 5 years participate in physical activity every day compared to 37% of older of First Nations children aged 9 to 11 years.
- Although the vast majority (90%) of First Nations youth participate in physical activity once a week or more often, only half (45%) are considered 'sufficiently active' – engaging in 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity most days.
- Only one in five (21%) First Nations adults has 'sufficient' physical activity (at least 30 minutes of physical activity for four or more days of the week).
- The most popular physical activities for adults were walking (89.8%), fishing (42.8%), berry picking or other food gathering (38.1%), swimming (37.7%) and bicycling (35%).
- Adults who were sufficiently active were more likely to be in excellent health and more likely to have good social supports.

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## ...RHS' top five resolutions (continued)

### 4 Eat a healthier diet

- Almost one-third (35%) of adult respondents always or almost always eat a nutritious and balanced diet compared with more than half (53%) who only sometimes do. The remaining 12% either rarely (9%) or never (3%) eat a balanced and nutritious diet.
- Although we can't say anything definitive about cause and effect, adults who "always" or "almost always" eat a nutritious diet are more likely to cite excellent health, more likely to have social supports, more likely to be "in balance" and less likely to have thought of suicide.

### 5 Spend more positive time with family, friends and Elders and participate in your traditions — whatever they are — during the upcoming year.

- Half (50%) of all adults understand a First Nations language 'relatively well' or 'fluently'. Among those 55 years and over, the rate rises to 71%, dropping to 39% among those 18 to 34 years, and to 26% among children, 6 to 11 years.
- The vast majority of First Nations adults consider traditional cultural events important in their lives (81%). The same is true for traditional spirituality (76.4%) and for religion, such as Christianity (70.3%).
- Although only 25.2% of First Nations children aged 3 to 11 spoke a First Nations language, 92.9% of parents/guardians felt that it was important that they learn.
- Almost as large a proportion (83.2%) felt that it was important that their children participate in traditional cultural events.
- When seeking personal support, First Nations adults looked most often to their immediate family members, their friends and their extended families.
- The vast majority of First Nations children got along well with their families (51.9% "very well with no difficulties" and 41.7% "quite well with hardly any difficulties").
- According to RHS data, those who consider traditional cultural events important tend to have a more positive assessment of their communities.

Now celebrating 10 years, the RHS has walked the courageous and rewarding path to success. The release of the survey results highlighted the First Nations Research Conference held Nov. 13–15 in Ottawa.

Over 300 participants attended the event, which also showcased the regional RHS reports and community-based research/health initiatives from across the country. Guest speakers — National Chief Phil Fontaine, Minister of State Carolyn Bennett and Vice-Chiefs Bill Erasmus and Angus Toulouse — said the RHS, now in its 10th year, is a time to celebrate this research initiative and all the work and dedication people have put into RHS.

"The RHS is a great example of a First Nations controlled initiative that is more efficient and effective than federal government initiatives," said National Chief Phil Fontaine. "This survey is more beneficial to First Nations because they can be part of the research from the beginning to the end of the process. The RHS is First Nations self-government applied to research."

RHS National Coordinator Jane Gray said the RHS contains the evidence you need to make evidence based decisions. "As a First Nations initiative, the RHS results is designed and presented from a First Nations perspective on health and wellness. The well-being of our First Nations communities has always been at the heart of this initiative. Doing 'what is best for our communities' is deeply-rooted in all of our work," said Gray.

The second day of the First Nations Research Conference focused on the RHS youth findings, as well as the panel presentations and workshops highlighted current health research and youth initiatives areas such as diabetes prevention, suicide prevention and tobacco reduction.

"The conference provided an excellent overview of some First Nations research initiatives and programs at the community, national and regional levels," said Gray. "Now with the release of RHS findings, it is our hope that our analysis of the information shared by First Nations community members can be used by all people to improve the lives of our children, youth, adults and Elders in our communities."

The survey was conducted in 238 First Nations on-reserve and other communities between August 2002 and November 2003, with more than 22,000 participants across the country. The RHS included three questionnaires designed for adults (18 years and over), youth (12 to 17 years), and children (0 to 11 years). The RHS 2002/03 was coordinated by RHS program staff and through regional offices.

Questions in the survey focused on areas of life that relate to the health of First Nations people.

The Peoples' Report, RHS at a Glance, RHS Fact Sheets, and the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002/03: Results for Adults, Youth and Children in First Nations Communities is available at [www.naho.ca/firstnations/english/regional\\_health.php](http://www.naho.ca/firstnations/english/regional_health.php)

For more information on the RHS, please contact Colleen Toulouse at [ctoulouse@naho.ca](mailto:ctoulouse@naho.ca) or 1-877-602-4445.



## Ajunggingiq Centre celebrates many accomplishments in 2005

With the tundra covered in snow and the bays frozen over, Inuit across the Arctic are deep into winter — and are ringing in the new year. The Ajunggingiq Centre wishes everyone a happy and healthy 2006!

Looking back over 2005, the Ajunggingiq Centre is proud to say it was a successful year. We gathered information on Inuit health and wellness and shared that important knowledge with Inuit communities, health care providers, Inuit organizations and others, with the aim of improving the health of Inuit.

Throughout the year, the Ajunggingiq Centre worked on health issues that matter most to Inuit: public health, mental wellness, suicide prevention, maternal and child care, substance abuse, health education, human health and climate change, and much more.

Here's why 2005 was such a productive year:

- The Ajunggingiq Centre completed a comprehensive project to encourage Inuit to consider careers in the health field. *Qaigitsi!* is an online searchable database of health career training opportunities that are available to Inuit. A CD-ROM version of *Qaigitsi!* was produced for use in Northern schools.
- *Nunaliit*, an Inuktitut radio play focusing on Inuit health and wellness, aired on Inuit community radio stations this spring. The play's goal was to highlight to Inuit that there are many people and places in their communities

to turn to for information on health and wellness. *Nunaliit* provided relevant health information to Inuit in their own language.



*CDs and cassettes of the Nunaliit play were distributed to radio stations throughout the North.*

- Through the *Inuusiqatsiarniq* suicide prevention project, the Ajunggingiq Centre gathered information from Inuit Elders on how they traditionally coped with and overcame hardships in their lives. Focus groups were held in the four Inuit regions. A report of the Elders' observations will be published in 2006.
- To commemorate World Suicide Prevention Day (September 10), the Ajunggingiq Centre, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the National Inuit Youth Council collaborated on a joint communications campaign to raise awareness of suicide rates in the North.

• For many Inuit, being healthy isn't just about feeling physically well. It's also about having a healthy and happy mind and spirit, or mental wellness. In recognition of this, the Ajunggingiq Centre produced two publications on mental wellness: a manual for Inuit counsellors and mental health workers, and an information booklet on the various types of mental illness.

Adding to these successes, the Ajunggingiq Centre ended 2005 on a very high note. We helped launch an important book, *Unikkaaqatigiit: Putting the Human Face on Climate Change* at a United Nations gathering on climate change in Montreal in December. This book was the result of a four-year research project in the Inuit regions, and is a joint project with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Nasivvik Centre for Inuit Health and Changing Environments at Université Laval, and the Inuit regional land claim organizations.

The Ajunggingiq Centre has many activities and initiatives planned for 2006 that will contribute to improving the health and wellness of Inuit and their communities, and it promises to be a productive year. Best wishes for a happy and healthy year!

For more information or to order copies of the Ajunggingiq Centre's new resources, please contact the Centre at [inuit@naho.ca](mailto:inuit@naho.ca)



## A look back at 2005

### Taanshi - Hello!

Happy New Year and best wishes for a healthy 2006! The last year was an eventful and productive year for the Métis Centre. Here are just some of the reasons why 2005 was such a great year:

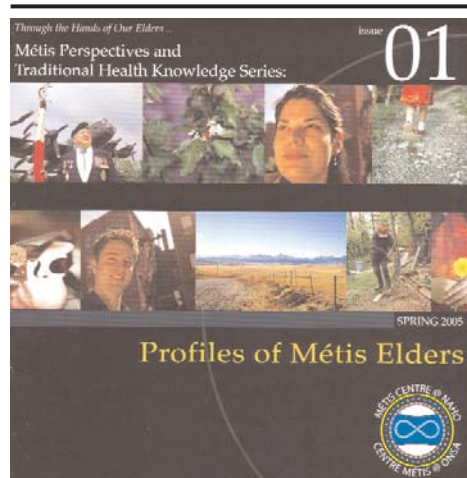
The Métis Centre launched a new publication titled *Profiles of Métis Elders*. Built on discussions from the Métis Centre's Elders' Gatherings, this booklet is the first in the *Métis Perspectives and Traditional Health Knowledge* series and profiles 14 remarkable Métis seniors, Elders and Healers. The Métis Centre appreciates the contributions of all participants who shared their wisdom with one another and the rest of us to develop this publication! *Profiles of Métis Elders* is available on-line; contact the Métis Centre for hard copies.

The Métis Centre's staff attended various conferences, gatherings and member organizations' annual general assemblies to disseminate Métis-specific health information and to build relationships at the community level.

During 2005, the Métis Centre awarded six \$5,000 Fellowships to graduate students of Métis ancestry to foster and facilitate Métis-specific health research. Congratulations to the 2005 Métis Centre Fellowship award winners: Tracy Friedel

(University of Alberta), Rosalie Moore-Anderson (McGill University), Selina Young (York University), Janice Murphy (University of British Columbia), Angeline Letendre (University of Alberta) and Cheryl Troupe (University of Saskatchewan).

A Métis needs assessment guide was developed to assist Métis communities to identify and respond to their health needs



The Centre released *Profiles of Métis Elders*, the first publication in the *Métis Perspectives and Traditional Health Knowledge* series.

and priorities. The Needs Assessment Guide for Métis Communities is available on the website in English and French at [http://www.naho.ca/MHC\\_Site/E/publications.html](http://www.naho.ca/MHC_Site/E/publications.html) The Métis Centre staff conducted Métis

community capacity building workshops in Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia in 2005.

The 2005/2006 Métis Centre Calendar was distributed across Canada and has proven very popular! Featuring beautiful images from past and present, the calendar has been a unique resource, as the months were translated in English, Michif, Ojibwa and Cree.

The Métis Centre's website and virtual network continue to grow with many new resources available online. Visit [www.naho.ca/metiscentre](http://www.naho.ca/metiscentre) for:

- the **Métis Centre's Online Photo Gallery**, which features many historical and current photographs of Métis. Submit your photos to the gallery by email at [metiscentre@naho.ca](mailto:metiscentre@naho.ca)
- the **Métis Centre's Health Information Bulletin**, a monthly publication available via e-mail, online and in hard copy, which features new research, publications, websites, conference listings and news stories on issues related to Métis population health. Contact [metiscentre@naho.ca](mailto:metiscentre@naho.ca) to subscribe!
- **Métis Centre E-News**, to be released in early 2006.

### Watch for these new resources in 2006:

- The *Online Health Careers Guide* will feature information and resources for Métis interested in careers in health;
- New publications in the series *Métis Perspectives and Traditional Health Knowledge*.

For more information or to subscribe to the Métis Centre's Health Information Bulletin or the Métis E-News, contact us or visit our website!



# NAHO becomes Aboriginal Affiliate of the Canadian Health Network

In April 2005, NAHO proudly became the Aboriginal Affiliate of the Canadian Health Network (CHN), a national, non-profit bilingual web-based health information service that helps Canadians find information on how to stay healthy and prevent disease. We are pleased to have this opportunity to gather culturally sensitive resources for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and to offer e-health information that we hope will empower Aboriginal people to take care of their health.

NAHO recently collaborated with the CHN Substance Use/Addiction Affiliate to produce a feature article on solvent abuse — "Parents be aware: sniffing kills!" — that was published on the CHN home page. This article, which was promoted through Aboriginal health organizations and media, discusses the signs of sniffing and suggests ways parents can discourage their children from abusing solvents. It can be found on the CHN website.

Throughout 2005, we also attended many conferences where we distributed relevant "Links of interest" pages to attendees, to promote our resources and improve their exposure. We collaborate actively with NAHO's Ajunginiq, First Nations and Métis Centres, as well as with other CHN

Affiliates, to arrange conference participation and maximize promotional opportunities.

We have developed a marketing and communications plan to reach out to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and to ensure our activities address the CHN program's strategic directions, which include:

- strengthening focus on health promotion;
- enhancing site information to better respond to Canadians' diverse needs;
- positioning the Network as an essential e-health information service by broadening its scope and strengthening its current relationships;
- improving accountability to Canadians.

Our marketing plan includes developing a brochure (available in English, French and soon to be offered in Inuktitut) to distribute at conferences and other events. A bilingual ad was also developed for Aboriginal journals and newspapers, and it too will be translated to Inuktitut.

We are also working on developing our network of contributors to expand our resource collection. We review Aboriginal organizations on an ongoing basis, and the ones we select become Network contribu-

tors that allow us to catalogue their e-health information and link to it.

By becoming the CHN Aboriginal Affiliate, NAHO has joined a far-reaching e-network of health information providers that includes the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, and national and provincial/territorial non-profit organizations as well as universities, hospitals, libraries and community organizations. We bring high level of credibility on Aboriginal health issues to the Network through our numerous knowledge-based activities and our strong connections within Canada's Aboriginal communities, as well as with non-Aboriginal organizations that have an interest in Aboriginal health.

We look forward to continuing to act as the CHN Aboriginal Affiliate during 2006 and using this opportunity to share helpful information to help Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples take care of their health.

Visit [www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca) and click on "Aboriginal Peoples" to check out our collection and to find information on topics such as diabetes, healthy eating and children's safety.

**For more information, please send a message to the following address:**  
[CHN-question-RCS@naho.ca](mailto:CHN-question-RCS@naho.ca)

As the CHN Aboriginal Affiliate, our target audience includes the following groups:

- Aboriginal women aged 34–54 with children under the age of 18
- Aboriginal youth
- Aboriginal men
- Aboriginal children
- Aboriginal women in remote, rural and northern areas.

Our secondary target audience includes Aboriginal seniors, Aboriginal people with disabilities and health intermediaries who work with Aboriginal Peoples.

Our list of core topics on which we will focus our resource development includes the following areas:

- cancer • diabetes • environmental health • healthy eating • injury prevention • maternal and child care • mental health • reproductive health • substance abuse • suicide prevention • tuberculosis • violence prevention • traditional knowledge •

When selecting resources for the Aboriginal e-health collection, we review the resources to ensure they embody these values:

- They must empower Aboriginal peoples to make informed choices about their health and their bodies.
- They must recognize that emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being are all important elements of Aboriginal peoples' health, language.
- They must be culturally sensitive with messages free of stereotyping.



## Information Centre on Aboriginal Health

220 Laurier Ave. W., Suite 1200

Ottawa, ON K1P 5Z9

Telephone: (613) 237-9462 • Toll-free: 1-877-602-4445

Fax: (613) 233-1549

Web site: [www.icaah.ca](http://www.icaah.ca) • e-mail: [icaah@naho.ca](mailto:icaah@naho.ca)

Just as NAHO underwent significant restructuring in 2005, so too has the Information Centre on Aboriginal Health (ICAH). Over the year, ICAH's role in serving NAHO's information and research needs greatly expanded.

This year ICAH launched two new services to help NAHO staff with projects:

- The **ICAH Research Alert**: a bi-monthly publication listing the latest articles, reports and research programs dealing with all aspects of Aboriginal health and related issues.
- **Funding Initiatives of Interest to NAHO**: a weekly-updated listing of grants, funds and other programs to help sustain NAHO and Centres.

We also have the new **ICAH Career Guides** series to help Aboriginal high school students find information on health careers and scholarships. The Guides have been popular at youth events such as the Blueprint for the Future Aboriginal Youth Career Fair and the 2005 Canadian Aboriginal Festival.

ICAH has been actively promoting both our services and broader NAHO initiatives and mandate to the public. We distributed copies of our new colourful ICAH brochure (as well as ICAH pens, highlighters and mousepads) at numerous conferences and meetings over the course of the year.

In addition to the new publications, ICAH continues to maintain and update our four online public databases:

- The **Resources database** has grown to nearly 2300 records of reports, articles, books and Websites on various aspects of Aboriginal health.
- The **Programs & Services database** lists nearly 1100 programs and services focusing on Aboriginal health, including funding and grant programs. NAHO staff interested in program funding can now find granting programs appropriate for proposals with this database.
- The **Careers database**, now undergoing an end-of-year revision, holds almost 1000 records of college, univer-

sity and post-professional programs in Canada and the United States, enabling Aboriginal students to find out about training for health and social services careers.

- The **Scholarships** database, revised in the summer, has 850 scholarships, bursaries, and awards for qualified Aboriginal students.

ICAH continues to work with NAHO staff and external technicians to improve the "user friendliness" and function of the ICAH website.

The Centre also continues to answer information requests by e-mail and telephone, help the public search the ICAH and NAHO websites to find Aboriginal health publications, and assist NAHO staff with accessing publications and literature searches for a range of projects.

[www.icaah.ca](http://www.icaah.ca)

### Positive Feedback for ICAH

#### Some quotes and notes from satisfied users:

"... there is much that is relevant and helpful to my assignment. I appreciate the effort that you went to in order to help me." – College student

"... I had the good luck to find your website and am still trawling through its gems! ... most particularly to your excellent page on suicide..." – Mental health researcher

"Your web site is such a wonderful resource. Thank you!" – Visitor

"Thanks very much. You have been a great help!" – Health promotion worker, Australia

"You two are the greatest. I can't believe the wonderful surprise in my mailbox. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!!" – NAHO employee

" I looked at just about everything you collected for me ... Thanks for your help. I now feel prepared." – NAHO employee

Several organizations have given unsolicited links to the ICAH website, including:

- *Aboriginal Planet* newsletter, Foreign Affairs Canada;
- University of Manitoba Health Sciences Libraries: describes ICAH as a "complete collection of patient education resources, reports, and community-based research";
- University of New South Wales Library, Sydney, Australia;
- A public health graduate class at the University of Toronto introduced the ICAH website as a good multi-purpose starting point for the public, and useful for researching health programs, services and curricula.

**Lead YOUR way!**

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL  
**Role Model**  
PROGRAM

The National Aboriginal Role Model Program's inaugural year met with great success. Throughout 2005, our first set of role models inspired many young audiences, sharing compelling personal stories of their experiences and accomplishments at conferences, gatherings, career fairs and schools across the country.

We also produced an array of promotional material this year: A Role Model Program DVD with a booklet, trading cards and posters will be distributed to Aboriginal schools, communities, youth groups, health centres and friendship centres throughout Canada.

NAHO has also recently selected the second set of role models. An official announcement will take place in March 2006, after which the young Aboriginal youth will attend training sessions to prepare them for their new duties. We extend a heartfelt congratulations to all of them.

We are confident our new role models will set a positive example among their Aboriginal peers and promote the value of self-esteem, culture and a healthy lifestyle, just as their predecessors did so admirably during the previous year.

## **~ Nomination Call ~ 2005-2006**

**Aboriginal Youth Nominating Aboriginal Youth:  
First Nations, Inuit & Métis who are 13-30 years old**

**Nominations are being accepted for the 2006  
National Aboriginal Role Model Program**

**Deadline date:  
May 21, 2006**

**Nominate your role model!**

**For more information check out:**

**[www.naho.ca](http://www.naho.ca)**

**Lead Your Way!**

**Or call 1-877-602-4445, ext. 548**

During 2005, the National Aboriginal Health Organization's Policy and Communications Unit worked on several initiatives **to foster Aboriginal participation in health care delivery and to affirm and protect Aboriginal traditional healing practices.**

These activities — reflective of NAHO's Objects Four and Five — support our vision of influencing and advancing Aboriginal health and well-being.

## Promoting Aboriginal health careers

### • Human Resources Information

How many Aboriginal health care professionals are there in Canada today? Where are they working and in what communities and regions are more needed? To answer these questions, we need detailed health human resources information - data that doesn't currently exist.

Despite the lack of exact figures, it is clear that Aboriginal Peoples — just as non-Aboriginal Canadians do — face critical shortages of doctors and nurses: Health Canada has found that up to 53% of nursing positions in First Nations communities were vacant or only temporarily filled in 1999, and over one-third of Aboriginal communities are more than 90 km from physician services. Effective health care delivery requires access to skilled professionals, and collecting specific data on their availability will help identify and address critical shortages. There is also a need for data to identify and document the enormous need for more Aboriginal people working in health care.

In 2005, NAHO began collaborating with the Canadian Institute for Health Information and Health Canada's First Nations Inuit Health Branch on the process of Aboriginal health human resources data collection. Information to be gathered will include demographics, education/training, geographical distribution, migration, employment/practice

characteristics and productivity.

In February 2006, a roundtable of key stakeholders will meet to develop a data collection framework to address the current lack of baseline data on Aboriginal doctors and nurses. This will lead to the actual data collection that will potentially occur later in 2006. Data gathered will ultimately help improve the health of Canada's Aboriginal population, by supporting arguments for increasing the number of health professionals serving Aboriginal communities throughout Canada.

### • Learning Institute on First Nations, Inuit and Métis Health

Over the past year, NAHO began exploring the development of a Learning Institute on First Nations, Inuit and Métis Health to introduce Aboriginal health issues to a wider audience. The Learning Institute will provide a unique learning opportunity for First Nations, Inuit and Métis and non-Aboriginal health professionals, educators, academics, researchers, policy makers and governments interested in advancing the health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

Once established, the Institute will be held in a different location each year to offer training opportunities throughout the country.

*continued on next page*

## Protecting traditional healing practices

**Throughout 2005, NAHO's Policy and Communications Unit was pleased to participate in and support many gatherings, which included:**

- Natural Health Products (NHP) Division session on NHP regulations and impact on Aboriginal Peoples (Ottawa)
- Access and Benefit Sharing working group of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Bangkok, Thailand)
- International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (Bangkok, Thailand)
- Aboriginal Women's Health Roundtable (Ottawa)
- Heritage Canada's Traditions Gathering (Edmonton)
- Elders and Youth Council Gathering (Eagle Butte, South Dakota)
- International Healers Gathering (Saddle Lake)
- Cree Nation Gathering (Saddle Lake)
- Elders and Youth Council Gathering (New Credit)
- Amazon Conservation Team/Indigenous Studies Program/NAHO Letter of Intent follow-up and implementation session (Washington, DC)
- Traditional teachings sessions in conjunction with the Canadian Aboriginal Festival (Toronto)

*continued on next page*

## ...Promoting Aboriginal health careers (continued)

NAHO's vision is to offer Web-based materials and videoconferencing to allow health professionals from rural, isolated and northern Aboriginal communities to participate equally. Topics may include cultural competency and cultural safety, traditional knowledge and healing, policy development, public health research, maternal child health, mental health and suicide prevention.

The Institute is currently in the early development phase, but planning is well underway. A roundtable of key stakeholders will take place in February 2006 to develop priority theme areas. We will then identify partners, panelists, facilitators, venues, audiences and other logistics for the Institute's inaugural session. Stay tuned for what promises to be an exciting and informative project for all involved!

## ...Protecting traditional healing practices (continued)

During 2005, the Policy and Communications Unit also produced several documents and collaborated on various projects:

Will be available during 2006 — watch our web site!

- *International Models for the Training and Support of Traditional Healers*
- *Draft Model to Protect and Promote Traditional Healing Practices and Knowledge*
- *Handbook for Indigenous people interested in participating in international forums that impact Indigenous communities and their knowledge*, particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity

Other collaborative initiatives included:

- *Jidwa:doh "Let's Become Again"* International Indigenous Elders Summit 2004 documentary DVD, which was released at the Canadian Aboriginal Festival in November. For more information about the DVD, please contact Alexandra Darnay of the Indigenous Health Research Development Program at [alidarnay@yahoo.ca](mailto:alidarnay@yahoo.ca)
- Letter of Intent with the Amazon Conservation Team and the Indigenous Studies Program at McMaster University regarding shared goals and activities around the protection and promotion of traditional healing practices and knowledge. For more information, please contact James Lamouche at [jlamouche@naho.ca](mailto:jlamouche@naho.ca)



## 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 to provide readers with an update of the activities of NAHO and its First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Centres.

If you have any questions or comments about NAHO or its publications, or would like to add your name to our distribution list, please contact us at:

### National Aboriginal Health Organization

220 Laurier Ave. W, Suite 1200  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5A9  
Phone: (613) 237-9462  
Toll Free: 1-877-602-4445

Fax: (613) 237-1810 • Web site: [www.naho.ca](http://www.naho.ca) • e-mail: [naho@naho.ca](mailto:naho@naho.ca)