



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

January 7, 2009

IHA and Ktunaxa Nation sign Letter of Understanding

CRANBROOK – Aboriginal people in the East Kootenay will benefit from a Letter of Understanding (LOU) signed today between the Ktunaxa Nation Council and the Interior Health Authority. The letter is the first step in a collaborative approach to improving health services to Aboriginal people.

“We have committed to close the health gaps between First Nations and non-First Nations by 2015 through collaboration and commitment,” said Health Services Minister George Abbott. “The Letter of Understanding between the Ktunaxa Nation Council and Interior Health builds on the Province’s commitment to increase Aboriginal influence on health planning for their communities.”

In 2006, the Ktunaxa Nation Council approached Interior Health to begin talks regarding health services for First Nations. From those early talks proactive steps were taken to form a working group to begin work on the LOU. Representatives from the Ktunaxa Nation Council, Interior Health, Ministry of Health Services, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, and the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation were involved in the process.

“IHA should be commended for their work on this initiative,” said Ktunaxa Nation Chair, Sophie Pierre. “They have recognized that the Ktunaxa Nation is in the best position to coordinate Health Services provided by the Federal and Provincial governments. This LOU is a starting point to ensure long term health benefits for the Aboriginal population within our Traditional Territory.”

The Ktunaxa Nation Council is made up of the communities of St. Mary’s, Lower Kootenay, Akisqnuq, and Tobacco Plains. The LOU encompasses Health Services for all Aboriginal peoples, including Métis and Inuit, who reside within the Ktunaxa Traditional Territory.

“We know that First Nations people live an average of seven years less than other British Columbians and that their risks of developing health conditions like diabetes are also greater,” said East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett. “The agreement symbolizes our mutual commitment to bridging the health care gap.”

“Interior Health is looking forward to our continuing working relationship with the Ktunaxa Nation Council,” said Interior Health Authority Board Chair Norman Embree. “The Ktunaxa have shown great innovation and leadership in taking the first steps to work collaboratively with IHA on better health services for their communities. The Letter of Understanding we signed today is the first of its kind for Interior Health and furthers our goal of meeting the needs of the Aboriginal population by involving them in health planning and providing culturally sensitive services and programs.”

The next step for the Ktunaxa Nation Council and Interior Health is to establish a working group to develop a joint Health Plan.

Media -for more information:

Jennifer Henkes, Interior Health Communications Officer, East Kootenay (250) 420-2404

Garry Slonowski, Communications Manager
Ktunaxa Nations Council
(250) 417-4022 ext. 226
gslonowski@ktunaxa.org