

STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE 5TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DIABETES AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES: RESTORING BALANCE OTTAWA, ONTARIO MARCH 16-18, 2009



Diabetes in Aboriginal people is a crisis that threatens the entire Aboriginal population. The utter devastation this disease inflicts on our families and communities has reached pandemic proportions and is a public health emergency.

As a spiritual and land based people, Aboriginal people enjoyed good health for thousands of years, living in harmony with the plants, animals, fish and the environment. With the arrival of Europeans and subsequent process of colonization, we were dislocated from our natural way of life.



This process eventually suppressed our spirituality and relationship with the land leading to many symptoms including the diabetes crisis we are experiencing today. Current approaches to stem the tide of diabetes have been met with limited success because these approaches have not addressed the consequences of colonization.

These consequences include the residential school system that suppressed our spirituality, foreign policies and laws that disrupted our relationship with the land, and the imposition of a culture with vastly different values and beliefs that undermined the traditional roles of our women and Elders. All these factors have caused us to live off balance and the diabetes epidemic has been the result.

The symptoms of diabetes are telling us loudly and clearly that it is time to reignite the spirit, return to our culture, traditions and traditional foods and to revive the central role of our women and the influential role of our Elders.

To restore balance as Aboriginal people we must nourish the spiritual aspect of our lives through the guidance and wisdom of the Elders. The revival of our traditional knowledge, values, cultures and beliefs must form the foundation of all programming that aims to eliminate diabetes among Aboriginal people.

We propose the following recommendations from this gathering:

1. The Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative's current mandate expires in March of 2010 and a renewal process is underway. The meaningful input and full participation of the national Aboriginal organizations is required in the ADI renewal process.
2. Because of the horrendous effects this disease has on our families and communities, it is important to continue programs focused on this issue. For this reason we need the ADI to continue.
3. For the ADI to be successful, funding must be increased and activities need to be consistent with the revitalization of our culture and traditions.
4. To support ADI renewal, to increase awareness and to strengthen international engagement and collaboration, a joint statement will be submitted to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples and international collaboration will be pursued through the International Diabetes Federation.

