



Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association

Annual Report 2020/21

Message from the Executive Committee:

During a year that can only be described as unprecedented, the ANFCA Executive Committee wishes to acknowledge the tireless dedication of community-based Executive Directors, staff, volunteers, and Board members. Across the province when many other community organizations, services, and groups were closing due to the pandemic, Friendship Centres stood firm in their service to community. We are grateful for the contribution, innovation, and passion of so many in our Friendship Centre family.

Message from the Executive Director:

Capturing all that 2020/21 was in a few short words is a near impossible task. Suffice it to say we have all collectively endured and overcome situations none of us could have predicted. In looking back, I am grateful for meaningful relationships – both old and newly formed; the support of family and friends; the steadfast resilience of the ANFCA team and the steely determination of the Friendship Centre Movement as a whole.

While the ongoing impact of this pandemic continues, we can celebrate the successes achieved along the way and reflect on what has been learned during this difficult time. Moving forward we will continue to acknowledge the value of Friendship Centres, we will continue to build important relationships, and advocate for more caring, culturally informed communities, and we will be more resourceful and innovative in seeking solutions to long standing systemic barriers.

Joanne Mason, ANFCA Executive Director

Key Areas of ANFCA Business:

Following extensive membership engagement, in April 2017, ANFCA Board of Directors adopted an ambitious five-year strategic plan focussing on four broad areas of direction – Administration, Communication, Governance, and Sector Specific Initiatives. These focal points encompassed many areas of opportunity and growth for both provincial and community-based Friendship Centres. As we round out the last year of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, despite significantly evolving political perspectives and the redirection of attention to our COVID response, we can acknowledge many accomplishments achieved. Looking forward, the ANFCA Board of Directors will adopt a *renewed* Strategic Plan 2022-2025 that will provide direction to the ANFCA through the coming years of pandemic response and recovery.

ANFCA is grateful to the many youth, Elders, Executive Directors, Friendship Centre staff, Board members and community-based subject matter experts who have shared time and perspectives to strengthen the impact of the work undertaken. With a desire to continue maintaining close community involvement and perspectives, ANFCA has and will continue to rely on administratively struck advisory panels and committees to advise on the work of ANFCA.

Administration includes six main areas of focus with two additional subsections – Friendship Centre Support, Training, Orientation and Capacity Building; Fund Development and Sustainability; Technical Support; Human Resources; Finance/Program Funding; and Support to ANFCA Committees.

Communication as defined in ANFCA Strategic Plan encompasses broad areas of focus - Internal Communication; Public Relations; Partnership Building and Event Planning. Each of these important categories was robustly worked on with positive impacts being achieved through 2020/21. Enhanced use of technology and virtual platforms has assisted improving communications with member Friendship Centres and partners alike. ANFCA continued to refine and uphold brand standards and reporting methodologies to ensure maintenance of consistent messaging.

Governance as defined in ANFCA Strategic Plan covers four areas of focus – Board Training and Capacity; Strategic Planning and Annual Reporting; TRC/UNDRIP; and Policy and Research. Each of these key categories was diligently addressed and positively impacted through 2020/21.

Sector Specific Initiatives encompasses seven broad themes including Demographic Groups; Youth; Education; Employment and Training; Environment; Justice and Health and Wellness. These broadly-based themes are further defined by a substantial 19 additional subcategories.

Administration:

Human Resource and Finance: Fiscally, ANFCA continued to demonstrate strong internal controls, strategic operational planning, and upheld ethical and transparent business practices. In 2020/21 ANFCA's revenue was reported at ~\$16.2 million, almost double that of the year prior. As a result of remote work requirements and to effectively uphold public health orders and create safe workplace environments, the ANFCA has, as Friendship Centres have, adopted new business practices to ensure transparency and accountability in times of virtual work situations. In the volatile early days of the COVID pandemic, the ANFCA was able to provide stable leadership and employment to our provincial team and provided leadership support and assistance at the local level on an as need basis. During 2020/21 ANFCA successfully onboarded three new employees to fulfil project requirements and welcomed a returning employee back to the team. Throughout the pandemic, ANFCA provided ANFCA staff and every Friendship Centre employee in Alberta access to confidential support to access assistance to develop personal resiliency plans and to partake in group and individual art therapy sessions.

Friendship Centre Support: Training, Orientation and Capacity Building – 2020/21 continued to see positive gains toward addressing the recognized need and improved proficiency to gather, analyze and report on the achievements, shortfalls, and emerging opportunities of and for Friendship Centres. The ANFCA implemented vital technology/software upgrades which largely insulated ANFCA operations from harsh impacts of COVID 19. Over 2020/21, the ANFCA has been working to enhance community-based technology through supporting technology upgrades, internet speed testing, and training and has been working in collaboration to assist any interested Friendship Centre to access the technical support needed.

Extensive work has been undertaken to develop applicable training tools and resource materials for community-based organizational and governance leadership. Executive Directors and key Friendship Centre staff have been invited to participate in skill development training and workshops related to fiscal literacy, business continuity preparedness and technology.

Orientation and Emergency Planning - Executive Director Orientation processes and tools have been overhauled with thanks to the ED working group and ANFCA staff. Over the past year, the ANFCA, in collaboration with local Executive Directors and Alberta's Emergency Social Services team has worked to refine tools, training and increase capacity of the ANFCA and member Friendship Centres to be well equipped for emergency preparedness, be that flood, fire or pandemic.

Technical Support: During 2020/21 ANFCA staff undertook over 2235 meetings with twenty-one-member Friendship Centres with over 3500 hours logged. An additional significant number of undocumented virtual and phone-based communications were also undertaken monthly to provide support and assistance to Friendship Centre EDs, financial staff, and Boards. ANFCA has remained committed to the development of specific resources, supports and exploration of viable sector specific initiatives. Efforts continue to be undertaken to support and address needed governance revitalization through internal and external channels.

The roll out of the newly renamed Membership Agreement, with centralized information, expectations, and accountability process occurred at the onset of 2020/21.

Capacity Building: Through increased focus on updating operational direction and planning for outcomes, ANFCA and member Friendship Centres have transitioned away from business plans to five - year Strategic Plans with every Friendship Centre having been offered external guidance and direct assistance to develop a renewed strategic direction.

Fund Development and Sustainability: To provide member Friendship Centres with access to relevant funding opportunities, ANFCA has continued to pursue framework type Agreements with key funders. Additional efforts have been taken to explore, develop and seek funding of a recreational sports league for Friendship Centre youth. This specific request was highlighted during the ED Cultural Retreat held in Kananaskis in February 2020.

ANFCA has undertaken preliminary research and a prefeasibility study to better position member Friendship Centres to take on social enterprise endeavours and reduce reliance on government funding. Investment Readiness research and collaboration plans are being worked on with the expectation to roll out a new sector specific initiative in 2021/22 with interested Friendship Centres. Work on social enterprise endeavours has continued with the advancement of this work with two interested Friendship Centres. Building on operational space requirements defined in the previously commissioned ANFCA building needs assessment feasibility of a provincial graphic design house as a potential social enterprise venture is also being undertaken.

Program Funding and Managing Funding Contracts: ANFCA works in a collaborative effort with local Friendship Centres, Alberta Indigenous Relations, regional technicians and NAFC staff to build effective resources, templates and to support the effective roll up of data for provincial and national reporting.

ANFCA distributed \$3,158,712 of UPIP OC resources to 21-member Friendship Centres throughout the fiscal year. \$1,217,762 of UPIP PSS resources were administered among 21-member Friendship Centres for community-based projects. An additional round one infrastructure support allocation was administered to nine Friendship Centres in the amount of \$736,248.02, allocation of a second round Infrastructure funding in the amount of \$937,153. was allocated to 10 Alberta Friendship Centres

Alberta Indigenous Relations Grant (AIR) - The Government of Alberta's Indigenous Relations contributes operational funding to the ANFCA and further supports member Friendship Centres with annual grants of \$25,000/Centre.

Organizational Capacity Stream (UIP-OCS) Is intended to offer a stable core funding base from which member Friendship Centres may continue to deliver programs or services or provide case management and referral services that support urban Indigenous peoples and communities. Organizational Capacity - Core funding covers the day-to-day operating costs of an organization such as salaries for specified key positions, utilities, rent, and travel. \$3,158,712 UIP Operational OCS funds were administered.

Programs and Services Stream (UIP-PSS) The activities and outputs of the Programs and Services funding stream are intended to support investments in one or more projects area of focus -Women; Vulnerable Populations Youth; Transition Services; Outreach Programs; and Community Wellness. \$1,217,762 UIP PSS FC Program funding was administered to Friendship Centres.

COVID Response Funding With the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, the ANFCA and other PTAs from across Canada worked in collaboration with NAFC to secure emergency response resources. In total the Alberta's allocation of over \$8 million was administered over multiple funding rounds allowing greatest flexibility and ensuring equitable distribution and access to funds on an as need basis. In keeping with the spirit of the Friendship Centre Movement and cultural values, Alberta Friendship Centres worked in collaboration to ensure resources were distributed to Centres with greatest or evolving needs.

Support to ANFCA Committees: Throughout the fiscal year, ANFCA provided sound technical support and coordinated planning to advance the agendas of the Elders' Wisdom Circle (EWC); Executive Committee (EC); Alberta Aboriginal Youth Council (AAYC) and Executive Director's Committee (EDC). Additional technical support has been provided to the Presidents' Meeting format.

ANFCA Executive Committee - This focal Committee of ANFCA is formed and given structure from the authority of ANFCA Board of Directors. Annually and on a staggered basis of 2-year terms, ANFCA membership elects qualified individuals to fill the roles of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer; the committee also includes National Board Representative and a National Youth Representative and is further rounded out with the appointment of a Provincial Elder duly recommended from the Elders' Wisdom Circle. The Executive Committee meets on a regular basis to ensure the strategic agenda of the organization is moving forward under the direction of the Provincial Executive Director. In the early months of the pandemic, the ANFCA Executive Committee met frequently to ensure the highest level of support to provincial operations.

Elders' Wisdom Circle -The Elders Wisdom Circle (EWC) met at regular intervals throughout the year with an agenda that was often as diverse as the people sitting at the table. In 2020/21 the EWC spent time and focus considering matters related to education and transfer of knowledge, youth engagement, climate change and general wellbeing of the community. The impact of COVID on community-based Elders and EWC members has been significant. When and where possible, the ANFCA provided additional care packages and supports to ease the burden of the pandemic in Elders lives. The Elders' Wisdom Circle continues to play an essential role in ANFCA Governance structure and regularly provides cultural guidance to ANFCA Board and staff.

Alberta Aboriginal Youth Council (AAYC) For decades ANFCA has remained dedicated to providing on-going support to the AAYC. In addition to hosting regular youth council meetings, the ANFCA coordinates workshops, youth training sessions, and actively seeks new partnerships and funding options to advance youth initiatives. The AAYC is composed of urban Indigenous youth representatives from up to 21-member Friendship Centres. The AAYC provides recommendations to the Board of Directors on matters of common concern or areas of opportunity.

Executive Directors' Committee (EDC) Generally meets on a regular basis in alignment with the ANFCA Board of Directors meetings – During 2020/21 Executive Directors met weekly throughout the early days of the pandemic and then biweekly throughout the fiscal year. This formal (EDC)committee is comprised of the 21-member Friendship Centre Executive Directors and provides recommendations to ANFCA Board of Directors for their consideration.

Governance:

Policy and Research: Throughout 2020/21 ANFCA continued to carry out important governance work of the Association and provided assistance to member Centres through the development and sharing of materials, resources and support on specific matters related to governance in a pandemic time.

As many staff moved to virtual desks, remote work systems became an uncharted territory and as such new draft policies and procedures were developed over 2020/21

- Communication and Document Retention Policy –
- Data Destruction Policy
- Use of Information Technology Resource Procedure
- Coronavirus Policies and Procedures
- COVID 19 Sick Leave / Sick Time policy
- Supplemental Employee Benefits Briefing
- Emergency Response Policy Support
- Asset Management and Disposal Policy and Guide
- Gifts Policy and Guide
- Skilled and Unskilled Volunteer Rates Calculation and Tracking Method
- Virtual File Management
- Research and development of policy template to be in compliance with the Public Health Orders

Friendship Centre Support: ANFCA works in partnership with members Centres in the review, recommendation and revision of Bylaws, policies and to assist with the supporting good governance practices in the development of AGM planning and process support. ANFCA has developed a virtual AGM planning guide and has assisted interested Friendship Centres in planning and hosting of community-based virtual AGMs.

Emerging Friendship Centre Support: Each year ANFCA is contacted with expressions of interest for the addition of a Friendship Centre in a community not currently being served. Since 2020, the number of community contacts seeking information and support to establish a new Friendship Centre have quadrupled. The ANFCA currently is working with five communities in their preliminary exploration of processes involved in the Friendship Centre membership process.

Training and Capacity:

Capacity ANFCA Board and Presidents: Planning and coordination of President Meetings all with a focus to support Indigenous Leadership - Reclaiming Our Space; Development of President Meeting Training Module Schedule 2021/2022; and the creation of Executive Committee Orientation process for the onboarding of newly elected ANFCA officers.

Training: With the involvement of the EDC, training needs for Executive Directors has been defined and virtual format training modules for both EDs and Board members alike have been developed. Virtual

training opportunities and resources will continue to be made virtually available to ensure broadest involvement and participation.

In order to meet the varied and growing training needs of the community, the ANFCA has created a Leadership Training Series (webinars, resource materials and 1-1 enhanced sessions):

- Let's Talk Audit Workshop to support successful completion of the annual audit process – Annual Audit Guidelines and workshop
- An Introduction to the Leadership Series – EDs and Presidents
- Leadership Resiliency
- Financial Sustainability
- Keys to Effective Board / ED Relationship
- Leadership versus Management
- Strategic Planning Overview
- Board Roles & Responsibilities
- ED Roles & Responsibilities
- Operational Planning Overview
- Risk Management*
- Data Collection*
- Program Evaluation*

*In draft format

Strategic Planning: Through increased focus on updating operational direction and planning for outcomes, ANFCA and member Friendship Centres have transitioned away from business plans to five - year Strategic Plans with every Friendship Centre having been offered external guidance and direct assistance to develop a renewed strategic direction.

Partnership Development: ANFCA is committed to creating strong, culturally informed, and mutually reciprocal relationships with provincial organizations, groups, associations and relevant government departments for the advancement of Alberta's Friendship Centre Movement. Increasingly ANFCA is representing Friendship Centres and urban Indigenous perspectives on a range of working groups and councils, included but not limited to:

Formalized Relationship Agreements with

Alberta Red Cross
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
Alberta Health Services

Representation and Stakeholder

Confirmed Friendship Centre standing with the GOA as Essential Service Providers
Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Council – Alberta Emergency Response
Alberta Parent Council Association
Alberta Teachers' Association

Collaboration

GOA Claire's Law Advisory Group
AHS Indigenous Wellness Core
Ministry of Housing and Seniors
Alberta Human Trafficking Task Force
Alberta Emergency Social Services
Alberta Treasury Branch

Office of the Alberta Ombudsman
Alberta Human Rights
TELUS
Mind Fuel Alberta
Alberta Food Banks

Sector Specific:

Youth: As part of ANFCA's ongoing commitment to urban Indigenous youth, ANFCA provides technical support and leadership support to Alberta's Aboriginal Youth Council and through special events and provincial undertakings such as the Youth and Elders Gathering and Rise Up

Rise Up: A youth leadership/civic engagement initiative. In 2020/21 Rise Up youth recorded nearly 930 volunteer hours and through training, events and community sessions engaged over 160 individual youth in the pursuit of knowledge and leadership. From cultural teachings and time with Elders to facilitator training and knowledge sharing to mentorship training and community-based workshops, AAYC and Rise Up youth have increased cultural understanding and become informed advocates, storytellers, and public speakers on matters related to UNDRIP, TRC, and Jordan's Principle. Through virtual storytelling and social media engagement, Rise Up youth have had virtual reach to over 250,000 contacts. Youth involved in provincial undertakings have spent time with Elders from across Alberta, youth advocate, Michael Redhead Champagne and Senator Murray Sinclair.

Elders: ANFCA has continued to work with and on behalf of the EWC and Elders at the provincial level. Over 100 wellness and cultural bundles were shipped to Elders across Alberta to ensure connections remained strong and that Elders were well supported with access to additional food security and mental well-being resources. Through partnership with TELUS, the ANFCA was able to administer 138 sim cards and \$0 cellular plan to Elders across Alberta. This connectivity initiative ensured Elders had means of reliable communication during periods of isolation during COVID.

Youth and Elders Gathering: Due to COVID the longstanding Youth and Elders Event was revised and hosted as a virtual event with 26 participants involved in virtual transmission of knowledge and engagement.

Women: In an effort to continue to specifically work to reduce harm to and improve the well-being of urban Indigenous women, ANFCA has multiple provincial initiatives underway with emerging partnerships evolving

Working In Friendship to Eliminate Violence: ANFCA has engaged with all interested Friendship Centres to gather perspectives through a series of virtual community engagement sessions. The extensive data collected will be analysed and will serve to inform a province-wide strategic anti-violence action framework.

Centring Relationships: Provincial Partnership ANFCA, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (AASAS) and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) are working in collaboration to focus on reducing intersectional barriers for Indigenous survivors of sexual and domestic violence by strengthening and amplifying community-based approaches. 'Centring Relationships' is a three-year

project in partnership with ACWS and AASAS based on the MMIWGs Inquiry Report key theme "The power and Responsibility of Relationships" in addressing violence against Indigenous women.

Protecting Our Sacred Fires: Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation Prevention ANFCA will be undertaking a baseline assessment of matters related to human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Alberta's urban Indigenous communities to inform the work. Elders will be engaged to ensure cultural teachings and Indigenous content is infused in the project. ANFCA will begin recruiting youth in 2021/22 to be trained as youth facilitators.

Connectivity for Safety: ANFCA has built a relationship with TELUS Alberta to ensure women in vulnerable situations or those needing to flee violent relationships have safe, secure access to communication means. Six Friendship Centres joined this Connectivity for Safety initiative - 90 cell phones were provided to women at risk.

Professional Development: In partnership with subject matter experts within the FCM, ANFCA hosted 'Domestic and Family Violence during COVID 19' and 'Sexual Exploitation during COVID 19' workshops for Friendship Centre staff across the province.

Education:

Circle of Learning-An Urban Indigenous Education Framework: Throughout 2020/21 ANFCA and two Friendship Centres of exploration delved into possible reasoning behind the disconnect of urban Indigenous children and their families from the Alberta public education system. 1,048 individuals accessed Circle of Learning information within Sites of Exploration This work focused on urban Indigenous children in grades one to three. The final report of this 29-month initiative is available in the AGM Board Kit and through the ANFCA by request. In its conclusion, The Circle of Learning Initiative has identified systemic barriers and key actionable steps for improvements to be realized with Alberta Education.

At its core, a meaningful urban Indigenous education framework must include factors of foundational importance such as sustainability, growth-fostering relationships, cultural safety, links to knowledge keepers, and trusted community and cultural connections. Many partnerships have been developed throughout this initiative, gaining ANFCA different seats with Indigenous education stakeholders in Alberta.

Key Findings:

- Urban Indigenous families' definition of 'parental engagement' is different than that of Alberta Education.
- ANFCA and Friendship Centres are a key player in the integration of all aspects of the Quality Standards documents (Alberta Education, 2019).

Facts of Discovery:

- 62% of Friendship Centres analyzed are regularly called upon to support schools with cultural programming and 81% of Friendship Centres analyzed have identified relationships with the schools in their community
- 57% of Friendship Centres analyzed have formal literacy and/or Indigenous language programs operating within their Centre
- 68% of 21 Friendship Centre community environmental scans completed identified that First Nation Metis Inuit (FNMI) workers are unavailable within their community.

Point of View – Families:

- 59% of Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified they are unaware of supports in place within the school or community to help their child(ren) succeed academically
- 92% of parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to see and hear Indigenous culture, values, and traditions reflected in their child(ren)'s schoolwork and/or at school
- 48% of parents surveyed disagree or strongly disagree that their child(ren)'s school is meeting their family expectations for Indigenous culture, values, and content within their child's school and schoolwork
- 36% of Circle of Learning families surveyed identified transportation to and from school and supports as a barrier
- 45% of Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified that there were none or they were unaware of volunteering opportunities within their child(ren)'s school or opportunities that encourage parental participation

Reflection

- *The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study* (2010), highlights that 58% of urban Indigenous peoples have claimed “no opportunity” (pp.48) in learning their Indigenous history
- *During the COVID pandemic*, Alberta Education reported 25,000 children have gone unregistered within the Alberta school system (Alberta Education, 2021).

Circle of Learning - Next Steps

In order to see meaningful outcomes and to address longstanding educational disconnection between public education and urban Indigenous students and their families' recommendations include:

- Alberta schools need to honour Indigenous peoples as Canada's First Peoples by creating culturally safe spaces within schools and openly showcase local Indigenous culture, protocol, voices, and stories
- Sustained and adequate funding must be committed to support student success in schools, thus creating channels for Friendship Centres to act as a conduit for establishing cultural education hub workers to assist schools and school boards in building relationships with urban Indigenous families
- ANFCA is awaiting a response from GOA on advancing finding in phase one of Circle of Learning.

Student Support Initiative: As part of the national response to COVID, ANFCA in partnership with NAFC was able to administer \$654,000.00 to support positive student learning outcomes in Alberta. Seventeen of 21 Friendship Centres opted to participate in the undertaking with provincewide initiatives carried by the ANFCA to ensure broad reach to all Friendship Centre communities - so no youth in need of support would be left behind. Results included student support engagement provided to over 3000 participants:

- Development and rollout of tutoring and mentorship programs
- Increased technology access- resourcing of students Chromebooks and tablets
- Enhanced connection to culture through land-based activities, Elder interaction, virtual teachings and storytelling
- Developed culturally informed and support resources such as cultural kits, backpack with school supplies, literacy (books/activities) bags, arts and crafts totes.
- Provincial Student Support activities – coordinated in partnership with community-based Friendship Centres:
- Developed and introduced STEM training and design program in partnership with Mind Fuel Alberta – 190 participants provincially

- Fitbit Challenge -Created and launched campaign to increase physical activities and to support mental wellness – 420 participants provincially
- An assortment of Student Support resource kits were provided to member Friendship Centres including: Early Literacy and Math Sets; Cree Syllabics; Resources on traditional medicines and land-based activities.

Justice:

Children of Incarcerated Parents: To help facilitate and move the important conversation of Canadian Coalition for Children of Incarcerated Parents forward at a national level (NAFC resolution #19-020), ANFCA has provided administrative support to NAFC and has become an active member of the Canadian Coalition for Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCCIP) which sees numerous organizations across Canada involved. In this collaboration with NAFC and CCCIP, an opportunity has been provided to develop a national survey to gain an understanding of the needs of families in our Friendship Centre communities who are dealing with children of incarcerated parents – the rollout of the survey is expected to be delivered by October 2021. Continued dialogue has developed alliances nationally and internationally with the hope of providing solutions for challenges faced by both children and families impacted by incarceration.

Environment:

Building on green work previously undertaken, ANFCA has returned focus to support Friendship Centre Green Infrastructure needs through information sharing, technical resources, and administration of funding.

Green Initiatives/Green Infrastructure: ANFCA administered round one infrastructure support to nine Friendship Centres in the amount of \$736,248.02 and second round infrastructure funding to ten Alberta Friendship Centres in the amount of \$937,153.57. In addition, ANFCA has finalized the development of a Relationship Agreement with Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) Green Building Technology (GBT) and has entered into a working relationship with GBT to carryout building sustainability assessments with all interested Friendship Centres with a goal to create not less than four sustainable Friendship Centre community hubs (3-year project).

Health and Wellness:

Through the strategic direction of the Board, ANFCA has continued to focus ongoing efforts on Health and Wellness in a range of forms. ANFCA advocates for member Friendship Centres and is working to address long standing relationship gaps which exist in some communities through the development of relationship accords and collaboration with other provincial organizations. Areas of focus includes, but is not limited to:

COVID Response: Engagement in Federal and Provincial COVID working groups and vaccine committees. Advocacy and support in the roll out of vaccination clinics in and through Friendship Centres Engagement with Alberta Health Services, medical experts, and knowledge keepers to ensure current information of pandemic was readily accessible to member Friendship Centres in a timely way

Coordination of training, information sessions, advocacy, support in problem solving with Friendship Centres on health-related matters and disparities including mental health strategies, communicable disease protocols, resiliency planning, vaccine clinic development, rapid testing, and resource development.

ANFCA supported 11 Friendship Centres to host vaccine clinics, coordinate with community stakeholders and partners to co-host clinic, or provided transportation, cultural support or coordinated block bookings to support their community members access the vaccine. ANFCA has administered over \$250,000 of funding to support Friendship Centres in the roll out of vaccines in Alberta.

Youth Mental Health and Resiliency: In partnership with engaged Friendship Centres *Filling Our Tipis: Youth Mental Wellness and Resiliency* Initiative has continued during 2020/21 expanded the ways in which Tipi Pole Teachings were shared through this dynamic initiative. In its third year of delivery with partner Friendship Centres Lloydminster, Miywasin, and Sagitawa, - ANFCA was able to develop a youth-based, lived experience Tipi Pole Teaching booklet to be shared as a resource along with an 8' tipi for each of Alberta's 21-member Friendship Centres.

ANFCA is exploring the possibility of continued funding to expand the program which is founded on traditional teaching systems that promotes Indigenous values, positive mental wellbeing, and resiliency for Indigenous peoples aligning with well-established western mental wellness and resilience building protective factors.

Circle of Life: Cancer Prevention - A two-year initiative in partnership with Sagitawa Friendship Society (Peace River) and the Hinton Friendship Centre. Outreach to assist in relationship and resource development was extended to each interested member Friendship Centre. Each partner Friendship Centre implemented *Circle of Life* for one year. The goal of *Circle of Life* was to explore, develop, and implement strategies where the cancer care journey is self-determined by Indigenous peoples living in two Friendship Centre communities. Ultimately, the initiative sought to reduce cancer incidence and related risk factors at the same time as providing culturally safe navigation support to community members and their families journeying through cancer.

Rising cancer incidence, lower survival rates, lower screening rates, and later diagnosis among Indigenous peoples is indicative of the growing inequity and disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples – *Circle of Life* sought to minimize inequities and improve health outcomes. As the largest urban Indigenous service delivery mechanism in Alberta with more than 300,000 points of service annually, Friendship Centres are well positioned to act as a catalyst to increase awareness of and encourage cancer prevention strategies as well as support community members journeying through cancer in ways that are self-determined by urban Indigenous communities.

The Circle of Life Project came to completion in March 2021. Three Cancer Screening Pathways resources were created and are now available for download from the ANFCA website. ANFCA is working with an external stakeholder to continue and increase cancer screenings accessibility at Friendship Centres.

Building Relationship: ANFCA is working with multiple stakeholders and groups to advance the role of Friendship Centres in health outcomes. Priority work is being undertaken with AHS in the development of a robust relationship agreement that acknowledges the work of Friendship Centres and their role in Indigenous health outcomes. This agreement will include a collaborative workplan to overcome disparity and increase opportunities for positive health outcomes for urban Indigenous people serviced through member Friendship Centres.

Friendship Centre COVID Response Highlights:

Mental Health: One of the greatest impacts of the COVID19 pandemic has been the increased need for mental health supports. Understanding this need, Alberta Friendship Centres have recruited mental health professionals to create and provide culturally safe and informed supports, counselling and to coordinate referrals for additional mental health supports. Friendship Centres provided support all community members with a significant increase in securing, developing and/or providing supports for new moms and their newborns.

Many Friendship Centres were innovative in offering mental health support with a cultural foundation through connections to Elders, delivery of traditional medicines, craft supplies and sessions, story telling and virtually based cultural teaching and workshops. A pleasant yet unexpected side effect of creating the virtual cultural programming was a newfound ability to reach many more community members who were not mobile or engaged prior to the pandemic.

Food Security: Throughout the pandemic, Friendship Centres were able to extend 101,773 service points of food security support to their communities. To meet the growing need for food access, some centres renovated, updated and/or modified their kitchens and practices to provide more consistent access to hot foods, brown bag lunches, and groceries. All 21 community-based Friendship Centres in Alberta have provided some level of food security to their community during 2020/21. Creative thinking was put to work to develop delivery strategies to support those most in need and unable to come to the centre to access food security support.

A Friendship Centre in the Central Zone provided 17,650 food hampers, bread donations, brown bag lunches, and hot meals to their community.

With the suspension of face-to-face learning in Alberta's public schools, breakfast and lunch programming for countless children across the region also abruptly stopped. Friendship Centres filled this much needed gap by providing families in need with access to nutritious food, lunches and snacks for kids to have at home. Additionally, during times of traditional holidays, when centres would typically host community gatherings and holiday celebrations complete with food giveaways, Friendship Centres adapted their approaches and found innovative ways to provide support one delivery at a time.

Elder Supports: For many Elders in Friendship Centre communities additional support such as delivery of medications, transportation to medical appointments, access to technology and communication channels, food hampers, personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies were delivered by Friendship Centre staff. The important connection to community helpers and caregivers eases the intense isolation they were experiencing. With the introduction to technology resources and tools and innovative virtual learning platforms created additional opportunities for Elders to access supports and increase community connections. The delivery of food, wellness and cultural supports provided a sense of security and continued community connection for the Elders.

Cultural Programming: During this reporting period, the growth in cultural programming using alternative platforms has been nothing short of remarkable. Centres have demonstrated the ability to provide supports to all age groups and technology skill levels. And youth have benefited from enhanced cultural programming, traditional mental health support, and discussions with Elders. The delivery of traditional medicines enabled individuals, families, and communities to come together in prayer during difficult times. Innovation overcame isolation and created new ways for sharing and exploration of teachings, languages, and crafts – all of which have helped stabilize our communities. Centres have provided access to family support groups, wellness sessions, traditional crafting and sewing sessions, and cultural teachings that included bannock making, beading, sewing, moccasin crafting, drum and rattle making to mention but a few highlights.

Transportation has been a barrier in Friendship Centre communities for many years and in more recent times has been further amplified by the discontinuation of bus and taxi services, leaving many Elders and families unable to access essential programs and services offered through local Friendship Centres. During COVID with the closure of public schools and school bus routes, transportation challenges grew, enhancing the level of isolation felt by many community members. In some circumstances the increased lack of access to transportation highlighted numerous high-risk situations involving family and intimate partner violence. Recognizing the urgent need to respond to this growing concern, Friendship Centres, largely in rural or remote areas, developed strategies to improve transportation access through the acquisition of commuter vehicles that would support the safe transportation of people away from unsafe situations and circumstances or to medical appointments and vaccine clinics or ensure the safe delivery of personal hampers, food and medical supplies, and traditional medicines. During 2020/21 Friendship Centres purchased seven vehicles and provided 803 points of transportation support.

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**Number of Vans
Purchased**

Academic Supports: Many urban Indigenous students were already struggling in Alberta's pre-pandemic public education system, and without considered and culturally appropriate academic supports, access to and support for technology/internet for remote schooling, school supplies and learning resources, not to mention food during the day, these same students kept falling further behind. To respond to this unmet community need, Friendship Centres stepped in to support their community members by sourcing and delivering appropriate school supplies, technology, youth wellness kits, and food security hampers. For those families in need, Friendship Centres supplied age and task appropriate devices, internet access and support to guide families and children through technology to access online schooling. Youth wellness kits and virtual youth groups provided a method of connecting with youth individually as well as providing a creative outlet while building deeper connections to culture. Tutoring opportunities were offered across the province with many Friendship Centres also providing homework clubs. By providing these virtual services and delivery programs, Friendship Centres demonstrated the importance of learning and have encouraged students to view education more positively.

Innovation: Virtual programming, while not a new concept before the pandemic, grew increasingly popular to ensure Friendship Centre members had access to critical services. Throughout the pandemic, virtual programming benefited every age group from hosting support groups for parents and individuals, through to supporting knowledge and growth of children and education for youth, to social engagements and cultural teachings with Elders. In some communities, filling the delivery services gap during covid has created a potential social enterprise means pos-pandemic. While in other communities, story time and cultural teaching time with Elders and language hubs have emerged as priorities. Friendship Centre Innovation has come in many forms during the pandemic.

Summary 2020/21

The responsiveness and innovation demonstrated during complicated days of COVID 19 is acknowledged by the immense volume of work carried out by ANFCA and Friendship Centres in 2020/21. As the pandemic continues to negatively impact all aspects of community, ANFCA and Friendship Centres continue to seek opportunities to improve services and meet the diverse and ever-changing needs of the community. This annual Report serves to document the good work of Friendship Centres in Alberta.