

Wisdom Council and Elder Circle

Terms of Reference

Executive Sponsors

Vice President, Provincial Clinical Excellence
VP & Medical Director, Clinical Support Services and Provincial Clinical Excellence

Administrative support

Senior Provincial Director, Indigenous Wellness Core
Executive Director, Indigenous Wellness Core

Purpose

The following Terms of Reference (TOR) outline operations of the Alberta Health Services (AHS) Wisdom Council and Elder Circle.

The Wisdom Council and Elder Circle reports to the AHS Executive Leadership team and to the President and Chief Executive Officer of AHS. It is a provincial Council representing the health needs of Albertans who identify as Indigenous.

Council Objectives, Functions and Duties

The Wisdom Council and Elder Circle will provide guidance and recommendations to AHS on service delivery, program design, and evaluation for province-wide, culturally appropriate health services delivered by AHS to Alberta's Indigenous peoples.

The Wisdom Council and Elder Circle will provide guidance and recommendations that draw upon traditional and cultural knowledge and practices to ensure appropriate and innovative health service delivery for Indigenous peoples in Alberta.

The Wisdom Council and Elder Circle will consider health priorities, resource needs and service delivery for Indigenous people throughout the province, drawing upon expertise of the Elder Circle and other expertise as required, to provide guidance and advice to AHS on the following, but not limited to, as it relates to the health of Alberta's Indigenous peoples:

- Improving access, quality, and health outcomes
- Teaching and values to support cultural safety, humility, literacy, and professional education
- Relationship and partnership development
- Health literacy
- Communication strategies
- Program development
- Research and evaluation

- Traditional wellness journey through traditional language and ceremonial teachings

The Wisdom Council and Elder Circle will:

- Bring the voices of Indigenous peoples and provide guidance to AHS system-wide priorities and strategies to improve health and wellness for all First Nations, Métis and Inuit who live and work in the province of Alberta.
- Provide guidance on how AHS programs/services can be adapted to meet the health needs of Indigenous peoples and enable services to support the traditional wellness journey of Indigenous peoples in primary, secondary and tertiary health service delivery.
- Identify issues, gaps and barriers such as unequal access for Indigenous peoples and identify strategies to address them.
- Provide guidance on health planning, implementation and evaluation through community engagement strategies that maximize effective internal and external stakeholder relationships and increase AHS' involvement with Indigenous communities.
- Consider workforce development issues and make recommendations to effectively access workforce career development and sustainability for Indigenous peoples.
- Provide guidance and recommendations on workforce development within AHS that contributes to competence in cross-cultural relationships and improves cultural safety in health service delivery.
- Collaborate with AHS leadership to develop annual commitments with measurable outcomes aimed to improve the wellness journey of all Indigenous people living and working in Alberta.
- Collaborate with IWC and AHS leadership to develop an annual report for endorsement by the AHS Executive Leadership Team. Annual reports are posted to the AHS website and available publicly.

The voluntary role of Council is advisory and advocacy in nature. An advisor seeks to inform a process, and an advocate seeks to ensure an outcome that is in the best interest of all Indigenous People living and working in Alberta.

The Council is not a decision-making board and is not comprised of elected officials; however, its focus is on bringing the voice of Indigenous people to health planning and is vital in both creating a better health system and in supporting Indigenous peoples where they live. Council operates at a system-wide level to improve health system access and supports for Indigenous peoples.

Accountability

Council meetings are conducted respectfully with an emphasis on listening and understanding to ensure all members have an opportunity to participate and that all perspectives are heard. It is the responsibility of AHS in collaboration with the Co-Chairs and Council as a whole to manage conflict when it arises, through consensus and ceremony, as appropriate. Additional requested participation for all Council members are as follows:

- Demonstrate an interest in Indigenous health and wellness, representing regional voices and bringing forward perspectives on lived experience.
- Attend scheduled meetings and notify the Indigenous Engagement Advisor if unable to attend.
- Travel to in-person meetings and submit appropriate expenses for reimbursement (see *Remuneration*).

- Be prepared for meetings by reviewing meeting materials in advance.
- Demonstrate respect for fellow Council members, AHS representatives, presenters, and members of the public and act in accordance with the [AHS Code of Conduct](#).
- Act as a representative on behalf of Council on other AHS committees as appointed and bring forward topics from these committees to Council as appropriate.
- Actively participate in Council work between Council meetings.

Council activities are to align with priorities approved by the Council that guide the work of the group.

Conflict of Interest & Confidentiality

Political Activity

- AHS is a politically neutral organization and does not support or endorse any political party or candidate at any level of government.
- Council is a public body and an extension of AHS. Members representing Council in-person, on social media, or in any other setting are to remain non-partisan.
- The [AHS Political Activity policy](#) recognizes the personal right of AHS representatives to participate in political activities. Council members participating in political activities shall not do so as Council or AHS representatives. For example, individuals participating in an electoral campaign or publicly endorsing a political candidate shall do so as individual citizens and refrain from using their membership on Council to further a political outcome.

Conflict of Interest

- Recognizing that Council members have interests outside of AHS, they are expected to fulfill their responsibilities in a manner that avoids involvement in any potential, apparent or real conflict of interest situations.
- Members are to promptly disclose and address any real or perceived conflicts should they arise.
- In the course of carrying out member duties, no member shall take part in a decision or action that may further a private interest of the member, of any person directly associated with that member, or a minor child of that member, in accordance with the AHS Conflict of Interest Policy.
- Should a conflict arise during the course of a meeting, the member must make a verbal declaration of that conflict and must withdraw from the meeting without participating in the discussion or voting on the matter.
- Members and AHS employees who interact with Council shall act honestly, in good faith, leaving aside personal interests to advance the public interest.
- No member shall use the office or power of a Council to influence a decision made by Council or the Board to further a private interest.
- To mitigate real or perceived conflicts, AHS employees, physicians, Alberta Health employees, and other members who have identified conflict may not serve in the capacity of Co-Chair.
- In the event that a conflict has been identified, it may be necessary to request the affected Council member to step down from the Council and any other associated AHS volunteer activities.

Confidentiality

Members will:

- Receive confidential information and will not distribute or relay confidential information outside of their role as a Council member.
- Seek clarity when needed to confirm that the information they wish to share is intended for a public audience.
- Ensure confidentiality shall encompass both AHS information and that shared in confidence by other members of Council (i.e., personal health information).
- Sign a confidentiality agreement in accordance with the [Alberta Evidence Act](#) and the [Health Information Act](#).

Diversity and Inclusion

- All who are part of or who interact with AHS are protected from discrimination on the grounds of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status and sexual orientation ([Alberta Human Rights Act](#)).
- Members who demonstrate discriminatory behaviour in conflict with AHS policies and the *Alberta Human Rights Act* will be asked to relinquish their membership on the Council.

Code of Conduct

The [AHS Code of Conduct](#) outlines the values, principles and standards of conduct that guide our actions and interactions. All Council members and AHS staff are to exhibit behavior in accordance with the Code of Conduct, including:

- Treating people with respect, compassion, dignity and fairness.
- Being open, honest, and loyal.
- Acting ethically and upholding professional standards.
- Taking responsibility for our own actions and expecting the same of others.
- Respecting confidentiality and privacy.

Members may be asked to relinquish their Council membership if their behaviour is found to be in conflict with the AHS *Code of Conduct* or *Conflict of Interest* policies. Members who are unable to follow Code of Conduct guidelines during Council meetings will be subject to removal from the meeting by the Council Co-Chairs and potential subsequent action in accordance with AHS Management and Human Resource processes.

Wisdom Council and Elder Circle Membership

Eligibility:

The Wisdom Council shall be appointed by the AHS Executive Leadership Team. There shall be a maximum of 20 voting members on the Council. The membership will be comprised of volunteers who:

- Are 18 years of age, or older.
- Identify as Indigenous and live in Alberta.
- Represent the provincial perspective with broad representation across Alberta and within each of the AHS Zones including urban and rural areas. The goal is to include two representatives from each of the AHS Zones (South, Calgary, Central, Edmonton and North) as well as representation from Métis and Inuit communities and Indigenous youth. An effort will be made to ensure equitable Treaty, rural and urban representation, particularly among the Elder Circle.

Membership shall consist of:

- Wisdom Council (12-14 members)
- Elder Circle (6-8 members)
- Maximum membership: 20

Non-members shall consist of:

- President and CEO and/or designate
- Senior Provincial Director, Indigenous Wellness Core
- Executive Director, Indigenous Wellness Core
- Executive Director, Community Engagement and Communications, or designate
- Indigenous Engagement Advisor, Indigenous Wellness Core
- Cultural helpers
- Indigenous Wellness Core directors, as needed

Terms

We value the experience of Wisdom Council members and value diverse representation and new voices to bring a variety of perspectives and experiences to the conversation. As such:

- The term of office for Council members will be for a maximum of six (6) years, served in two, three-year terms unless otherwise determined by the AHS Executive Leadership Team.
- The length of appointments to the Elder Circle will be self-determined following an annual review between the Elder Circle member and the Co-Chairs to discuss ability and desire for ongoing commitment to their role.

Recruitment and Vacancy Management

AHS will work in conjunction with Wisdom Council members and Indigenous communities in Alberta to recruit members who are supported by their communities and appointed by the AHS Executive Leadership Team.

Candidates will complete an Expression of Interest form, undergo a formal or informal interview involving at least one of the Council Co-Chairs and the Indigenous Health Engagement Advisor. Additional screening may include reaching out to the individuals' community for references or other steps deemed appropriate by the Council Co-Chairs.

Those moved forward for appointment must be approved by the AHS Executive Leadership Team.

Elders are identified based on unique culture and traditions of their communities. **The Wisdom Council membership shall name members to the Elder Circle.**

Resignation

Members wishing to resign from Council during their term should communicate this intention in writing to AHS in a timely manner. An exit interview will be offered and is conducted by AHS Community Engagement to support transparency.

Distinct Roles

Elder Circle

Honouring diversity of language amongst Indigenous cultures means a precise description of an Elder isn't available. We must seek to understand how each community describes their Recognized Elders.

Through Indigenous ways, Recognized Elders are held in high esteem and recognized by the members of the community as persons with knowledge and wisdom who share knowledge with their communities on topics such as life and culture, experience, vision, values, and compassion.

They are Keepers (Knowledge Keepers) of stories, ceremony, spiritual teachings, and medicines.

The Elder Circle is made up of 6-8 Elders. The role of the Elder Circle members is to provide guidance and insight to Wisdom Council members based on their experience and status within Indigenous communities.

While Elder Circle members are not expected to attend Wisdom Council meetings in their entirety, including presentations, they are welcome to participate in the full meeting. Elder Circle members will be encouraged to attend at a specified time to provide wisdom and guidance to the Wisdom Council. The time frame for Elder Circle participation will be provided by the Co-Chairs with the notice of the meeting and directly to the members of the Elder Circle. The goal is to ensure AHS and the Wisdom Council make the best use of the valuable time of Elders and respect the key leadership roles they hold in their home communities.

Co-Chairs

Co-Chairs will be appointed by members of the Wisdom Council for adoption by the AHS Executive Leadership Team. Each Co-Chair will fulfill the duties of a Council Chair by sharing these responsibilities at all meetings of the Wisdom Council. The Co-Chairs will hold the position for up to a three-year term and be available during their tenure to participate in the planning and implementation of Council meetings, activities, and communications.

Indigenous Engagement Advisor

The Indigenous Engagement Advisor is a member of the AHS Indigenous Wellness Core or another provincial program as appropriate. Advisor duties include:

- Facilitate collaboration and effective communication between Council and all partners, internal and external to AHS and the IWC.
- Maintain ongoing relationships between Council members, AHS Executive Leadership and the IWC to provide consistent participation, documentation, record management and monitoring of follow up actions to support Council meetings.
- Represent, where directed, AHS and the IWC by enhancing relationships through ongoing engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities.
- Maintain documentation of all meeting's minutes by highlighting actions identified and facilitating achievement of WC recommendations including following up with action plans, implementation of Wisdom Council commitments and preparation of Wisdom Council annual reports and published materials.

- Coordinate and facilitate regular meetings with Council members and Co-Chairs and AHS or IWC leadership.
- Act as the public contact person to manage, direct, and address issues incoming through communication channels.
- Provide guidance to the Wisdom Council to support interaction with AHS leadership and with the public.

AHS Community Engagement & External Relations

AHS Community Engagement & External Relations assists with Council support through:

- Logistical and process supports to Council.
- Onboarding and orientation support for members.
- Collaborating with Council and AHS to plan activities.
- Creating awareness of Council across AHS and to the public.
- Promoting Council through communication channels (e.g., social media, public service announcements, etc.).
- Managing Council of Chairs meetings and activities.
- Coordinating Council deliverables and authoring Council documents to be submitted to the Board.
- Seeking out opportunities for Council involvement in engagement activities.

Meeting Frequency

There shall be a minimum of two in-person and two virtual meetings per year which shall be scheduled at the beginning of the fiscal year. Wisdom Council members are asked to attend all scheduled meetings or notify the Indigenous Engagement Advisor if they are unable to attend.

Where weather or ability to travel is an impediment to holding a meeting, technology may be incorporated (Video conferencing, Skype, Zoom, or Telehealth at AHS sites closer to individual's homes could be considered.)

The Elder Circle will attend for one-half day meeting to provide their guidance and advice to Wisdom Council members on any key initiatives or decision-making items. They are welcome to attend the Wisdom Council meeting in its entirety.

Quorum

A quorum shall consist of 50 per cent plus one of the core membership. Electronic/virtual participation is permitted.

Open invitation

The Minister of Health and the Deputy Minister of Health, or their respective designate(s), have an open invitation to attend Council meetings. The schedule of Wisdom Council meetings is shared with Alberta Health annually by AHS Community Engagement.

Decisions

Decisions shall be made based on consensus.

Support to Council

Council will be supported by Permanent Resource Persons, the Indigenous Engagement Advisor, the Indigenous Wellness Core, and AHS Community Engagement and External Relations.

Permanent Resource Persons will include those with expertise and knowledge in the health spectrum for Indigenous peoples and will support the Council. They will participate in Council meetings in a non-voting, ex officio capacity to assist Council in achieving its objectives.

Permanent Resource Persons are individuals appointed by virtue of their role within the organization and are submitted to the rules and regulations of their organizational positions. Duties of Permanent Resource Persons include:

- Attendance at all Council meetings and events.
- Sharing AHS strategies, updates, and plans in a timely manner.
- Participation in development of Council commitments, priorities, and activities to ensure alignment with AHS Indigenous Wellness Core provincial planning and operational priorities.
- Identification and provision of opportunities for Council participation, input, and engagement.
- Reporting back to Council how input was used.
- Acting as a champion for Council and encouraging other AHS teams to connect.

Remuneration of Wisdom Council and Elder Circle Members

Remuneration of Wisdom Council and Elder Circle members will be in accordance with the AHS Indigenous Traditional Protocols approved by AHS Executive Leadership Team. AHS Executive may authorize payment of expenses incurred by members of the Council while acting as a member, which, in the opinion of the Executive, are reasonable. Payment of such expenses shall be pursuant to the terms set out in the *AHS Travel, Hospitality and Working Session Expenses – Approval, Reimbursement, and Disclosure policy #1122*, as amended from time to time. Consideration will be given to aligning honorarium with cultural protocols.

Notice

Notice of the date, time, and place of every meeting of the Wisdom Council shall be given electronically, at least four weeks prior to a meeting. In the event the Wisdom Council Co-Chairs or the Executive Leadership Team determines an urgent requirement to meet, notice of the time and place of the meeting may be given electronically or by telephone at least 24 hours in advance.

Agenda/Minutes

The Indigenous Wellness Core will provide administrative support for meeting scheduling, agendas, minutes, and communications.

Minutes will be circulated to the Wisdom Council members as well as the ad hoc members, in a timely manner.

Resources

Resources required for the Wisdom Council may include:

- Volunteer expenses.

- Alberta Health Services personnel.
- Office supplies.
- Meeting space.

Amendments

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the Wisdom Council every three years or as required by the AHS Executive Leadership Team. The next review should occur in spring 2026.

Approval

These Terms of Reference will be approved by the AHS Executive Leadership Team.