

Appendix 6

Statement on Meaningful Engagement of Aboriginal People

This statement is intended to act as a guidepost for how partnerships can better be facilitated between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal players. It is in response to requests from CAAN members on how best to frame issues of importance when pursuing partnership agreements. It recognizes that there are different levels of engagement, and at times, political issues may arise. While we are aware and respect the choices of individual Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS (APHAs) to sit on various committees or Boards, this level of representation does not abdicate the rights of other APHAs to have access to culturally controlled programs and services.

CAAN originated in 1992, as a group of concerned Aboriginal people, some living with HIV/AIDS saw a need. The group incorporated as the National Aboriginal People with HIV/AIDS Network (NAPHAN), however the group was not able to fully mobilize, in large part because dollars were not available to the Aboriginal community in the first two phases of Canada's National AIDS Strategy.

When the second phase of the National AIDS Strategy (NAS-II) ended in 1997, CAAN became incorporated as it secured project dollars through the then Medical Services Branch (now First Nations & Inuit Health Branch) of Health Canada and established an office in Ottawa. Shortly after, many Aboriginal HIV/AIDS groups who belonged to other national HIV/AIDS organizations withdraw their memberships and became members of CAAN. CAAN is a lead voice on Aboriginal HIV/AIDS issues, and for Aboriginal People Living with HIV/AIDS (APHAs) and Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Service Organizations (AASOs) because it has a primary mandate to address HIV/AIDS.

CAAN is one of the National Partners that works with the federal government to ensure a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS is available in Canada. In addition to CAAN, the National Aboriginal Council on HIV/AIDS (NACHA) provides policy advice to the federal government on Aboriginal HIV/AIDS issues. Both work closely together and have common members to ensure issues have streamlined and cohesive actions with clear roles and relationships.

This statement is to clarify that while CAAN respects the decisions of its members (individual and organizational) to make alignments wherever they see necessary, that Aboriginal groups continue to be in need of critical elements in any partnership negotiations that may be formed with the non-Aboriginal community. These are:

- Recognition and acceptance that Aboriginal people possess Treaty and Aboriginal Rights, and are not classified as a visible minority. The right to self-determination is key to addressing negative impacts of government sanctioned assimilation policies (Residential Schools, etc). Aboriginal people have parallel systems which must be recognized.
- Aboriginal people require adequate resources (not based on per capita formulas) to design, deliver and control culturally appropriate and relevant programs and services.



- Individual Aboriginal people have all the rights and freedoms available to anyone to choose which programs and services they access. This right to choose does not diminish the right to have Aboriginal-specific programs/services also available. As some Aboriginal people become involved with non-Aboriginal service providers, they do so as individuals and not as an official representative of the Aboriginal population.
- Aboriginal people come from diverse backgrounds and are not one homogenous group. This diversity is found within First Nations; between First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Some are based on risk behavior, gender imbalances, sexual orientation, social status, historical issues and often result in minorities within a minority, some of which are compounded by environmental factors, e.g. Correctional Institutions.
- There can be competing interests when considering partnerships. This can include perceptions that a larger organization may want to absorb the smaller group, or, that the larger group may see loss of funding as a threat. Both are valid that need to be openly discussed in order to better understand how to work together. It must be clear that what has contributed to many social challenges for Aboriginal people are based on non-Aboriginal society in general, backed by government policy, which sought to define both the problem and the solution for Aboriginal people, not in partnership with.
- Aboriginal peoples have distinct worldviews that govern how our societies are structured. Cross-cultural efforts are but one way of helping to bridge this divide.
- Aboriginal people often face many challenges which result in inequities that are not easily overcome. These “lived experiences” must be treated as the common ground which binds Aboriginal people together and who are the experts in their own communities and affairs. True and lasting solutions will only come from within the Aboriginal population.
- Aboriginal people must be full and equal partners in any relationship, and have the right to insist that community/cultural protocols and codes of conduct are respected. Skills transfer in some cases must be considered between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnerships so that Aboriginal people can advance the work themselves.
- Partnerships are oftentimes necessary and need to be negotiated with respect and a true willingness to realize mutual objectives without dictating the process or outcomes.
- Non-Aboriginal organizations do provide services to Aboriginal people. These need to be fairly assessed to determine: 1) whether these services are better delivered by an Aboriginal organization and if so, under what conditions; or 2) how best to collaborate with Aboriginal groups so that services provided by non-Aboriginal groups have proper referral systems, Aboriginal staffing, Aboriginal involvement and autonomy.
- A cornerstone of community development is the meaningful involvement, at all stages, of the community being targeted. •

