



**MEDIA RELEASE** | May 18, 2018

## **SYILX CHIEFS WELCOME MENTAL WELLNESS FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT**

(Unceded Syilx Territory/Westbank, BC: May 18, 2018) -The Chiefs of the *Syilx* Okanagan Nation welcome yesterday's announcement establishing a \$30 million fund targeted towards Mental Wellness. The much-anticipated funding agreement is a result of collaboration between the Province, Canada and the First Nations Health Council and will provide the much-needed resources to provide resources needed to address mental wellness issues at the community-level. The funding announcement is also an important step towards improving health outcomes for Indigenous Peoples, including Syilx Peoples. The funding announcement comes at a critical time where Syilx families and communities continue to battle the impacts of mental health and addictions-related issues on a daily basis.

For countless generations, Indigenous health has been connected to the health and well-being of our lands. The *Syilx* Okanagan Chiefs have been working at every level of advocacy to bring mental health and addictions issues to the forefront and welcomes this funding commitment that will hopefully shed light on these critical issues. The funding agreement also outlines priorities to improve structuring at the local, regional, and provincial levels aimed at ensuring that BC First Nations are full partners in the planning, design, funding in delivery of mental health and substance use services. This work will require effective partnerships with the Ministry of Child and Family Development, Interior Health and other organizations recognizing and respecting the need for Syilx-specific approaches to be fully developed and implemented.

OKIB Councillor Allan Louis, FNHC Interior Representative has stated that, "The *Syilx* Okanagan Nation's health and well-being is directly tied to the health of our lands. The *Syilx* Okanagan Nation has a long tradition of healing practices and approaches and the Nation is best positioned to design approaches aimed at improving the mental wellness outcomes for Syilx Peoples."

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the *Syilx* Okanagan Nation has stated that, "For years, we have advocated at every level for the funding necessary to initiate a Nation-coordinated approach to provide mental wellness services to our families and communities." Grand Chief Phillip concluded by stating, "Yesterday's announcement confirms that our years of advocacy has finally been heard."

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