

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Indigenous Health Committee develops new land acknowledgement statement

June is National Indigenous History Month in settler Canada – a time set aside to recognize the resilience, diversity, history and heritage of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. This event honours the stories of the Original Peoples and stewards of this land who continue to guide and enrich our communities. The Alberta Medical Association has chosen this month to unveil a new land acknowledgment statement, which reflects a deep respect and reverence for all those Indigenous Peoples who have come before us.

“The new land acknowledgement statement was developed by the AMA Public Affairs Branch, with guidance from AMA’s Indigenous Health Committee. Its goal is to honour the Original Peoples, the settlers who have come to call this place home, and our relationship to each other and the land where we all live together,” explains Dr. Cassandra Felske-Durksen, the chair of IHC. “Over the past year, we have met several times to explore how best to support the creation of a personal self-reflection for settlers and visitors that expresses their relationship with, not ownership of, the land. Land is not inanimate and is not an object: it is alive and it is a relation. Land acknowledgements are about so much more than just land and place – they are about people and spaces.”

Dr. Felske-Durksen, an Otipemisiwak family physician based out of the Indigenous Wellness Clinic at Edmonton’s Royal Alexandra Hospital, has helped several organizations develop territorial acknowledgements that include a commitment to reconciliatory action. As chair of IHC, she worked to ensure the AMA’s new land acknowledgement statement was mindful of intentionally naming all of the Indigenous Peoples within the Territory. “It’s an act of allyship against pan-Indigeneity,” she stresses. “Naming the many distinctions-based Original Peoples helps ensure their uniqueness is recognized and their stories, traditions and cultures are honoured.”

The new land acknowledgment statement, which will be officially rolled out in June, will be used at AMA meetings, gatherings, platforms and in other organizational communication. Watch the AMA website for more details over the coming weeks as IHC introduces the statement and shares an accompanying guide on usage, including pronunciations.

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