

New way of working together for Indigenous health

The Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada and CNA have signed a partnership accord to further develop their collaborative Indigenous health and nursing work.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary, A.N.A.C. chose Authentic Indigenous Health and Wellness Partnerships: Reclamative Leading Practices as the title of its 2016 national training forum in honour of its founding Indigenous nurse leaders. One of the highlights of the forum, held Feb. 15-17 in Montreal, was the signing ceremony.

“Through this partnership accord, both A.N.A.C. and CNA can demonstrate how well we can work together on mutual goals,” A.N.A.C. president Lisa Bourque Bearskin said. “While autonomous, both organizations have a long history of working together and when Indigenous issues are at the forefront, CNA has shown it will stand with A.N.A.C. to address these issues; and when they are issues facing nurses in general, A.N.A.C. will stand behind CNA to ensure we find and express in a respectful way, a shared voice.”

Since A.N.A.C.’s inception, the two associations have collaborated on various projects and initiatives, such as endorsing the Jordan’s Principle and Shannen’s Dream campaigns; providing input to the Council of the Federation’s health-care innovation working group and Health Canada’s advisory panel on innovation in health care; and monitoring developments in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research’s Pathways to Health Equity for Aboriginal Peoples.

“This partnership accord does not signify the beginning of a new relationship between our two associations — rather it marks the beginning of a new way of relating,” said CNA president Karima Velji during the signing ceremony. “It represents a formal gesture that celebrates the shared history of our two associations and demonstrates our commitment to authentic engagement as national allies collaborating to advance nursing and Indigenous health.”

As part of this accord, the associations will develop an agreed-upon annual work plan in



Lisa Bourque Bearskin and Karima Velji sign the partnership accord.

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consultation with their members and Indigenous peoples. Information from recent reports — such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada recommendations, the auditor general’s findings on access to health services for remote First Nations communities and the principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — will be used as guideposts for how to move forward, said Bourque Bearskin. “A.N.A.C. believes that answers come from within the Indigenous community, and non-Indigenous allies can support our communities by acknowledging [these] critical pieces.”

Work will include improving recognition and understanding of Indigenous rights in policy, practice, education and research; building capacity of nurses working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities; and addressing issues of access, chronic disease management, illness prevention and health promotion.

The association presidents exchanged gifts of artwork commissioned for the ceremony, which was presided over by Lea Bill, a traditional knowledge holder. Those in attendance were given small bundles of tobacco, a traditional medicine plant. ■