



Photo: Canadian Paramedic Memorial Foundation

First Nations Paramedics / Paramédics des Premières Nations / Onkwehón:we Ronwatiia'takéhnhas: Reshaping The Narrative

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While paramedicine programs flourish in communities across Canada, many Indigenous communities remain overlooked. The question remains: why are these resources plentiful for some yet scarce for others?

The siren's wail slices through the quiet of a First Nations community. The sound is more than just an emergency signal; it echoes longstanding

disparities. Picture the landscape momentarily if you can: isolated roads winding through vast forests or across icy tundra, communities

scattered over distances most city-dwellers can't quite fathom. Emergency medical services (EMS) in these settings aren't simply essential; they're lifelines frayed thin by underfunding, geographic isolation, and a historical legacy of neglect. Shockingly, in certain areas, expert emergency wound care, even basic prehospital care—taken for granted in most Canadian towns—is hardly more than a distant promise.

Yet amidst these daunting challenges, First Nations paramedics quietly reshape the narrative. They're not merely health-care workers dispatched into crises, but trusted neighbours, fluent in more than just medical procedures. They speak the language of their respective communities—culturally, historically, and emotionally. They comprehend that healing isn't always about medicine. Healing is about addressing generations of trauma, mistrust, and the invisible threads that link social determinants of health.

Cultivating Trust

Take, for instance, a paramedic responding to an elder experiencing chest pain or suffering a serious wound in a remote community. Sure, there's the clinical urgency—vitals, medications, transport—but equally important is the trust cultivated through shared experiences and cultural understanding. These paramedics know that their uniform isn't always welcome, that health care's past sins have fostered a persistent wariness. So, they approach things differently, carefully stitching medical intervention with cultural sensitivity and gradually mending decades-old rifts.

But this delicate balance is constantly threatened. The stark reality is that funding for Indigenous EMS services remains disturbingly inconsistent, at times virtually non-existent. This underfunding directly impacts the quality and availability of health care in these communities. While community paramedicine programs flourish elsewhere, bringing preventive care and proactive health management rights to patients' homes in many Indigenous communities remain glaringly overlooked. It begs the question: why are resources plentiful for some yet painfully scarce for others?

Advocacy becomes crucial here. First Nations paramedics and dedicated allies are actively pressuring provincial, territorial and federal authorities, demanding equitable resource allocation that recognizes unique needs—parity and meaningful justice. They're championing policies that don't simply patch existing holes but fundamentally rebuild the framework for health-care delivery in their communities. The urgency of this issue cannot be overstated. The goal isn't charity; it's genuine self-determination in health services.

Reflecting on these paramedics' stories reveals incredible resilience. Imagine navigating treacherous roads with minimal equipment, holding together lives with ingenuity and sheer determination. These aren't abstract statistics, but deeply personal stories of commitment, sacrifice, and a profound belief in community.

They're individuals facing impossible odds, yet persistently answering calls, knowing every intervention inches their communities closer to equity.

In essence, First Nations paramedics aren't just changing health care—they're redefining it entirely. They embody hope and strength.



They possess the quiet courage necessary to confront systemic neglect head-on.

Bridging this gap is not simply about emergency response; it's about reclaiming dignity, rebuilding trust, and ultimately transforming the health of Indigenous communities for generations to come.



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and General Director of First Nations Paramedics (FNP/PPN). FNP/PPN is Quebec's only Indigenous-owned and operated provincially-contracted pre-hospital emergency medical service dedicated exclusively to serving Indigenous communities. With more than 36 years of experience in emergency medical services and health-care advocacy, Robert passionately promotes inclusive and culturally representative EMS systems. Robert has been instrumental in pioneering innovative health-care delivery models, championing policies that amplify Indigenous voices and striving to achieve equitable, accessible health care for Indigenous peoples across Canada. Additionally, he serves as the Quebec provincial representative and the sole Indigenous national representative on the Canadian Paramedic Memorial Foundation.