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Ontario Hospital Association Appoints Paul Francis, Jr. as Executive Director, Indigenous Health

Over the past several years, the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) has been working to deepen its commitment to advancing culturally safe care, laying the groundwork to respond to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As part of its [2023-2027 strategic plan](#), Indigenous Health was established as an organizational priority, affirming a commitment to addressing longstanding inequities and improving care outcomes for Indigenous peoples through advocacy, hospital member support, and system-level initiatives.

To further this work, the OHA sought a leader with deep expertise and proven leadership to help guide these efforts, and is pleased to announce the appointment of **Paul Francis, Jr. as Executive Director of Indigenous Health**, a secondment appointment developed in collaboration with St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG), Thunder Bay.

Paul brings a wealth of experience and a strong commitment to advancing Indigenous health and wellness. During his tenure as Vice President of N'doo'owe Binesi at St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG) in Thunder Bay, he led organization-wide efforts to embed cultural safety and humility across SJCG's programs and services, while also extending this work through regional, provincial, and national partnerships to strengthen culturally safe care across the broader health system.

Combining strategic and cultural oversight, and with guidance from Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin (Elder's Council), Paul led the development and implementation of SJCG's Wiidosem Dabasendizowin: Walking with Humility – A Plan to Develop Relationships and Practices with Indigenous Peoples. This work focused on providing culturally safe care, advancing Truth and Reconciliation, and amplifying Indigenous cultural safety in Northwestern Ontario. SJCG's journey included building strong foundations through staff education, creating spaces rooted in Indigenous traditions for ceremony and learning, and integrating N'doo'owe Binesi (Indigenous Health Division) into the interprofessional team to ensure access to culturally appropriate care and traditional healing.

"This appointment recognizes both the need and the opportunity for Ontario's hospitals to move forward together in advancing meaningful action on Truth and Reconciliation. It creates the conditions for shared leadership, learning, and accountability across the hospital system," said Janine Black, President & CEO of St. Joseph's Care Group, Thunder Bay.

The creation of a dedicated role strengthens and accelerates the OHA's efforts to prioritize Indigenous health across its organization and Ontario's health system. As Executive Director of Indigenous Health at the OHA, Paul will report directly to OHA President & CEO Anthony Dale. He will lead the expansion and implementation of the OHA's Indigenous Health strategy, working with staff, hospital leaders, Indigenous partners, and communities to embed culturally responsive care and reconciliation principles across the health system. It's a significant step forward in the OHA's ongoing commitment to building meaningful relationships that support improved health outcomes for Indigenous populations throughout Ontario.

"Today marks the beginning of a new phase in the evolution of the Indigenous Health strategy for the OHA," said Kahontakwas Diane Longboat, Elder and member of the Turtle Clan, Mohawk Nation, at Six Nations Grand River Territory and a ceremonial leader, traditional teacher, builder, and healer. Diane is President and founder of the Institute for the Study of Spirit, a national Indigenous women-led charity and has served as a strategic advisor to the OHA for the past two years.

"Paul's knowledge of Indigenous health care needs built N'doo'owe Binesi at St. Joseph's Hospital to meet the specific cultural, ceremonial and linguistic needs of the Indigenous patients in northwest Ontario, embodying traditional medicines and practices into modern medicine," Diane added.

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“This role is about nurturing reciprocal relationships - listening, learning, and taking meaningful action - while working within the Ontario Hospital Association,” said Paul Francis. “I look forward to working with hospitals and Indigenous communities across Ontario to advance culturally responsive care, strengthen Indigenous health sovereignty, and build a more equitable, wholistic health system.”

“Advancing culturally safe care and reconciliation is a long-term, system-wide journey – one that requires humility, partnership and measured, sustained action. By creating the Executive Director of Indigenous Health role, we are ensuring this work has the leadership and focus it deserves,” said OHA President & CEO Anthony Dale. “Paul has demonstrated how inclusive care and Indigenous healing traditions can be integrated across care settings in ways that improve experience and outcomes – we are thrilled to welcome him to the OHA.”

Paul begins his secondment with the OHA on January 19, 2026. He will also maintain a partial leadership role with N'doo'owe Binesi while transitioning to this new role.