



# NUU-CHAH-NULTH TRIBAL COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council Declares A State Of Emergency As Drug Crisis Continues To Devastate First Nation Communities**

Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council refuses to lose any more loved ones. From this day forward, “Enough is enough.”

**(September 19, 2024 – Port Alberni, BC)** In response to the current mental health and opioid crisis disproportionately affecting First Nations communities, the **Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council** (NTC) has declared a state of emergency in all 14 Nuu-chah-nulth Nations.

During a press conference held at the NTC office in Port Alberni, members of the NTC called for dedicated and substantial funding to adequately provide meaningful and culturally appropriate trauma-informed services to Nuu-chah-nulth communities. The Province of BC, Island Health, the Government of Canada and the First Nations Health Authority are called upon to fully resource numerous mental health and crisis supports, as well as the development and implementation of toxic poisoned drugs and mental health strategies. Inspired by self-determining Nations throughout the province, the NTC is asking for capacity dollars to lead and develop meaningful solutions for its members.

“This is a real emergency. We are losing too many, especially young people, to this crisis,” said Cloy-e-iis (Judith Sayers), President of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. “When we invest in mental health, education, housing and economic development, we can create a future where fewer people turn to opioids to cope with trauma and pain.”

After multiple tragic losses in the small community of Ahousaht First Nation, the Nuu-chah-nulth communities have decided enough is enough. At the core of this crisis is a legacy of systemic racism and inequalities.

- First Nations people make up less than **4%** of BC’s population, but almost **20%** of toxic drug deaths in BC. These communities need adequate funding and resources to provide help and proper health care for their people.
- The current mental health and opioid crisis continues to rage through First Nations communities at **six times** the rate of other BC residents.
- It has been over **eight years** since British Columbia declared the drug crisis a public health emergency. Since then, over **14,000** have died due to toxic drugs.



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Mental health is a major factor in this crisis, though, it is often overlooked; substance use disorder is a mental health issue, not a moral failing. Many are doing their best, but unfortunately, it's just not enough.

“Our people have been in a state of crisis for too long. Intergenerational impacts stemming from the residential school era and displacement brought upon through colonialism have severely impacted the holistic nature of who we are as nuučaanuł people,” said Naasathluk (John Rampanen), Ahousaht First Nation Elected Chief Councillor. “We seek true reconciliatory action from the provincial and federal governments in a sustained manner to support our efforts to overcome these barriers.”

While the NTC is delegated to provide numerous support services to its communities, it is not adequately equipped with the resources to realize meaningful change. Generational trauma and the impacts of the residential school system continue to fracture First Nations communities. The need is great, and the barriers are many. The cries of mothers who have lost their children echo through these communities. The NTC, and the communities they represent, are fighting to end this crisis for them.

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## **About the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council**

The Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council (NTC) provides programs and services to over 10,000 registered members. The role of the NTC is to represent 14 First Nations in three regions stretching 300 kilometres of the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island from Brooks Peninsula in the north to Point-no-Point in the south. The NTC represents Ahousaht, Ditidaht, Ehatesaht/Chinehkint, Hesquiaht, Hupacasath, Huu-ay- aht, Kyuquot/Checklesah, Mowachaht /Muchalaht, Nuchatlaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, Toquaht, Tseshaht, Uchucklesaht and Ucluelet First Nations and provides a variety of programs and services to them. For more information, please visit [www.nuuchahnulth.org](http://www.nuuchahnulth.org).

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## **Photo captions:**

- **NTCPressConference1:** Curtis Dick from Ahousaht First Nation speaks on behalf of the families who have lost loved ones to the opioid and mental health crisis.
- **NTCPressConference2:** Cloy-e-iis (Judith Sayers), President of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, speaks during the press conference held to declare a state of emergency in all 14 Nuu-chah-nulth Nations. From l-r: Curtis Dick, Ahousaht First Nation, Naasathluk (John Rampanen) Ahousat First Nation Elected Chief Councillor, Les Doiron, Vice President Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and waamiiš (Ken Watts), Elected Chief Councillor.
- **NTCPressConference3:** Ahousaht First Nation members hold artwork and photos, donning T-shirts and sweaters of loved ones lost to the opioid and mental health crisis. Framed photos of Nation youth are displayed on the table in front of Nation leaders.