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Ovide Mercredi leads NAN team on health transformation

Former National Chief will have a team of five other experts

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The Nishnawbe Aski Nation has chosen Ovide Mercredi to lead efforts to make what it describes as broad-ranging changes to the health care system in NAN communities across northern Ontario.

In an announcement on Tuesday, NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said the health transformation team will also include five other experts:

- Helen Cromarty - NAN elder and health advisor
- Dr. Doris Mitchell - family physician, Chapleau area
- Dr. Michael Kirlew - family physician, Sioux Lookout area
- Mae Katt - nurse practitioner, Thunder Bay
- Dr. Alika Lafontaine - past president, Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada

According to the announcement, the health system for First Nations has been "in crisis" for decades.

It noted that the federal Auditor-General in 2015 found that First Nations in northern Ontario and northern Manitoba did not have access to clinical and client care services that was comparable to services received by other residents living in similar geographic locations.

In February of this year, NAN submitted a five-year plan to Ontario and Canada "for a strategy of engagement, alignment and collaboration that allows First Nations to be their own leaders in safety, quality improvement and patient-centred care."

That was followed in July by the signing of a three-party *Charter of Relationship Principles Governing Health System Transformation*.

NAN's statement said it will lead the creation of a shared vision of the root problems, solutions and implementation strategies, and that the the transformation of the health system will be community-led.

"Transforming health systems across NAN territory is a monumental undertaking, and we are honoured that Ovide Mercredi and other health experts have accepted this challenge," Fiddler said.

Mercredi said he looks forward "to working together in kindness to implement a holistic and comprehensive health system by, with and for the Nishnawbe Aski people. The health system envisioned by NAN leaders will not just be based on federalism, but also on our self-determination and our inherent duty to take better care of ourselves and each other."