

Talking Stick is an anonymous chat platform that connects First Nations individuals to culture-based peer support and confidential conversations.

Highlights from this edition

- » Talking Stick to launch Special Teams
- » First Alerts Updates
- » Talking Stick represented at 2024 E-Health Conference
- » TetherAll: Talking Stick's Virtual Cousin

Talking Stick to Launch “Special Teams”: Building Connections and Partnerships

Now two years old, Talking Stick has established itself as “the place to go to know.” Created to anonymously connect First Nations people seeking support to First Nations peer advocates trained and committed to using their own lived experience to help, the Talking Stick “community” has become a mainstay in Saskatchewan.

The platform has grown to include FirstAlerts, an emergency alerting system that allows Nations to craft and issue messages to their members through that Talking Stick app. Next up will be the addition of “Special Teams” – a way for Indigenous guests to chat anonymously with experts in a range of fields to get help, have questions answered, or access resources without fear of judgment – “no name, no shame.”

The first “tenant” in the Special Teams section of Talking Stick will be the MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, an organization based in Toronto that is working with Indigenous leadership across the Prairies. The Ayaangwaamiziwin Initiative (“Carefulness; Preparedness”) is being implemented to address the troubling increase in cases of infectious syphilis and congenital syphilis (transmission between pregnant people and fetuses) with or through access to more culturally appropriate testing and care. The rates are particularly high among Indigenous people, where access to testing and care is challenging for a number of reasons: remote communities, stigma, intergenerational trauma from residential schools, lack of awareness in culturally appropriate ways, and low access to primary care and prenatal healthcare.

Dr. Sean Rourke, a neuropsychologist, scientist, and advocate for expanded testing and treatment of sexually transmitted blood-borne infections (“STBBI”) has led an initiative to address skyrocketing infection rates and has partnered with Talking Stick to collaborate on solutions.

“We are very excited to be working together with TryCycle in allyship with Indigenous people and their communities in Saskatchewan and the Prairies with “ways of knowing and doing” that will support these communities to have access to the health information and supports they need for self-determination with health and wellness.” Sean B. Rourke, MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, St. Michael’s Hospital

The MAP Centre will be the first of many organizations and services to join Talking Stick and make themselves accessible anonymously to provide Indigenous people with the support, guidance, and information they need when they need it most.



Sean B. Rourke, MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions

FirstAlerts

Since FirstAlerts was unveiled on February 14, 2024, at James Smith Cree Nation, First Nations across Saskatchewan have been steadily signing up, taking control of their messaging and alerting capacities to ensure their members receive reliable, trusted, and timely information when minutes count.

Whether it is a missing person, threats to Nations posed by floods or fires, or the need to protect Nation members from violent individuals or poisoned drug supplies, FirstAlerts provides critical information right to members' smart devices through the Talking Stick app.

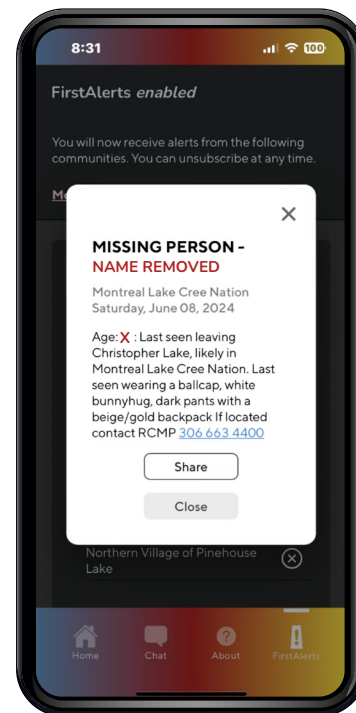
In Saskatchewan, 10% of First Nations have FirstAlerts activated in their communities, and it is expected that this number will climb to over 40% by the end of June.

To see if your Nation is using FirstAlerts, download the Talking Stick app and opt-in to receive alerts. It is free, and, as always with Talking Stick, it is completely anonymous.

Breaking News – 1st FirstAlert is Issued!

On Saturday, June 8, 2024, FirstAlerts was activated for the very first time!

A notice was issued by the leadership of Montreal Lake Cree Nation at about 8:30 a.m. to notify members to keep watch for a missing youth. It included a description, as well as instructions and contact information if the person was spotted. It was a perfect example of how the system was intended to be used, and Montreal Lake Cree Nation had just activated FirstAlerts **the day before** the alert was sent.



E-Health Vancouver

Over 1,300 digital health developers, providers, practitioners, experts, and supporters descended on Vancouver, BC, from June 2 to 4 to share stories and experiences at the annual e-Health Conference.



Michelle Voegtler (third from right) with colleagues after the closing of e-Health Vancouver

Kelly Gregoire and Michelle Voegtler shared their Talking Stick experience, facilitating a session called “No Name, No Shame: Empowering Indigenous Voices with Anonymous Peer Support.”

Kelly and Michelle took their audience through the Talking Stick journey, emphasizing the importance of building trust in order to create the safe space needed for Indigenous people to open up and accept support for their mental health. The combined superpowers of anonymity and lived-experience peer support were the cornerstone of the approach and resonated loudly with attendees. Real anonymous connections to peers who share the unique perspectives of being Indigenous remove barriers and counter the hesitancy that often stops Indigenous people in need from reaching out for help.

Of the over 300 sessions at the conference, “No Name, No Shame” was one of only two that spoke directly to the needs of Indigenous people, and the response was overwhelmingly positive and even emotional at times.

The impact of the presentation became clear in the hallway conversations that followed. One such encounter connected Michelle to the Elder who was leading the closing ceremony. That connection led to Michelle being invited onto the stage to participate in the closing, reinforcing the importance of being trusted allies and good humans!

TetherAll: The Power of Connection in Mental Health and Addictions

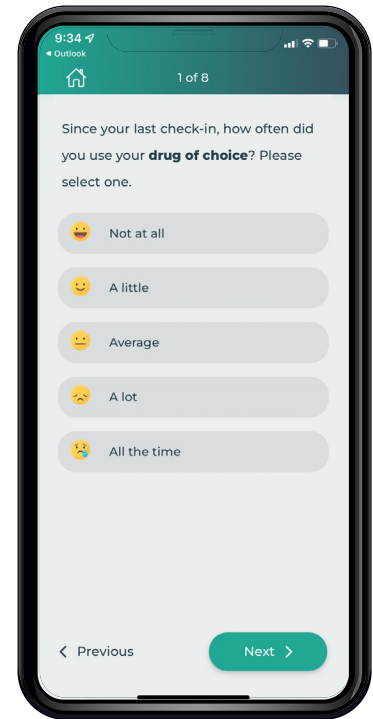
Since 2019, Talking Stick's virtual cousin, TetherAll has been at work in Saskatchewan, helping First Nation health providers in their efforts to meet the mental health and substance use needs of their members.

Now available as part of the Talking Stick suite of services, TetherAll is an innovative digital platform that keeps health professionals connected with clients between sessions. While the users must step out of the anonymous Talking Stick environment, it creates a confidential link to a culturally safe professional care team that ensures the connection and support needed to achieve wellness.

The "digital compassionate tether" supports Measurement-Based Care and supplies Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PREMs) by providing a confidential space for journaling and answering validated assessment questions through a mobile app. With PREMs uploaded in real-time to an intuitive clinician dashboard, TetherAll keeps the care team in connection at all times, reducing stress and strain, enhancing preventative care, and ensuring timely support and crisis mitigation through early intervention.

By leveraging data and technology to enhance human connections, users achieve improved clinical decision-making, planning, and care coordination.

With Talking Stick as the pathway, this creates stronger, more effective support systems that contribute to the overall health of the Nation.



Talking Stick's 2 Years of Impact by the Numbers

258,484

Messages exchanged between Talking Stick peer advocates and guests.

19,529

Unique guests who have used Talking Stick.

3,183

Hours that peer advocates have spent chatting with guests on Talking Stick – that's almost 400 eight-hour workdays of care provided!

960

People who have opted to receive emergency notifications through FirstAlerts.

45

Indigenous students from social services programs at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), First Nations University of Canada (FNUC), and Northlands College who have completed their student placements through Talking Stick's Internship Program.

Need to chat? You Talk. We Listen.

- » First Nations Peer Advocates are available now.
- » Always Anonymous.
- » Confidential. Safe. Secure.
- » 1 on 1 private conversations.



Download our free app:
Talking Stick-Indigenous



Or go to our website:
my.talkingstick.app

Thank you to our partners

Talking Stick was created in partnership with Saskatchewan's Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and TryCycle Data Systems.

info@talkingstick.app

