

Press Release

For Immediate Release
September 09, 2026

EMBARGOED UNTIL September 9, 2026, at 3:30 p.m. MST

Saddle Lake Cree Nation Asserts Sovereign Treaty Rights to Restore Access to Life-Saving Healthcare Amid Provincial Restrictions

First Nation takes steps to establish safe haven for gender-affirming care on reserved lands, invoking Treaty No. 6 'Medicine Chest' clause, asserting jurisdiction in the face of Alberta provincial restrictions.

FORT PITT, Saskatchewan- September 9, 2026-*In a historic assertion of First Nations sovereignty during the 150th anniversary of Treaty No. 6 agreed to at Fort Pitt, Saddle Lake Cree Nation leadership announced it will pursue measures to create a safe haven for gender-affirming care on its reserved lands and territories. Rooted in the sacred 'Medicine Chest' clause of Treaty No. 6, this initiative places these services outside provincial jurisdiction, directly challenging Alberta's assault on gender diverse people and families by restoring access to life-saving medical care for all individuals within Treaty territory.*

This historic move establishes a pivotal national precedent for Indigenous health jurisdiction across Canada. By asserting its sovereign right to regulate healthcare on Treaty lands, Saddle Lake Cree Nation provides a legal and operational blueprint for First Nations nationwide to protect communities made vulnerable by colonial violence and uphold human rights against overreaching provincial legislation.

FAST FACTS

- **The Crisis:** Alberta Bills 26, 27, and 29 place severe restrictions on transgender youth and families, including bans on medical treatments, name/pronoun changes, and sports participation.
- **The Solution:** Saddle Lake Cree Nation will welcome Canadian-trained clinicians to provide safe, protected, and uninterrupted gender-affirming care, primary care, and specialist care on reserved lands, effectively opening up the pathway for pan-Canadian clinician licensure within their jurisdiction. These clinicians will be exempted by Saddle Lake Cree Nation from sanctioning by their health regulatory bodies.

- **The Human Cost:** Denying care significantly increases mental health risks, with studies showing up to a 72% increase in suicide attempts without supportive medical care. Indigenous trans and gender diverse people have been reported to experience or commit suicide at a prevalence of 50% due to loss of previously established respected roles, as a direct result of colonial violence.

Dr. James Makokis, Nehiyo two-spirit Family Physician, stated: “Premier Smith’s anti-trans laws are a profound violation of Treaty Number Six. They fail to uphold the spirit and intent of the ‘Medicine Chest’ clause in our Treaty. We are asserting our sovereign rights. The Saddle Lake Cree Nation categorically rejects these attacks on all gender diverse peoples, including *Tastawiyiniwak*—our two-spirit relatives—ensuring that life-affirming healthcare remains accessible, safe, and protected from external political interference.”

Okimawskwe Chief Dale Steinhauer added, “As a sovereign Nation and rights holders under Treaty Number Six, our primary responsibility is to protect the health, dignity, and life of every person who comes to our territory. We will not stand by while basic human rights and vital healthcare services are denied. Our people know all too well the consequences of governments removing the rights of parents to be parents, and children to be children - and we will not allow what happened to us to happen ever again. When we were being stolen from our parents and experienced Genocide in Indian Residential Schools, we wondered, “Who are the people that will help us?” Today, we are those people. Today we offer our help, support, and jurisdiction to override these dehumanizing laws.

Saddle Lake Cree First Nation has launched a [GoFundMe](#) fundraiser dedicated to the legal, governance and implementation work necessary to advance and defend Saddle Lake Cree Nation’s Treaty health jurisdiction.

EVENT DETAILS:

Date: September 9, 2026

Location: Fort Pitt, Saskatchewan -

Time: 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. MST

Events are livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube during the day, starting at 9:30 AM MST

[Onion Lake Cree First Nation Facebook](#)

[7thGenMedia Youtube](#)

MEDIA RESOURCES

Refer to the attached backgrounder, which includes the confirmed list of speakers.

For more information or to book an interview:

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Email: serena@serenamah.com | Phone: 780-982-5058 | Website: [Saddle Lake Cree First Nation/](#)

- According to The Trevor Project, LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt.

Gender-Affirming Care: Policy Context at a Glance

UNITED STATES

A growing patchwork of state restrictions has limited gender-affirming medical care for minors. In June 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Tennessee’s ban against an Equal Protection challenge in *United States v. Skrmetti*. Federal executive actions since January 2025 have also sought to end federal support for gender-affirming medical interventions for people under 19 and have defined federal sex policy in binary terms. Enforcement and related investigations continue to generate litigation, including disputes over funding, provider records and patient privacy.

UNITED KINGDOM

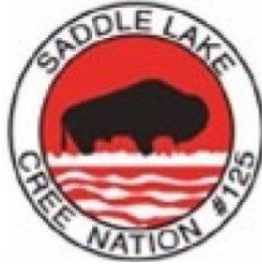
The NHS stopped routine prescribing of puberty blockers for people under 18 through its gender identity services in March 2024. The UK government subsequently made restrictions on private sale and supply of puberty blockers for gender incongruence or dysphoria indefinite, with review planned for 2027. The government cites the Cass Review and advice from the Commission on Human Medicines; the policy remains part of a contested international debate about evidence, access and youth well-being.

ALBERTA

Alberta’s Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (Bill 26) received Royal Assent in December 2024. It created restrictions on gender-reassignment surgery for minors and on puberty blockers and hormone therapy for gender dysphoria or gender incongruence, with stated exceptions for some youth aged 16–17 and those already receiving treatment. Alberta also enacted measures governing student names and pronouns and participation in female sport. These policies have faced constitutional and human-rights criticism and court challenges; legal status and implementation should be verified at publication time.

An Affirming Indigenous Health Frame

Two-Spirit is an Indigenous-specific term connected to Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality and is not interchangeable with every LGBTQ+ identity. Indigenous health organizations emphasize culturally safe, trauma-informed and gender-affirming services, and recognize Two-Spirit, trans and gender-diverse people as members of every community with rights to health care. Coverage should avoid collapsing distinct identities or treating trans people only as subjects of political conflict. The Alberta anti-trans legislation is viewed as a continued assault on First Nations citizenship, nationhood that perpetuates colonial violence in the context of neo-colonialism. Given that Canada is in a post “Truth and Reconciliation” state, it is critical that all Canadians reflect on, and most importantly act on all acts of injustices against any people.



BACKGROUND

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Treaty No. 6 and Fort Pitt

Treaty No. 6 began at Fort Carlton in August 1876 and concluded at Fort Pitt on September 9, 1876. It included a “medicine chest” commitment for the use and benefit of First Nations people. Canada has also acknowledged the Treaty commitments concerning the medicine chest and assistance in times of famine and pestilence. First Nations have long understood Treaty health promises as living obligations, not frozen nineteenth-century benefits. The September 9 event marks 150 years to the day since the agreeing to Treaty No. 6 at Fort Pitt.

What's New

- Saddle Lake Cree Nation is asserting its Treaty rights and jurisdiction to provide safe refuge for those seeking and providing gender-affirming care. Starting with the creation of a new health law, the First Nation will take steps for Albertans to receive gender-affirming medicines and treatments that were banned by the UCP government.
 - **Any Albertan will be able to access gender-affirming care** on Saddle Lake Cree Nation reserved lands and territories, without affecting existing health services for Saddle Lake Cree Nation citizens.
 - Saddle Lake Cree Nation plans to **welcome any Canadian-trained clinicians to practice gender-affirming care, primary care and specialist care** on its reserved lands and territories.
 - Saddle Lake Cree Nation will continue to work with health regulators in Alberta and Canada to ensure there are no licensing jurisdictional barriers for clinicians, in effect paving the pathway for pan-Canadian licensure for all clinicians.
- Saddle Lake Cree Nation is launching a GoFundMe page as part of these efforts. Funds raised will help fund legal costs associated with asserting its constitutional and Treaty rights. (<https://gofund.me/2c7bf36c5>)

Asserting Treaty Rights and Jurisdiction

- Treaty No. 6, a Peace and Friendship Treaty, was adhered to on September 9, 1876. The Treaty enshrined the "Medicine Chest", making provision: "That a medicine chest shall be kept at the house of each Indian Agent for the use and benefit of the Indians at the direction of such agent."

- The Medicine Chest clause is a living and enduring promise that encompasses *Nehiyawak* access to Western medicine. Today, it underpins universal, publicly funded health care in Canada. It must be understood in accordance with the spirit and intent of the Treaty and the ongoing nation-to-nation relationship between Treaty Nations and the Crown. The Medicine Chest includes gender affirming care. Gender-affirming health care is a treaty right.
- **The Alberta government's anti-trans laws are a violation of the Treaty.** The *Nehiyawak* did not consent to the elimination, suppression, or systemic dismantling of Indigenous health and medical systems. The *Nehiyawak* maintained autonomy over controlling and regulating health systems, including Western health systems operating on their reserved lands and territories.
- Accordingly, Saddle Lake Cree Nation is asserting its jurisdiction and nationhood. It is exercising inherent rights and law to protect human rights and enable gender-affirming care for all gender-diverse peoples.

Protecting People Against Continued Harm

- A growing number of jurisdictions worldwide, including Alberta, have enacted laws targeting sexual minorities and gender-non-conforming peoples. These include anti-trans laws banning gender-affirming care, restricting name changes and the use of preferred pronouns, and excluding children and youth from participation in sports.
- In December 2024, the UCP government passed a series of anti-trans laws, specifically:
 - Bill 26, the *Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)*
 - Bill 27, the *Education Amendment Act, 2024*
 - Bill 29, the *Fairness and Safety in Sport Act*
 - Bill 9, *Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act* (the notwithstanding clause)
- On December 2025, the UCP government passed a law banning mandatory programs focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion, cultural competency, and unconscious bias:
 - Bill 13, the *Regulated Professions Neutrality Act*
- These laws represent continued harm to gender-diverse peoples and First Nations people, which ultimately has roots in colonial violence. **Saddle Lake Cree Nation rejects these anti-trans and anti-Treaty laws** and is determined to create a safe haven for gender-diverse peoples and ensure the education of non-Indigenous peoples to adhere to Treaty obligations.
- *Nehiyawak* have always practised inclusion of gender-diverse peoples. The *tastawiyiniwak* (the "in-between people", also known as Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer) have always been included, accepted, and an integral part of Indigenous societies, often holding important roles. In this spirit, Saddle Lake Cree Nation is taking steps to protect the *tastawiyiniwak*, and all gender-diverse Albertans, against continued assault.
- Gender-diverse young people need and benefit from support:
 - Studies have shown that anti-transgender laws cause an increase (up to 72%) in suicide attempts among transgender and non-binary youth.
 - In a November 2024 statement opposing Alberta's anti-trans laws, the Alberta Medical Association Section of Pediatrics stated: "It is no surprise that transgender youth and adolescents have increased mental health issues when you consider the harassment, ostracization and bullying they are subjected to."

Confirmed Speakers

1. *Okimawskew* (Chief) Dale Steinhauer (she/her) - Saddle Lake Cree Nation
2. Counselor Tyler Youngchief (he/him) (Kehewin Cree Nation and Father of 7 yo transgender son Presley (he/him), who may appear on stage alongside Tyler)
3. *To be confirmed* Brooks Arcand-Paul (he/him), MLA Edmonton West-Henday (Shadow Minister for Indigenous Relations, Alberta NDP)
4. Dr. Asa Radix, MD, PhD, MPH (he/him) - President of World Professional Association for Transgender Health (<https://wpath.org/>), will appear by video from South Africa
5. Dr. Bolu Ogunyemi, MD, FRCPC (he/him) - President of the Canadian Medical Association (<https://www.cma.ca/>), will appear by pre-recorded video
6. Dr. Ojistoh Horn (Mohawk; she/her), MD, CCFP - President of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada (IPAC) (<https://ipacamic.ca/>) and citizen of Akwesasne and Kahnawake Nation. Will appear with Dr. Veronica McKinney (Cree/Metis; she/her), MD, CCFP, CEO National Consortium for Indigenous Medical Education (<https://ncime.ca/>)
7. 4 video vignettes featuring:
 - a. Gender affirming settler physician: Dr. Mark Armstrong, MD, CCFP (he/him); will discuss impact on practice and on his patients.
 - b. Trans female athlete (she/her): Riley Simpson, 16 yo softball player will appear with mother Eldyka and sister Kyra to discuss impact on sports participation.
 - c. *Nehiyaw* mother and her trans child: Rachele Gladue (Mikisiw Cree, they/them) and Leo (they/them) to discuss impact on limiting of access to “the Medicine Chest.”
 - d. Founders of *tapahteyimôkamik* (The Humble Lodge; Two-Spirit Rites of Passage Fasting Ceremony;
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/healing-and-connection-inside-the-humble-lodge-s-two-spirit-fasting-camp-1.7586539>): Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack (Saddle Lake Cree Nation; she/her) and James Lamouche (Grouard Metis; he/him) parents of a trans child and leaders championing courageous spaces for *tastawiyiniwak* and families.
8. Dr. James Makokis, MD, CCFP (Saddle Lake Cree Nation, he/him) will close the session with members of *tapahteyimôkamik* and Edmonton 2-Spirit Society (<https://e2s.ca/>).

Reference Sources (Verified August 28, 2026)

- [Treaty No. 6 text — Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada](#)
- [Canada–Onion Lake Cree Nation Treaty health MOU background](#)
- [U.S. Supreme Court — United States v. Skrmetti \(2025 opinion\)](#)
- [White House — January 2025 executive order on youth gender care](#)
- [UK Government — indefinite puberty-blocker restrictions](#)
- [Government of Alberta — Bill 26 overview](#)
- [First Nations Health Authority — 2S/LGBTQQIA+ care](#)

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