



## **NEWS RELEASE**

For immediate release

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# **Autism Research Centre and Cowessess First Nation to develop North America's First Autism Support Program for Indigenous Youth**

**A 9:00 am press conference on Friday, May 22, at the Cowessess First Nation Urban Office in Regina SK, will provide additional details of the innovative initiative in Indigenous autism research.**

COWESSESS, Saskatchewan—May 22, 2019—The Autism Resource Centre (ARC), in partnership with Cowessess First Nation, is excited to announce a ground-breaking research initiative to develop a program exploring autism in indigenous communities. This program is made possible by a multi-year funding contract from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) Autism Spectrum Disorder Fund. The 3-year project called the Building Block Program: Transition Services for Indigenous Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder is focused on researching autism within First Nations communities and improving participation of Indigenous youth with autism that are transitioning from high school to paid employment. ARC, Cowessess First Nation, other community-based partners such as the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Network, Street Culture Project, and academic partners from the University of Regina and Simon Fraser

University, will be embarking on this project which is one of the first in North America focused on autism through an Indigenous perspective and worldview.

“Autism is a growing disorder in First Nation communities across the province. Studies prove that early intervention is key however, waitlists for diagnosis are long. There is a need for equitable access to supports and services for Indigenous children with autism but the problem is a lack of resources, research and funding. This partnership will assist the direction we want to go in terms of addressing what is needed to help families who suffer without the proper supports in place” says Chief of Cowessess First Nation Cadmus Delorme.

According to preliminary research conducted by ARC through funding received by the Co-operators Foundation Community Economic Development (CED) Fund, autism within the Indigenous community is both under-detected and underrepresented. Possible reasons for under-detection and underrepresentation include, but are not limited to diagnostic substitutions like FASD diagnosis, geographical location and a history of mistrust that exists towards western medical forms of interventions that reflect the impact of historical oppression and discrimination.

“We are very honored to be working with Cowessess First Nation on this project made possible by the generous funding received from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) Autism Spectrum Disorder Fund. We also greatly appreciate the willingness of Chief Cadmus Delorme and his team to teach ARC the traditional and cultural perspectives needed to make this programming successful for years to come”, says ARC Executive Director Keely Wight.

“Through the development of autism resources, increased awareness of autism within the Indigenous community and specialized services such as supported employment, cultural identity, mental health and transition planning, together with Cowessess First Nation, we can ensure our Indigenous young people with autism have the skills to become employed in a career of their choice, and that employers understand the value employees with unique abilities can bring to their workplace” Wight adds.

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