**FIRST NATIONS APP OPENS DIALOGUE THROUGH NEW PLATFORM** April 11, 2020

(Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatoon, SK) – The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) Executive has partnered with TryCycle Data Systems (TDS), a Canadian digital health solutions company, to launch the new Talking Stick App. A First Nations peer support platform that provides culture-based support and confidential conversations.

“The Talking Stick platform will help in advancing First Nations social support systems and economic development, as 200 community-based First Nations peer advocates will be hired in Saskatchewan,” says FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron. “Talking Stick is a ‘by First Nations, for First Nations’ approach to encourage anonymous conversations and listening. As First Nations, we traditionally build relationships in person, but with COVID-19, it’s impacted our abilities to connect and pass on stories, knowledge, and wisdom. The Talking Stick App will help in communicating the needs of our people and reduce common barriers that exist today.”

**Every Voice Matters** is the theme of Talking Stick, a commitment to language, inclusion, and self- determination, with the emphasis on job creation, skills development, and training. The app has a chat service, which is available in 7 First Nation languages (Plains Cree, Woodland Cree, Dene, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, Salteaux). Talking Stick is a Nation-to-Nation program. The peer advocate network and infrastructure are designed to compensate for the lack of resources and cultural supports that exist today for First Nations people.

“The Talking Stick app is a great example of helping people to learn more about vaccinations in an easier and more relatable way. The FSIN created this idea and now are sharing it as a tool across the country,” says Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services. “The Government of Canada will continue to support FSIN on this project, and work with First Nation leaders as they continue to enhance the tools, supports, and resources they need to support their members to feel confident about vaccinations and other issues.”

Talking Stick will help to address the unique challenges and emotional impacts that are affecting First Nations communities in these uncertain times. Talking Stick will encourage confidential conversations and listening as it relates to vaccine hesitancy, mental wellness & emotional health, violence & anger, isolation (depression, stress, loneliness), trauma, grief, and loss.

“Talking Stick will help to create hope, supported by courage, with a goal to change. This partnership with FSIN is about investing in First Nations innovation. It’s an opportunity for change and the potential benefits are literally limitless,” says John MacBeth, Founder & CEO of TryCycle Data Systems. “This represents taking control in areas that were previously undervalued or underappreciated. When I think about what we’re doing, this is allowing us to do something disruptive, dynamic and allows us to support First Nations potential.”

“The anonymous chat platform will provide a safe destination for any First Nation person to share in confidence, their concerns, fears, questions, and emotions related to a variety of issues they’re facing today like vaccine anxiety, pandemic-related distress, and other culturally specific topics as they emerge,” says FSIN Vice Chief David Pratt. “The Talking Stick app encourages non-judgmental conversations with community-based peer advocates who are trained to listen. The peers who are from and engaged with First Nation communities are best equipped to understand the challenges and obstacles of their own community. This program will create a first-of-its-kind peer advocate network to support community health and healing.”

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations represents 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan. The Federation is committed to honouring the spirit and intent of the Treaties, as well as the promotion, protection and implementation of the Treaty promises that were made more than a century ago.

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