

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

**Highlights from this edition**

- When seconds matter, Talking Stick is there
- Bell Let's Talk recognizes Talking Stick
- New Features Focus on Community Safety

## Help is 33 Seconds Away

When someone is looking for support, there is nothing more frustrating than having to wait – being put on hold, being stuck in a queue, being added to a waiting list, or hearing that call volumes are higher than normal and being asked to leave a number so someone can call you back within 24 hours!

When presented with these barriers, many people simply walk away or hang up. When seeking help for mental health challenges, it is often the case that it takes hours or days to summon the courage to reach out. If help is not there when the person is ready, there is a chance that they will simply retreat. The key is to bring help as quickly and easily as possible. Going from the Talking Stick app or browser landing page to a chat with a peer advocate takes as few as five clicks. In fact, a recent evaluation of Talking Stick indicated that, on average, a guest is connected to a Peer Advocate within 33 seconds of pressing <CHAT NOW>!

This quick, reliable response ensures that nobody has to endure the frustration of feeling unheard or unworthy of receiving help.

EVERY VOICE MATTERS, and Talking Stick won't make anyone wait when time is of the essence!



Talking Stick – it's there when you need it!




**By Indigenous, for Indigenous.**




**talking stick**  
EVERY VOICE MATTERS

## Bell Let's Talk...

January 24, 2024, was the annual Bell Let's Talk Day, shining a light on the need for investments in mental health support in Canada.

This year, Talking Stick was prominent in the media and lauded as an innovative resource for Indigenous people seeking mental health and wellness support.

On January 24, CTV featured Talking Stick in two television stories:

- CTV National News did a piece called "[A new app for Mental Health Support](#)" that featured Provincial Director Cecile McKay and Regional Manager Tiffany Carriere speaking about the ease of access, the anonymity, the importance of real human connection, and the "by Indigenous for Indigenous" aspect of the platform that promotes cultural safety.
- CTV NewsChannel ran an [interview with Kyle Prettyshield](#), Executive Director of FSIN's Health and Social Development Secretariat. Kyle speaks to the importance of Talking Stick in FSIN's communities and the need to make it available to all Nations across Canada.

Talking Stick never uses bots and will never simply connect a person to a bunch of self-help reading sites. Its superpower is connecting Indigenous guests to real Indigenous peer advocates who are always standing by to help.

Bell Let's Talk Day is once a year, but access to reliable, culturally safe mental health support is a 24/7/365 matter, and Talking Stick ensures that help is there whenever the need arises because Every Voice Matters.

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# Talking Stick Adds New Community Safety Features

Talking Stick has made its mark as an accessible, reliable, safe, and culturally sensitive place to go when Indigenous people need help. But what happens when community safety is threatened or when whole communities need support?



Chief Robert Head (right) with TryCycle's CEO John MacBeth at James Smith Cree Nation

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (“FSIN”) seized upon the growing use of Talking Stick and, in partnership with TryCycle Data Systems, created two new features on the Talking Stick: FirstAlerts and the Disaster Assistance Response Team (“DART”).

**FirstAlerts** was released on February 15, 2024, at James Smith Cree Nation. In the aftermath of the attacks that shook and continue to haunt that community, its leaders recognized the opportunity to secure a reliable, accessible, timely way to push important information out to community members. Most importantly, the messages are Indigenous-led – controlled by the community, so there will be none of the lags or confusion that are often experienced with provincial alerts through the 911 network.

“We’re trying to get the word out there right the first time and actually start with legitimate information,” said John MacBeth, CEO of TryCycle Data Systems. “This is the first step in what we like to think is alert sovereignty: controlling the message, which hasn’t been provided before. The more communities that adopt (FirstAlerts), the better the collective safety is for everybody.”

One of the challenges faced by responders during the James Smith Cree Nation tragedy was the provision of accurate, timely information to the community and to first responders. It was determined that lack of information led to confusion and fear.

**“An app like this will help our First Nations to respond quickly and to provide protection and advanced warning to all of our memberships,” said Chief Robert Head, of Peter Chapman First Nation.**

The integration of FirstAlerts into Talking Stick adds a new layer of utility to the application that will be used when someone goes missing, a natural disaster strikes or community safety is in jeopardy.

“It is another layer that is available to our Nations, in terms of communication; in terms of letting our membership know when there is an emergency,” Vice-Chief Dutch Lerat of the FSIN explained.

If someone goes missing, forest fires threaten a First Nation, a batch of toxic drugs enters a community, or some other critical information needs to be shared quickly, FirstAlerts will be put into action.

Access to FirstAlerts is optional on the Talking Stick app, and users have complete control over the notifications they receive. As is always the case with Talking Stick, anonymity is assured, and no personal information is ever collected.

## Coming in March 2024 – Disaster Assistance Response Team (“DART”)

When difficult situations occur that impact an entire community, many people are left feeling the need for support and often do not have access to the resources required to put them at ease. Further, their usual support network may consist of people in the same community who are suffering the same impact.

Talking Stick’s Disaster Assistance Response Team (“DART”) is a group of specially trained peer advocates that can be activated immediately when a crisis strikes. These Indigenous peers will be available during times when other services may be overwhelmed or unavailable, providing information, an empathic ear, and compassionate reflection in times of crisis.

The DART system will operate in the same way that guests currently access the chat feature on Talking Stick. All interactions will be anonymous and culturally safe and will disappear once the chat has ended. DART peers will be easily identifiable on the app, so the guest can connect quickly and confidently when the need arises.

The integration of DART and FirstAlerts into Talking Stick ensures that Indigenous people can receive support and information that is trusted, clear, and entirely in their control.

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## 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**

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## 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.

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