



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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Northern Leaders Emphasize Importance of Proactive Measures on One-Year Anniversary of COVID-19 Vaccines Arriving in Manitoba First Nations

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing the following statement on COVID-19 in Northern Manitoba.

Grand Chief Garrison Settee states:

“Today marks one year since the first COVID-19 vaccines arrived in First Nations in Manitoba. One year ago, we were filled with great hope as the first vaccines were administered in Pimicikamak Cree Nation and Norway House Cree Nation. Thank you to the many health care heroes who have been involved in advocating for access and delivering the COVID-19 vaccines to First Nations citizens across Manitoba.

If you have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccine, I encourage you to do so. As well, limit your contacts, reduce non-essential travel, and get vaccinated. I’m thankful to have received my vaccines, including my booster shot, to help protect me from the COVID-19 virus.

I met with MKO leaders today to discuss our concerns and next steps in the ongoing battle against COVID-19. I want to thank all the leaders who were able to make time to join us for today’s call, along with our provincial and federal partners for making themselves available to provide updates and to listen to our concerns. Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse and representatives from the Manitoba First Nations Pandemic Response Coordination Team also joined our call and I thank them for being there. It is encouraging seeing so many people working together in support of MKO First Nations.

MKO leaders have a wide range of concerns related to the pandemic. As we have seen in earlier waves in Manitoba, the cases tend to rise in Northern Manitoba later than the south. Today, we discussed the need to be proactive and ensure measures are in place that will enable us to respond appropriately to the outbreaks that will occur as the Omicron variant makes its way through the province.

Although we have not heard of any lab-confirmed cases of the Omicron variant in our First Nations, we are assuming the variant is already in our communities. Our leaders are raising the alarm over the need to ensure planning is done now to ensure our communities have

access to sufficient health care staff as well as essential service workers. MKO First Nations access health services both through on-reserve nursing stations as well as off-reserve health centres and hospitals. We expressed our concern to the province about the closures of hospitals that serve our communities along with a potential lack of access to timely medical services once COVID-19 cases begin rising in our communities.

The lack of health care staff is also impacting the ability of some MKO citizens to access their third COVID-19 vaccines. We know the COVID-19 boosters work and we are hopeful all MKO communities can have access to their third shots as soon as they become eligible. We are also encouraging all MKO citizens who have children ages 5 and over to consider first and second doses for your children. This will help provide some protection to children if they do contract the virus.

I am concerned about the mental wellness of MKO citizens young and old as we continue to navigate this pandemic and live with lock downs. Some community members have experienced hydro outages this week during extremely cold temperatures. It is difficult to help one another through these trying times when we are in lock downs to prevent the spread of COVID-19. I urge all partners to consider mental wellness initiatives to support the well-being of MKO citizens.

There are many concerns we won't be able to resolve during one meeting. For example, a lack of housing and access to high-speed Internet continues to be a pressing concern for our communities. Now is the time for us to conduct business via online meetings and for students of all ages to be accessing their lessons online. High-speed internet in all communities is an ongoing need. An increase in housing would also assist with the ability of people to properly isolate, and help prevent the spread of the virus, when diagnosed with COVID-19.

We have some hope in knowing the Monoclonal Antibody treatment is now available and we are also pleased to learn that approval for new antivirals is expected soon. Although the Monoclonal Antibody treatment is available, we understand our nursing stations must receive outside approval to administer this treatment. MKO encourages the province to consider removing this extra step.

MKO will continue to work with our provincial and federal partners to ensure the needs of our communities are considered in the planning and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I thank the leaders for their strong advocacy on behalf of their community members today and every day.

Once again, I am urging MKO citizens to continue to do what they can to stop the spread of COVID-19."

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