



## Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc.

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For immediate release  
January 19, 2022

### **MKO Urges Province to Transform Health Care to Assist Citizens in Leaf Rapids**

**Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB** – Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing the following statement in response to the urgent need for reliable, accessible, and ongoing health services for the citizens of Leaf Rapids in Northern Manitoba.

#### **Grand Chief Garrison Settee states:**

“I continue to be very concerned about the situation in Leaf Rapids. I commend and recognize the citizens of Leaf Rapids who have come forward to share their reflections with my office regarding the ongoing closure of their health centre.

I especially recognize **Dennis Anderson** for bringing this critical situation to the public’s attention through his advocacy and **Elizabeth Charrier** for taking the time to send me a detailed letter on behalf of herself and 64 other Leaf Rapids citizens. The letter clearly explains their concerns around the ongoing lack of access to health care.

On January 18, 2022, representatives from Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak and Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin met with leaders from the Northern Regional Health Authority to seek answers and to discuss the re-opening of the Leaf Rapids Health Centre. It was a positive meeting which included an acknowledgement that work needs to be carried out to transform the health service delivery model in Leaf Rapids to a primary care model in the longer term.

In the shorter, more immediate term, we have pressed for urgent action on the re-opening of the Leaf Rapids Health Centre. We expect an announcement from the Northern Regional Health Authority about the re-opening to be made public soon. The citizens of Leaf Rapids have the right to access health care services.

Although not an ideal solution, for emergency situations, the health centre remains closed with the option for a clinic assistant in Leaf Rapids to arrange a telehealth virtual appointment with a Thompson physician three mornings a week for Leaf Rapid citizens. The assistant can also book a phone call appointment that one can attend from home. Residents can call **204-473-2441** to book an appointment. The clinic assistant is on site from Monday to Friday.

As citizens living in Leaf Rapids have pointed out, the availability of health services in the community is a longstanding issue that existed long before the pandemic. Leaf Rapids is a unique community since it lacks a Mayor and Council who could help to oversee the response to emergencies in the community. The town has an administrator who does not live within Leaf Rapids. I urge this administrator to call a state of emergency for Leaf Rapids.

The closure of the Leaf Rapids Health Centre has resulted in the 580 citizens of the Town of Leaf Rapids being unable to reasonably access the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and related supplies, the Rapid Antigen Tests, and the specified standard for medical grade masks required under the applicable public health orders. In addition, the closure of the Leaf Rapids Health Centre denies access of the citizen of Leaf Rapids to the monoclonal antibody treatments for persons who display the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 that are otherwise available and are being provided at provincial health centres and hospitals.

MKO plans to address the lack of PPE, masks, and rapid tests within the community. Our organization will work to source these items on an urgent basis. An MKO staff member will personally deliver the supplies directly to the community since transportation is an issue. The Leaf Rapids post office is currently closed and there is no bus service into the community.

Although I continue to be concerned for the citizens of Leaf Rapids, I am reassured to know **Dr. Barry Lavallee** and **Dr. Yvette Emerson** of Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin are providing guidance to the Northern Regional Health Authority on finding solutions to transform the health care system in Leaf Rapids. These leaders will join me next week in a Facebook Live session to provide information and seek input and direction from Leaf Rapids residents.

I look forward to witnessing the implementation of First Nations-led solutions, supported by adequate resourcing, to improve access to health care in Leaf Rapids.

I continue to urge the provincial and federal governments to make collaborative investments to stabilize and create long-term solutions for providing accessible health services in Northern Manitoba.

One week ago, I wrote to the **Honourable Audrey Gordon** asking for an urgent meeting regarding the situation in Leaf Rapids. I have not received any response or acknowledgement of my letter. I am once again urging our Minister of Health to meet with my office to discuss and plan next steps in support of the health and well-being of our Northern Manitoba citizens.

All Manitoba citizens have the right to access equitable and quality health care. The absence of access to health care services puts human lives at risk. MKO will continue to stand with the community of Leaf Rapids and advocate for solutions in addressing systemic failures.”

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**For more information:**

Melanie Ferris, MKO Communications

Phone: 204-612-1284

Email: [melanie.ferris@mkonorth.com](mailto:melanie.ferris@mkonorth.com)

Web: <http://mkonation.com/>