



Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc.

For immediate release
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MKO Statement on the Need for Reliable, Timely Medical Transportation for Citizens Facing Emergencies in Northern First Nations

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement to remind service providers at all levels of the need for urgent action to ensure anyone experiencing medical emergencies can access timely medical treatment in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

This week, a newborn baby was required to wait more than 24 hours for medical transportation to move him from the Pimicikamak Cree Nation (PCN) in Northern Manitoba to Winnipeg, Manitoba. Staff from MKO and Keewatinowik Inniniw Minoayawin (KIM) were required to intervene and advocate for a medevac to provide transport for this baby. The baby was picked up and transported to Winnipeg on October 6.

“The fact we had a two-week old baby waiting more than 24 hours for potentially life-saving treatment must be addressed,” shared **PCN Chief David Monias**. “I am urging officials to take immediate action to rectify this situation and ensure any Pimicikamak citizens who need a medevac are able to get one when they need it. I applaud the members of my Council, the staff at the nursing station, and our advocates at MKO and KIM for working to ensure this baby gets the help he needs.”

The baby first went to the Cross Lake nursing station during the evening of Tuesday, October 4. His family took him back to the nursing station Wednesday, October 5 at 2 pm. His family was concerned about the baby having ongoing seizures.

The family was told a medevac would arrive at 5 pm on October 5. They were then told the baby would be picked up at midnight the same day. The baby was NOT picked up on October 5.

On October 6, the family was told the baby was supposed to be picked up. A helicopter landed in the community and then was re-routed. The helicopter departed without the newborn baby.

“It is completely unacceptable we had a two-week old baby waiting more than 24 hours for potentially life-saving treatment. I am urging officials at all levels to take immediate action to rectify this situation. This is not the care that our people deserve,” said **PCN Councillor Shirley Robinson**. “The nursing station did what they needed to do. Our concern is, why was this baby at the nursing station after 24 hours? I am very disturbed to know that several flights came and were redirected elsewhere. Our children are sacred. We are talking about a newborn child! Thank you to MKO and KIM for stepping in to ensure this baby was able to receive medical transportation yesterday.”

“This is an ongoing concern we have in Cross Lake and probably in all Indigenous communities up north. My community has 10,000 people. We have six nurses. We have four doctors. There are a lot of demands on the nursing station to have all these cases, all the people who need medical attention. It is a broken system. FNIHB has not heeded our concerns to the fullest extent of what our requirements are, to meet the medical standards in the community. I have always been screaming about this lack of standard care that Indigenous people have in my community. This has been ongoing. There are many life-threatening situations where people need to be flown out. We cannot do that simply, it takes hours for a plane to get there and like these last couple of medical flights we had, people got re-routed. Due to what? I haven't received any explanation from the airlines on what people are being re-routed. The government does not listen to the solutions we provide. They want control. This is one of the things—the medevac flights—we need to do something different because what happens is when a person is referred, the person is flown out to Thompson. Then from Thompson, they fly them out to Winnipeg. It takes hours to wait for a plane and then for another plane from Thompson in a life-threatening situation. That is ridiculous. That is serious. We have been crying, we have been screaming about this for so many years, but we are still in this situation. We need a standard of excellence in our communities, like any other citizen in Canada. We deserve that kind of medical attention as well. I get so frustrated; I get so upset when these things happen. Our people, they blame the Chief and Council for not doing anything. We have been screaming for something to be done. We want to bring these services to the community, even though we understand there is a shortage of nurses everywhere. There has to be a system where the care is adequate when people need immediate attention. This baby is in a precarious situation and yet after two days, he was still waiting in Cross Lake for a medevac. We need to care for our people with the same care as anyone else receives in Canada. Our nearest hospital is Thompson and it's always full because it serves all of Northern Manitoba,” stated **Donnie McKay**, the Councillor responsible for health in PCN.

“We shouldn't need to go to media to advocate for our children and yet it feels this is one of the only options that will get results,” said **Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “I am extremely concerned to hear that medical transportation for this newborn baby was unavailable for more than 24 hours. Systems have continually failed our children. I am imploring leaders to do all they can to get patients moved safely out of our Nations when they need to receive urgent treatment in Winnipeg. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and with the leaders of Pimicikamak Cree Nation as they work to get support for their citizens.”

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For more information:

Melanie Ferris, MKO Communications

Phone: 204-612-1284

Email: melanie.ferris@mkonorth.com

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