



## Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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### **MKO Statement on Distinction-Based Indigenous Health Legislation**

**Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB** – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement to respond to the federal government's move to co-develop distinction-based Indigenous health legislation. This legislation was announced in the federal government's Speech from the Throne in 2020.

**Grand Chief Garrison Settee states:**

"MKO is willing to work with both the federal and provincial governments on a process to co-develop a distinction-based Indigenous health legislation. Health is our Treaty right. MKO will advocate that this legislation recognize and reflect our laws and the right to health. We do not want to see any new legislation being used as a colonial tool to diminish, derogate, or abrogate from these sacred agreements of our citizens.

MKO expects the federal government to have the funding and resources for focused, substantial, and formal consultations with the MKO First Nations and their members. MKO wants to ensure engagement and consultation processes moves forward in a respectful and rights-based approach. Options for health legislation will only be as good as the consultation process with leaders and the grassroots people. We must ensure that we make space for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, women, men, youth, and Two Spirit/gender-diverse or non-conforming people to have a voice in developing this legislation.

Canada's Constitution protects our inherent rights as First Nations. We need to be a true partner in decision-making and negotiations for developing options for legislation.

I am concerned about the timeline for this process given we are in a pandemic. Our human resources are rightly focused on assisting and supporting Northern First Nations with the ongoing response to COVID-19. There needs to be recognition and a response to the fact that First Nations leaders and grassroots citizens are impacted by the pandemic.

Our First Nations health experts absolutely need a seat at any tables, and we have emphasized this during our response to COVID-19 and the current process for vaccine allocation, prioritization, and distribution. Federal and provincial governments need to recognize and honour the importance of Indigenous-led approaches and models based on traditional wisdom and worldviews as we proceed with developing any new laws.

Northern First Nations face unique challenges when it comes to accessing health care. This must be reflected in the legislation. Our First Nations have limited and substandard access to primary, secondary, and tertiary care.

This legislation is an opportunity to formulate cultural safety standards, eradicate racism ingrained in colonial health systems, and to support and finance Indigenous-led health services and programs that includes access to traditional healing practices, land-based approaches, reflects our worldview, values, culture and languages. There is opportunity to address gaps in medical transportation, non-insured health benefits such as access to medications, addressing mental health, crisis supports, health planning, recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff, funding MKOs health transformation project and improve clinical care services.

MKO and the leaders of Northern First Nations have long advocated for action and measures to improve access to health care. We assert that funding for health care must be substantially equitable, predictable, and sustainable. Ultimately, we want to be healthy and as well as our ancestors were before colonization. Any new health legislation should also address the social determinants of health and provide the necessary infrastructure for healthier and prosperous communities.”

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