

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RESPONSE TO ONTARIO TRIPARTITE JOINT ACTION TABLE ON FIRST NATIONS HEALTH CRISIS/STATE OF EMERGENCY

THUNDER BAY, ON: Leadership from Matawa First Nations Management today provided their response to the March 31, 2016 meeting between northern Ontario First Nation leaders, Hon. Jane Philpott, Government of Canada Minister of Health and Hon. Eric Hoskins, Government of Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

This meeting resulted in a commitment to create a tripartite joint action table. According to an April 1, 2016 statement by Hon. Philpott, “the precise membership and terms of reference for this table are yet to be established and that this work is expected to begin within the next two weeks.”

“I would like to offer my perspective on the initial outcome of this meeting as a leader representing people who will be directly impacted by this process that is being set up,” said Neskantaga First Nation Chief Wayne Moonias, one of the northern Ontario First Nation leaders who attended the meeting with the Ministers.

“While it is a good start, immediate actions need to be taken *now* to address the urgency at the community level. Waiting for a table to be established and waiting for agreement on how immediate actions are to be implemented will take long and is a luxury of time that we do not have and, more importantly, that a life depends on.” Chief Moonias added, “How many of our people and young generations have to die before the government realizes that there's needs to be immediate action taken?”

Recommendations on improving health outcomes in First Nations in the immediate, short, medium and long-term have been well documented in several reports including by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Auditor General of Canada’s Spring 2015 Report and the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They have also been made in inquests such as the Selena Sakanee Inquest (1999) and Bruce Moonias Inquest (2013) and by First Nations themselves. “Immediate actions on addressing the health crisis are already known and should be filtered down *directly to our people and the communities who need them* and nowhere else. If they do not, faith in this process will wane very quickly,” stated Chief Moonias.

Canada’s budget 2016 committed \$8.4B for investments in education, water, housing and social infrastructure for Indigenous people. “Investments in the recent federal budget are macro-level and not in full consideration of the health crisis in our part of the country. Therefore, *new investments are required* for this process in order for it to produce the kind of change that our community members need to feel and that will improve their quality of life,” said Chief Moonias.

“The Matawa communities are prepared for direct participation in the joint action table in order to ensure their unique needs and challenges are represented,” said David Paul Achneepineskum, CEO of Matawa First Nations. “We look forward to our future work with the federal and provincial governments and political territorial organizations on addressing our longstanding health crisis.”

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For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Officer – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca.

Matawa First Nations Management is a Tribal Council providing a variety of advisory services and programs to 8 Ojibway and Cree First Nations in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and 1 First Nation in the Robinson-Superior Treaty area. Follow them on Facebook or Twitter @MatawaFNM..

