

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA APPLAUDS WEBEQUIE FIRST NATION MEMBERS ON COMPLETION OF 1,000 KM WALK TO RAISE AWARENESS ON FIRST NATION HEALTH INEQUITIES

WEBEQUIE, ON: A number of Matawa Chiefs today joined Webequie First Nation Chief Cornelius Wabasse in welcoming Norman Shewaybick, his sons and participants of the 'Healing Journey Walk Home 2016' back to the community as part of the conclusion of the walk. Prior to the healing journey walk, the First Nations in Matawa provided their full support.

The walk started on February 12 at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay to raise awareness on the health inequities and disparities that exist for First Nations in northwestern Ontario and to issues a call to action to address them. On February 24, Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority issued a declaration of health and public health emergency which included a number of orders for the action of provincial and federal governments within 90 days.

First Nations in Matawa have been expressing the same outcry over health and public health for some time and have issued States of Emergency as a result of the suicide epidemic in several communities over the last 3 years and more. 41 recommendations from the *Selena Sakanee Inquest* (1999) and 23 recommendations from the *Bruce Moonias Inquest* (2013) which have provided guidance to federal and provincial governments on how to improve some of the social determinants of health have been ignored.

The Matawa Health and Social Services Task Group (MHSSTG) made up of health and social managers who act as an advisory body and provide recommendations on health and social issues regionally have been developing solutions to the address the health and social crisis in Matawa First Nations. Some of the solutions to some of the social determinants of health are outlined in the: [Back to our Roots: Chii Kee Way Meno Biimadeseyung - The Strategy to Overcome Prescription Drug Abuse/Misuse in Matawa Communities](#). They are also currently looking at models on health and social governance.

The issue of health and public health is also a priority as a pillar within the Regional Framework Agreement community-based process of negotiation related to mineral and other related developments in the area known as the Ring of Fire that is currently taking place. Matawa First Nations are hoping that solutions being proposed to address the health care crisis, including improving socio-economic conditions, will be met with support and resources from both the federal and provincial governments.

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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.



QUOTES

“I firstly want to thank Norman Shewaybick for sharing and keeping his promise to his late wife Laura. It is unfortunate that how well you live and how long you live depends on your postal code in the province of Ontario. It is clear that those in the POL and POT postal codes do not have equal access to health care. It is not enough to look at this from the perspective of treating sicknesses, we need to frame this health policy debate around the nonmedical factors that are contributing to an ineffective health care system that results in poor health and lower life expectancy. If First Nations are in poverty and don’t have the community infrastructure and economy to promote and sustain good health—this problem will only continue. We have the recommendations and solutions to address health inequities but they must be met with meaningful support so they can be implemented.”

— *David Paul Achneepineskum, Matawa First Nations Management CEO*

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.