



## CHIEFS COUNCIL

### MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MATAWA CHIEFS COUNCIL POINT OUT INEQUITIES FOR FIRST NATIONS ON WORLD RABIES DAY

**THUNDER BAY, ON:** Celebrated around the world on September 28, 2024, World Rabies Day is an opportunity to raise awareness about the impact of rabies on humans and animals, provide information and advice on how to prevent the disease in at-risk communities, and support advocacy for increased efforts in rabies control. The Matawa Chiefs Council (MCC) are taking the opportunity to point out inequities for First Nations around the issues of prevention, surveillance and post-exposure treatment of rabies—a fatal and easily preventable zoonotic disease.

While there have only been 26 reported human cases of rabies in Canada since 1924 (with the [last one being reported](#) more recently on September 9, 2024 by the Brant County Health Unit in Temiskaming)—human cases of rabies are extremely rare and are always a concern nonetheless.

Since the Matawa Animal Services Pilot-Project began earlier this year—the MCC have been provided briefings regarding many related issues including the interdependence between peoples, animals, and the environment within First Nations. The approach used is that of the One Health Model—which is recognized by the World Health Organization to optimize the health of humans, animals and ecosystems by integrating these fields—rather than keeping them separate.

One of the inequities being noted is the lack of consideration for the unique circumstances of First Nations in comparison to municipalities when to applying health unit/[veterinary advice](#) that keep people, animals and the environment safe from rabies. For example, some of the precautions they provide to the public to reduce the risk of being exposed to the virus are: keeping pets rabies vaccinations up-to-date (because it is the law) and keeping pets away from wildlife. The MCC are saying that these kinds of recommendations ignore the reality in First Nations and inappropriately discharge the governments’ duty to protect First Nations’ public health from reasonably foreseeable threats.

On May 23, 2024, the MCC made a [submission](#) to Ontario’s proposed Bill 171, *An Act to Enact the Veterinarian Professionals Act, 2024 and to Amend or Repeal Various Acts*. The Matawa Animal Services Pilot-Project is currently advocating with the *Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness and Ministry of Rural Affairs* on the removal of barriers to veterinary professional service delivery in First Nations in Bill 171 and its regulations.

### QUOTES

“We have discovered that First Nations in Matawa wait 8-10 years for a veterinarian clinic to happen in any of our communities. We live in very close proximity to wildlife. Not receiving regular veterinarian services (which would include regular pet vaccine protection from rabies) puts us at more risk to experience rabies than other communities who are near municipalities who have veterinarians and veterinarian hospitals.”

—Chief Chris Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation

“We require regular access to veterinarian services to ensure that our loved ones are protected, and our communities remain safe. Also, we need proper disease surveillance, disease testing, facilities to house animals who have bit a person for rabies observation, and we need to have immediate access to post exposure treatment for humans. We require equal access to veterinarian services to protect our communities and keep peoples, pets, and the environment safe. Right now, we are not even under-served—we are **un-served**. We are highly at-risk.”

—*Chief Sheri Taylor, Ginoogaming First Nation*

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