

March 20, 2020

Summary Report of the Ontario Regional Chief

Please find a summary of highlights from this week. Numerous conference calls were held with all levels of government including Indigenous Services Canada, AFN Executive Committee, Ministry of Health, COO Leadership Council, and FNIHB. Although these were separate conference calls there were recurring topics throughout all of the calls. These will be highlighted throughout this summary.

COVID-19 AND PREVENTION

COVID-19 is a new virus. Main symptoms include, fever, cough (with or without chest pain) and difficulty breathing. While testing is available, there is currently a shortage for test kits. Anyone with symptoms should assume that they have the virus and take steps to stay away from other people as much as possible to prevent its spread.

Canadians are being asked to practicing social distancing, and especially around the elderly and other vulnerable members of the population i.e. people with asthma, the very young, those with compromised immune systems. Also, everyone is encouraged to practise good hand and home hygiene by washing hands frequently, avoiding touching face and cleaning surfaces regularly.

PROVINCIAL MEASURES TO CONTAIN SPREAD OF COVID-19

The Ontario Government declared a state of emergency on March 17 in response to the pandemic. As a result of this declaration, all public facilities are legally required to close public immediately including: public libraries, schools, child care centres, bars and restaurants, except to the extent that such facilities provide takeout food and delivery. Further, all organized public events of over fifty (50) people are also prohibited, including parades and events and communal services within places of worship.

These orders will remain in place until March 31, 2020, at which point they will be reassessed and considered for extension. As well, where they can, people are being asked to work from home.

FEDERAL MEASURES TO CONTAIN SPREAD OF COVID-19

On March 18, Canada's pandemic plans came into effect. Canada closed its borders to foreigners and called its citizens home. Upon their return, Canadians are required to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days, no exceptions.

To protect the supply chain of important goods to Canada, domestic flights and flights from the U.S., Mexico and the Caribbean will not be affected and measures do not apply to commerce or trade. Certain kinds of workers who need to cross the Canada-US border will be exempted from requirements to self-isolate.

PANDEMIC PLANNING

Some members of the Leadership Council expressed concern that some of their communities had no pandemic plans or their plans needed to be updated. Further discussion outlined that pandemic plans that are in place need to be assessed to ensure they are up to date or current and relevant. FNHIHB has noted preparedness support for updated pandemic plans is provided to First Nations that request it.

Further to this, FNHIHB has noted it is doing the following;

- Templates of Pandemic Plans to be sent out to all communities.
- Task Forces are being established.
- A northern remote working committee has been established.
- Training for planning will be provided by FNHIHB via the Red Cross.

THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM – CHANGES BEING MADE FOR PANDEMIC

All non-essential services and non-elective procedures are being postponed indefinitely to allow hospitals and health service providers time to prepare as well as to re-direct resources for pandemic readiness

Home, acute and long-term care delivery is being changed. A major focus is being placed on hospital bed capacity management.

A plan in case the health system gets flooded is being developed and may include calling in additional workers from retirement, and medical and nursing schools.

FISCAL YEAR FUNDING – REGULAR CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS

Anne Scotton – Regional Director Ontario Region ISC informed the members that funding for the current fiscal year and April 1st cheque issues will go forward, even in the event there are missing reports or lack of documentation for compliance to their contribution agreements. Funds will be released with the next payment run.

There will be no lapses or surpluses. Moving money around will be expected but ISC would like to be informed.

Communities will still be expected to use their regular program dollars first. For example, use education program dollars to bring students home during the shut downs due to school closures. As noted elsewhere in this memo, additional monies required for emergency operations related to the pandemic are being made available as well.

FOOD SECURITY

One of the more urgent issues that was common on all teleconference calls was that of Food Security. Plans are in place to access larger supply chains to relieve local suppliers who may be feeling the pressure from over-shopping by people who have close access to retail grocery stores.

Traditional food harvesting is also being encouraged in response to the Food Security issues that have risen. Discussions between FNIHB/ Parks Canada/Provincial Parks are planned and one of the asks will be to relax rules about harvesting wild meat within Park borders.

The Provincial Government will be lobbied, also by FNIHB, to keep the winter roads open for as long as possible to ensure trucks bringing in food and essential products will continue for as long as reasonably possible.

SEASONAL EVACUATIONS

Communities who experience seasonal evacuations are being told to prepare for those as well. Host communities are on standby according to representatives from FNIHB.

OFF-RESERVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS – CONCERNS

Work is underway with municipalities to address concerns raised by members for their homeless members in the cities and other urban areas so they don't fall through the cracks.

Hospitals and staff should be reminded of their oaths to save lives after it was disclosed that some hospital staff turned some Indigenous people away who were presenting for care at their emergency departments.