



Nishnawbe Aski Nation

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ATTAWAPISKAT SUICIDE CRISIS A NATIONAL TRAGEDY

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler says the State of Emergency declared by Attawapiskat First Nation on the suicide crisis faced by the remote, northern community is a shocking reflection of the lack of action to address the suicide epidemic across NAN territory.

“We have been working around-the-clock over the past few days to do everything we can to make sure that the people of Attawapiskat have the supports they need and we will redouble our efforts to help Chief and Council deal with the terrible situation,” said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. “The numbers of suicide attempts experienced by this community are shocking and nothing short of a national tragedy.”

Attawapiskat Chief Bruce Shisheesh declared a state of emergency calling for immediate action and long-term support following a dramatic increase in suicide attempts. The community has reported 101 suicide attempts since September 2015, with 28 attempts in March and 11 on Saturday alone.

“We have been overwhelmed by the international attention this tragedy has garnered. Canada is recognized as one of the best countries in which to live, and it has been difficult to explain to the foreign press why so many of our people resort to taking their own lives while living in one of the most prosperous countries in the world,” said Fiddler. “During my meeting with the Prime Minister last week I explained the need for immediate action on the suicide and the health emergency across NAN territory and look to his government to engage with us immediately on developing solutions so that no more lives are lost.”

Fiddler issued a call to action on January 20, 2016 to the governments of Ontario and Canada after several NAN First Nations were thrown into crisis over Christmas following the suicides of a 10-year-old girl in Bearskin Lake First Nation, a 20-year-old woman in Fort Albany First Nation, and a 14-year-old girl in Neskantaga First Nation. NAN has called for a Special Emergency Task Force to address the growing suicide epidemic across NAN First Nations.

NAN’s call to action followed the launch of The People’s Inquiry on Suicide by Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon of the Mushkegowuk Council, one of NAN’s Tribal Councils. The comprehensive report documents the ongoing suicide pandemic in the Mushkegowuk communities along the James Bay coast (NAN’s eastern border) and identifies key solutions and recommendations.

Fiddler and representatives of the Sioux Lookout Area Chiefs Committee on Health (CCOH) have declared a Health and Public Health Emergency for First Nations in the Sioux Lookout region and across NAN territory on February 2016. The Emergency was declared to address urgent and long-standing health issues caused by the inequality of health and health care services and calls for immediate, intermediate and long-term action strategies to address this crisis.

First Nation leaders and health officials will appear before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on Parliament Hill this week to outline the health emergency and present recommendations.

To address the issue of suicide, NAN is looking for both the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada to commitment resources for the development of crisis response teams to immediately begin to assist communities as well as developing a long-term strategy for suicide prevention including physical and mental health services, counselling and addiction treatment.

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