



Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **NAN RESPONSE TO FEDERAL BUDGET**

**THUNDER BAY, ON:** Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler expressed disappointment that despite its investment of \$828 million for Indigenous health, the Government of Canada has not responded to a proposal to significantly transform the delivery of health care services in NAN First Nations with the release of Budget 2017 today.

“The chronic failure of the health care system for First Nations across NAN territory has left our communities in a state of crisis. It is nothing short of a national tragedy that First Nations lack access to even the most basic health services. Children are dying and lives are at risk - the system simply isn’t working,” said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. “Our proposal for health transformation isn’t about revising policy or trying to fix a broken system; it’s a completely new and necessary approach to the total transformation of health care in our communities.”

Over a year ago, NAN leaders declared a health and public health emergency to bring attention to the ongoing community health crisis across NAN territory. Recognizing that the approach of incremental change to federally funded and administered health systems leads to worsening crisis and greater health disparities, NAN and First Nation leaders have worked closely with the federal government through various health action tables, working groups, roundtables and leadership meetings to establish and move forward a health transformation agenda to replace the current agenda of incremental change.

Six months ago, NAN submitted a plan and process for health transformation that incorporates best-practices, standards of care, community capacity building, rebuilding of health systems, rebuilding of relationships of trust, knowledge translation and data-driven decision-making. This First Nation-led process represents the best way forward to improve health outcomes for NAN First Nations.

NAN’s call for change comes after a scathing report by the Auditor General of Canada in 2015 confirmed the continued failure of Health Canada to address the needs of First Nations when it comes to access to and the delivery of health care services in remote First Nations.

There is general agreement from Indigenous health officials that NAN's submission for health transformation is an appropriate solution to this health crisis, and NAN is disappointed that the government has chosen incremental change in this year's budget.

Fiddler is also disappointed that Budget 2017 provides no new funding for First Nations child welfare, as ordered by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, promising only to create an "Indigenous Framework on Early Learning and Child Care" with input from stakeholders before committing to funding.

"First Nations Children are among the most vulnerable members of society, and recent tragedies like the tragic youth suicides in Wapekeka First Nation have painfully demonstrated the desperate need for more services for our children and families," said Fiddler. "The chronic underfunding of First Nations child welfare continues to put our children at unnecessary risk. Progress is being made through our work directly with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, but this budget misses a critical opportunity to invest in positive outcomes for First Nation children and families."

Just a few blocks from the budget release in Parliament, the Tribunal is currently hearing submissions on the federal government's failure to comply with a 2016 ruling ordering an end to the discrimination of First Nations children by the continued federal underfunding of on-reserve child welfare services.

The hearing was sparked as a result of a non-compliance motion filed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, the Assembly of First Nations, NAN and Chiefs of Ontario. The human rights complaint also targets Ottawa's uneven application of Jordan's Principle, which places the care of First Nations children ahead of jurisdictional disputes over funding.

On March 10, 2017, NAN and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Minister Carolyn Bennett announced a Remoteness Quotient Table to address the unique costs of providing child welfare services in NAN First Nation communities.

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