STATE OF EMERGENCY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO: HSF urges health organizations to join together in response to Indigenous health Call to Action

Collective support of national health organizations in Canada required to end needless deaths and suffering caused by profoundly poor determinants of health.

Toronto, ON – Friday February 26 2016 – The Heart and Stroke Foundation is committed to supporting Indigenous capacity in health to close the gap in health inequities relating to heart disease and stroke and will act to support remote First Nation communities in northern Ontario, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and Sioux Lookout territories.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation is answering the call to action under the declared state of emergency in northern Ontario by asking all of its partners and allies in health to collaborate and support First Nations in the north and all Indigenous communities. “Indigenous health is a priority for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Together we will make it happen,” said CEO David Sculthorpe.

Sculthorpe committed that the Heart and Stroke Foundation will take the following steps in response to the call to action:

1. Mobilize our partners to join a roundtable to collectively support community services in Northern Ontario.
2. Send a letter to the Federal and Provincial governments emphasizing the need for equitable access to health care in Indigenous communities.
3. Extend our services and expertise relating to heart disease and stroke prevention, treatment and recovery.

The Foundation has partnerships and alliances with more than 80 national health organizations and professional institutions and is urging all partners to make Indigenous health a priority in order to support reconciliation, ensuring remote communities like those in NAN and Sioux Lookout have equitable and accessible health care.

“We have reviewed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and believe we must invest in First Nation, Métis and Inuit children and youth, recognize the intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools and the social and economic determinants that impact the health and well-being of so many Indigenous communities in Canada,” added Sculthorpe. “It’s incumbent upon us to use our strength and expertise to advocate and improve the systems that are underserving Indigenous peoples.” The CEO emphasized that Canadians cannot afford to do nothing.

Remote First Nation communities in northern Ontario and the broader NAN Territory are in a state of Health and Public Health Emergency and are reporting needless deaths and suffering caused by profoundly poor determinants of health. The people have experienced poor health outcomes and a substandard state of health and well-being as a result of inadequate medical diagnosis and treatment of preventable diseases.

First Nations people experience a level of health care that would be intolerable to the mainstream population of Ontario, and the Foundation supports the action plan put forward by NAN and Sioux Lookout.
NAN and Sioux Lookout are asking for the following action:

a) Meet with provincial and federal Health Ministers to commence an investment and intervention plan on an urgent basis.

b) Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to provide detailed plans and timelines indicating how First Nations communities will be provided with safe, clean and reliable drinking water.

c) Health Canada to provide detailed plans and timelines on how they will follow all the recommendations in the Spring 2015 Auditor General Report including:
   - addressing deficiencies in the Health Canada nursing stations infrastructure,
   - ensuring all necessary supplies and equipment are available,
   - ensuring that Health Canada nursing stations are capable of providing Health Canada’s essential health services,
   - ensuring that allocation of resources is based on community needs.

d) Federal and provincial governments to conduct an assessment of health system deficiencies and associated health liabilities.

e) Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) to approve the proposal for a Long Term Care facility for the Sioux Lookout Region and that all existing beds at the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre are in operation.

f) The governments shall comply with Jordan’s Principle and that all children receive the health and developmental services that they require. This shall include the provision of specialists in the communities to conduct community-wide assessments and referrals.

g) Provincial and Federal governments to commit resources for the development of long term strategies to crisis situations including suicide prevention, mental health services, counselling, addiction treatment and after care.

h) Provincial and Federal governments to commit to and support SLFNHA’s Approaches to Community Wellbeing (public health) model to address health inequity, determinants of health and prevention of infectious and chronic diseases.

i) Address the discriminatory and unethical policies and practices under Non Insured Health Benefits.

About the Heart and Stroke Foundation

The Heart and Stroke Foundation’s mission is to prevent disease, save lives and promote recovery. A volunteer-based health charity, we strive to tangibly improve the health of every Canadian family, every day. Healthy lives free of heart disease and stroke. Together we will make it happen. heartandstroke.ca

For more information, please contact:
Teresa Roncon
Heart and Stroke Foundation
troncon@hsf.on.ca
416-489-7111 x 3060