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RECENT RACIAL STEREOTYPING OF PLAINS/WOODLAND CREE MAN REAFFIRMS NEED FOR HEALTH OMBUDSPERSON'S OFFICE

(Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatoon SK) – The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) says its planned First Nation Health Ombudsperson's Office is more important than ever to addressing racism, stereotyping discrimination in Canada's health care system after a Cree Elder and Knowledge Keeper was denied proper medical care at a walk-in clinic in Saskatoon.

In March, Joseph Naytowhow of Sturgeon Lake First Nation went to the clinic for a painful medical condition, and a doctor immediately asked him "whether he took drugs and alcohol." Leaving the office without being examined, he was later diagnosed with a serious viral infection after going to the emergency room.

"We need to work together to improve the lives in a caring, compassionate and respectful manner. The treatment of Joseph Naytowhow is unacceptable, and it happens too many times when our members seek medical assistance. The systems need to change, and the health professionals need to understand that we, as First Nations, have had our own health care system since time immemorial. We come from a place of respect, honour and dignity, and it is always disheartening when we receive word that our family members and relatives are mistreated, misinterpreted, and misunderstood," said Chief Christine Longjohn of Sturgeon Lake First Nation.

"We have always been concerned about the challenges experienced with the health system in Saskatchewan and the quality of care received by our members. This incident illustrates that there are still many challenges to be addressed, and the spectre of racism continues and has not been properly addressed at this point," said Grand Chief Brian Hardlotte of the Prince Albert Grand Council. "If we are truly going to make a difference with respect to discriminatory attitudes then it is necessary to have accountability and recourse. We have had recognition from local health authorities related to these challenges, and it is initiatives like this that will eventually make a difference."

"This incident of racial stereotyping by the medical community is the latest of many complaints of systemic racism within Canada's health care system that must be brought to the attention of the highest health authorities for resolution," said FSIN Vice Chief David Pratt. "In 2017, we received a mandate by the Chiefs to address these incidents of discrimination by doctors, nurses and other medical professionals. The Treaty Right to Health guarantees us top quality

health care, and, unfortunately, incidents like this prevent our member nations from receiving what was promised under Treaty. We are now in the process of establishing a health ombudsperson's office to ensure accountability for when these incidents happen.”

In February, FSIN announced its plans to establish the first ever First Nation Health Ombudsperson's Office in Saskatchewan. The office will ensure First Nations have a point of contact where they feel safe to be able to report incidents of discrimination when accessing health care services in Saskatchewan. The Office will also assist in determining options to resolve conflicts or concerns for overall system change improvements.

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations represents 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan. The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations is committed to honouring the spirit and intent of the Treaties, as well as the promotion, protection and implementation of the Treaty promises that were made more than a century ago.

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