



## ***FSIN Emergency Management Policy Secretariat 2023 & Beyond***

---

### **1.0) FEDERATION OF SOVEREIGN INDIGENOUS NATIONS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SECRETARIAT PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) is mandated by the Chiefs-in-Assembly to implement and protect the Treaty and Inherent Rights of the 74 First Nations, which includes the portfolio of Emergency Management and Crisis Response Readiness.

In addition, FSIN's Emergency Management department has provided pandemic response support to the 74 First Nations as well as First Nations affected by crisis-emergency events throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Going forward, the FSIN Emergency Management secretariat-department shall ideally consist of the following;

1. Executive Director of Emergency Management
2. 1 Northern Emergency Management Coordinator  
1 Southern Emergency Management Coordinator
3. Administrative Assistant
4. Communications Technician
5. Search & Rescue Oversight Technician
6. FSIN Emergency Management Task Force or Commission

The FSIN Emergency Management department proposes to continue its work in the development of an effective Emergency Management Secretariat that meets the most pressing needs Saskatchewan First Nations in the following areas;

## **2.0) Safety & Security of First Nations**

Emergency management affects many aspects of First Nation governance and ultimately impacts health and safety of First Nation communities experiencing them. State of Emergency events such as forest fires and wild-fires, flooding, tornadoes, and extreme weather, are just a few examples of state of emergency events that form an ever-present threat to First Nation communities.

State of emergency events will continue to increase in number and severity due to the ongoing effects of climate change associated with Global Warming. First Nation communities in the north are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. First Nations must develop strategies for mitigation, prevention, response and recovery from all forms of Emergency Events and Crisis.

Other State of Emergency Events or crisis events which are increasing, are violence related events that can be linked to drugs & alcohol and gang related activity. A clear example of this type of event is the James Smith Cree Nation massacre, where 12 people lost their lives from a senseless drug fueled rampage by a local community member. Less violent but tragically similar events have unfolded in other First Nation communities, overwhelmed and held hostage by drugs and gang related or violent activity.

## **3.0) Search & Rescue/Recovery Capacity & Oversight**

Other aspects of Emergency Management include search and rescue, search and recovery. These operations expend a great deal of resources of time and expense as well as greatly affect the mental and emotional well being of community members and frontline technicians and workers.

In terms of Search & Rescue/Recovery, the FSIN receives many calls for assistance throughout any given year from First Nations leadership or affected family members of missing or lost loved ones. It is very difficult to form an effective response when resources; financial or otherwise are lacking. Furthermore, the FSIN is cognizant of fledgling organizations such as Saskatchewan First Nations Emergency Management (SFNEM) that have formed search and rescue capacity.

Notwithstanding any work conducted by SFNEM, the FSIN would propose to provide an oversight and liaison element of Search and Rescue/Recovery events, in order to provide assurance to family members and community leadership that pertinent organizations are acting in the best interest of missing or lost persons. Pertinent organizations would include RCMP, Social Services, Government, Tribal Councils, First Nation Leadership, and of course the families of the missing.

There is a duality to the issue of Search & Rescue, for example- some people go missing as result of getting lost in the woods, or on the other hand go missing as a result of foul play. Either type

of missing person case is a terrific strain on families and communities. Ultimately, either type of situation is heart-wrenching to the families of the missing. The most important response is to be on hand to lend emotional support and provide any available resource, as the family or community goes through the process of search or recovery.

#### **4.0) Social Infrastructure Gaps & Inequalities**

The results of emergencies such as fires damaging infrastructure or housing, bear a tremendous strain to First Nations already dealing with numerous social issues such as suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and other social infrastructure challenges related to poverty and chronic underfunding by federal authorities. Coordinated efforts will be undertaken to liaise with housing and infrastructure technicians to discuss this ongoing problem, especially as related to social infrastructure and quality of life.

It is important to identify these issues in terms of mitigation, prevention, response and recovery from Emergency Events and Crisis Response simply because healthy communities are able to respond more quickly and recover more quickly. Strategies can be implemented that will address the 4 pillars of Emergency Management that will not only aid communities during times of crisis but also improve quality of life and health indicators for First Nation communities.

Health Indicators are ultimately the result of the wellness of individuals, families and communities. First Nations must bear the cost of mortality when their members pass away, as there are no programs that fund this kind of service. Off-reserve members that do not possess life insurance, must cover these costs on behalf of their loved ones. Due to social-economic shortcomings (employment or wealth) First Nation governments most often cover these costs on behalf of their membership.

The FSIN Emergency Management Secretariat proposes to track the impact of Social Infrastructure Gaps and Inequalities in order to establish an ongoing data-base of the impact of these shortfalls, in regard to managing Emergency Events requiring any form of community response, in terms of human or financial cost in respect of mortality or health indicators, especially in relation to Social Infrastructure Gaps and Inequalities with mainstream or non-Indigenous Canada.

#### **5.0) Measuring Mortality Rates and Health Indicators – Data Sovereignty**

Since March 2020, the COVID 19 Pandemic has posed the most significant and profound threat to First Nation's health, safety and well-being. Saskatchewan has had the lowest vaccination rate in Canada and First Nation communities have lagged far behind the provincial average. First Nations have experienced an unprecedented loss of elders and membership in general.

Another factor contributing to extreme mortality rates and with respect to Covid-19 impacts was the lack of available regular medical service due to health and hospital facilities which were overwhelmed with Covid patients. Patients with chronic illness could not consistently access required medical treatment, in some cases resulting in death.

As well, the long-term effects of COVID infections and the prevalence of Long Covid in First Nation communities is not yet known. FSIN Emergency Management will continue exploration of this issue and provide a report to the Task Force Chiefs, as well as ensure that all pertinent agencies are informed of Health Indicators and Mortality Rates in respect of Data Sovereignty and Ownership.

#### **6.0) *Tracking the Impact of Communicable Disease & Alcohol and Drug Related Death***

The impact of vulnerable lifestyles and historical trauma related to residential schools and various historical policies of assimilation have caused a great degree of drug and alcohol abuse in First Nations communities. This in turn has led to an epidemic rate of communicable disease such as Syphilis, HIV, and Gonorrhea in some regions and First Nation communities within the province.

Tracking the toll of mortality related to vulnerable lifestyle and communicable disease is critical for the purpose of forming any strategic response and/or informed decision making. In addition, broad communication strategies must be formulated to address and stop the growth of vulnerable lifestyles and drug and alcohol related abuse. Alcohol and Drug Abuse is killing First Nation members and seems to be increasing in spite of efforts to stymie the growth.

Response strategies must be developed and shared with all government agencies both provincially and federally, and within the FSIN. This effort should be conducted in correlation with our member First Nations and Tribal Councils. Surveillance and Response of the alcohol and drug-related death epidemic must occur in order to inform all government agencies and First Nation governments.

#### **7.0) *OCAP Principles and First Nations Jurisdiction***

Another critical issue brought to the forefront by the pandemic is the aspect of Data Sovereignty. During the pandemic First Nations were dependent upon the province of Saskatchewan and Canada, to provide data related to the pandemic. Access to accurate data was critical to ensuring that First Nation communities were adequately informed of all matters and developments with respect to the pandemic, i.e.-mortalities, vaccination rates, vaccine side effects, etc.

With further regard to critical data, it should be clearly understood that First Nations form a high proportion of the entire provincial population of Saskatchewan. The Indigenous community is the largest minority in the province and is the main factor driving the population growth in Saskatchewan. Furthermore, most if not all, First Nation residents must carry out their everyday business within urban centers, which includes shopping, work, recreation and medical. Additionally, many First Nation community members alternate back and forth between urban centers and First Nation communities. Therefore, it is imperative that First Nations have not only access to their data, but also ownership of all data.

With regard to First Nations Data, an FSIN Emergency Management Secretariat would ensure that all Data attained from First Nations Emergency Events would become the property of First Nations exclusively visa vi the FSIN Convention Act, and its various boards, commissions and sub-committees.

### **8.0) Vaccination Acceptance and Uptake**

It should be noted that the Covid-19 Pandemic has been perhaps the most profound event to affect the entire world since World War 2. Providing this statement is no exaggeration and many people and organizations are deeply fatigued. The pandemic has been marked by right-wing public skepticism and denial bordering on outright rejection by some groups within society.

Through the course of the pandemic, the public has witnessed Covid denial turn to anti-masking and then anti-vaccination. So-called “Freedom Convoyers” who were actually right wing zealots actually took over the nations capital in a bid to undo all public Covid safety measures. It is unclear whether these groups were the victims or the culprits in the widespread use of misinformation and fake news. It can be argued that this resulted in Canada’s Covid mass vaccination effort stagnated and stalled in many regions of Canada.

As a result of the prolonged campaign of misinformation and fake news the province of Saskatchewan has perhaps the lowest rate of vaccination across Canada, and that rate is even lower in First Nation communities. In addition to Covid vaccination misinformation, vaccinations for other diseases once vanquished are on the rise once again. Some examples of diseases once almost eradicated and now on the rise are; Measles, Polio, Whooping Cough, Tuberculosis, and more.

The FSIN will work in conjunction with our other departments and outside organizations to provide science based information that is accurate and informative to the effective use of Vaccinations to combat the various maladies easily beaten with the use of vaccinations.

FSIN Emergency Management will utilize our Talking Stick App and staff to provide a coordinated effort that will address Vaccination Uptake and counter the misinformation and fake news.

**9.0) Environmental Stewardship & Emergency Events Oversight**

During the FSIN Emergency Management formal engagements with First Nation leadership and communities, environmental concerns related to water, were raised as a worrisome matter. In addition to forest wildfires and climate change, communities and leadership expressed a desire to see the protection of water elevated as an issue of oversight and action. In First Nation belief systems, water is the quintessential provider of life, and must be protected at all cost.

In response to this valid concern FSIN Emergency Management proposes to develop an ongoing database for baseline purity levels for all water tables accessed by First Nation communities. Such measurements would be key to monitoring for contamination from Industry (such as the Husky Oil spill and Train Derailments) and would be beneficial to reclamation efforts when contamination occurs.

FSIN Emergency Management shall endeavor to develop an effective data base to institute a body of work and a portfolio that will document water purity levels in relation to health and safety of communities. FSIN will work in conjunction with existing federal and provincial agencies in providing this work as an assurance to First Nations community and leadership that adequate measures are being taken in protection of water tables. Of course this work will also monitor flooding hazards and response of waterways that are in proximity to First Nations.

## **10) Project Methodology: FSIN Emergency Management Secretariat**

The issues identified in this proposed body of work are the most relevant to a collective First Nations Emergency Management and Response strategy. The FSIN recognizes and applauds the work carried out by the Prince Albert Grand Council and their hard in creating Saskatchewan First Nations Emergency Management (SFNEM). SFNEM has been mandated to provide Emergency Response Training to First Nations across the province, with the goal of being the Emergency Response Service Provider for Saskatchewan First Nations.

It should be recognized that SFNEM is a service provider and is not designed to address underlying situations or principles of First Nations jurisdiction or sovereignty. It has not been determined how SFNEM will receive direction from Saskatchewan First Nations, nor provide accountability or assurance that equity will be provided to all First Nations and Tribal Councils.

It should be noted that a technical working group has been in existence and functioning with representatives of First Nations and Tribal Councils for a number of years. Further engagement is required for defining a clear working relationship between Saskatchewan First Nations and SFNEM.

The FSIN Emergency Management Department and Secretariat will work with SFNEM and the First Nations of Saskatchewan to further engage on refining the First Nations Emergency Management portfolio and operational guidelines as pertaining to Emergency Event situations as they arise.

As outlined in this proposal and by the toll which the pandemic wreaked upon First Nation communities it imperative to ensure that First Nations are properly prepared and equipped to deal with any manner of Emergency Event.

### **10.1) FSIN Emergency Management will continue to work towards:**

1. Set up of an Emergency Management Secretariat and Commission.
2. Amending the Letter of Understanding for First Nations Emergency Management among Federal, First Nation and Provincial government;
3. Expand Capacity of First Nations Emergency Management Service Delivery; and work with First Nations and Tribal Councils to carry out this objective in correlation with leadership direction.
4. Developing and implementing a mutually suitable structured network for First Nations Emergency Management programs, services and capacity.

### **10.2) PROPOSED SCOPE FSIN OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT WORK**

For 2023-2024, Emergency Management will be focussing on these mandated areas:

**1. Engagement with Emergency Management Chiefs Task Force**

**Timeline: April 1, 2023 to March 30, 2024;**

- a. Implement motions from FSIN Emergency Management Task Force as they are provided.
- b. Expand the Secretariat's role in Emergency Management to include liaison with Saskatchewan First Nations Emergency Management and provide definition of affiliation with Saskatchewan First Nations in general and reporting processes.
- c. Develop a strategic plan for the development and implementation of Emergency Response Protocols for any future widespread or isolated Emergency Event or Crisis.

**2. COVID 19 Winding Down FSIN Pandemic Response**

**Timeline: April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024**

- a. Continue to provide PPE Supplies upon request to First Nations or Community Organizations.
- b. Maintain secure storage for PPE and sanitizer, sanitizing stations until such time as there is a formal declaration of the end of the Covid-19 pandemic is officially declared over by the World Health Organization.
- c. Will require that expired Hand-Sanitizer be disposed of in a safe and transparent manner. The FSIN possesses approximately 10 tonnes of expired Hand Sanitizer which will need to be disposed of as a toxic material with proper safeguards in place for disposal.
- d. Upon pandemic conclusion dispose of PPE in an amicable manner which is both economic and practical. FSIN may require the assistance of the Public Health Agency of Canada in the matter of disposal or recycling, or possibly even long term-storage. FSIN will continue to liaison with federal, provincial and First Nations and Tribal Councils to provide clear and consistent data that communicates matters of critical importance for First Nations in the area of Emergency Management.

**3. FSIN Emergency Management Communications**

**Timeline: April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024**

- a. Continue in all efforts to improve vaccination uptake in the First Nations community.
- b. Encourage the use of mental-health and wellness resources and identify service networks that would have capacity to assist communities in after-care of State of Emergency events.



- c. Research and provide info to First Nations on long-term effects of COVID (i.e. multiple infections and immune system functioning and damage to organs) and the extent Long COVID in First Nations communities.
- d. In coordination with Justice and Women’s Secretariats, develop Search and Rescue and emergency response and communication protocols relevant to Indigenous experience.
- e. Develop and Implement Emergency Operation Center Protocols that are responsive and effective for First Nation communities experiencing State of Emergency Events or Crisis.
- f. Track Mortality Rates of First Nation citizens and record and communicate rates and causes to relevant agencies and First Nations leadership and organizations.

#### **4. Wildfires/Forest Fires/Flooding Emergency Operation Center (EOC) Support**

**Timeline: April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024**

- a. Providing support to regional EOC’s or First Nation leadership in terms of advocating for resources.
- b. Liaison with community leadership and assist in coordination of evacuations in providing evacuees with access to mental-health and available financial supports.
- c. Communications coordinating of breaking news, communiqués and bulletins related to State of Emergency Events or Crisis.

#### **5. Search and Rescue/Recovery Oversight & Liaison/Emergency Operation Center (EOC)**

**Guidelines**

**Timeline: April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024**

- a. Upon request by First Nations leadership to do so, set up an Emergency Operations Centre in consultation with leadership and community frontline technicians.
- b. Technical coordination will be provided with expertise in searches to liaison with community, family and activated agencies.
- c. Develop draft terms of reference for First Nations EOCs, for use in response to First Nation State of Emergency Events.
- d. Departmental Acquisition of ATV/Side by Side for assistance and oversight in land searches including truck and trailer, or any other required equipment.
- e. Continued Engagement with search and rescue teams around the province, RCMP and the media.
- f. Coordinate with other FSIN Secretariats such as Justice and Health and Social Development, or Women’s Commission, as required.
- g. During emergencies, where requested, coordinating resources and search and rescue teams.
- h. Developing best practises for use in searches conducted across the province.

- i. Developing best practises for critical response and debriefing techniques and sharing them with all relevant agencies.

## **6. Establishing Protection of Water Table- Database**

**Timeline: April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024**

- a. Meet with regional and First Nation emergency management and lands and resources technicians to coordinate testing of water purity.
- b. Create website for information sharing with up-to-date water information.
- c. Coordinate ongoing schedule of testing for First Nations.
- d. Coordinate with FSIN Lands and Resources and Health and Social Development Secretariat.
- e. Institute ongoing or evergreen data base that provides up to date data on water safety quality of water tables within proximity of First Nations.
- f. During State of Emergency Events or Crisis coordinate or assist in coordination of First Nations community response, and liaison with relevant government agencies or business corporations involved.

## **7. Continued FSIN Engagement on First Nations Emergency Management**

- a. Continue engaging with First Nations leadership and communities and government agencies on expanding First Nations capacity in Emergency Response and Crisis Management.
- b. An overarching goal is providing services in a trauma-informed manner as our engagements have shown a high level of technician burnout.
- c. Ensure that all people working and volunteering on emergencies, have access to cultural and mental health supports.