



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Grand Chief Dumas responds to recent examples of systemic and anti-Indigenous racism in Federal and Provincial healthcare systems

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) issues this statement in response to recent experiences of systemic racism in healthcare, which continue to result in the death and/or serious injury of First Nations citizens in Manitoba and elsewhere. The circumstances which have resulted in the death of a citizen of the Sandy Bay Ojibway Nation in Hanna, Alberta, and in the neglectful treatment of a serious injury of the wife of Councillor Wood of the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin First Nation, are the most recent horrific examples of a healthcare system rife with systemic and anti-Indigenous racism.

“On behalf of the Assembly, I want to first and foremost extend my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Lillian Vanasse on the passing of their loved one. And I extend my well wishes to Carol Wood of the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin First Nation and wish her a speedy recovery from her injury,” said AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas. “I am especially concerned and frustrated by the death of Lillian Vanasse, a citizen of the Sandy Bay Ojibway Nation, who died tragically in Hanna, Alberta under troubling and neglectful circumstances.”

Grand Chief Dumas went on to state, “there can be no doubt that the death of Ms. Vanasse and the untreated injury of Carol Wood, are the result of deeply engrained systemic racism within Provincial and Federal healthcare systems. I acknowledge the media outlets and the advocates for bringing these horrific examples of systemic and anti-Indigenous racism into public scrutiny. Those responsible and those who perpetuate systemic racism within the healthcare system must be held accountable. First Nations in Manitoba and the AMC will continue to push the Provincial and Federal governments to bring about the changes required for the healthcare system to uphold its responsibilities, to not cause harm and to treat every human with respect and dignity.”

Grand Chief Dumas added, “Healthcare systems are built on notions of white superiority and on assumptions, policies, priorities and decisions that originate in Canada’s colonial and racist history. This is why a First Nations-led process for healthcare transformation is so important. Without our own systems and people in place, the existing systems will continue to cause harm to First Nations peoples even if those perpetuating the mistreatment and racism towards First Nations are removed.”

Dr. Marcia Anderson, First Nations Pandemic Response Coordinator (PRCT) Lead stated, “In referring to a strategy to address systemic racism, I recommend explicitly including the development and implementation of anti-racism policies in health service delivery organizations and transparent public reporting of health care quality and health system performance by race so that there is accountability and the ability to monitor progress over time.”

“I note there are discussions currently underway between Federal, Provincial and First Nation/Indigenous stakeholders on systemic and anti-Indigenous racism within healthcare systems. I call on federally and provincially elected officials, as a take away from their discussions, to immediately expedite a First Nations-led approach for healthcare transformation, along with development of a strategy that will address the underlying assumptions that perpetuate systemic racism within the federal and provincial healthcare systems within Manitoba. Such a strategy should ensure that there is ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.” concluded Grand Chief Dumas.

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About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Inineu (Cree), Anishinineu (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.