



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMC demands Manitoba act immediately to protect First Nations children in care

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) has sought clarification from the Government of Manitoba regarding the public health measures in place to protect First Nations children in care in Manitoba.

The AMC has received distressing information that foster parents in Manitoba are not required to be vaccinated against COVID-19. At the same time, parents of children in care are being denied access to their children if they are unvaccinated. On its face, this policy is inherently discriminatory and perpetuates the systemic harms faced by First Nations citizens. The AMC demands that the province act immediately to ensure that First Nations children's physical and mental health in care, an overwhelmingly disproportionate number of whom are First Nations, are protected.

Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said, "Throughout the pandemic, a number of parents seeking support from the AMC First Nations Family Advocate Office have come forward describing visitation access being denied by Child and Family Services (CFS) agencies based on the presumption of risk of children coming into contact with COVID-19 through access to their unvaccinated or partially vaccinated parents, siblings and extended family. Yet, these same children are residing in homes and coming into contact every day with unvaccinated foster parents and other foster family members."

Currently, Manitoba healthcare and child protection workers are required to be double-vaccinated due to their frequent and close contact with vulnerable members of the public, including children under the age of 12.

Grand Chief Dumas continued, "First Nations children in Manitoba already suffer from the generational trauma of being forcibly removed and disconnected from their families and culture. The current foster care system is simply a continuation of centuries of discriminatory Crown policies aimed at harming First Nations citizens, including residential schools and the 60's Scoop. Now, during a global pandemic, we hear that the province has not only significantly enhanced the harms that First Nations foster children are facing by denying them access to their family, but at the same time have put those children at risk by failing to enact public health measures or policies to reduce the chance of COVID-19 spreading in a foster care setting. Children under twelve residing with unvaccinated foster parents are also at higher risk of negative mental health outcomes as they are not able to attend many public places in Manitoba without a vaccinated parent or guardian."

Grand Chief Dumas added, "Unvaccinated foster parents adversely affect First Nations children in their care as they cannot attend many public places without a vaccinated parent or guardian. These children are therefore more vulnerable to develop negative mental health issues. If those foster parents whom the children in care live with are allowed to be unvaccinated, but First Nations parents who only visit their children must be vaccinated, this treats the parents differently and puts our children at risk."

“Just like healthcare and child protection workers who are required to be double-vaccinated due to their frequent and close contact with vulnerable members of the public, including children under the age of 12, the same requirements should be in place for foster parents. I have already written a letter to Manitoba and Canada to put public health measures or policies in place requiring all foster parents with First Nations children in their care to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible and have called on them to ensure that First Nations foster children are not being denied access to their families and cultures based on discriminatory policies” 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 / Ininew (Cree), Anishinew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.