



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMC disturbed by reports of deaths in state custody

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) is disturbed by reports of deaths of intoxicated people in the custody of police forces, specifically the RCMP, across the country and in Manitoba. In media stories, it is being reported that since 2010 there have been 60 in-custody deaths of intoxicated persons in Canada since 2010, including one in The Pas, Manitoba, where the individual was being held under the *Intoxicated Persons Detention Act*. The AMC issues this statement to call on governments to support adequately staffed sobering centres, as well as to provide the preventative and social services that address the underlying causes of homelessness and addictions.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas stated, “The media reports of the deaths of intoxicated people in state custody are very disturbing, particularly the citizen identified as being from Mosakahiken Cree Nation who died under questionable circumstances in a RCMP holding cell in The Pas. Last year, there was the woman in Thompson who died in RCMP custody after being arrested for being intoxicated. People who are suffering from addictions and experiencing homelessness should not lose their lives because of being detained under the *Intoxicated Persons Detention Act*. The issue is particularly acute in northern First Nations and urban centres where the only option identified by the Police and/or RCMP is detention of intoxicated persons within local jailing or holding cells.”

Grand Chief Dumas added, “I spoke with the reporters for this story and relayed my personal experiences with how we can assist people who are a danger to themselves under this existing legislation. Unfortunately, in remote communities, the only place for accommodating these people is often the local RCMP detachment where there is no adequate supervision for people who are vulnerable or a danger to themselves. This has resulted in needless suffering and injury to some of our people. The stereotype of the “drunken Indian” results in a lack of police officials checking on the health status of people being held in detention. This racism has fatal consequences. I will reiterate that this is a health issue and not a criminal issue and should be treated as such with treatment and addressing the social determinants of health in First Nations across Manitoba and in other urban centres where the issue presents itself. These people should be taken to hospitals or treatment centres rather than jail cells.”

“This is actually part of a larger problem of First Nations deaths in state custody in Canada and Manitoba, including within correctional institutions such as Brandon, Headingley, the Winnipeg Remand Centre, the Women’s Correctional Centre, the Manitoba Youth Centre and Stony Mountain penitentiary. In other Commonwealth countries, there have been inquiries established into the issue of the High Level of First Nations People in Custody and Oversight and Review of Deaths in Custody. I am calling on Manitoba to call an Inquiry not only into the deaths of intoxicated persons while in custody but also examine the high level of First Nations’ deaths in all circumstances of state custody that includes child and family services and health facilities,” 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.