



Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
ᐱᓄᓂᐱᓂᐱ ᐱᓂᐱ ᐱᓂᐱ

100 Back Street, Unit 200 Thunder Bay, ON P7J 1L2  
Tel: (807) 623-8228 Fax: (807) 623-7730

## NEWS RELEASE

Thursday January 19, 2017

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL 10 A.M.

### **FIRST NATION LEADERS CALL FOR ACTION ON SUICIDE CRISIS**

**OTTAWA, ON:** Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler is calling for the Government of Canada to act on First Nation proposals to improve access to health services, including emergency funding for a mental health proposal submitted by Wapekeka First Nation to Health Canada just months before the tragic loss of two youths to suicide.

“One year ago this month we issued a call to action for the Government of Canada to address the suicide crisis across NAN territory. Since then we have lost at least 17 more people to suicide, including two young girls in Wapekeka just over a week ago. The current piecemeal approach to this perpetual crisis isn’t working and more lives are at risk,” said NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler at a press conference in Ottawa this morning. “Our First Nations know what works in their communities and many have had success with community-led approaches, but when funding runs out they fall back into crisis. Proposals and recommendations are submitted, including a direct plea for help by Wapekeka last summer, and it is unconscionable that this government has failed to act.”

Wapekeka declared a state of emergency following the loss of two 12-year-old girls to suicide this month. Fiddler chastised Health Canada for failing to fund a proposal submitted by Chief Brennan Sainnawap in July 2016 for mental health supports for at-risk youth. Submitted just months before this tragedy, it notes Chief and Council’s concern over several suicide attempts by youth in the past year.

The Grand Chef called on the Government of Canada to provide emergency funding for Wapekeka’s community-based proposal, and work with NAN First Nations on long-term strategies to stop the suicide epidemic that continues to devastate our communities. NAN has submitted a comprehensive proposal for the transformation of the delivery of health care in our communities, and Fiddler is calling on this government to act on it.

“Canada boldly sells itself to the world as the best country in which to live, with a health system that is the best, but it continues to fail our people. In the Mushkegowuk territory

our youth are still taking their own lives. What is it going to take to hear their cries for help?" said Jonathan Solomon, Grand Chief of the Mushkegowuk Council. "The system is broken. Our front-line workers are burned out and our communities are tired. The government may announce initiatives from time to time, but they are just dragging their feet while we continue to bury our loved ones. Actions speak louder than words. We have heard far too many words, but have not seen nearly enough action."

On January 20, 2016 NAN issued a call to action to the governments of Ontario and Canada to address the growing suicide epidemic across NAN First Nations. The call to action followed the launch of *The People's Inquiry on Suicide* by the Mushkegowuk Council, a comprehensive report documenting the ongoing suicide pandemic in First Nations along the James Bay coast.

In October 2016 NAN submitted a Strategy for Health Transformation to Health Canada for the transformation of the delivery of health services in First Nations. This collaborate, Indigenous-led health transformation is built on community-based, community-driven programs developed by First Nations for First Nations.

Accessible only by air and seasonal winter road, Wapekeka is located approximately 450 kilometres northeast of Sioux Lookout, Ontario, with an on-reserve population of approximately 350 people. Wapekeka's 'Youth Mental Health' submission to Health Canada also highlights the success of their comprehensive year-round strategy, including the SOS (Survivors of Suicide) Conference held for the past 22 years, which was lost two years ago due to federal funding cuts.

***For more information please contact:***

*Michael Heintzman, Director of Communications – Nishnawbe Aski Nation (807) 625-4965 or cell (807) 621-2790 or by email [mheintzman@nan.on.ca](mailto:mheintzman@nan.on.ca)*

*Joshua Frogg, Media Liaison for Wapekeka First Nation – Phone: 807-738-2727 (mobile) Email: [joshuaf@wapekeka.ca](mailto:joshuaf@wapekeka.ca)*