

Two youth suicides in Wapekeka prompt Grand Chief to call for emergency response

Remote First Nation reeling after two 12-year-old girls commit suicide last weekend

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“Wapekeka has been devastated by the loss of two young lives in such a short period of time and we are shocked and deeply saddened by this tremendous loss,” Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler is calling for a coordinated emergency response by federal and provincial health care and mental health agencies for Wapekeka First Nation following the suicides of two 12-year-old girls since the weekend.

A team of crisis workers is currently in the community, located approximately 450 kilometres northeast of Sioux Lookout, and more are scheduled to reach the remote First Nation over the next few days.

"Wapekeka has been devastated by the loss of two young lives in such a short period of time and we are shocked and deeply saddened by this tremendous loss," Fiddler said.

"We are working non-stop to coordinate an emergency response and are doing everything possible to ensure that the necessary mental health and counselling supports are made available immediately, especially for high-risk youth who need urgent medical attention and specialized care," Fiddler said.

Fiddler also expressed a message to the community, "From east to west we are united across NAN territory as we send prayers and condolences to Chief Brennan Sainnawap, his Council and the families of these young victims."

Last year, NAN issued a call to action to the governments of Ontario and Canada to establish an emergency task force 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 the Mushkegowuk communities along the James Bay coast.