



Assemblée des Premières Nations Québec-Labrador

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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION

FIRST NATIONS MUST BE FULLY INVOLVED IF QUEBEC IS GOING TO FLATTEN THE CURVE WITH THE HELP OF THE ENTIRE POPULATION

Wendake, April 2, 2020 – In a time when Quebec government authorities are mobilized to face a major crisis, it is our duty to remind that the life and health of First Nations populations in Quebec are as important as that of all other citizens.

"The facts reported by Radio-Canada concerning the actions taken by two institutions in the same region, which resulted in an increased risk of spread, are quite disturbing and deserve the immediate attention of the Government of Quebec and the competent public health authorities," said Ghislain Picard, Chief of the AFNQL. The Radio-Canada article reports that two members of the Innu Nation, who were presenting symptoms related to COVID-19, did not receive the appropriate attention and instructions from two hospitals on the North Shore.

"Since the beginning of the crisis, our representations have called for substantial mobilization on the part of the Government of Quebec, on the undeniable principle that in matters of public health, the provincial government has an obligation to exercise its responsibility, which includes the members of our communities," added AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard.

In order to help flatten the curve, the leaders of our Nations are asking that their local actions be aligned with those of the public health and civil security networks. We cannot stress enough the reality that our populations are much more vulnerable to the pandemic. Let us remember that overcrowded housing, geographic remoteness, language, psychosocial risk factors, high rates of chronic disease, food insecurity, and lack of resources and professionals are all factors that increase the vulnerability of our populations and that the decisions and actions of public health authorities must be adapted to this reality.

Furthermore, the AFNQL wishes to salute the Quebec government's decision to control access to certain regions where most of our communities are located. This is in addition to the measures already adopted by some communities to control or restrict access to their territories.

In order to limit the spread within our communities, First Nations leaders have requested from the outset that measures be taken to allow them to hold screening tests locally.

Although a few communities have finally been able to reach an agreement to this effect, many other communities are asking for the same opportunity to limit travel, thus reducing the risk of spread, and reducing the anxiety for our members to travel unnecessarily outside the community.

"Uncertainty and anxiety will continue to increase. How can the curve be flattened under these conditions? We are all equal in the face of the crisis, except that the vulnerability of our populations adds to the challenges faced by our leaders. The pandemic makes no exceptions, it does not discriminate, it has no borders. It is no longer a question of which government is responsible for what. The AFNQL expects the governments to take their responsibilities "concluded the Chief of the AFNQL.

About the AFNQL

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador is the regional political organization that brings together 43 First Nations Chiefs in Quebec and Labrador. Follow the AFNQL on Twitter @APNQL.

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