BC Métis FEDERATION

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Tuesday, February 20th, 2024

Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health and Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs
Province of BC

Re: BC Métis Federation Request – Inclusion and Representation Meeting URGENT REQUEST

Honourable Dix,

I write to you today to request an urgent meeting to address deeply concerning health related issues facing the estimated 6000 BC Métis Federation members and our partner communities located throughout BC.

The BC Métis Federation members are confronting a growing healthcare crisis. There is a lack of provincial health support or equitable access to address the growing health issues specific to BC Métis Federation members. The provincial health policies and programs appear to exclusively recognize Métis Nation BC citizens, the cost and damage to our Métis members and their quality of life demands corrective actions by the Provincial Ministry of Health.

Since the early 20th century Métis have been racialized by governments, divided amongst each other, and segregated from their First Nations kin. These systemic divisions and differences have created a very uneven playing field for Metis. In recent years, the systemic discrimination has continued with the Province and the Government of Canada making exclusive agreements with certain groups like Métis Nation BC (MNBC) but ignoring other Métis representative bodies. When the Province signed an exclusive Métis Nation Relationship Accord in 2006 with MNBC, presumably to make progress in health and other social indicators like housing, it effectively reinforced systemic barriers for the majority of Métis peoples in BC who are not represented by MNBC.

The systemic disparities and oppression continue for Métis in BC, who lived in the shadows in their communities. The evidence is that the Province knew better, and even stated as such, but did nothing. Way back in 2002 the Province stated candidly, "*There is a critical need for accurate, region-specific data about the health problems that Aboriginal people experience, including non-status First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal people living in urban areas. More collaborative work is needed to create health databases.*"[1] The First Nations Health Plan was developed and released in November 2006 with specific actions in key areas to meet local needs and increase local control but there was no action for Métis people. Another Provincial Government report in 2007 stated that despite considerable interest in the health status of all Aboriginal people (including Métis, Non-Status, and Inuit), in most cases, relevant

[1] British Columbia. Provincial Health Officer. (2003). Report on the Health of British Columbians. Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2002. The health and well-being of people in British Columbia. Victoria, B.C.: Ministry of Health Planning. P.128 https://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/annualrpts/pho/phoannual2002.pdf, p.136

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data are only available for Status Indians. [2] The Provincial Health Officer admitted that *"Additional attention will be required to improve the health of Métis and other Aboriginal people whose needs are not directly addressed in the First Nations Health Plan"*. Repeated reports and public statements by governments recognizing the continued marginalized status of Métis peoples in BC has not resulted in an effective action plan since signing the Métis Accord in 2006.

The result of this record of marginalizing Métis people in BC has created significant unintended discriminatory policies, with current severe impacts of Métis health. BC Métis Federation has been forced to redirect internal funding to support members with health programs and health crisis relief. Currently BC Métis Federation has invested approximately $900,000,00 during the last 3 years to over 450 members and partner communities for various health related measures as a crisis "band-aid" only. The demands for health travel, prescription assistance, emergency dental care, food security, etc. are increasing daily and BC Métis Federation cannot and should not be responsible for provincial health costs.

Due to the growing health issues the BC Métis Federation created the "Emergency Assistance Program". Members who apply for the Emergency Assistance Program are kept anonymous and interviewed on a case-by-case basis with our qualified healthcare team. The Emergency Health Program application and program guidelines can be found at: Emergency Assistance Program - BC Métis Federation (bcmetis.com). The Emergency Assistance Program support is a one-time opportunity.

The fact is that BC Métis Federation has implemented our Emergency Assistance Program due to the overwhelming health needs of our members. There are various types of health-related applications. BC Métis Federation Emergency Assistance Program applications examples include medical equipment support (power wheelchairs), Métis child treatment health-related assessments (autistic members specifically) that have estimated costs of $5100.00 and often are time-sensitive putting tremendous strain and stress on our members, increased dental type applications from families with younger children, and Métis elder prescription assistance where elders have maxed current provincial healthcare coverage and they simply have no financial resources to meet their medical care requirements.

The Emergency Assistance Program has assisted 24 families with an average payment of $1500.00 per family in the last few months alone. BC Métis Federation has received 46 applications during this time. Several applications have requested Emergency Assistance Program maximums of $3000.00. Applicants span multiple age groups with some applicants being over 70 while young adults under 30 and younger with children are the most significant cohort of applications.

Finally, BC Métis Federation began the Food Security Program in December 2023 to support Métis families access one-time $100 financial relief due to increasing costs of living. BC Métis Federation leadership has decided to maintain the Food Security Program until March 2024 based on the demand from members facing increasing dire situations and current available budgets. In December, BC Métis

[2] The Health and Well-being of the Aboriginal Population in British Columbia. Interim Update. February 2007. Office of the Provincial Health Officer https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/ministries/health/office-of-indigenous-health/interim_report_final.pdf p. 1

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Federation's Food Security Program supported 70 families located throughout BC alone. As of January 2024, BCMF has received several new applications with increasing daily inquiries. The demand is growing but given the affordability issues confronting our Métis members throughout BC, our leadership believes this is becoming a crisis.

Currently no Métis health programming is available for BC Métis Federation members or partner communities to support the specific and identified needs from the Emergency Assistance Program as well as the Food Security Program.

I want to emphasize the importance of what BC Métis Federation has currently done demonstrating our commitment to providing tangible Métis health support for our members. It is our position that the Provincial Government must reflect our co-investment commitment with BC Métis Federation and be included and access in all Indigenous health related programs for BC.

Therefore, BC Métis Federation is requesting a meeting with your office on a priority basis to discuss future BC Métis Federation health programming access and support for our members. Our members are slipping through the health care cracks in BC because of exclusive First Nations Health Authority and Métis Nation BC Provincial engagement health policies. BC Métis Federation members do not get served in any capacity through these Indigenous organizations and BC Métis Federation is requesting a co-investment health strategy to better serve our estimated 6000 members.

Health needs for BC Métis Federation members will continue to increase and something needs to be done on a timely basis given the growing crisis of health-related issues. BC Métis Federation will continue to support our members, but it is incredibly unreasonable by any level of government to expect Indigenous organizations or communities to redirect limited resources for their health needs which are a Provincial mandate.

Thank you,

Keith Henry
President

cc BC Métis Federation Board
BC Métis Federation Partner Communities
Honourable David Eby, Premier of BC
Honourable Mark Holland, Federal Minister of Health
Honourable Murray Rankin, Provincial Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation