



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

January 15, 2021

### **BCAFN condemns building stigmatization of First Nations as the COVID-19 pandemic worsens**

***(Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC – January 15, 2021)*** – The BC Assembly of First Nations condemns the recent harmful racist commentary expressed in response to the COVID-19 breakout within the Cowichan Tribes on Vancouver Island. Cowichan Tribes publicly reported a surge of 76 (6 recovered) COVID-19 cases since January 1st and issued a stay-at-home order until January 22nd. Shortly after revealing this information to the general public members from the broader Cowichan community posted racist commentary on social media.

“We must not direct fear, blame, and anger towards groups of people who are misperceived as a threat. Any one of us could do everything right and still catch the virus,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. The Regional Chief continues, “These are dangerous times as we experience the increasing visible social sickness of racism, and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must pull together and work against its harmful effects. We are hopeful the end of the pandemic is in sight and we can support each other and show empathy to reduce the hurt and pain that can deeply harm communities for generations.”

In addition, a number of businesses and services in BC have been reported to refuse access to Indigenous people. Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial Health Officer, has added her voice to the chorus who have condemned racist rhetoric and behaviours.

Social media platforms have been consistently used to fuel polarization and have hosted an explosion of hate speech in recent years. While there have been some changes to social media, we must ensure that these companies continue to work against bigotry and threats posted on their platforms. Everyone can also fight racism by stepping up when they see it happen and call it out.

#### **Helpful links:**

- Healing in pandemic times: Indigenous peoples, stigma, and COVID-19  
<https://www.indigenoushealthnh.ca/initiatives/healing-pandemic-times>
- Dr. Bonnie Henry addresses reports of racism towards B.C. Indigenous communities  
[https://globalnews.ca/video/7577793/dr-bonnie-henry-addresses-reports-of-racism-towards-b-c-indigenous-communities?fbclid=IwAR0NEN3ZZq5lop7vXG722XHwWCFf8Oa-cWR1mf3jwlaiss\\_w3niQBH3QV638](https://globalnews.ca/video/7577793/dr-bonnie-henry-addresses-reports-of-racism-towards-b-c-indigenous-communities?fbclid=IwAR0NEN3ZZq5lop7vXG722XHwWCFf8Oa-cWR1mf3jwlaiss_w3niQBH3QV638)

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