

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

NEWS RELEASE

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No time to wait: FNLC calls on Horgan Government to take immediate steps to implement all recommendations identified in Turpel-Lafond Report on systemic racism in health care

(X̱w̱məθkʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̱ilwətaʔ/ sə̱ilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) — The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is calling for government action on the appalling, multi-level systemic racism outlined in the explosive and condemnatory report released today by independent investigator Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. The report, *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care*, stems from an independent investigation following allegations that surfaced earlier this year about a “Price is Right” game being played in some BC hospital emergency rooms in which health care workers were guessing blood alcohol levels of Indigenous patients entering those ERs.

While Dr. Turpel-Lafond and her team did not necessarily find evidence of a widespread and comprehensively organized “Price is Right” game, they did however, uncover widespread evidence of pervasive systemic racism that is encountered on a regular basis by Indigenous patients and their families, as well as Indigenous health care professionals. The report makes 24 recommendations to address this.

We strongly commend all those who bravely came forward, despite any trauma, grief, or fear, to provide their deeply personal and distressing accounts of the racism they experienced or were witness to. It is by these personal accounts being brought to light that we can begin to understand the depth of systemic anti-Indigenous racism and the breadth of change that is required to end it. The only way to rid our society of racism is to take collective actions to incite real and tangible change in all systems that openly or covertly promote it, and to foster inclusivity, equity and respect for all persons.

The FNLC calls on the Government of BC to act decisively by immediately accepting and committing to implement all 24 recommendations contained within the *In Plain Sight* report. There is no time to wait; the current COVID-19 pandemic necessitates constant engagement by First Nations with the healthcare system, and we categorically demand a safe healthcare system for our people at this time and going forward. We look forward to an early opportunity to meet with Premier Horgan and Minister Dix to discuss the report and implementation of the recommendations.

Quotes:

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Political Executive

“The extent of systemic racism identified by Dr. Turpel-Lafond is very disheartening. Every person in this province deserves to have access to the same level of quality healthcare regardless of race or colour. It is offensive to



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know that there are Indigenous people in BC that are afraid to seek medical treatment because of the racism they may face. Our healthcare system must be one based on equality and cultural inclusion. The recommendations Ms. Turpel-Lafond provides paint a clear path forward towards a more accountable, inclusive system that has no place for racist attitudes, actions and inactions.”

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations

“We have known for years that the healthcare system in this province treats First Nations people with disrespect and discrimination. Now, thanks to Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and her team, we have the proof of this deep seated, systemic and horrific racism within the healthcare system. This is not a matter of a few bad apples; the investigation found that many high-level administrators knew of this racism and chose to ignore it. I urge the provincial government to immediately engage with First Nations leadership to shape a way forward for our own structures, but to also support, inform and direct those in leadership to achieve cultural safety and a strong Indigenous human rights foundation within the system. It’s time that the BC government takes hard and urgent action to enforce Indigenous peoples’ right to safety, dignity, and respect when seeking medical assistance.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

“These are the voices of our families and our relatives and they have to be heard; they can no longer be silenced by a narrative of indifference and negligence and a culture of low expectations, that has long been perpetuated by our governments. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond’s investigation has shed light on something that is truly insidious and destructive: anti-Indigenous racism runs so rampant and unchecked in our society that it has become the unspoken norm, something devastating “in plain sight.” We need to use this report as a stepping-stone to change. We need to implement the recommendations and, importantly, we need to raise our voices loud and clear to call out those complicit in allowing racism to endanger and, in some cases, irreparably harm Indigenous lives. You have to go to the hospital sometimes - and it has to be safe for all British Columbians including First Nations.”

-30-

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

For further comment please contact:

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