



**ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
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**NATIONAL CHIEF CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ENGAGEMENT WITH FIRST
NATIONS TO ADDRESS RACISM IN CANADA'S HEALTH SYSTEMS**

(Ottawa, ON) – Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Perry Bellegarde reiterated recommendations and called for urgency in addressing systemic racism in Canada's health care systems at a two-day virtual meeting with federal, provincial and territorial ministers and Metis and Inuit leaders that ended today.

"We need to stop debating whether systemic racism exists," said AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde. "Joyce Echaquan and too many others have left us a vivid record of the tragic consequences of systemic racism in the institutions we all seek for help, safety and care. We need urgent action by provinces and territories to engage First Nations to develop a plan and strategies to ensure safety and accountability. We're not going to end racism in Canada's health systems tomorrow, but we need to take actions now."

The meeting, convened by Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller, Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett and Health Minister Patty Hajdu, gathered Indigenous leaders and health system experts to discuss short and long-term strategies to eliminate anti-Indigenous racism in Canada's health care systems. It is the second of its kind since the death of Joyce Echaquan in hospital September 2020.

"There seems to be a shared sense of responsibility by all parties to addressing racism in the health care system, but until First Nations and Indigenous peoples are treated with the respect, quality of care and attention they deserve, meetings of this nature will not have the impact that's required," said National Chief Bellegarde. "Implementation of recommendations and reporting on their progress and outcomes will be essential."

In his comments, National Chief Bellegarde reiterated with urgency the recommendations shared at a similar meeting held in October 2020.

National Chief Bellegarde also underscored the need for the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out in First Nations communities to be a priority.

“Until we close the gap in quality of life between First Nations and the rest of Canada, the health needs of our people will continue to be much greater and more urgent than those of non-Indigenous Canadians. And this matters most in a pandemic,” said National Chief Bellegarde. “First Nations continue to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 as a result of crowded homes and lack of clean water and should be prioritized for immunizations.”

The AFN is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada. Follow AFN on Twitter at @AFN_Updates.

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