

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

NEWS RELEASE

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COVID-19 and Opioid Crisis Cases out of Control: FNLC calls on the Government of BC to Implement Further Measures to Combat Dual Pandemics

(X̣ẉṃə̣θ̣ḳẉə̣j̣ə̣m (Musqueam), Sḳẉx̣ẉụ́7̣mesh (Squamish) and sə̣ḷiḷẉə̣ṭə̣ʔ̣ (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) — The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is calling on the government of British Columbia to take increased and immediate action to fully address the COVID-19 pandemic and the equally devastating opioid crisis. Existing public health orders and measures being taken to prevent and respond to positive COVID-19 cases have not yet been successful in flattening the curve. We cannot afford to have COVID-19 cases to continue to rise exponentially in British Columbia.

First Nations governments play a critical role in protecting the health and well-being of their members; however, the Province has still not yet provided community-specific proximate data regarding the locations of positive cases and community transmission levels. More information is urgently required to inform sound decision-making, management of resources and facilities, and cooperation with other governments and health authorities.

In light of First Nations' inherent rights and authority, and the extremely disturbing rise of COVID-19 among First Nations people, we call on the government of British Columbia to engage in innovative and collaborative dialogue with First Nations governments to address these needs in a substantive way that departs from the status-quo. We urge the continued scaling of culturally relevant contact tracing in a way that meets the needs of specific First Nations communities.

We also call for increased attention and resources be dedicated toward the concurrent opioid crisis – which continues to kill over 160 people per month, or 5 people per day in BC. An urgent expansion of access to harm reduction services is immediately needed, and targeted and accessible messaging is required to mitigate the harms of policies intended to fight COVID-19.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations states, “We are at a critical moment in the second wave of COVID-19. We must work together, and the role of First Nations governments must be respected. We need to redouble our efforts to bend the curve the other way. As we chart a path toward a vaccine, we need to make sure that the trust and collaboration remains strong. We cannot forget that this work must occur under the banner of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs states, “The drastic increase of COVID-19 cases in the past several weeks to a stunning high of 941 yesterday, is incredibly alarming and a deadly trend we take with absolute seriousness. This is not a time to take a slow approach to the pandemic. Public health officials must provide First Nations with the information they request in order to protect their communities. Receiving region-specific data one month after the fact does not allow us to plan effectively. Further, maximum



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd.
Prince George, BC
V2K 5S3

Ph: 778-945-9910
Fx: 778-945-9916



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 – 312 Main Street
Vancouver, BC
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

measures must be taken now to cut off the chains of transmission, to protect all British Columbians.”

“We found ourselves in a good place over the summer as BC’s COVID-19 curve flattened. However, this likely led to complacency by many citizens and now we have seen the second wave of the pandemic hit BC with a vengeance,” said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit. “Systemic social and economic inequalities make Indigenous communities particularly susceptible to this virus. It is critical that the BC Government increases all efforts, including the provision of increased data to First Nations governments, to mitigate the spread of this devastating virus.”

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For further comment please contact:

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC:	250-320-7738
Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations:	250-981-2151
Robert Phillips, First Nations Summit Political Executive:	778-875-4463