



MEDIA RELEASE

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Tl'etinqox Government Alarmed by Critical Gaps in COVID-19 Emergency Funding

Tl'etinqox, BC (April 2, 2020): As Indigenous communities brace for the impact of COVID-19, the Tl'etinqox Government is raising alarms about critical gaps in the rollout of emergency funding that are putting communities at risk.

Funding to support Indigenous communities is administered provincially by Emergency Management BC ("EMBC") and federally through Indigenous Services Canada ("ISC").

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolds, Tl'etinqox Government is gravely concerned that EMBC and ISC are putting Indigenous communities at risk with emergency funding that is inadequate, unclear and restricted in ways that prevent communities from taking critical steps needed to protect their elders, families and communities. In particular:

- The \$215 million allocated by ISC to support First Nations across Canada (\$41 million for all BC First Nations) is grossly inadequate given the scale of this pandemic and the significant logistical challenges faced by remote First Nations;
- Both EMBC and ISC are unclear about whether emergency funds can be used to supply communities with essential food and supplies, so that communities can be closed off and members encouraged to stay at home and not travel to and from urban centres for groceries or staples;
- This lack of direction and support means that Indigenous communities are left uncertain about whether they can afford to take the most critical protective measure for their Communities right now – closing off these Communities as much as possible to prevent the introduction of COVID-19; and
- Tl'etinqox Government, and many Indigenous communities across BC, are still waiting to be fully reimbursed for emergency expenditures for their wildfire response in 2017. This is a tremendous financial hardship for First Nations and makes critical emergency decisions harder not knowing if or when expenditures will ever be reimbursed.

Tl'etinqox Government is committed to taking every precaution to protect the health and safety of its citizens. It calls on Canada and British Columbia to address these critical gaps in funding so that Indigenous Nations can protect the lives of their elders, families and communities with the full support of ISC and EMBC, rather than facing barriers to decisive action.

Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tl'etinqox Government:

"It is unacceptable that our ability to safeguard our communities from COVID-19 is challenged by a lack of meaningful commitment to emergency funding from EMBC and ISC.

There should be no question about our ability to use emergency funds to close off our communities and make sure our people have essential staples and supplies so they don't need to go to town and risk bringing back the virus. This is our first, best line of defence. Once COVID-19 is in Indigenous communities, our elders are at high risk, and so are our members with respiratory issues or compromised immune systems, our families in over-crowded houses. ISC and EMBC funding rules should not stand in the way of us taking the steps required to protect our elders and loved ones.

After three years of battling government to follow through on their commitments to emergency funding for the 2017 wildfires, Tl'etinqox Government is still waiting for \$720,000 in reimbursement. During an emergency they say they are there to support your community, but then after the fact it can take months or years of effort to get expenses reimbursed and sometimes they just deny reimbursement.

These problems can cost lives. We are calling on ISC and EMBC to get their funding programs in order and work with Indigenous communities to save lives instead of saving costs at our expense."

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