



March 18 2020

Hon. Marc Miller, Hon. Patty Hajdu and Hon. Carolyn Bennett,

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) and our membership of over 3,600 paediatric experts from across the country to share our serious concern over the potential for COVID-19 to disproportionately impact Indigenous communities. We urge all levels of government to scale up collaboration with Indigenous leadership, including the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Assembly of First Nations (AFN), and the Métis National Council (MNC), to ensure that Indigenous communities have equitable access to healthcare and necessities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meaningful action must be taken now to avoid a repeat of the disparate impact of the H1N1 virus upon Canada's Indigenous communities. Many overlapping and mutually reinforcing effects of colonialism have resulted in health inequities that make remote and Northern communities uniquely vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. Poor access to health services and physicians outside of major cities creates barriers to timely testing and treatment. Inadequate housing conditions, including overcrowding and mold, increases the risk for respiratory illnesses and reduces the ability to effectively self-isolate. A lack of access to reliable clean water sources significantly decreases the ability to practice regular handwashing, one of the most effective preventative measures for individual and community health.

COVID-19 poses a significant test to Canada's healthcare system and amplifies underlying challenges and inequities. While current evidence indicates that the presentation of COVID-19 in children is typically mild, the potential for it to spread to family members, particularly elders and those with underlying health conditions, is a significant risk to public health and the well-being of families and communities.

The CPS therefore calls on federal, provincial and territorial governments to work with the ITK, AFN, and the MNC to ensure equitable access to healthcare and necessities to reduce the impact of COVID-19 upon the health and prosperity of Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast.

Sincerely,

[Original Signed By]

Ellen Wood, MD
CPS President

CC: Natan Obed (President, ITK), Perry Bellegarde (National Chief, AFN), David Chartrand (Vice-President and National Spokesperson, MNC)