



## Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FIRST NATIONS TO DEVELOP FUTURE HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS™

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## Press Release

### *SIoux LOOKOUT AREA FIRST NATIONS CALL FOR IMMEDIATE GOVERNMENT ACTION TO ADDRESS THE TSUNAMI OF COVID-19 CASES IN THE REGION*

**Sioux Lookout, ON, 2022:** Bearskin Lake First Nation deals with a devastating infection rate of over 45% as other communities in the region brace for a similar situation as COVID-19 cases spike in multiple communities. The Sioux Lookout Area Chiefs passed a resolution calling for immediate supports from both levels of government to prevent further large-scale outbreaks.

The Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) provides the public health response for 31 of its members communities. On January 5, 2022, SLFNHA hosted a Special Emergency Chiefs meeting where Chiefs expressed exasperation regarding the inadequate response from both levels of government and the preventable delays that continue to put their communities at risk.

As of today, Bearskin Lake First Nation has 192 COVID-19 reported cases amongst its population of 412 people. Despite an adult vaccination rate of 84%, cases continue to climb daily. The community has declared a state of emergency as they continue to struggle with shortages of health human resources and on-the-ground supports. The community has called for military assistance, but this has not been provided.

In addition to supports from SLFNHA, Windigo First Nations Council and Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), neighbouring communities and fundraising efforts have come to the assistance to the community.

Provincial MPP, Sol Mamakwa stated: "Bearskin Lake is in crisis and their calls for help are being ignored by the provincial government. With half the community sick or isolating, the limited health resources available in the community are stretched to the breaking point. Basic needs are going unmet, like access to food or wood to heat homes. Families are worried for their loved ones and the emergency needs of the community are not being met".

As COVID-19 activity increases throughout the region, other communities brace for similar situation to Bearskin Lake and voice outrage at the inadequacy of government supports and the preventable delays. There are active cases in 13 of SLFNHA's member communities with a total of 245 cases in the region.

"The situation in Bearskin Lake clearly demonstrates the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 for First Nations" states SLFNHA Public Health Physician, Dr Lloyd Douglas. "The impacts are devastating to First Nations communities who face major infrastructure shortages, boil water advisories, overcrowding and complex health conditions. None of the 33 First Nations have hospitals in the community and communities face an imminent risk of overwhelming their community pandemic resources."

On December 30, 2021, Sioux Lookout Area First Nations acted ahead of the province by declaring a regional lockdown in an effort to curb the Omicron variant. SLFNHA and the Sioux Lookout Area Chiefs are demanding immediate and urgent action from Canada and Ontario to support communities as they work to protect their communities from the deadly virus. Required resources include assessment and testing centres, enhanced perimeter security, isolation infrastructure, food security and operation and maintenance.

SLFNHA and the Sioux Lookout Area Chiefs are also urging Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), policing services and other visiting service providers to immediately respect community protocols including isolation requirements and other protective measures to ensure the safety of their community members.



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“The governments have committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples which includes addressing the structural violence that exists as a result of colonization”, states SLFNHA Board Chair John Cutfeet of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug. “This includes ensuring that both levels of government address the long-standing gaps in emergency management and public health while addressing the immediate crisis by providing the same access to tools, resources and supports as other areas in the country.”

This urgent call for action is an opportunity for both levels of government to support the necessary community-led solutions needed to mitigate this imminent threat.

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*For more information, please contact:*

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