



Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority acknowledges that it is situated on the traditional territory of Lac Seul First Nation, signatory to Treaty 3, and Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850.

Media Release

Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority Responds to Recent Global News Article

Sioux Lookout, ON

February 12, 2024

In response to the recent article published by Global News titled "Why an Ontario town with fewer than 6,000 people has OPP's largest jail," the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) would like to provide additional information on the role of SLFNHA in providing services, on-going advocacy efforts, and a partnership approach to addressing the mental health and addictions crisis.

The advocacy efforts of SLFNHA in providing vital services to community members, particularly those who are vulnerable and in need of support, are supported by the Sioux Lookout area Chiefs Council on Health (CCOH). Co-Chair of the CCOH, Chief Donny Morris of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, has shared the on-going challenges and barriers experienced by First Nation members while accessing health care services.

SLFNHA, the CCOH, and partners are deeply committed to ensuring the well-being and safety of all community members we serve. We are all working together within a broken and underfunded health and mental health system to support clients struggling with mental health and addictions.

Despite proactive approaches and repeated efforts to collaborate with local organizations and leaders, including submitting proposals for additional support to the local shelter, adequate funding from the federal government has yet to be received. This lack of support impedes the ability to expand necessary services and infrastructure within the community, ultimately impacting the health and well-being of those vulnerable and in need of support. Adequate funding for treatment centres in the area is urgently required.

Regarding the involvement of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) in certain situations, it is essential to clarify that individuals are escorted by police only when safety is a concern. There are collective efforts to ensure that individuals are provided with opportunities for alternative accommodations, including returning to their rooms or utilizing the shelter, depending on the circumstances. Collaborative efforts between SLFNHA, the OPP, and the local shelter in establishing a mutually agreed-upon process for addressing concerns related to intoxication is paramount in ensuring the safety of all involved parties.

While local partners coordinate to address gaps in the system, it is essential that governments coordinate across ministries and departments to provide adequate funding. This will remove barriers to developing a comprehensive system involving all sectors and partners. Investing in mental health and addictions services would support healing and wellness, while also diverting costs and resources from the policing and justice sectors.



“It is crucial to clarify that individuals seeking assistance are not simply "kicked out" onto the streets. SLFNHA staff work tirelessly to engage with clients, providing them with the necessary accommodations and support to attend appointments and access essential services. Harm reduction is priority over displacement in concerning situations.” – Sonia Isaac-Mann, CEO and President, SLFNHA.

In September 2023, the SLFNHA Chiefs in Assembly passed a resolution calling for a “Declaration of Public Health Emergency and Social Crisis to Address Mental Health and Addictions Among Sioux Lookout area First Nations”. The resolution sites systemic racism, intergenerational trauma from colonization and poor social determinants of health as factors leading to the current state of crisis.

The Resolution calls on provincial and federal governments to immediately provide funding to services for comprehensive mental health and addictions that includes community-based and trauma-informed treatment. It further calls on Canada to adhere to their Treaty obligations to ensure that First Nations have the right to access all social and health services without discrimination.

SLFNHA, supported by the CCOH, continues to fight for adequate resources and for governments to remove the multiple policy barriers in place. For example, representatives from SLFNHA joined Nishnawbe Aski Nation and other partners in Ottawa on January 24 in an emergency meeting organized with provincial and federal health ministers to address this current crisis. The provincial government failed to attend.

Moving forward, as SLFNHA continues to address many of these issues with local partners, we are actively developing and sharing important data to combat these gaps in the system to advocate for the equity of health services in northern and remote First Nation communities. This will be seen in the upcoming release of the Mental Health and Substance Use Report.

“This Report shows that mental health and substance use issues have worsened over the years. Furthermore, numerous states of emergency called over three decades have generated inadequate responses from the provincial and federal governments. Understanding our current state of mental health and addictions crisis conveys the urgency of an epidemic-level response from the provincial and federal government.” – Janet Gordon, Chief Operating Officer, SLFNHA

SLFNHA urges the following:

- Media outlets and the public to seek accurate information from appropriate sources.
- Media outlets to report with compassion for those struggling with mental health and addictions and to use their platform to advocate for governments to respond on an urgent basis.
- Partners to work together to continue the vital work being done to support the communities we serve



Sioux Lookout
First Nations
Health Authority

SLFNHA remains dedicated to our Mission, Vision, and Values for all aspects of service and care delivered:

Mission: Transforming the health of Anishinabe people across Kiiwetinoong by providing community-led services and a strong voice for their community health needs.

Vision: Resilient and healthy Nations supported on their path to wellness.

Values: We value respect, relationships, culture, equality, and fairness. We work to protect the Anishinabe teachings of love, courage, respect, wisdom, truth, honesty, and humility.

Quick Facts:

- Client Services accommodate 250-325 clients per night with a total of 303 beds between 3 hostels.
- SLFNHA Discharge Department works to re-book travel with clients that have missed their flight inadvertently.
- Security responds to an average of 187 incidents monthly.
- Security re-accommodates 92% of intoxicated clients.
- Patient Navigators are available to clients 24 hours a day for translation services, advocacy and liaison services, and medical appointment support.
- Patient Navigators and Client Advocacy Representatives will assist with housing applications for those unable to return home.
- SLFNHA has sent in two applications for funding to help provide additional funding and support for the local homeless shelter.
- Health Hubs in communities have been built to reduce the need for patients and escorts to leave their communities.

For more information please contact:

Nick Sherman

Communications Manager

807-356-4684

communications@slfnha.com