



Government  
— of —  
Saskatchewan

Ministry of Health  
Deputy Minister  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 3475 Albert Street  
Regina, Canada S4S 6X6

May 14, 2020

Rick Laliberte  
Treaty Ten Pandemic Council  
North West Communities Incident Command Centre  
(nwcicc@sasktel.net)

Dear Rick Laliberte:

Thank you for your letter of May 10, 2020 that shared the concerns of the First Nations and Métis leaders and regional Municipal Governments in northwest Saskatchewan with respect to the Government of Saskatchewan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am responding on behalf of Dr. Saqib Shahab, Chief Medical Health Officer. I understand that the Ministry of Government Relations, and the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA) will address the issues you have raised under their jurisdiction in separate letters to the Treaty Ten Pandemic Council.

First, let me begin by saying that the Ministry of Health agrees that a successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic requires the collective efforts of all individuals and agencies. The Ministry of Health and Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) will continue to work with all partners, including northern communities and First Nations and Métis governments to protect all citizens from this global pandemic.

Your letter raised specific concerns about mental health supports and homecare in the northwest. Thank you for bringing these issues forward. Mental health supports are critically important, particularly during stressful times such as these. The Ministry of Health will continue to work with the SHA to ensure that appropriate services are available wherever needed. In the case of home care, the SHA has advised that there are no recent changes to these services in the north. However, your letter implies that there are particular concerns that the Ministry should look into, whether long-standing or related to the COVID-19 response. I encourage you to contact Brad Havervold, Executive Director of Community Care Branch at 306-787-6092 or [Brad.Havervold@health.gov.sk.ca](mailto:Brad.Havervold@health.gov.sk.ca) to discuss specific concerns of the Treaty Ten Pandemic Council related to mental health and home care services in the north.

...2

---

The Ministry of Health is committed to engaging in clear and respectful communications at all times. We are also committed to keeping the north informed of COVID-19 issues, and engaging with northern governments in a consistent and meaningful way to develop measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. This engagement will continue even though Dr. Shahab is not available to meet with the Treaty Ten Pandemic Council daily, as requested. As you can appreciate, he is exceptionally busy.

Dr. Shahab has regular communications with all MHO's including Northern MHO's who keep him apprised of specific issues. The SHA informs me that northern Medical Health Officers (MHOs) and the Executive Director of Primary Health Care meet daily with the Northwest Communities Incident Command Centre, and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. There have also been daily calls between the MHOs, the Executive Director of Primary Health Care, and the Mayor and Councilors of La Loche. These calls have been occurring since the outbreak was declared. There are also daily calls between northern MHOs and the MHO for the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority to ensure consistent responses for on- and off-reserve communities. Informally, each community in the northwest connects with the SHA's local managers and Directors, with the involvement of MHOs as needed.

Dr. Shahab speaks very highly of the relationship between northern MHOs and the northern communities they serve, and notes their history of working together to support the connections and interdependencies northern communities share. While most of Saskatchewan is moving ahead with phases of reopening, the approach to reopening any community with an outbreak, including the northwest, must be considered carefully and based on local epidemiological factors. Key factors include a downward trend in cases for two consistent weeks, adequate testing and contact tracing, and low risk of community transmission. We are committed to ensuring that this information is shared with the community by the local Medical Health Officers and to discussing any changes to the order.

I am pleased by how quickly and effectively the system has responded. Examples of significant actions include: dozens of SHA staff have been redeployed to assist with household screenings, testing, and contact tracing in communities across the north; testing is available 24/7 in La Loche; EMS services in Beauval and Buffalo Narrows have been expanded to 24/7 operations; the local MHO and SHA representatives are working with the community to identify alternative housing solutions for residents who need to self-isolate; a Managed Alcohol Program began earlier this week in La Loche to mitigate the risks of alcohol withdrawal; and community leadership has been a vital partner in enforcing mobility restrictions. We are by no means over this threat, but it is encouraging to see how quickly our collective efforts have had a meaningful and positive impact, as demonstrated by the recent epidemiological data showing a steady decline in new infections.

Finally, I wish to thank you for reaching out to Dr. Shahab and the Ministry of Health to identify where we need to improve our response to COVID-19 to ensure the best health for the residents of the northwest, and all Saskatchewan people. This is a time of uncertainty and apprehension around the world, and I appreciate that you have highlighted this as an opportunity to work together.

Sincerely,



Max Hendricks  
Deputy Minister of Health

cc: Dr. Saqib Shahab, Chief Medical Health Officer  
Rebecca Carter, Assistant Deputy Minister  
Brad Havervold, Executive Director, Community Care