



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M. P.
Minister of Health
Health Canada
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The Honourable Deb Matthews, PhD, M.P.P.
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
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Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

January 5, 2012

Dear Ministers Aglukkaq and Matthews,

This letter is to implore your ministries to work together to immediately address the devastating impacts of opiate addiction in remote and isolated areas of northern Ontario.

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Chiefs-in-Assembly declared a Prescription Drug Abuse State of Emergency in November 2009 (Resolution 09/92).¹ The Eabametoong First Nation community of 1,200 people² declared a state of emergency in October 2010 as a result of "extreme social disruption, after the community experienced 3 murders, 73 drug charges, 61 assaults, and 47 arson cases (35 structural fires)."³ Despite extensive acknowledgement of these unique challenges^{4 5 6} and compelling testimony by elected representatives on the suffering they have witnessed in their ridings,^{7 8} NAN Resolution 11/59 of November 24, 2011 states "there has been a lack of response by both levels of government to the epidemic of Opioid addiction in our territory."⁹

RNAO had the privilege of being invited to attend the NAN Think Tank on Prescription Drug Abuse in March 2011. Four NAN strategic directions for action were identified:

1. Treatment and Detoxification: To intervene with people abusing, or addicted to narcotics, and their affected families.
2. Security and Policing: To reduce the supply of misused narcotic prescription drugs getting into our communities.
3. Prevention: To reduce the demand for misused narcotic prescription drugs by focusing on health education.
4. Creating healthy communities: To work on root causes of abuse and addiction¹⁰

It is our understanding that there are almost 200 people who are doing well from both clinical and social perspectives within six community-based Suboxone programs in Nishnawbe Aski First Nations. Despite its cost-effectiveness and value as being least intrusive to community members, access to Suboxone is being curtailed. The same week that Health Canada Non-Insured Health Benefits added Suboxone to the drug formulary as an exception, requiring case-by-case review for approval, Health Canada, Sioux Lookout Zone, issued a directive to prevent nurses from administering Suboxone to new clients.

One of the fundamental principles in *RNAO's 2011 provincial political platform, Creating Vibrant Communities*, is the need for "fairness and respect for our First Peoples. Nowhere are the consequences of government inaction, failed policies and inequity felt more profoundly than in Aboriginal communities. Vibrant communities mean respect for the right of our First Peoples to self-determination and equitable access to resources, jobs, health care, clean water, good schools and safe housing."¹¹

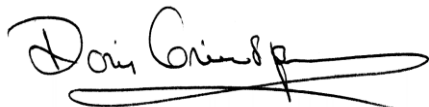
Ontario's nurses are deeply shamed by the deplorable living conditions that people in Attawapiskat and other First Nation communities face¹² and the unsatisfactory governmental response that recently prompted notice by the United Nations.¹³ We are outraged that immediate help needed to be provided by the Canadian Red Cross as "Ottawa and Ontario bicker over which government is responsible for providing emergency aid to Attawapiskat."¹⁴ Along the same lines, the people of NAN should not be placed in such egregious conditions that NAN leadership has "to file a Human Rights case against Ontario and Canada for failing to provide resources, programs and services that that are urgently required to deal with prescription drug abuse."¹⁵

Minister Aglukkaq, RNAO urges Health Canada to listen carefully to the concerns being brought forward by community leaders, health-care professionals, and those most affected so that appropriate policy action, including funding, may be quickly taken.

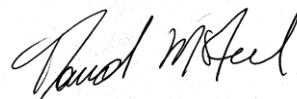
Minister Matthews, RNAO urges the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to follow through with Deputy Grand Chief Mike Metatawabin's urgent requests for funding for the NAN Prescription Drug Task Force that have been pending since the summer of 2011.

Ministers Aglukkaq and Matthews, we urge you in the strongest possible terms to listen and respond to the voices of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.ONT.
Executive Director, RNAO



David McNeil, RN, BScN, MHA, CHE
President, RNAO

Copy:

Mike Metatawabin, Deputy Grand Chief, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Nycole Turmel, Interim Leader of the Opposition, NDP

Bob Rae, Interim Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada

Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada

Tim Hudak, Leader, Ontario PC Party

Andrea Horwath, Leader, Ontario NDP

¹ Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) (2011). **Resolution: 11/59 Prescription Drug Abuse State of Emergency**. Thunder Bay: Author, November 24, 2011, 1.

² CBC. (2010). Ontario First Nation pleads for help. **CBC News**. October 23, 2010.

³ Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) (2011). **Resolution: 11/67 Support for Eabametoony First Nation Community-Based Prescription Drug Abuse Treatment and Recovery Programs**. Thunder Bay: Author, November 24, 2011, 1.

⁴ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2010). Rising use and abuse of narcotics. August 27, 2010.

⁵ College of Physicians and Surgeons (2010). **Avoiding Abuse**. Toronto: Author, 35.

⁶ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2010). **Prescription Opioid-Related Issues in Northern Ontario: A Pan-Northern Strategy Framework for Action on Misuse, Abuse and Diversion**. Toronto: Northern Ontario Area, Provincial Services, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

⁷ Hampton, H. (2010, Sept. 15). First Reading. *Narcotic Safety and Awareness Act, 2010*. **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**. Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Second Session, 39th Parliament, 2115.

⁸ Gélinas, F. (2010, Sept. 27). Second Reading, *Narcotic Safety and Awareness Act 2010*. **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**. Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Second Session, 39th Parliament, 2312, 2319.

⁹ NAN (2011). **Resolution: 11/59 Prescription Drug Abuse State of Emergency**, November 24, 2011, 1.

¹⁰ Nishnawbe Aski Nation (2010). **Restoring Our Nation: Action Plan for Community Recovery from Opioid Addiction. Initial Report from the NAN Think Tank on Prescription Drug Abuse**. Thunder Bay: Author, March 11 and 12, 2011, 5.

¹¹ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2010). **Creating Vibrant Communities: RNAO's Challenge to Ontario's Political Parties**. Toronto: Author, 2.
http://www.rnao.org/Storage/65/5964_Backgrounder.pdf

¹² Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2011). Action Alert: Urgent Action Needed on Housing Crisis in Attawapiskat. November 23, 2011.

http://www.rnao.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=3622&SiteNodeID=403&BL_ExpandID=

¹³ Mackrael, K. (2011). UN official blasts 'dire' conditions in Attawapiskat. **Globe and Mail**. December 20, 2011.

¹⁴ Talaga, T. (2011). Red Cross steps in to help Attawapiskat as Queen's Park and Ottawa bicker. **Toronto Star**, November 24, 2011.

¹⁵ NAN (2011). **Resolution: 11/59 Prescription Drug Abuse State of Emergency**, November 24, 2011, 2.