

**For Release
October 25, 2021**

Ktunaxa Nation Governments Declare a Mental Health State of Emergency

Cranbrook/ʔa·kiskʷaqʷiʔit – The governments of the Ktunaxa Nation, Yaqit ʔa·knuqʷiʔit, ʔakisqʷnuk, Yaqan Nuʔkiy and ʔaqam have declared a State of Emergency regarding the mental health crisis within ʔamakʷis Ktunaxa (Ktunaxa Territory).

“There are many challenges facing vulnerable Ktunaxa citizens in our areas,” said Shawna Janvier, Ktunaxa Nation Council Chief Administrative Officer. “Many of these challenges stem from the impacts of past and present post-colonial trauma and these effects have been compounded by the current opioid crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Primary care providers have consistently noted that mental health intakes are the top reason for visits to primary care facilities yet the gap in services remains large. It is vital to the health of Ktunaxa Citizens that other governments meet us at the table with the mindset we are working from a government-to-government relationship. It is too often we are seen as solely a service provider when in fact we are the Ktunaxa governments and we have fiduciary obligations and responsibilities to care for the health and well-being of our citizens regardless of where they reside.”

As winter approaches and cold weather dips to levels far below-zero, and amid the ongoing opioid crisis in the region, vulnerable Ktunaxa Citizens are at risk of increased overdoses and death from exposure. Many of these citizens are unable to access mainstream services due to outdated or culturally misaligned program requirements and simply because the programs needed to support our most vulnerable citizens do not yet exist.

“The Ktunaxa governments are proud of our work on the frontlines during these crises and we are doing the best that we can, with the resources we have, and with the support of our local health authority and local community partners,” said Debbie Whitehead, Ktunaxa Nation Council Social Sector Senior Manager. “However, our region continues to have a shortage of psychiatrists and it is time we work together to look at ways we can meet the immediate needs of vulnerable people, through exploring the transfer of the function of duties or increasing the scope of practice of nurse practitioners, similarly to what was done to address the pandemic and opioid crisis. Many of our vulnerable adults have complex needs but the capacity is not there to support them. The need for holistic, culturally-relevant and culturally-appropriate care is not just apparent, it is an urgent priority.”

“This declaration is a call to action to all local, provincial and federal governments to

continue to stand with us, the Ktunaxa Governments, and to call upon Ministries and Crown Corporations who have yet to come to the table to recognize that this is a shared State of Emergency,” said Yaqan Nuʔkiy Nasuʔkin (Chief) Jason Louie. “A commitment to government-to-government planning and to making investments in immediate interventions that are culturally appropriate, sustainable and effective and that address the determinants of health is vital to assure the safety of these vulnerable Ktunaxa Citizens.”

“The mental wellness of Ktunaxa youth and young adults is a particular concern as issues experienced by our young people have been compounded by the pandemic and lack of access to adequate support services. We need to act now otherwise the cycle of addictions and trauma will continue to perpetuate itself.”

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