

BC's COVID Cabinet: First Nations Leaders Call on Premier Horgan to Mandate Re-Appointed Health Minister and Newly Appointed Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to Collaborate in Disclosing Life Saving Information

As BC's second wave grows with skyrocketing numbers, the importance of sharing information with First Nation communities has never been more urgent.

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA (November 26, 2020) – As Premier Horgan unveils his new cabinet, a coalition of First Nations is calling on the Premier to mandate Minister of Health, Adrian Dix, and newly appointed Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Murray Rankin, to collaborate in creating an information sharing protocol with First Nations to begin sharing lifesaving COVID-19 information with their governments immediately.

The Heiltsuk Nation, Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and Tsilhqot'in National Government, supported by a growing number of nations, have been requesting the following COVID-19 information from the BC government since May 2020:

1. The location (not the personal identity) of proximate, presumptive and confirmed COVID cases near their communities;
2. Whether the proximate case involves a person that has travelled to one of the Nation's territories within the last 14 days; and,
3. The name of a person infected by COVID who is a member of one of the Nations, to be used for culturally-safe contact-tracing.

"We congratulate Ministers Dix and Rankin on their appointments. Despite months of government-to-government negotiations, we have still not received this potentially life-saving information," said Marilyn Slett, Chief Councillor of the Heiltsuk Nation. "First Nations governments must receive this information in order to take effective preventative action to protect our communities. BC's failure to provide this information keeps us in the dark and puts our community members' lives at risk."

"As one of our communities is in the midst of an outbreak, this information becomes even more critical to Nuu-chah-nulth," said Judith Sayers, President of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. "We call on Premier Horgan to ensure his new ministers' mandate letters include a strong commitment to sharing information and saving Indigenous lives."

Information sharing would empower Indigenous governments to protect their members, and begin building trust. It would also make progress in fulfilling BC's commitment to reconciliation, including adopting and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is expected to release an investigative report into systemic racism in the BC Healthcare system any day now. Colonial approaches to information sharing have a racist legacy and the real potential to result in adverse health outcomes for First Nations.

In September 2020 the Nations filed a complaint with the BC Information and Privacy Commissioner to compel the Ministry to disclose information, arguing non-disclosure violates

section 25 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, which states a Minister must disclose information about a risk of significant harm to an affected group of people.

For more information, or to arrange interviews:

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