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SCO Welcomes New COVID-19 Funding

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — Today, the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is pleased to learn of the federal government's announcement of \$200 million in new funding to provide support to Indigenous Peoples and communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's no secret, the pandemic is taking its toll on our people, both physically and mentally, especially during this week of record breaking case numbers," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "I am pleased to see this added support from the Trudeau government, which our communities are in need of right now. We look to the government to move swiftly on this funding so it can be put to immediate use for the people we serve."

The funding announced today is greatly needed as COVID-19 numbers are rising rapidly in many First Nation communities, including in member communities of SCO. First Nation communities were already facing additional burdens before the pandemic, stemming from colonization, economic apartheid, and racial discrimination. Our communities are now dealing with COVID-19 as best they can on top of managing poverty, poor infrastructure and worsened health outcomes.

Today's announcement includes \$59 million in funds for First Nations for on reserve infrastructure, including for implementing public health and safety measures in community buildings by adding hand washing stations, buying hand sanitizers and personal protective equipment for staff, installing signage and barriers to promote physical distancing, and doing safety checks and upgrades to existing ventilation systems.

The funding also includes \$120.7 million to help Indigenous early learning and child care facilities safely operate during the pandemic by addressing their most critical needs, such as implementing enhanced cleaning protocols, hiring additional staff, and offering training.

The federal government also announced \$25.9 million in funding for Indigenous post-secondary institutions deal with increased costs due to the pandemic, such as developing supports to retain staff, automating administrative services, adapting courses for online learning, and implementing public health and safety measures for in-person services.

"We are starting to see additional strains on our community health and education infrastructure," added Grand Chief Daniels. "I am committed to ensuring that we do everything we can to support our Citizens as the pandemic increases during the second wave."

The Indigenous Community Support Fund, which now totals \$885 million, was first announced on March 18, 2020. The fund acknowledges the primary role of Indigenous leadership and community-based solutions in effectively responding to the challenges brought by COVID-19.

The funding announced today will be distributed through a combination of allocations directly to First Nation communities, and needs-based funding that will be application driven for organizations serving off-reserve members and urban Indigenous peoples.

Meanwhile, SCO continues to work with its communities to address the pandemic and other health care challenges. In July, SCO received \$775,165 from the Indigenous Community Support Fund to support off-reserve SCO members. This funding was distributed directly through SCO's 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota member communities at the direction of the Chiefs' Executive Committee, with the exception of Waywayseecappo, Tootinaowaziibeeng, and O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi First Nations. Chiefs of these three First Nations asked SCO to distribute on their behalf.

"I look forward to continuing to work with all levels of government and our community leaders to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "It is up to all of us to keep people safe and to do what we can to address the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on First Nation People."

The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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