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SCO DENOUNCES TRAGIC DEATH AT HANNA, ALBERTA HOSPITAL

Sandy Bay Citizen Latest Victim of Racist and Abusive Health Care System

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is appalled by the tragic death of Lillian Vanasse, member of the Sandy Bay Ojibway Nation in what is now Manitoba.

“The message is very clear and simple,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “We are saying enough is enough and that not one more of our Relatives should die of racism. Our condolences and prayers go out to Lillian’s family, friends and all those who knew her.”

Originally from Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation, Vanasse was living in Hanna, Alberta. On Christmas day 2020, she was admitted to the local hospital complaining of severe flu-like symptoms and shortness of breath. Her husband, Cory Ashley, reports that despite her pleas for help and the severity of her symptoms Vanasse was not given proper treatment such as oxygen. She died on December 26, 2020.

Ashley has since filed a complaint with the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons demanding that the hospital’s policies and procedures be immediately reviewed by a third party non-biased entity.

“How much more are we expected to take,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “It is abundantly clear that if nothing is done now to stop this disturbing pattern, the body count for First Nation people will continue to rise, especially given the disproportionate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. All orders of government must take the steps to ensure that no one is subjected to racism when they seek lifesaving assistance from any health care system in Canada. Our lives matter.”

Vanasse’s story is painfully familiar. This past year alone she joins Joyce Echaquan and Cheynna Gardner and others who died tragically due to health care systems that are steeped in racist attitudes and misconceptions. The current system has created a deadly gap in resources and infrastructure when it comes to health care delivery for the First Peoples of Canada.

Overwhelming evidence of systemic racism towards First Nation people has been found in a soon to be released survey conducted in the last month by SCO on Manitoba’s health care system. For example, 70 per cent of respondents in the study report that they have experienced instances of racism

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when accessing services and programs in the Manitoba health care system, and nearly 80 per cent report witnessing a family member or loved one being discriminated against or treated badly because of their race. An overwhelming majority, 92 per cent of survey respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that racism is a problem in Manitoba's healthcare system.

These statistics on racism have real world outcomes for First Nation people in Manitoba. A [2019 joint study](#) from the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba and the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy at the University of Manitoba found that First Nation people in Manitoba have a life expectancy that is on average eleven years shorter than non-First Nation people, and that the gap is growing.

"These recent deaths and the responses in our survey show very clearly why SCO is in the process of transforming health care for the people I represent," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "It is vital that we create equitable access and culturally-appropriate health care for Elders, youth, families, and our communities. Leaving this in the hands of colonial leadership continues to lead to severe and deadly consequences."

-30-

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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