

Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

www.scoinc.mb.ca Facebook: [@SCOIncMB](https://www.facebook.com/SCOIncMB)

SCO Expresses Concern over Closure of Rural Hospital during Pandemic

Province Prioritizing Budgets Over People – SCO Grand Chief

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 7, 2020

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO), the Chiefs' Health Action Table, and Tootinaowaziibeeng First Nation are calling on the Prairie Mountain Health Region and the provincial minister of health to immediately address concerns over the closure of the Grandview Health Centre during a global health pandemic.

"It's ludicrous to see a hospital that many people, including members of our First Nations, rely on being closed during an active pandemic," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "Our First Nations already deal with some of the worst access to health centres in the country, and now the province is actively shutting down rural health centres like Grandview at the most inopportune time."

Hospital and emergency services were suspended at Grandview Health Centre Thursday, November 26, 2020, as staff were reassigned to deal with an outbreak in the local long term care home. Prairie Mountain Health Region announced the hospital closure in a post on their website without any community consultation. The closure means anyone needing urgent healthcare will have to be transported to other facilities with the closest being over 30 kilometres away.

"This is just another example of how the province responds to the pandemic when it involves our Anishinaabe people," remarked Chief Barry McKay of nearby Tootinaowaziibeeng Treaty Reserve. "Since as far back as March, officials had the chance to plan for the second wave of COVID-19. Instead, in the middle of critical code red restrictions, the province has decided to give us even less access to health care than normal by temporarily closing Grandview Hospital."

An emotional rally and vehicle procession was held in a rural Manitoba community on November 26, 2020, as residents paid tribute to the last patients being transferred away from the town's hospital, which the health authority said would be closed temporarily.

Many non-Indigenous community members have also expressed their displeasure with the province. They even held a large drive-in rally just hours after the Prairie Mountain Health authority announced that the hospital would be closing temporarily.

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“If there was ever an example of why First Nations need to exercise self-determination over their own health care, this is it,” said Pine Creek Chief and SCO Chair of the Chiefs Health Action Table, Karen Batson. “We have always been an afterthought when it comes to healthcare delivery, and this rash decision only serves to widen those gaps.”

SCO is concerned this will not be a short-term closure. Recently the community’s RCMP detachment was shut down, while the emergency department in nearby Roblin was also closed in September and only reopened this week.

“This provincial government is bent on austerity especially when it comes to cutting services that are vital for First Nation people,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “Budgets over people, especially over our people during a health care crisis, will be a shameful legacy.”

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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.

For Media Inquiries:

Vic Savino, Communications Officer, Southern Chiefs’ Organization

Winnipeg Sub-Office: (204) 946-1869 Ext. 104 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca