

**Head Office**

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## **SCO SURVEY ON HEALTH CARE SYSTEM FINDS OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCE OF RACISM AND ABUSE**

### **Majority of First Nation People Report Experiencing Racism**

**March 19, 2021**

**ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB** — Today, in advance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21, the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) released a [new report](#) on experiences of systemic racism in Manitoba's health care system and the results are damning.

"I am appalled by the findings in this report," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "While none of it is shocking to First Nation people, it is heartbreaking to read so many traumatic experiences that our people have had to endure at the hand of Manitoba's health care system."

SCO's *Survey on Racism in Health Care* consisted of nine closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The survey was shared online between December 1, 2020 and January 11, 2021. 397 qualified responses from First Nation people in 54 First Nation communities were received and they paint an overwhelming and consistent pattern of discrimination, neglect, and even abuse.

The majority of respondents, 72 per cent, reported experiencing instances of racism when accessing services and programs in the Manitoba health care system and nearly 80 percent reported witnessing a family member or loved one being discriminated against or treated badly due to their race.

One respondent reported that *"A health care worker said my bladder fell because I was an aboriginal and I drank lots and that my surgery could be done anywhere by another doctor."*

Over 65 per cent of respondents have received negative comments from health care workers, ranging from verbal threats, insults, being scolded or mocked, and one respondent quoted a health care worker who told her *"to make sure I go on the pill because she didn't want to see me back there"* after having her first child.

An overwhelming majority, 92 per cent, of survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that *"racism is a problem in Manitoba's health care system."* Furthermore, nearly 65 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their health was impacted because of racism in Manitoba's health care system, and only 12 per cent disagreed with this statements.

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One respondent actually reported being “surprised” when their family members or they were “treated well” when seeking health care. Many commented that health care workers regularly assume that all First Nation people are “just looking for drugs” when seeking health care.

*“It is assumed that I am a drug user so I always start my appointments with “I don’t want opiates or pain killers” or “I am not seeking pain killers”. This works to a certain extent. I don’t know what I will do if, God Forbid, I have pain and seek emergency care.”*

Lastly, more than half of respondents indicated that they have avoided seeking health care due to the effects of racism. In one example, *“I’m scared to get sick and go to the hospital. I usually wait til I’m very sick before going to the hospital. I don’t trust the health care system.”*

Survey participants also offered key advice for health care workers and decision makers on how to improve the dire situation of systemic racism in Manitoba’s health care system. The top two suggestions were:

- 1) Mandatory education for all health care providers to learn about First Nations’ cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- 2) Hire more Indigenous health care providers.

*“We have daily reminders throughout our lives of how differently we are treated, and it’s clear how much of an impact this is having on our health,”* commented Grand Chief Daniels. *“It’s even more prominent now with COVID-19 pandemic, which has laid bare for everyone to see how systemic racism has left First Nation people more vulnerable in terms of our health and physical wellbeing.”*

Major gaps exist between First Nation people and other Manitobans, and those gaps are widening, appearing in lower life expectancies at birth, higher suicide attempts, and poorer access to health services, as shown in a [2019 report](#). On average, First Nation citizens have a life expectancy that’s shorter by 11 years compared to the rest of those living in Manitoba.

Last month, Grand Chief Daniels and senior staff from the Southern Chiefs’ Organization participated in meetings with the federal government on this precise issue, stemming from many recent examples of racist treatment of First Nation people at the hands of Canadian health care systems, including Joyce Echaquan in Quebec and Sandy Bay Ojibway Nation member, Lillian Vanasse in Alberta.

All levels of government must act now to establish a new health care model where First Nation communities, leadership, and health care professionals have increased self-determination, and self-governance over their health care.

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“SCO recognizes the importance of incorporating First Nations values, worldview and wellness into health policies, programs, and services,” concluded Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “Currently, SCO is in the process of transforming health care for southern First Nations. We are taking control of our own health to create culturally-appropriate health care with equitable access for Elders, youth, families, and our communities.”

Several weeks ago, on Indigenous Justice Awareness Day, SCO launched a similar [survey](#) on experiences of racism towards First Nation citizens when dealing police services in Manitoba. The survey is currently open, and those results will be shared in the spring.

You can view the full report as well as other anti-racism resources on the [SCO website](#).

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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.*

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