

**Head Office**

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

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**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](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca) Facebook: @SCOIncMB



## **SCO LEADERSHIP SETS AGENDA FOR COMING YEAR Taking Control of Our Healthcare a Priority – Grand Chief Daniels**

**March 24, 2021**

**ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB** — At the latest Chiefs’ Summit, held yesterday by the Southern Chiefs’ Organization (SCO), an ambitious agenda was set for the coming year with a focus on health care and justice.

“These have been a top priority for us and we are ready to take bold new steps,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare how much inequality exists in the current health care system. There’s no denying that the people and communities we represent must continue to assume greater control of their health and wellness. I am pleased to see we will continue along this critical path.”

The Southern Chiefs of Manitoba voted in favour of a critically important health transformation resolution calling for the formation of a Southern First Nation Health Authority Action Plan. That plan will include a representative from each SCO community to assist with transferring services and programs from Canada to an SCO First Nation Self-Governing Authority.

The vote comes after last year’s historic signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SCO and the Government of Canada. That MOU formalized the commitment to a working relationship to address gaps in the health care system, including the growing 11 year gap in life expectancy, and to assist in bringing much needed health care services closer to First Nation communities.

“I look forward to working alongside the Chiefs of SCO to advance this very important initiative,” stated Pine Creek First Nation Chief and Chiefs’ Health Action Table Chair, Karen Batson. “Health care for First Nations in southern Manitoba has to be our priority, including equitable access and culturally-appropriate health care for Elders, youth, families, and communities. This work is central to wellness and the success of Anishinaabeg and Dakota peoples.”

This resolution also comes after SCO recently made public the results of a [survey](#) on racism in health care, which overwhelmingly confirmed systemic racism towards First Nation people. The results show that almost 72 per cent of respondents report they have experienced racism when accessing services and programs in the Manitoba health care system, nearly 80 per cent report witnessing a family member or loved one being discriminated against or treated badly because of their race, and the vast

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majority of participants, 92 per cent, either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “racism is a problem in Manitoba’s health care system.”

“That report is one more reason we need to dramatically change the manner in which health care is delivered to our people,” added Sagkeeng First Nation Chief Derrick Henderson. “In order to improve health outcomes for our Nations, we must build a high quality, culturally-safe health system that is designed by and under the leadership of our people.”

Along with today’s resolution to take the next step toward health transformation, the Chiefs passed a resolution directing SCO to work with Canada to devolve the administration of the NIHB program. SCO will work to strengthen the health benefits program for the benefit of all southern First Nation citizens, further increasing First Nations’ governance and authority over our own health services.

“The mandates we have been given today are historic and will one day lead to a complete devolution of federal entities in our lives, so we can finally begin to exercise self-governance and self-determination,” said Grand Chief Daniels. “We represent diverse Nations, and I look forward to moving forward all the while respecting Treaty and regional priorities.”

SCO also passed a resolution to expand the Justice Strategy to establish an SCO First Nation Court Worker program, which will initially employ three court workers. This program is part of SCO’s mandate to reduce the overrepresentation of our citizens within a colonial criminal justice system.

The court workers will help southern citizens navigate the courtroom experience and the criminal justice system by providing culturally appropriate supports such as language and cultural resources, and through providing information to communities and individuals.

“I want to express my appreciation to all of my fellow Chiefs,” concluded SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “Through their collective dedication and ingenuity, we keep finding innovative ways to meet and advance our work, while following all public health guidelines and keeping safety paramount during the pandemic. Together, we have been able to continue to move forward in unity in the midst of health restrictions and this incredibly difficult time.”

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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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**For Media Inquiries:**

**Caitlin Reid**, Manager of Communications, Southern Chiefs' Organization

(204) 557-2399 | Email: [Media@scoinc.mb.ca](mailto:Media@scoinc.mb.ca) [www.scoinc.mb.ca](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca)