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SCO SENDS CRITICAL COVID-19 SUPPLIES TO SOUTHERN FIRST NATIONS

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is pleased to announce that vital supplies to help battle the current wave of COVID-19 are now enroute to our member First Nations.

"We have been fully engaged since the moment we learned about this virus and the harm it could do to our communities and people," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "With the arrival of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, we knew we had to take our response to a whole new level."

This week, SCO began delivering thousands of rapid tests and FN-95 masks, along with medications like Tylenol and Advil for infants, children and adults, to member communities on a population basis. All supplies are of the highest quality and have been approved by Health Canada.

"COVID-19 has and continues to have an enormous impact on my community and all of our southern Nations," stated Lake Manitoba Chief, Cornell Mclean. "I know my fellow Chiefs will be pleased to see this response from SCO."

While SCO is pleased to announce the shipment of COVID-19 supplies, it has to be noted that this was to have happened weeks ago. SCO initially placed orders in December, and then was forced to reorder that month and again in January, when our supplies were either diverted or delivered to larger customers in the supply chain.

"It's been abundantly clear from the data that First Nation people and communities have the most critical need when it comes to accessing these essential supplies," added Grand Chief Daniels. "We have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to inequitable access to health care, and the implications of colonization, racism, and the infrastructure deficit. It is profoundly disappointing that at a time when First Nation lives are on the line, large corporate and government entities are jumping the line and leaving First Nations waiting for the supplies we need to protect our citizens."

This week, First Nation people make up 24 per cent of new cases and 44 per cent of those in the Intensive Care Unit. Despite the fact that the current wave of COVID-19 was predicted and anticipated, to date Ottawa has not provided adequate numbers of rapid tests or high-quality masks to First Nations. The rapid tests are of particular importance as polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests are not available in most First Nations.

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“Despite these continued systemic shortcomings, we will continue to care for our communities and support our leaders as long as the pandemic is with us and beyond,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “We will emerge strong and resilient, even when Canadian systems and structures make it more difficult.”

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 81,000 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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