

April 21, 2020

House of Commons of Canada's Standing Committee on Health

RE: study on Canadian response to the COVID-19 pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, it is more important than ever to make sure that Inuvialuit have access to the essential health care, food security, and basic human services we need. Inuvialuit have thus far succeeded in creating an environment where COVID-19 has not spread in the community. In order to ensure ISR communities remain safe, it is essential that additional supports and funding is made available immediately, to ensure the safety and sustainability of our communities.

As the Hon. MARC Miller has stated, "Northern communities, in particular those in remote and fly-in only parts of the country, are uniquely vulnerable during this crisis". Minister Miller's comments resonate across the ISR and reflect the true challenge our communities face.

To help address these challenges and mitigate the adverse effects on our communities, IRC has taken a number of extraordinary steps, including developing separate programs to help address the specific challenges that the pandemic has created: Child First Initiative; On the Land Support; and immediate support for Elders during this crisis. These programs have received an overwhelming level of interest, and IRC staff continue to work hard to ensure the ongoing success of these programs. Many of these programs have received support from the Federal Government, but additional resources, supplies and supports are required, including from the Government of Northwest Territories.

A coordinated response in the North to the COVID-19 pandemic, requires significant coordination, investment and provision of equipment. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. **Clarity on the specific measures the Federal government is taking to ensure that transport and shipping routes are maintained and supported during this time.** Local roads and air traffic routes are essential to ensuring food security and energy provision to the remote communities of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, and the continuation of these routes must be maintained for the well being of our communities.
2. **A clear protocol and plan for the proactive supply of essential medical response equipment to the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.** It is essential that any and all equipment; including medical tents, respirators, test kits, etc., are available in the ISR, and that a clear plan to mobilize these supplies and services is shared with our communities immediately. A chronic care management system – one that enables health professionals to travel to communities on a regular basis not only to determine the state of people's health, but also to provide necessary information on how to prevent and manage health matters in the community.

3. **A medical response unit must be strategically located *in the territory*.** A response plan must be established that specifically addresses how to mobilize both this unit and the necessary equipment into a community to isolate the virus, where a positive test is confirmed. As a proactive necessity, this response team and equipment must be able to assess residents of any impacted communities to ensure appropriate isolation and reduce the possibility of further spread of the virus. Indeed, it has been established that there may be a potential resurgence of the virus before a vaccine is developed. It is essential that emergency response personnel are prepared to respond to any such resurgence in the ISR. We look forward to working with you and the Government of Canada in coordinating the effective and efficient delivery of these necessary services.
4. **A commitment of ongoing funds to address the financial and associated pressures that the IRC and Inuvialuit response will require.** The remote nature and significant scale of our communities adds significant financial cost as we coordinate and organize our regional response. One-time funding is not sufficient to address the lasting and significant impacts on our communities that this virus has caused.
5. **A commitment to support critical air services to northern and remote communities.** While it has been stated that the territorial governments will manage contracts with air carriers so they can maintain a basic network of routes and services to provide access to critical goods to fly-in communities in the North, no plan to operationalize or make real these essential services has been shared or developed. Operational subsidies for our airlines are a fundamental necessity and a plan to ensure the survival of these services is required immediately. Medical evacuations, medical testing and the provision of supports are all done through fly-in services in communities, and it is essential that our airlines are sufficiently supported so as to enable the continued delivery of these necessary and life-saving services.
6. **Ongoing support to improve food security in the North.** Food security is fundamental to the safety and well-being of Inuvialuit. Increased and ongoing support for programs and initiatives already in place in ISR communities must be provided to ensure the long-term sustainability and food security of the region.
7. **Immediate implementation of point of care testing.** Inuvialuit require immediate access to timely and effective testing mechanisms in order to ensure the long-term safety of our communities and people. Testing must be available in the community and the results of such testing must be available as quickly as possible in order to ensure the population health of our community.
8. **Production of Data on testing in the North.** The provision of all data and information on where tests have been conducted (including what regions and communities); where specifically testing is available and distributed across the region and in communities; the location and availability of respirators and other essential medical equipment
9. **The supply and provision of basic Personal Protective Equipment for Inuvialuit and front-line staff.** It is essential that front-line service workers and community members who interact on a daily basis (grocery store, hardware store, etc.) are provided with basic PPE, including masks, gloves, etc. These

supplies are needed to ensure the safety of our staff and for the people who live in our communities. A plan and time frame to deploy and stock these materials and equipment is necessary and immediate.

10. Response Plan for any outbreak of the Virus. While the ISR has managed to prevent any community spread of the virus thus far, it is essential that an operational plan be in place immediately, that will address a community response to any potential outbreak. Many people, staff and community organizations will need to be mobilized in order to quickly and effectively manage a potential outbreak. To this end, it is essential that an emergency response plan – one that engages actively with each local community – is developed and shared, so that it can be actioned swiftly and mitigate any potential adverse impacts on the community and the people we serve.

Recently, in response to measures taken to help address the challenges related to COVID-19, the Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau stated: “No Canadian should ever have to worry about where to get their food or how to receive essential health care services”. In order to ensure the Prime Minister’s words are indeed true, it is essential that the Federal and territorial governments work with ISR communities and address the unique needs of the people that call the North home. The above ten actions are a crucial and important step in helping to secure the safe and well being of the Inuvialuit and the communities that make up the ISR.

As I have stated before, it is essential that we be nimble and respond quickly and effectively to developments around the world, while maintaining our commitment to the safety and security of the Inuvialuit and all the people who call the North their home. Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) continues to: secure supports for community members; advocate to orders of government for necessary goods and services; ensure people are able to access basic supplies and food during this time, and generally work to secure the well being of our communities.

Thank you, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or feedback.

Sincerely,



Duane Ningaqsiiq Smith
Chair & Chief Executive Officer