



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 008**

Thursday, November 26, 2020

---

Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina





## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Thursday, November 26, 2020

• (1835)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)):** I call to order this meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

In view of the information I have with regard to our other witnesses, we'll commence the meeting. Hopefully, we'll take a moment to get them connected when they're available.

I acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people, for those in Ottawa, and for my location, it is the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and Chonnonton first nations.

The committee is meeting to continue its study of support for indigenous communities through a second wave of COVID-19.

There are some best practices to tell you about. Please look down at the bottom centre of your screen, and you'll see a little globe. When you touch on that globe, you'll see “off”, “English” or “French”. At that point, you would select the language you wish to speak in and wish to hear.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute. The issue of all this technology and microphones and so on is for accuracy of the interpretation. Without proper interpretation, the meeting can't legally proceed. We need everyone to be heard properly and interpreted properly.

With that, by video conference for the first hour, we have the following witnesses: Chief Bryan Mark will be joining us. From the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, we have Angeline Gillis, Janna MacKay and Amber MacLean-Hawes. Appearing as an individual, we have Professor Debbie Martin.

Welcome to everyone.

I now invite Angeline, Janna or Amber to go ahead for six minutes.

**Ms. Janna MacKay (Senior Director, Health and Social Services, Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq):** Good evening, everyone.

The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq would first like to acknowledge and commend the swift action taken by Nova Scotia community leadership to proactively lock down their communities at the start of the pandemic. Some communities closed borders and had checkpoints for entry, implemented community-wide curfews

and shifted to offering only essential services in the early days of the pandemic. Undoubtedly this strong leadership helped convey the seriousness of the situation and the importance of following provincial public health guidelines, and contributed as well to having no reported cases of COVID-19 in our first nation communities.

The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, or the CMM, is a tribal council organization representing the eight Mi'kmaq communities of mainland Nova Scotia. Our mission is to proactively promote and assist Mi'kmaq communities' initiatives towards self-determination and enhancement of community.

At the CMM, we have an emergency management team. In mid-March, the organization shifted to an emergency management structure. Soon after that, daily calls with chiefs and government officials began, which explored issues in the region. Early questions included how communities access ample PPE and testing supplies, what were considered eligible expenses for various COVID funding envelopes, what were considered essential services, and jurisdictional issues around who was responsible to respond if there was a community outbreak.

Some challenges noted here were very long delays in receiving responses to questions, clear communication lines that took too long to be established and information overload. Eventually, trilateral calls were established between the Nova Scotia first nation communities, the Province of Nova Scotia and Indigenous Services Canada.

As public health is a provincial responsibility, the ability to receive clear responses to questions directly from Nova Scotia's chief medical officer of health, Dr. Robert Strang, was vital.

Existing health disparities were exacerbated by the pandemic. Similar to other indigenous populations, the Mi'kmaq experience higher rates of chronic disease, food insecurity, overcrowding in homes and impaired access to health services, all of which create barriers to employing adequate public health measures.

This past August, our communities, along with representatives of provincial and federal governments, came together for a COVID response debriefing session. The primary lessons learned here can be summarized into the following categories: communication, mental health impacts, economic impacts, jurisdictional issues and human resources.

For communication, throughout the pandemic there has been a lot of information shared, but it was not always coordinated effectively. There was too much information provided to single touch-points, such as chiefs, to effectively distribute within the communities. We recommend fully transparent communication lines between communities, all levels of government and supporting organizations at the start of the decision-making process.

In terms of mental health impact, mental health supports were already under-resourced, and the pandemic made it worse. When communities started locking down, a trauma-informed and harm-reduction approach was used. However, communities observed an increase in drug use and relapse, with the added challenge of accessing appropriate services. Even as services began to reopen, the very low capacity that is possible cannot meet the need.

We recommend improved access to treatment centres now, with a specific focus on youth treatment; appropriate care planning for future treatment centre closure; and access to culturally appropriate mental health supports.

In terms of economic impact, the funding opportunities made available during the pandemic did not adequately meet Mi'kmaq communities' needs. Communities relied heavily on own-source revenue to fill gaps not met by government support programs. First nation communities were also left out of decisions that would affect the financial livelihood of communities, such as closure of fisheries and gaming. This left communities in debt and uncertain about their financial futures.

We recommend increased funding, including economic recovery plans, for community own-source revenue.

In terms of jurisdictional issues, the pandemic response has amplified the disconnect between first nations community bylaws and their enforcement. It is the observation of community leaders that neither federal nor provincial law enforcement would assume authority for community bylaws.

We recommend that law enforcement respect and support bylaws developed by community leadership.

In terms of human resources, the pandemic highlighted the need for improved emergency management support at the local community level. First nation communities had to pull from already understaffed community-based resources, which contributed to staff burnout and high stress.

• (1840)

We recommend targeted funding for permanent emergency management coordinator positions at the local community level.

In closing, improved communication, access to more human resources and the provision of mental health supports will positively impact health outcomes for Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq when faced with a second wave of COVID-19. Economic recovery plans need to include Mi'kmaq community governments, businesses and entrepreneurs. First nation communities will be better prepared for the next wave; however, improvements for increased preparedness will require continued communication and co-operation on all levels of government. Fortunately, the challenges ahead are better under-

stood, staff are better prepared and agreements are being put in place.

Future success in this pandemic requires attention at all levels. We are all in this together.

*Wela'liog.*

• (1845)

**The Chair:** Thanks very much. Thanks for noting the time almost exactly to the second. It's important, because we need to make sure we get our rounds of questioning in.

With that we go to Professor—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Chair—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Sorry, Mr. Chair.

I have a point of order.

There was no interpretation. I wanted to bring that to your attention so we can have it fixed.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Gill, were you on the French line on the global icon?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I still am, Mr. Chair. I can hear the witness fine, but when you speak, I can only hear you in English.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I see.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I hear you fine now.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll continue.

Professor Debbie Martin, it's your turn now. You have six minutes. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Debbie Martin (As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

*Nakurmiik* and *wela'lin* for the invitation to speak to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

I am speaking to you from Mi'kma'ki, which is the unceded and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq.

I am a Canada research chair in indigenous peoples' health and well-being at Dalhousie University and an associate professor of health promotion.

When people ask me what health promotion is, the best description I've heard is an analogy that has to do with a cliff. Our health care system is meant to deal with all of the things that happen at the bottom of the cliff, after people have fallen off. The ambulance arrives—

[Translation]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I can't hear the witness or the interpreter.

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll suspend for a brief moment.

Mr. Clerk, can we determine what the interpretation issue is?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue):** Yes. It's under way.

**The Chair:** Okay. Signal me when we're functional again so we can continue.

• (1845) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1855)

**The Chair:** I'm going to continue the meeting now. Chief Mark will have an opportunity to speak after we listen once again to Ms. Martin, who is our witness.

• (1900)

Please begin from the beginning again, Ms. Martin. Go ahead for six minutes.

**Ms. Debbie Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

*Nakurmiik* and *wela'lin* for the invitation to speak to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I am speaking to you from Mi'kma'ki, which is the unceded and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq.

I'm a Canada research chair in indigenous peoples' health and well-being at Dalhousie University and an associate professor of health promotion.

When people ask me what health promotion is, the best description I've heard is an analogy that has to do with a cliff.

Our health care system is meant to deal with all of the things that happen at the bottom of the cliff after people have fallen off: The ambulance arrives, they are brought to the hospital, and they get triaged and then treated.

The role of health promotion is to prevent people from falling off the cliff in the first place. It might include messaging, physical infrastructure and policies that prevent people from falling off the cliff. Essentially, health promotion is a close cousin of public health, because it is concerned with keeping people healthy and keeping them from requiring services offered by health care.

Our health care workers are frequently referred to as our first line of defence against COVID-19, and I disagree with this description. In the fight against this disease, our health care workers, in fact, are the very last line of defence. They play backup to strong, evidence-

based public health policy. Public policy is the offensive line, and you, as elected leadership, have become front-line workers.

The offensive line in the Atlantic region has done tremendous work. We have had great success with the Atlantic bubble. What has characterized the success of the Atlantic bubble has been strong public health leadership, strong policy directives and a well-organized and collaborative approach by provincial, indigenous and municipal leadership. However, we are well aware that we are not immune to this disease, and we are quickly seeing an exponential rise in COVID-19 cases in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Here is where the concern lies, because once the virus begins to spread in this region, we know all too well that indigenous communities face particular vulnerabilities, and those vulnerabilities are now magnified by COVID-19. These are ongoing structural inequalities that disproportionately affect first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. This region has some of the highest levels of both food and heat insecurity in the country. There are multiple ongoing drinking water issues: Some Inuit communities in southern Labrador, for instance, are faced with not just an issue related to clean water but in fact lack any form of running water at all.

There are issues with overcrowded housing and with homelessness that are compounded during the pandemic because there are fewer alternative public spaces for homeless people to occupy through the day, such as libraries. There is a lack of services and supports for indigenous women and girls who are fleeing violence. There is inequitable access to timely and culturally safe health care.

These are just a few of those structural inequalities. Each of these things makes it that much more difficult to abide by public health protocols that are required to ward off the virus. In other words, should the virus enter our communities, we are not equally well positioned to fight it.

I have heard three major concerns raised about the funding formula that is being used to calculate COVID-19 supports for indigenous communities. The first one is that per capita calculations include data from the 2016 census, which does not paint an accurate portrait of the number of people per community. The Indian Register, for example, would be a much more accurate representation for on-reserve populations.

The second thing is that definitions for “remote” do not currently account for the poverty experienced by many who live on-reserve. Even a 10-kilometre distance between reserve communities and large population centres can make services completely inaccessible.

Third, not all communities have even been eligible to apply for Indigenous Services' COVID-19 support. NunatuKavut communities, for instance, are scrambling to write funding proposals where funds are not assured, serving to deepen the inequities experienced even among indigenous communities within this region.

Looking ahead to the hopefully not-so-distant future, our communities are already expressing concern about whether there will be access to any form of transition assistance once people are no longer able to receive COVID supports. Many of these federal funding dollars have provided a desperately needed infusion of funds, but it isn't clear what happens once that funding runs out and when the need is still very high. This issue is especially important for those in the lowest income brackets, who have begun to rely on the extra support for heating their homes, addressing food security and so forth.

Earlier this week, Indigenous Affairs minister Marc Miller noted that we do not have solid epidemiological data for first nations, Inuit and Métis communities; thus, we may be vastly underestimating the scope of the problem. Combined with the fact that many indigenous communities also have limited access to testing, not only might we not have a good understanding of the numbers of people who are reporting infections, but we are unable to accurately identify who is infected and then undertake appropriate contact tracing. Without access to data, indigenous communities are unable to project what their needs will be in order to effectively respond to the crisis.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, my recommendation to the standing committee is this: Think of yourselves at the top of the cliff as the front-line workers. What good public policy decisions can you work towards to ensure that the community spread is minimized? PPE and hand sanitizers are important, but let's think instead about what helps keep people healthy and keeps them away from the cliff in the first place. That's food security; affordable, safe housing; access to safe, clean sources of drinking water; access to timely and culturally safe health services for communities; and improving access to much-needed epidemiological data that is specific to indigenous communities.

*Nakurmiik and wela'lin* for your time and attention.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Martin. You're right on six minutes.

Chief Mark, welcome. Please go ahead for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Chief Bryan Mark (Conseil des Innus d'Unamen Shipu, Innu Nation):** I would like to start by thanking you for giving me this opportunity today.

On behalf of the chiefs of the nine communities that make up the Innu nation of Quebec, representing approximately 20,000 members, I want to thank you for the invitation you extended on May 26 to appear before the committee. That was exactly six months ago today. I want to thank my colleague, Chief Mike McKenzie, for participating in that meeting and standing up for the needs of the Innu nation. I also want to thank Dr. Stanley Volant, an Innu doctor and one of our members.

As you know, we have highly knowledgeable experts providing medical support as part of the Innu nation unit in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the first wave, we have been able to protect our communities, and that continues now, in the midst of the second wave. The Côte-Nord is one of the only regions in Quebec that is not considered a red zone—an area deemed to have the

highest risk of transmission of COVID-19. The Innu make up 12% of the population in the region. We are convinced that, thanks to the strategic unit, we were better able to align our local efforts with regional measures.

Like our ancestors, we were forward-thinking, anticipating future events and taking initiative to mobilize and better support our community. Our collective leadership is a testament to the pride we have as Innu. Our priority is the health of our people, and we will keep up our efforts. Now, we must continue working to prevent outbreaks that would send us into reaction and response mode.

Our members have made enormous sacrifices. The reality is we are geographically isolated and that puts us at risk. We have many people who continue to come and go in our communities, ranging from construction workers and health care workers to educators and transportation service providers. Understanding our reality is paramount. We accept all essential workers, but we are also confronted with the challenge of keeping our people, especially our seniors, healthy. Luckily, they have been spared thus far thanks to our collective efforts.

The overriding concern of our elected representatives in the Côte-Nord and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean administrative regions is the vulnerability of our populations to the pandemic given the high risk of spread. That spread would be serious, indeed, if we could not afford to keep the resources we had managed to put in place to protect our communities. Since the second wave began, we have been able to implement co-operation-based protection measures, with the help of our partners.

The question we were asking back in May, during the first wave, was this: What steps has the federal government taken to ensure the continuity of health and safety services in our communities? Some funding supports are in place, but restrictions are in effect, restrictions we have to explain to our people.

We have gleaned bits and pieces about the vaccination strategy that has been so talked about of late, and we urge federal authorities to set out a clear plan for the months ahead, one that goes hand in hand with our local approach. First nations governance must have a hand in developing and implementing the plan. We are calling on the federal government to ensure its short-, medium- and long-term measures support those we have taken, whether in the area of health care, social services, education, public safety, the management and protection of Nitassinan or economic opportunities.

As my colleague Chief Mike McKenzie said back in May, we must be able to rely on the federal government to support our businesses in order to protect what we have. Our economic levers must be maintained and supported to bridge the gaps and stay afloat in the quest for financial autonomy. The economic recovery has nothing to do with us. I would even go so far as to say that a recovery is incompatible with the reality of some of our communities; there can only be talk of an economic beginning.

On a social level, our members need a boost. As you know, winter is long, but it is even longer where we live. We are, for the most part, isolated, but we must encourage our people to keep up the fight against an invisible enemy that few saw coming. We are in solution mode, and we have a plan. We do, however, need help to carry it out.

Come winter, food security becomes a real concern.

• (1905)

Our elders need reassurance that they will be able to eat caribou, that the essential cultural connection between the Atik caribou and Innu will not be broken, that our families will be able to find comfort during the holiday season and celebrate—in accordance with the rules—by at least eating what our people have eaten since time immemorial.

We are requesting substantial support for our traditional food security. With respect for the resource and the rules, our hunters are ready to set off in search of food to feed their families, as our ancestors have always done. That is vital.

Bear in mind that our reality is unique and that we always have to fight for what is obvious. The spectre of federal and provincial authorities is always there and can often delay what is obvious. The fact is political goodwill is the ingredient that will help ensure measures are aligned to make a real difference.

We stepped up as a nation and we are continuing to do so. However, we need support if we are to keep the situation under control. People's lives are at stake.

*Tshinashkumitin*. Thank you.

• (1910)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief.

We're going to have time for one round of questioning from each of the parties from members of our committee. They are Mr. Melillo, Ms. Zann, Ms. Gill and Ms. Blaney.

Our first questioner, for six minutes, is Eric Melillo. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Chief Mark.

Chief Mark, does your community now have enough personal protective equipment?

**Chief Bryan Mark:** I can't speak for all nine communities, but in my community, we had a lot of trouble accessing personal protective equipment in response to COVID-19. We had to turn to private companies while keeping to our allocated funding.

[*English*]

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hope I'm coming through clearly. I think I have a bit of a delay.

**The Chair:** You're coming through fine. Go ahead.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** I have a couple of questions for Dr. Martin as well.

Doctor, I see that one of your research subjects is food justice, and I believe you also mentioned food security in your remarks.

I'm wondering if you can provide some insight for committee members as to how the current pandemic has impacted food security for indigenous peoples, for indigenous communities and of course across the north.

**Ms. Debbie Martin:** Food security, for those of you who are unfamiliar with it, is the idea that people have the ability to access safe, culturally appropriate food and the right amounts that provide for their nutritional needs. In many cases, food justice also involves the idea that indigenous people specifically be able to access lands and their territories in ways that allow them to enact culturally appropriate activities.

What we've seen during the pandemic is that many indigenous communities, in some cases, are in fact getting out on the land even more frequently as a result of having more time to be able to do that. In that respect, there are also more safety concerns. When more people are going out on the land and enacting their cultural activities, there's also a lot of risk involved.

We have things like climate change in the north, for example, with late freeze-ups and early breakups of ice. It presents a lot of danger for people accessing the land in the ways they've always done. It's an interesting interpretation of what food security looks like. I think we need to think about safety, but we also have to ensure that people have access to enough food. That is also a concern. We know that many communities, in fact, have had difficulties accessing food because of transportation issues. Some of the logistics around that have been troublesome.

I also spoke to a colleague of mine who works with the Nunatsiavut government in Labrador, who indicated that many of their smaller communities don't have lights on their runways, which means that when the weather is good, flights need to get in and out for emergencies but also for supplies, for food, for health supplies and so on. If those runways don't have adequate lighting, then if the weather isn't good in the evening, they simply can't get in or out of those communities, which poses a threat not just for safety but also for accessing needed supplies. I think there are multiple layers and multiple ways in which food security is affected.

• (1915)

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Absolutely.

That might answer part of my next question, but I'll put it out anyway. It's a little more specific to some of the government programming that has been in place to help address food security. Particularly, I'm interested in your thoughts on Nutrition North. I'm sure it's something you're fairly familiar with through your work.

When I talk to people, whether it's in my riding in Kenora or across the north, it seems that this program, frankly, hasn't done enough. We've seen increases in food insecurity and we've seen a lot of these challenges persist. I'm curious if you have any specific thoughts on that program and how it might be improved.

**Ms. Debbie Martin:** I spent a little time looking at the issue of the Nutrition North program and I think you're bang on. What you've heard is consistent with what I've heard in terms of the research that we have done in looking at that program, in that a lot of the subsidies provided to the program aren't necessarily reaching the pockets of the consumers as they purchase foods from stores in northern communities.

I'm not sure that I have the right solution or the single solution to solving that problem. I think that a lot of the indigenous communities in those regions that are relying on the Nutrition North program often have a lot of their own ideas about how to do that. I'm not sure that I have anything specific to add to that right now, but I think they would.

We also know that a lot of the grocers aren't necessarily able to offer the subsidy directly to their own customers. If there's a way to ensure or mandate that the subsidies that are directed to the owners of the grocery stores can be passed on to the customer... I think that's the biggest gap I've noticed.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

We'll move on now to Lenore Zann for the next six-minute round of questioning.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.):** Thank you very much, and *o'weliag* for all of the Nova Scotian witnesses to be here tonight.

We've chatted a little bit before this meeting as well about some of the issues that have been facing Millbrook First Nation and other Mi'kmaq communities during the COVID pandemic. One thing I remember we talked about is the fact that it all happened so quickly and with such emergency that it was very difficult to have enough staff to fill out the applications in order to get the financial supports from government.

Ms. Gillis, would you mind filling us in a little bit more on that and give us some suggestions on what needs to be done to address that issue this time around?

**Mrs. Angeline Gillis (Associate Executive Director, Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq):** Absolutely. Janna did touch on it a little bit in her opening statement.

For many of the communities here in Nova Scotia, a lot of their own-source revenue is generated via gaming or fishing. At the time of the pandemic, one of the first decisions made by the provincial government, without any prior consultation with the communities, was to shut down their gaming facilities. Due to that, we also did not at that time have the programming in place, so the communities turned to their own-source revenue and had to make decisions to cut many positions in their community. A lot of the non-essential services were cut. Many who stayed on were in leadership, health and the little EMO support they did have.

Because these are individuals who support communities to access funds, when all of the information overload in programming came down, the ability to access that funding became impaired. As Janna MacKay mentioned, they turned to tribal organizations like ours, which did not have funding per se in place to deal with COVID. Nobody did, but they turned to us, and we were able to kind of turn into an EMO office where we used existing staff that are hired through other programs to help support communities to write proposals. That was on individuals who were already doing other jobs.

When you have to cut positions in already reduced-capacity positions, the ability to access that funding becomes more difficult, and as a result missed opportunities happened and there was more dependence on OSR, own-source revenue, which in turn created more debt. That's what we saw.

● (1920)

**Ms. Lenore Zann:** Do you have any suggestions for what we can do, what the federal government can do, what I can do to help avoid that this time around? What do you need?

**Mrs. Angeline Gillis:** I think it's just that. It's funding to support EMO coordinator positions to write proposals and access funding for communities, which didn't exist the first time around. There was no HR support for communities or for organizations like ours to access that funding. Much of the funding we saw was under-subscribed versus oversubscribed. Instead, they went without.

**Ms. Lenore Zann:** That's a shame. I'm so sorry to hear that.

Thank you very much for that.

The other issue I want to ask about is mental health. We heard in the spring that the pandemic was having impacts on mental health across the country for indigenous communities that were already vulnerable before this crisis. They are even more so now and will probably be more so afterwards.

The Minister of Indigenous Services said that the government has invested \$82.5 million to address the impacts of the pandemic on mental health in indigenous communities in addition to the \$425 million in existing annual funding for community-based mental health services.

Can you please describe the impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of Mi'kmaq communities in our area? What can we do to improve it as we go forward?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Janna MacKay:** I have one minute for mental health. That's a big one.

**Ms. Lenore Zann:** I know. I'm sorry.

**Ms. Janna MacKay:** That's okay.

We did take some of the funds that were allocated for that region. Big numbers across the country of course get pared down and pared down to not quite as much for a particular region.



In our region, the Atlantic region, those funds with the CMM are going towards access to more mental health clinicians. As I said in my opening remarks, access to treatment is incredibly impaired right now. We're seeing increased drug use and relapse here, and there's no place to go. Positions are being cut in the community, or their time is being used elsewhere. Some of these are mental health workers, and so they're not able to service the community adequately.

What's the impact? The impact is that communities are struggling. It's really hard to see an end in sight when treatment isn't available.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill, you may go ahead for six minutes.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses and say a special hello to Chief Mark and Mr. Therrien Pinette. *Kuei kuei utshimau* and *kuei kuei*.

Chief Mark, you talked about the community's needs as far as health care and business are concerned. Did you see any differences in the needs of Innu communities during the first wave versus the second wave? If so, what were they? I realize, of course, that the situation can vary depending on the community. If so, feel free to share that with us.

**Chief Bryan Mark:** *Kuei*. Good evening, Mrs. Gill.

I wish I could provide a unified answer for the entire Innu nation, but the realities of each community are so different and community-specific that it would be hard. That's precisely why I wish my colleague Jean-Claude Pinette were with me today. He could speak to those issues.

Economically, the whole Innu nation is affected by the pandemic. Things weren't great before the pandemic given our geographic location—a particularly remote and isolated area without roads. Some people have tried to start small businesses, but they were hit hard by the first wave of the pandemic. The impact is being compounded by the second wave.

• (1925)

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I gather, then, that the community's needs grew because you weren't able to properly address them. If you like, you can send the committee additional information on all nine communities to help us understand the situation.

You mentioned food security and the Atik caribou, which I see pictured on the wall behind you. Correct me if I'm wrong, but some communities did not partake in goose hunting, a traditional means of subsistence for first nations, because they were worried about contracting the virus. I imagine that had an effect on food security, which is already precarious in some cases.

What can the federal government do to help you?

**Chief Bryan Mark:** The federal government could perhaps support the steps we have undertaken with the provinces. Those steps are meant to give us access to the resource, but in a controlled manner, so as to protect that resource. This would enable us to feed our

seniors not through individual hunting, but through controlled community hunting. It is perhaps in that context that the federal government could help us because we have been trying to negotiate something to access the resource for five or six years.

The file has been dragging on for years. During this time, seniors have been unable to eat their traditional meals, and a number of them have left us.

I don't know whether I have answered your question. I also don't know whether the federal government could intervene in that respect with the provincial government.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I have no doubt about that. I know how important the Nitassinan resources and territory are to you.

I would like to ask another question about the isolation of certain regions, such as the Lower North Shore, Unamen Shipu and Pakua Shipu.

You talked about risks. In what way do risks increase or what other needs could the government meet?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have one minute. Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Chief Bryan Mark:** In terms of food security, there are still buffer zones. During the transition period between seasons, it is very difficult to have access to adequate and suitable food—if we consider certain foods' expiry dates. That is somewhat along the same lines as the other witness's comments, as he was saying that, despite the nutrition north Canada program, people have to acquire commodities, which are extremely expensive for an isolated community like ours.

We are seeing on social networks that our situation is not unique. For example, a litre of milk costs about \$10. Even with nutrition north Canada subsidies, some questions have remained unanswered.

• (1930)

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Chief. We'll stop there.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** *Tshinashkumitinan*.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thanks, Ms. Gill.

Ms. Blaney, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses here today for the important testimony that they've added to this study.

I'll start with you, Ms. MacKay. You talked about something that we've heard about before, which is the issue of bylaws and the ability for the bylaws to be enforced and the challenges that you're seeing. I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about that and let us know if COVID has actually had a detrimental impact or if this has been a long-standing issue that COVID just exaggerated. I'm not sure that's the right word, but I hope you understand what I mean.

**Ms. Janna MacKay:** I will defer this question to Angie.

**Mrs. Angeline Gillis:** That's a great question.

In Nova Scotia we have what is known as the tripartite process. One of the working groups that was implemented as a result of the truth and reconciliation process was the need to look at the way our justice system is set up.

In that, we started to conduct studies on the gaps with bylaw enforcement. It isn't necessarily that we do not have the capacity to develop bylaws; our communities have done that. The gap we are seeing is with enforcement, getting enforcement to act, and that gap was, in fact, exacerbated through COVID when our communities tried to protect themselves by implementing the lockdowns, implementing curfews and such. We could not get any of our law enforcement officers to support us in ensuring that the bylaws were followed adequately to protect the communities. That gap was something that was brought more to light when COVID struck.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you. That's very helpful.

If I could come to you, Professor Martin, you said a couple of things. The first thing you talked about was timely and culturally safe health care. I just want to make sure that we clarify on the record what that looks like.

The other thing you talked about, which I've seen in numerous studies, is the barrier created by a lack of data. It's hard to measure what's working and what's not working and the long-term impacts, simply because we don't have substantive data. I hear that across Canada.

Could you answer these two things? What direction do we need to take in terms of getting more clear data, and what is timely and culturally safe health care?

**Ms. Debbie Martin:** They are two really good questions.

I think there are two different things in terms of the timeliness of access to care. For remote, rural and isolated communities, access to timely care becomes urgent in the case of COVID-19 if emergency services are needed. Again, with issues related to weather and geographic isolation, timeliness is sometimes difficult to enact and the ability to have supports in that way becomes impeded. I think one way to address that would be through improved access to telehealth opportunities and better connectivity in rural, remote and isolated areas.

In terms of culturally safe care, I think we have seen in the media and know very well the impact of racism and systemic racism in our health care system. It's one thing to require services, but it's certainly another thing to choose not to have those services because

you know that the way you're going to be treated once you enter the health care system is not culturally appropriate or is in fact racist. I think that's what I wanted to bring out. I'm glad you asked me about that, because it was a very condensed sentence I put in there.

Then again, the lack of access to data is a massive problem as well. What I would suggest here is turning to some of the amazing work that's being done already by indigenous communities in terms of improving their own access to data.

Nationally, we have the First Nations Information Governance Centre. They have done some amazing work in collecting data from very diverse first nations communities across the country to address that gap, but that doesn't mean the capacity is there to now pivot to understand how to collect this epidemiological data that's needed to understand, and to do contact tracing and all of that other stuff for COVID-19. What we're left with is a huge gap in our knowledge about the epidemiology of COVID-19 in indigenous communities. Without that information, we can't act accordingly.

I think what needs to happen as the first step is a full and complete engagement with the appropriate indigenous leadership that can advise on how to engage with that type of data collection that has to happen. Without that, I don't think any amount of government funding would improve access. We are already facing a lot of skepticism and reluctance from indigenous communities around participating in research because of a massive history of colonialism that has created a negative taste in the mouths of many people who have taken part in research in the past. There really needs to be a lot of capacity built within communities for them to be able to do that work themselves.

● (1935)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney, we're right out of time. Thanks very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're sorry about the technical issues that caused us delays.

I want to thank our panellists. These are remarkable contributions to our report. If there's anything that you feel has not been discussed that should be, please submit written testimony, and it will be incorporated into our report.

We're going to suspend for just a few moments to set up our next panel. We will resume momentarily.

Once again, thanks to our witnesses.

● (1935)

(Pause)

● (1940)

**The Chair:** We'll call the meeting to order once again and resume our study of support for indigenous communities through a second wave of COVID-19.

Joining us by video conference are National Chief Norman Yakeleya of the Dene Nation, Minister William Goodon of the Manitoba Métis Federation and Herb Lehr of the Métis Settlements General Council.

Chief Yakeleya, please go ahead for six minutes.

Chief, you are on mute.

Mr. Clerk, could we have a technician call Chief Yakeleya? In the meantime, we will hear from Minister Goodon of the Manitoba Metis Federation for six minutes.

• (1945)

**Mr. William Goodon (Minister, Manitoba Metis Federation):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To all the committee members, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today. I'm very pleased to speak to you about the support for indigenous communities, businesses and individuals through the second wave of COVID.

I want to say thank you again for inviting the MMF to speak to the committee on the COVID crisis gripping the world and our country, and in particular on its impact on the Manitoba Métis. I am here on behalf of our president, David Chartrand.

The Manitoba Métis government has been dedicated to providing supports to our citizens, families, workers and businesses as they try to cope with the hard impacts of COVID. The Government of Canada has heard our concerns, which President Chartrand expressed to you in his other appearances. We need to continue to work together to address the continued standing challenges.

We acknowledge Canada has responded quickly, meaningfully and in partnership with us to adjust the programs to allow our Métis government to deliver a flexible financial lifeline to our indigenous communities, businesses and individuals. This is especially important to recognize, as we have had no support from the Manitoba provincial government. We have been delivering food security income and other supports for many of our more vulnerable citizens, including our seniors, students, early learners and homeless.

These are difficult times we are facing here in Manitoba. We are deep into code red, with job losses, closures and significant COVID cases. We have lost loved ones here in the Métis community as a result of this pandemic. There is no doubt that Canada's indigenous support programs, in addition to its broader COVID-19 economic response plans, have helped with preventive measures to slow down the devastating impact on our communities. We are working to do all we can with these preventive measures to minimize the impacts.

At the same time, COVID has had a significant influence on our people, even before the onset of its second wave. Historically and in modern days, the Métis were and are well known as entrepreneurs and business-minded people. The concern for the future of this sector is significant. Many of our citizens are employed in the services and construction sectors. Their type of employment does not enable them to work from home. The lack of reliable and sufficient Internet bandwidth for both our rural and urban citizens, and in particular our entrepreneurs, creates further challenges during these unprecedented times.

Ensuring all criteria are met, we are dedicated to release the federal supports intended to provide flexible, immediate support. In Manitoba, we are in the depth of full closures of non-essential activities across the province. The funds being released through the

Louis Riel Capital Corporation and our Metis Economic Development Fund are there to help those in the crisis we face now and to assist in reopening in a safe and responsible manner.

We currently have three COVID-19 Métis business support programs.

Our MMF COVID-19 economic response for entrepreneurs was an early and urgent response that was launched on March 23 and at that time disbursed over \$650,000.

Our MMF COVID business support program was launched on November 3 and has provided \$1.173 million approved to date, with applications approved in 72 hours and funds distributed within the week.

The Métis emergency business loan program has approved and disbursed over \$4.3 million in financial supports to our businesses and entrepreneurs.

The COVID crisis has also exposed the particular vulnerability of our citizens and communities resulting from our long-standing exclusion from the federal health supports available to other indigenous peoples. While the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Indigenous Services Canada worked with first nations and Inuit to provide PPE and other forms of medical assistance, the Métis were left to fend for ourselves. While we are all now focused on the need to contain the second wave, we hope that as Canada tries to build resiliency with an equitable and sustainable economic recovery plan, the impact that COVID is having on our people will figure in this plan.

• (1950)

. We believe an equitable and sustainable economic recovery plan should incorporate the commitments made to us during the 2019 election campaign. Acting on these commitments will serve to stimulate economic activity and resolve long-standing inequities.

These include commitments by Canada to, first, close the infrastructure gap in Métis communities by 2030 through investments in critical health infrastructure, such as Métis Nation health hubs; second, to codevelop distinctions-based indigenous health legislation to ensure indigenous control over the development and delivery of services; third, to attain a 5% indigenous procurement target in federal spending; fourth, to establish a major projects benefit framework that will ensure that Métis communities benefit from major projects.

The federal government's budgets in 2018 and 2019 contained significant allocations over a 10-year period for Métis-specific programs and services, such as housing, early learning and child care, and post-secondary education. The MMF applauds this dedication to a government-to-government and nation-to-nation approach. Accelerating the release of the balance of this funding in a shorter time frame may also help to address long-standing needs and provide economic stimulus in our communities.

**The Chair:** Chief, we are beyond time.

**Mr. William Goodon:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Are you close?

**Mr. William Goodon:** I was just going to say thank you. That was my last sentence.

Thank you very much for your time and for allowing me to speak here today. It's much appreciated.

**The Chair:** I'm glad we didn't miss that. Thank you very much.

Chief Yakeleya, I see that you're not muted now. Can you hear me? If so, please go ahead for six minutes.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya (Dene Nation):** Yes, thanks to my 18-year-old son, who is technology-savvy and made it happen.

**The Chair:** Great.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** *Marsi.* Mr. Speaker, I am National Chief Norman Yakeleya of the Dene Nation of the Northwest Territories.

As our elders have always said, we ask all of Canada to continue to pray for all of us as we go through the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was elected in August 2018 on a platform of unifying the Dene and rebuilding the Dene Nation through our existing and modern treaties with Canada and the Northwest Territories government and other indigenous governments.

Time is of the essence for us as elected leaders. My three-year term—1,095 days—is down to 268 days, as we all continue to lead and manage our way through this pandemic as Dene.

What you will hear from me will be consistent with the points we have talked about as Dene, what we have talked about with the other indigenous governments and the Government of the Northwest Territories, as well as what we have talked about with the Prime Minister and the ministers.

The pandemic really is about the health of our Dene and the health of our economy, either trapping or in wages, which sustains us. The Dene medicine wellness model is something we want to encourage, and what we ask of Canada, through the economic issues, is that they consider the proclaimed policies that affect the Dene people.

As we collectively protect our way through the second wave—and anticipate a possible third wave—a number of things are very clear.

One, the status quo is not enough. We would not want to go back to the normal way, because if we go back to the normal way of how we were doing business, we would still be in a situation of begging Canada to help the indigenous people.

We understand also that no one government can go it alone. Unilateral decision-making is counterproductive. However, the current system, the fiscal arrangement with the GNWT and Canada, supports these unilateral decisions. This is a time that demands collaboration and co-governance.

The pandemic has really brought to light the shortcomings in our existing systems. It has shed light on the fact that change has to happen. We are managing, but barely. Systems are stretched to the

breaking point. People, especially our caregivers—known as elders, mothers and fathers—and special people in our communities, are exhausted.

The economy is in recession, and climate change is extremely important, along with what's happened with our weather.

We look at the pandemic as opportunities. The pandemic has helped create the conditions that make it clear that the only way ahead is through a collaborative co-governance approach among the indigenous governments, Canada and the GNWT, whereby issues of common concern can be discussed and next steps agreed upon. For example, arranging for new fiscal arrangements must be a priority with this government and with the indigenous governments. Another example is that the chiefs are very concerned about the greatly increased alcohol and drug abuse in our small communities and the fatalities we have suffered resulting from the pandemic's related public health restrictions.

Much of the program funding, design and programming for indigenous people resides within the Government of the Northwest Territories, with indigenous governments often reduced to being recipients of the funding, which may or may not meet their needs due to not having any input into program design and implementation. We encourage direct funding to the aboriginal governments. Let us do our own wellness program, rather than having someone do it for us.

The opportunity is now there to revisit these arrangements on a trilateral basis, to make it acceptable to the three governments and to promote efficiency, effectiveness and creativity in dealing with what are now almost intractable problems like housing, health, energy and the economy.

● (1955)

At the start of the pandemic, the Dene Nation made a case to Canada that the safest place for people in our community was on the land rather than in the community. Canada agreed, and funding was provided to assist families to go on the land in a common-sense, innovative approach.

The Dene Nation recognizes the need to rebuild the NWT economy post-pandemic. It has put out a road map in a document called the "Resetting the Sail: Dene Nation Post-Pandemic Economic Reset Plan April 2020".

The Dene Nation and the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources put out a paper called "Resetting the National Sail: a Consideration Paper on Indigenous Governance and the Canada Water Agency".

The Dene Nation is a primary advocate for the creation of a territorial government whereby indigenous elected leaders and those of the Government of the Northwest Territories can gather and hopefully reach consensus on how to deal with issues of common interest. The Dene Nation is also advocating the coordinated approach of the Arctic and northern policy framework, which is to be structured in the same way. We are advocating for a Dene chapter—

**The Chair:** Chief, we're right out of time...go ahead.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Thank you very much.

The four recommendations are that the Dene Nation needs a trilateral table to work with all three governments and that the Dene nation supports whatever other initiatives we can work together on with this committee and the Government of Canada.

*Marsi cho.*

• (2000)

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Chief. Have the teenager invoice the Government of Canada for the technical work.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** You're so kind, gentlemen.

**The Chair:** That brings us to an old acquaintance from the Métis Settlements General Council, Herb Lehr.

Welcome, Herb. Please go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Herbert Lehr (President, Metis Settlements General Council):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee, for the invitation to speak today on behalf of the Métis Settlements as part of your study on COVID-19 and its effect on indigenous communities. I am pleased to provide the committee with an update on the situation across our eight communities and how we wish to work collaboratively with the Government of Canada in the weeks and months ahead.

For members who may be new to this committee, the MSGC is not part of the Métis National Council or a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta. As such, we do not have access to Métis distinction-based funding. Our settlements are spread throughout northern Alberta, and we are unique in that we are the only Métis in Canada with a land base.

Through the MSGC, our people hold a fee simple title to 1.25 million acres of land, equal to the size of Prince Edward Island. Our self-governing powers are currently enabled by Alberta law and make MSGC responsible for many functions, akin to a municipal government, including citizen wellness, clean water, housing, roads and capital infrastructure, as well as other essential services.

The settlements are in the second wave of COVID and are not immune to its impacts. Our central board of health has been active in coordinating our response and in liaising with government authorities to request and distribute PPE. However, due to the current second wave, the need for PPE and isolation units remains. Since my appearance here in June, we have had approximately 13 cases across the settlements, including six cases deemed recovered and one death of an elder. These numbers may be higher, but we have a data gap because of our limited ability to offer testing and monitoring.

I want to thank the Government of Canada and ministers Bennett and Miller for their support in our battle against COVID-19. To date, MSGC has been able to receive over \$1.8 million through the indigenous community support fund, which has allowed us to fight, contain and somewhat manage the virus. We have applied for additional COVID-19 support available through the same program and are hopeful for a positive outcome shortly. As we enter the second wave, continued federal government support for the settlements remains key as our financial situation continues to deteriorate.

Many of the difficulties I raised back in June remain, including skyrocketing mill rates, financial insolvency within the resource development industry across the settlements and an acquisition moratorium on oil and gas in Alberta. Simply put, our own source revenues have been significantly hit. The current situation has only accelerated the more fundamental challenge for MSGC, which is our long-term viability.

We are in an emergency and need federal action now if we are to continue our way of life. Our settlements have often relied on ourselves, but some provincial partnerships have existed, such as, most recently, the MSGC-Alberta long-term arrangements. This, along with our own limited savings, has been our primary funding source, but the LTA will sunset in 2023 and provincial funding has already been reduced by half, beginning this fiscal year, to the end of the agreement. Alberta has made it clear that it will no longer continue funding the settlements beyond 2023.

In addition, the 2016 landmark Supreme Court ruling in Daniels v. Canada has fundamentally reframed the Canada-Métis fiduciary relationship.

Given these facts, it is time for the Government of Canada to ensure a proper relationship with the Métis settlements, including long-term financial sustainability. While MSGC, Alberta and Canada are in tripartite negotiations for a long-term sustainability agreement, immediate funding is needed if we are to remain operational. MSGC is seeking federal funding of \$50 million per year for three years as a stopgap measure until the tripartite negotiations are complete—a process which could take years to conclude.

As we continue to address the COVID situation, we know that these costs, as well as the major infrastructure deficit we face, are unsustainable over the next few years. The Métis settlements in MSGC face the prospect of insolvency in under 12 months if we do not receive immediate stopgap funding from the Government of Canada.

To support our financial ask, we have provided a full business case with third party experts and have briefed Minister Bennett's and Minister Miller's advisers on its details. We recently briefed both deputy ministers at Crown-Indigenous Relations and Indigenous Services Canada about our current situation and our request for inclusion in budget 2021. We would ask ministers and officials, as well as this committee, for their support for our request.

• (2005)

In closing, thank you for the invitation to be here today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

*Kinana'skomitina 'wa 'w.*

I yield any remaining time to Chair Bratina.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lehr.

We have time for one round of questioning, with Mr. Viersen, Ms. Damoff, Madame Bérubé and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Viersen, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I welcome Herb to the committee. I got to know him fairly well over the last few years, and he does great work.

You talked about the \$50 million that they're looking for in bridge funding. I wonder if you could outline a little around what has happened to the Métis settlements over the last five years, essentially, and where the revenues they normally have been funded with have dried up.

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** Sure I can.

We had entered into a long-term agreement with the province to create some of the sustainability, but the real agreement with the province had to be around creating some businesses and trying to ensure that we were more economically viable and making the money ourselves versus going to the province. A lot of our settlements got into oil and gas ventures, and of course, as you all know, the oil industry dried up in Alberta and the majority of these companies have now gone bankrupt.

With the province there was an agreement we had that we were supposed to talk about the co-management agreement and we were supposed to look at increasing revenues from that component. We never got to that part of the agreement with the province, not yet. We've asked for them to put it back on the table, but the moratorium on oil and gas right now doesn't help. They were concerned about other countries coming in and buying up all the reserves, so they put a moratorium on it.

As for other businesses, we had logging in some of our communities. All these types of ventures have dried up, and we're in a real pickle. Of course, with Alberta leading the way with the number of people with COVID, it's a very scary situation.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Yes. It's COVID, on top of an economic meltdown that we've been facing in Alberta long before COVID showed up.

For some of the new committee members, could you explain what's unique about the Métis settlements—how many there are, and where they're located?

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** Thank you very much. Three of those settlements happen to be in your riding, so you're quite familiar with them. We're spread across Alberta, mostly in northern Alberta. We have four in the western part of it and four more in the eastern component of it.

There were 12 Métis settlements. They took back four of them, and we ended up with eight communities. These communities are similar to reserves. The vast difference between us is that we're taxpayers. We've always been taxpayers, but the land is held under fee simple title, the same way that the first nations land is held under fee simple title, so your net worth doesn't go up on any improve-

ments you make to the land. The members are way more culturally attuned than, I would suggest, a lot of other Métis because we have to live that way of life. We choose to live that way of life. Our peoples speak quite fluent Cree in different dialects, depending on where they're from, and there has been more retention of the language in our communities historically. Lately we're showing more loss of the language.

These communities—for the most part, the majority of them—have very poor cell and Internet reception, similar to other remote places. The community I'm from, Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, is about 45 minutes from any town. It doesn't matter which way we go; in three different directions, it's about 45 minutes to an hour to get to a town. For the most part, we've been labelled as the same as the reserve. To be honest, they thought the settlement boys and girls were all first nations.

• (2010)

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Thank you for that description.

I've been able to tour a number of them. One of the Métis settlements suffered a pretty damaging fire over the last couple of years. Could you give us a bit of an update on that?

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** I sure can, and thank you very much.

The community that he's referring to is called Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement. It's the largest settlement that we have. It's 16 townships of land, around 600 square miles. It had a fire that came onto it called the Chuckegg Creek fire. I may not be correct in my numbers, but I believe it burned around three-quarters of the trees on that land.

Those trees were worth over \$2 billion. A lot of them were trees from our reforestation projects. The community had expended a large amount of money. They were looking out for their future by planting trees that they could log later on. They lost 15 houses in that community.

All of our communities are the same. There are very few homes that are insured, because the cost of insuring the homes is atrocious. This community is approximately 12 hours from Edmonton. We have our meetings in Edmonton, so they have to come all the way to Edmonton to meet with us when we meet as a collective. The people have been put in new homes. The Métis Settlements General Council took its own money and passed on \$3 million to rebuild those homes, and we had hoped to recoup that money from either the provincial or federal government disaster plans. To date, we have not recouped anything.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt. Thanks very much, Mr. Viersen and Mr. Lehr.

We go now, for six minutes, to Ms. Damoff.

Pam, please go ahead for six minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thanks a lot, Chair. Thank you to all of our witnesses for your very helpful testimony tonight.

Chief Yakeleya, I'm going to start with you. You published a book of Dene medicine and on-the-land healing resources for Dene communities. You also spoke earlier about getting funding for land-based education. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about whether your guide has encouraged and inspired more Dene to go back to the land. Could you also address the importance of being on the land during the pandemic for both physical and mental health?

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Hello?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes, you're there.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Thank you. My son is not here. He just gave me instructions: "One, two, three, Dad."

• (2015)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** He's a smart boy.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Yes.

Thank you very much for a very powerful question, and I want to thank the previous speaker from northern Alberta. Certainly we understand.

We wanted very much to say that within the Dene culture and tradition, for guidance and for direction and support in our way of life, when we knew that COVID was coming into Canada and we started to monitor it in March, as the Dene national chief, I went to my elders. I talked to an elder and said that this sickness was coming upon us.

The elder said, "*Kah*. We heard about it in the past and we know it's coming."

I asked, "What shall we do?"

He said, "I'm glad that you've come to talk to me. I will tell you. We heard this in the past from our elders. We were told to go on the land, and that's the only place we are going to be safe. When you go back to the land, you will learn your medicines, you will learn your way of life, you will learn to live in a healthy relationship with your families and your children, and you'll learn how to be a person again."

It's not something I wanted to happen, because living on our land is very tough. It's wintertime. After a week, however, I had to follow what the elder said, and we pushed a strong initiative to get our people on the land as much as possible, and we have been very successful.

The federal government really supported this initiative with the ministers and put direct funding into our communities to get people on the land.

Part of the whole thing about this is that our land holds all our medicines. We are mindful and respectful of the medicines used in western society through the hospitals, but our elders also told us that there are medicines on our trees and in our animals and that we need to learn.

Part of the imitative we undertook was to have a project about compiling the medicines from all over the different regions in the Northwest Territories. We put it together with the elders and the re-

searchers and compiled a book about helping us use our own medicines for COVID-19.

For the second phase, which we're in right now, we will receive \$40,000 from the federal government to do some more work. The real work will begin when we go into our regions and specifically ask the elders about our own medicines. The elders are very sacred in regard to teaching and keeping it among ourselves, but we said we want to share this with our indigenous brothers in Canada. That's very powerful.

The other matter we wanted to talk about was education. We need to train our young people with education to live on the land. That is why we pushed strongly to support the education initiative on the land.

Also we are working on the wellness treatment model on the land, but haven't received money or much support from the federal government for it. We have issues of addictions—alcohol and drugs—and of providing wellness for our communities to keep them safe.

In a nutshell, we're following the guidance of the elders and are encouraging our communities to use as much support as possible through Nutrition North and the harvesting program and the government support for us to get our people on the land.

At the same time, we are maintaining some safety for some of the elders in our communities who aren't able to go on the land. We want to use this opportunity to get fish from the lakes—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Could I interrupt you just for a second? I only have 30 seconds left.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Okay.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Is one of your recommendations that the federal government should fund land-based addictions and wellness programs that you're not getting funding for?

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** That's music to my ears, and that's what we're pushing for—core programs. Thank you.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Pam, thank you; I'll move your 10 seconds over to our next speaker, and that is Madame Bérubé.

You have the floor, Madame Bérubé, for six minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses who are joining us virtually this evening.

My question is for all three witnesses.

Have your communities been consulted about what you needed to prepare for the second wave?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** I'm sorry; who was she asking?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** This is for all three witnesses.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Chief Yakeleya, go ahead first, please.

Would you please repeat the question, Madame Bérubé?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Have your communities been consulted about what you needed to deal with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic?

• (2020)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Anyone...?

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Hello...?

**The Chair:** Are any of our witnesses ready to answer that question?

Minister Goodon, please go ahead.

**Mr. William Goodon:** Thank you very much, and thank you so much for the question.

At the Manitoba Métis Federation, our Métis government was very much involved in discussions. My presentation was mostly about economic responses and what we've had to do to protect our small businesses, our entrepreneurs, and even going down to our musicians, our fishers, the folks who are harvesting on the land and those things that we talked about.

I would say there's been no doubt that the current federal government speaks to us on a government-to-government and nation-to-nation basis, and we very much appreciate that.

I want to add that I spoke about the distinctions-based approach before, and I want to say a big thanks to my colleague from the Métis settlements. I have so much respect for what they do up there, and Herb is a friend. I've spoken to him a few times over the years.

For me, the distinctions-based approach isn't just for the Métis National Council; it's for the Métis nation, and that includes the Métis settlements. Whatever Herb talks about when he's speaking of the needs of his community, that falls right into the distinctions-based area. I know that's a little off track here, but yes, we were consulted.

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** I'm very happy that the Métis nation and MNC have been consulted on these issues. However, as non-affiliates, there has been no discussion with us on this type of stuff, and we have received zero funding, ever, from the Métis National Council or from the Métis Nation of Alberta.

As Métis settlements were very much stand-alone, we kind of feel like the forgotten child, to be honest. We're the one who's left out here.

We're very happy that other Métis people get to move ahead, and that's why we're pushing so hard right now so that we have a direct

relationship with the federal government and that we get brought into the fold and into the marriage, if that's what you want to call it.

**The Chair:** Chief Yakeleya, do you have the question and answer now?

You're still on mute.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Hello.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Can you hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** Okay. Boy, I'm having fun this afternoon.

I want to apologize. I didn't hear the question. I was on the other official language, French, and I didn't hear the question, but I'm hearing the two other speakers, so I'm not too sure how I respond, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** I will put it to you again.

Did the government consult you about the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Were you consulted by the federal government on the second wave?

I'm not sure if National Chief Yakeleya has his translation channel on, but that was the question.

You have half a minute to answer. Go ahead.

**National Chief Norman Yakeleya:** We had minimal consultation. As you know, the system right now is that it's with the territorial government and the federal government. The Dene Nation hasn't really played a major role unless we use the other national aboriginal organizations to help us.

In regard to the funding, there was very minimal consultation, if any.

• (2025)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much; and thanks, Madame Bérubé.

We have six minutes now with our final questioner, Rachel Blaney.

Ms. Blaney, go ahead.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Chair; and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

Minister Goodon, my first two questions will be to you.

You talked about data and some of the challenges in that regard. We've heard from multiple witnesses that there isn't the ability to gather that information. Can you talk a bit about that and about where the gaps are?

The other thing you talked about was the 5% in procurement. We know it is not even in the 1% realm yet. What we're hearing from government is that the process will happen. What are the gaps on your side?



**Mr. William Goodon:** Okay. Remind me again of the first question. I had some good answers, and then—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** It was about data.

**Mr. William Goodon:** Excellent.

President Lehr talked briefly about the Daniels decision. In that decision, the Supreme Court said that the federal government has responsibility for all aboriginal people as described in section 35, including Métis. However, somehow it's taking the Department of Health a little while to figure out that the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch includes only two out of the three aboriginal peoples as described in section 35.

The data that's collected on first nations citizens and on Inuit doesn't reach down to us here at the Métis level. We need to move forward on that relationship and build the capacity that works for Métis governance structures. Whether it's the Manitoba Métis Federation in Manitoba, the Métis settlements in their jurisdiction or the Métis Nation of Alberta in the rest of Alberta, for those types of things there needs to be that government-to-government relationship to build that capacity properly so that we can know who is sick.

In Manitoba we have a particular problem because our premier has decided to not work with the Métis people, so we're shut out on both sides here. Although we have an excellent relationship with the Government of Canada, that doesn't translate at some point all the way down.

That would be my first point.

Remind me again of your second question, because it was an excellent one too.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** You have a very short amount of time, because I want to get to another question.

It was about that 5% procurement.

**Mr. William Goodon:** On the 5% procurement, there are a whole lot of things going on here. Obviously, when it comes to things such as the bandwidth, the Internet connectivity that's happening across the country, we want to be involved in it, because in our communities we need to be fully participating Canadian citizens, and I'm sure President Lehr feels the same way. That's one of the biggest examples I could use.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much.

President Lehr, I wonder if you could talk a bit about the jurisdictional challenges. You're working with both the provincial and federal governments. How is that going? Where are the things that are blocking you? Are both governments taking their responsibility and their jurisdiction seriously and working with you in a meaningful way?

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** Thank you very much for that question.

I feel like the proverbial football that has been talked about in the Daniels case. We're still being tossed back and forth, and the honour of the Crown creates all these problems under section 91 versus section 92.

Our problem, as the government knows, is that this province is not supportive of UNDRIP. They've come straight out and said they're going to oppose UNDRIP, whereas the federal government wants to move that way. This government that we're currently working with has decided that it no longer wants to fund the Métis settlements. The last bit of money that we have is drying up. We have community members who are thinking, "Do I have to move now, because I won't have water or sewer or anything in this community anymore?"

There's a huge problem with the relationship and with the length of time, and it's exacerbated because of COVID. That's why we had to come through this venue in order to try to move forward. COVID is having an impact on what gets delivered to everybody.

• (2030)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** With the provincial government making that decision, you're dealing with COVID, but even without COVID, what will be the health impacts on those territories?

**Mr. Herbert Lehr:** It's going to be devastating. We have censuses that we do, similar to the Métis nations across Canada. They don't get concise data, because Statistics Canada isn't set up properly to be able to do those proper queries. In our cases, they use the postal codes. Our people get mail in the surrounding towns, so the postal codes make it a skewed information system.

We can't get the data we need, nor do we have the relationship with Alberta Health Services in order to be able to get that type of information.

Our people already have problems, and it's getting exacerbated day by day, because not only do they have that past trauma already from smallpox right down to the Spanish flu, when they burnt homes with the people in them, but they now feel that they have no place to go. Nobody really wants them.

There are changes to the Metis Settlements Act that the minister is trying to push right now that would make it a lot harder and more onerous to live in the community. These are very trying times.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Yes. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, and thanks, Ms. Blaney.

Thank you to all our witnesses. I'm sorry that the technical issues took away some of our questioning time. If there's anything further that you feel that we should have in our report, please submit it in writing, and we'll make sure that the analysts review and include pertinent information in our upcoming report.

Once again, thank you so much. Thank you for your patience.

I understand we have a bit of committee business.

Madame Bérubé, do you have a motion to bring forward?

[Translation]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Please go ahead. You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Chair, I just have one question about this.

I am wondering why I must present it this evening, as it was approved in subcommittee.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The full committee is now entertaining the motion.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** One moment please.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I think it's important that we make it clear that our amazing witnesses don't have to stay for this part.

**The Chair:** Thanks for that. Thank you so much, everyone.

In our normal course of business, when we're all meeting in person, we would have a slight social gathering to exchange best wishes. We'll do that technically.

Thank you so much.

Madame Bérubé, do you have your motion for us?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Please read it.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** One moment, it won't be long.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Do you have it?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Here is my motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee resume and complete its study on food security in northern communities undertaken during the first session of the 43rd Parliament and that the evidence and documents received by the Committee at that time be considered by the Committee during the current session and that the Committee report its recommendations.

● (2035)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Has the committee heard the motion clearly? If so, in our virtual setting, I will ask if we have unanimous consent to approve the motion.

I see no opposition to the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We have unanimous consent for Madame Bérubé's motion. Once again, thank you for that.

We will move on to our next meeting next Tuesday. I'll ask all parties to make sure their witness lists are updated by Tuesday, December 1, and to notify the clerk accordingly. I believe we still may want to hear from parties regarding witnesses. Please do that before December 1.

With no further business at hand, I declare this meeting adjourned.







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>