

March 30, 2020

The Honourable Scott Moe
Premier of Saskatchewan
226 Legislative Building
Regina, Saskatchewan
CANADA S4S 0B3

Dear Premier Moe,

Saskatoon organizations have come together with unprecedented commitment and action to address COVID-19 in our community. The COVID-19 Community Response is made up of over 40 front-line organizations who are part of the Safe Community Action Alliance, as well as governments and organizations including the City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon Police Service, Saskatoon Fire and Saskatchewan Health Authority.

We are successfully diminishing sectoral barriers within our community to meet the urgent response COVID 19 requires. We know that a coordinated response is the only way to address this crisis and minimize a public health emergency. It enables us to have both a broad and deep understanding of the needs and strengths in the community, as well as to use a unified voice in identifying and requesting what our community needs.

We are now using this one voice to ask you to work more closely with us. We have been working exceptionally hard to ensure that our vulnerable population has the needed urgent supports to prevent contracting and spreading the virus. If members of this community are not supported appropriately, the health system will become overwhelmed and numbers will multiply quickly.

We are coordinating shelter, food, testing, centralized access services, and outreach for people who are homeless, have severe mental health and addictions and/or present as high risk to contract and transmit the virus. Two organized service Hubs, pooling community organizations staff resources, operate each day to provide that central access service. We have systems in place for data collection, tracking, accountability and reporting. We are acknowledged as being the central point for community response, with both the Saskatoon Foundation and United Way Saskatoon choosing to direct their fundraising to this collaboration.

We are doing what we can, but to be effective, we need the Government of Saskatchewan and relevant ministries to be working alongside us through an integrated process that streamlines communication and decision-making.

We are appreciative of the fact that the Ministry of Social Services has been willing to have preliminary conversations about the vulnerable sector strategy with us. But the biggest gap in our ability to respond as efficiently and urgently as is needed, is the lack

of a formalized process for coordination and communication within the Ministry of Social Services, and intersectorally, with other ministries such as Health and Justice.

The COVID-19 Community Response has identified serious gaps in being able to support vulnerable populations:

1. There are significant challenges in providing support to urban First Nations people who are falling into jurisdictional cracks and not able to access supports that are targeted to First Nations communities. 25,000 Indigenous people are located in Saskatoon or visit Saskatoon for extended periods of time, with demand for services usually distributed to other home reserves and councils across the province. Now, Urban Indigenous Services are overwhelmed with requests beyond their usual service components. The Saskatoon Tribal Council has been trying to absorb this additional demand. Friendship Inn and White Buffalo Youth Lodge have also seen the food demands increase, having to serve take out and provide delivery of food to Elders and other vulnerable families and individuals.
2. Shelter services struggle to separate and physically distance clients. A block funding approach, based on the maximum capacity of the shelter, is needed to support their efforts and enable safer service provision and decreased transmission within Saskatoon.
3. It is critical that a hotel-based shelter service also be implemented immediately in collaboration with the community agencies who serve the vulnerable sector, the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Provincial Government. This process must include adequate and consistent funding for intensive case management support for clients and all necessary safety measures for staff, clients and hotel supports.
4. Social Services, particularly Income Assistance, have agreed to relax some reporting mechanisms and attempted to work with the COVID-19 service Hubs to direct people quickly to safe shelter and food, but there has been confusion about reporting processes, wait-times, available resources, and options for alternate hotel accommodations and costs. We are in need of urgent decisions.

There has never been a more critical time for us as leaders to find ways to work together, to put aside jurisdictional challenges, from within Ministries to other levels of government, to focus on what will be the best way we can save lives in this public health crisis.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mayor Charlie Clark, City of Saskatoon
Councillor Hilary Gough, City of Saskatoon
Pamela Goulden-McLeod, Director of Emergency Planning, City of Saskatoon
Tribal Chief Mark Arcand, Saskatoon Tribal Council
Shirley Isbister, CUMFI

Chief Troy Cooper, Saskatoon Police Service
Chief Morgan Hackl, Saskatoon Fire
Darlene Brander, Board of Police Commissioners
President Peter Stoicheff, University of Saskatchewan
Colleen Christopherson-Cote and Bonnie Heilman, Safe Community Action Alliance

cc:

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