



Ontario Native Women's Association

Media Release
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ONWA Responds to Federal Cuts to NWAC: Jeopardizes Aboriginal Women's Health

Health Canada has announced that they will cut funding for all programs of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) geared toward the improvement of Aboriginal women's health. The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) finds this decision gravely concerning and disappointing in that it puts Aboriginal women's health in jeopardy.

Aboriginal women are considered to be the most vulnerable population in Canada. Not only do they have the poorest health rating in Canada and the highest levels of chronic disease, but from a social perspective they also remain at highest risk of health concerns due to circumstances such as severe poverty. According to Statistics Canada, 36% of Aboriginal women live in poverty which is more than double the rate of poverty for their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

While the President of ONWA, Dr. Dawn Harvard, acknowledges the current financial climate, she does not believe that severe cuts to initiatives led by Aboriginal women are the answer. "These decisions may prove to be less cost-effective over the long term," she states. "The key to effective policy and programming for Aboriginal peoples is ensuring that they are driven by Aboriginal peoples. We only need to look to our recent history of government imposed policies and programs such as the Indian Act and Indian Residential Schools, as proof."

The Federal Government has attempted to defend its decision by explaining that cuts to NWAC were made to preserve on-reserve services. This response is unacceptable, considering that 70% of Aboriginal women currently live off-reserve, and the Federal Government has a fiduciary responsible to ALL Aboriginal women, not just a select few.

The Executive Director of ONWA, Betty Kennedy, is gravely concerned about how Federal health cuts will trickle down. "It is not only Aboriginal women who will be affected by these cuts. Many of our Aboriginal women are the primary and sole providers of care and their families depend on them," she says. "In the absence of Federal health initiatives, Provincial organizations - in addition to their countless other responsibilities - will be tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that Aboriginal women's health remains at the forefront at a national level."

ONWA believes that the Federal government's budget cuts will be quite costly to Aboriginal women and their families and is strongly urging the Federal government to reinstate health funding to NWAC.

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