

Physicians across the province are calling on the Government of Saskatchewan to declare a public health state of emergency regarding HIV and AIDS. Saskatchewan has had the highest rate of new cases of HIV in the country - at times double or even triple the national average - with urban, rural and reserve communities experiencing localized epidemics. For years, health care providers, community-based organizations, researchers and people living with HIV have urged the provincial government to invest the resources needed, but the response has been insufficient. "The action taken has not been proportional to the size of the problem," says Dr. Stephen Sanche.

Indigenous communities have been particularly hard hit by HIV, and the effects are wide-spread and intergenerational. Tribal Chief Felix Thomas of the Saskatoon Tribal Council has seen for years what HIV has done, and will continue to do, if the epidemic is left unchecked. "We're most concerned about helping the people who are sick now, and making sure nobody else gets sick with this disease." As many know, HIV is a disease that thrives on social inequity, where those who are facing multiple challenges are at greater risk. Vice-Chief Kim Jonathan from the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations says, "We need to be looking at the big picture of how health interacts with justice and social services and make sure we deal with the growing problem of crystal meth in our communities." Stigma around HIV runs high in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, which has made it hard for people living with HIV to speak out about what's going on in Saskatchewan. Danita Wahpoosewyan is a woman living with HIV from Sakimay First Nation, and knows well that HIV thrives on silence. "HIV has been taking away many of my brothers and sisters. It's time for change and to get real in dealing with this epidemic. We all need to reach out and to take responsibility in order for our problem in Saskatchewan to get better. I'm tired of seeing my people dropping dead like flies."

The need for coordinated leadership to address the HIV epidemic in Saskatchewan is urgent. Physicians across Saskatchewan are calling on the provincial government to:

- Declare a state of public health emergency
- Formally adopt the UNAIDS 90-90-90 goals to eradicate HIV by 2020
- Adopt and implement the 10-point plan created by provincial stakeholders (clinical and community) in 2015, with special emphasis on naming an individual or body with the resources and authority to take action to implement the plan and achieve these goals
- **Immediately: Offer universal coverage of anti-retroviral treatment for all HIV+ patients in Saskatchewan, regardless of jurisdiction**

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