



FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECRETARIAT OF MANITOBA

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REPORT FINDS FIRST NATIONS ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES IN MANITOBA ARE DENIED NECESSARY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

November 16, 2023

Winnipeg, MB, Treaty Territory 1-- The First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba (FNHSSM) released a report today entitled, “***Supporting the Gifts of First Nations Adults Living with Exceptionalities.***” The report, which is being released in honour of Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, is a qualitative study detailing the experiences and challenges of First Nations adults living with disabilities in Manitoba in accessing supports and services.

“This report gives us a snapshot into some of the critical challenges faced by many of our most vulnerable relatives which are caused by on-going government failures,” said **Chief Sheldon Kent of Black River First Nation and Chair of the FNHSSM Board of Directors**, “It finds that First Nations adults with disabilities in Manitoba live without required supports and services and that they are denied opportunities to meaningfully participate in daily life both on- and off-reserve.”

This study was conducted with the objective of providing unique insights into First Nations’ understandings of ‘disability’ and the experiences of First Nations adults living with disabilities in Manitoba and their caregivers. As part of the research, a Manitoba-wide engagement process was conducted. During this process, First Nations Elders shared that there is no word for “disability” in First Nation languages. Instead, First Nations understand persons with ‘disabilities’ as those having unique perspectives and gifts.

In May 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that Jordan’s Principle, a child-first principle which ensures First Nations children get the services they need when they need them, must be fully implemented. This Report highlights that while Jordan’s Principle aims to close the gaps in government services for First Nations *children*, once these children reach the age of majority, they are cut off. There is no equivalent principle or programming for First Nations *adults*.

The Report calls on all levels of government to invest in the creation of a new principle akin to Jordan’s Principle and new programming specifically designed for First Nation **adults** with disabilities. “For far too long, governments have willfully ignored the needs of our most vulnerable relatives on and off reserve, those living with disabilities. This systemic exclusion has been thoroughly documented through the lived experiences of study participants and their families. Commitment is required by all levels of governments to ensure First Nations living with exceptionalities can live a meaningful and integrated life” said **Amanda Meawasige, Director of Community Engagement & Intergovernmental Relations at FNHSSM and co-lead for the study.**

Joni Wilson, the mother of 21-year-old Aidan Wilson, is far too familiar with the issues raised in the FNHSSM Report. In 2021, she, along with a Coalition of families, filed human rights complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal about the denials, delays, and disruptions of services and supports to adults with disabilities by the Federal Government. “It is my hope that the FNHSSM Report will help

raise awareness about the discriminatory treatment by governments of First Nation adults with disabilities. Aidan and others like him deserve the right to necessary services and supports” said **Joni Wilson**.

The First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba livestreamed the press conference releasing the report on November 16th from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., link can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/fnhssm>

The full research report is available on the FNHSSM website: <https://www.fnhssm.com/>

For Interviews and Media Contact:

Renata Meconse, Director of Communications
rmeconse@fnhssm.com
204-333-0176

