

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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News Release

August 13, 2019

UBCIC, David Dennis and Frank Paul Society Challenge Racist Abstinence Exclusion for Liver Transplants

(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver, B.C. – August 13, 2019) This morning, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), David Dennis and the Frank Paul Society jointly filed a formal complaint at the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal. The complaint challenges the lawfulness of the Abstinence Policy that deprives persons with alcohol use disorder of eligibility for liver transplants until they have abstained from alcohol use for a period of six months.

The Abstinence Policy discriminates against Indigenous peoples, who have disproportionately higher rates of alcohol use disorder largely due to the centuries of racist and harmful colonial policies implemented at all levels of Canadian government, but especially through the intergenerational traumas of the Indian residential schools on Indigenous families and communities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action directs all levels of government to recognize these impacts on Indigenous peoples health, but we cannot wait for government to drag their feet in identifying and eliminating the systemic harms currently affecting Indigenous peoples.

David Dennis, President of the Frank Paul Society, has end-stage liver disease and would be a priority candidate for a liver transplant if it were not for the Abstinence Policy. “I’m not just at the bottom of the waiting list for a liver transplant; I’ve been kicked off the list entirely,” stated David Dennis. “I want to continue to live and be here for my children and family. But if I don’t make it, I want the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and Frank Paul Society to carry on and get rid of this lethal form of racism.”

“The respondents, the Minister of Health, the Provincial Health Services Agency, Vancouver Coastal Health and the BC Transplant Society, are jointly responsible for the Abstinence Policy, and they should be held accountable for ignoring the discriminatory and fatal effect it has on Indigenous people,” continued David Dennis. “Scientific evidence provides little or no support for

the Abstinence Policy; liver transplant outcomes are not meaningfully correlated with six months of abstinence from alcohol.”

“Denying eligibility for liver transplants is one tragic example of discriminatory denial of health care services to Indigenous peoples in British Columbia,” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “The Abstinence Policy is another case of an antiquated, moralizing policy that disproportionately punishes Indigenous peoples without any scientific rationale.”

“Fair and unbiased access to healthcare should be at the cornerstone of Canadian policy,” concluded Grand Chief Phillip. “The proper response to Indigenous peoples whose lives have been affected by intergenerational trauma and oppressive colonial policies should include empathy and understanding, not another door shut to justice and equality. This is an easy win for the government to make good on its commitments toward reconciliation and equity. We are looking for immediate action- it is unconscionable for even one more person to suffer as a result of the Abstinence Policy.”

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Media inquiries:

David Dennis, President, Frank Paul Society: 250-266-1565

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs: 250-490-5314

Jason Gratl, Legal Counsel, 604-317-1919

**Note to media: David Dennis and Grand Chief Phillip will have media availability in person at the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (312 Main Street, 4th floor) between 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. **

UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca