

Dec. 15, 2021 For Immediate Release

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heather Winterstein, age 24

Dec. 15, 2021 (Niagara Region, ON) – The Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc. extends its sincere, heartfelt condolences to the family of Heather Winterstein, who passed while in Emergency Room care. We were appalled and outraged to learn of the treatment and omission of care received by Heather, a 24 old Indigenous woman, who presented at the Emergency Department of Niagara Health System more than once in two days. This type of treatment, or lack thereof, **MUST** stop. Heather **MUST** be the last Indigenous person to needlessly die in a hospital emergency department.

We stand firmly with the family in their quest to find the answers to “what went wrong”. As Indigenous leaders and part of the Indigenous Health Network, within this community, we know we have been promoting Indigenous Cultural Safety training opportunities to all non-Indigenous health care providers throughout the entire LHIN 4 region, both on and off reserve, for some years now. That makes this unnecessary passing all the more tragic and disappointing.

The fact this has happened confirms and indicates to us that Indigenous Health Care must be delivered by Indigenous services. ‘We can try to keep teaching non-Indigenous health care providers, caregivers, social workers and justice workers but we are not seeing any changes in the numbers or outcomes.’ Says Wendy Sturgeon, executive director. “Frankly it turns out to be a waste of our time in many cases, and certainly in this case. We heard the coroner stated this was a totally preventable death’. Just imagine, Heather’s family has to deal with that knowledge now for the rest of their lives.”

As far as the review and panel goes, we are heartened to see the direction that NHS is taking to ensure the family is part of this as well as Indigenous community leaders and other respected, fair professionals. We look forward to this process once immediate grieving has subsided a bit and the family feels strong enough to begin the process.

However, we do call on Canada, Minister of Health, Jean-Yves- Duclos, to initiate a National Act with teeth, accountability, and consequences to breaches thereof, that would make “murder by omission” or withholding of health treatment services to Indigenous people illegal in Canada. ~ saying it is illegal now is no longer good enough~ it is criminal and needs to be treated as such. Reconciliation in health care is also acknowledging and supporting, with enhanced resources, our own Indigenous Health Care Services. It is time for Canada to give up its guardianship and paternalistic fictional image of itself as our “caregivers and overseers”. We were healthy and intact for thousands of years prior to the rollout of colonialism. The assumed superiority has to stop!

The “First Peoples, First Priority Health Care Act” will enforce what could not be done through decades and decades of education, and by eons of trying to work together to change a totally broken system with an extended, poor history of interactions with Indigenous people.

This two-prong approach: enhanced and expanded resources for Indigenous Health Care by Indigenous Health Services and the National First Peoples, First Priority Health Care Act will begin to ease the fears of Indigenous people across Turtle Island to access health care and send a strong message to all Canadians.

The Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc. is founded on the collective goal to enhance, promote, and foster the health and wellness, social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis and Inuit women and their families, within First Nation, Métis, Inuit and Canadian societies. We believe in becoming involved in the activities that affect our daily lives. The chapter is affiliated with Ontario Native Women's Association.

– 30–

For additional information please contact:

Wendy Sturgeon

Executive Director

Tel.: 905 871 8770 **Cell:**

Email: edncnw@gmail.com

www.ncnw.net