



*Métis  
Nation Of  
Alberta*

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To the Citizens of the Metis Nation of Alberta

### ***RE: Update on Metis Health Programs and Services***

Please accept the following as an update with respect to the Métis Nation of Alberta's (MNA) recent challenges with the Métis National Council (MNC) with respect to the delivery of Métis health programs and services in this province.

In recent weeks, some of you may have heard about or have even attended regional health meetings that are being hosted by the Métis National Council (MNC), along with a consultant from Ottawa and select individuals who have been chosen by the MNC. It is important for members to know that the MNA is not formally a part of these meetings and that the MNC has chosen to work around the MNA, as the democratically elected representative of Alberta Métis.

In order to understand how this unfortunate situation came to pass, I want to provide you with some background on these health initiatives. In September 2004, the federal government committed \$700 million over five years for Aboriginal health. Based on a commitment from then Prime Minister Paul Martin, a historic Métis-specific allocation of this funding was secured. The MNA, along with all of the MNC's affiliates, were instrumental in realizing this breakthrough in Métis health.

This \$700 million is targeted in three areas: \$100 million is designated for the Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative, that is, measures to increase the numbers of Aboriginal people in health careers or to retain health workers in Aboriginal communities, of which the MNC is receiving approximately \$10 million; \$200 million is being placed in the Aboriginal Health Transition Fund, which is suppose to fund short-term projects to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the health system for Aboriginal people, of which the MNC is being allocated \$4.3 million overall; and \$400 million has been committed to existing health promotion and disease prevention programs, that is, programs designed to deal with prevention and life-style issues rather than primary care, of which the MNC is receiving an undisclosed but very minor amount. These amounts must be spent by March 31, 2010 – over the next three years – and there is no guarantee that programs will continue after that date.

Although these resources fall short of the health needs of Métis or what a fair distribution would demand, they are still an important breakthrough for the Métis Nation. The real problems have arisen in how this funding is being used by the MNC. More specifically, the challenges relate to how David Chartrand, who is the MNC

Minister for Health, has chosen to conduct himself in a unilateral fashion that undermines accountability to the MNA.

For example, in the past, whenever the MNC has secured such funding from the federal government, it has always respected the primary role of its provincial affiliates, which are its Governing Members, in managing funds and in designing and delivering programs. The MNC was not created to deliver programs and services from Ottawa. That is the role of its Governing Members. However, this time, the MNC negotiated a deal with Health Canada that not only transfers all funding to the MNC but that gives it the power to administer these funds more or less as it pleases.

The MNA was not involved in negotiating the contribution agreements the MNC concluded with Health Canada. We were not even kept informed of the proposals submitted to Health Canada by the MNC or on the progress of negotiations. Instead, copies of agreements were provided to us only after they had been signed. The MNA was simply expected to accept what the MNC had done – and if we did not do so, the current leadership of the MNC could simply by-pass the MNA and other Governing Members by entering into agreements with virtually anyone it wished to deliver Métis health initiatives at the provincial level.

The MNA was also concerned about the accountability challenges this type of national agreement creates. In all other programs we operate, the MNA has a direct contribution agreement with the federal department that provides funding. This ensures that the MNA alone is accountable for the funds for which it is responsible. In the arrangement the MNC negotiated, funding targeted at Alberta Métis must flow through the MNC, and if either the MNC or another MNC affiliate miss one of their reporting requirements, then Health Canada has the right to stop payments under the agreement as a whole. The MNA would therefore be placed in a position, through no fault of its own, of having its funding depend on actions of others. We have learned from past experiences that these types of umbrella funding agreements create real problems for the MNC and its Governing Members. That is why from Urban Multi-Purpose Youth Centers funding to Powley funding, each Governing Member negotiates and enters into its own bilateral contribution agreement with the federal government. In the past, the MNC Board of Governors have all taken strong stands on this principle. However, in this situation, the Minister responsible for Health pushed forward on a national umbrella agreement without the support of the MNA or other Governing Members.

Based on these realities, with the full consent of MNA Provincial Council, a motion was passed in February 2007 to withdraw from these MNC-led initiatives and seek a direct agreement with Health Canada in order to resolve the MNA's concerns.

Unfortunately, instead of respecting the MNA's decision and allowing the situation to work itself out, David Chartrand began to bilaterally approach select individuals and groups in Alberta to deliver these Métis health programs and services for the MNC in Alberta. His actions clearly undermined the principle of respecting each MNC provincial affiliate's respective jurisdiction. Further, his actions set back our agenda

to have our own Métis governments respected by others. How can we expect others to respect our governments if the MNC itself will not respect the jurisdiction of its own regional governments?

The result of Mr. Chartrand's efforts was signing an agreement with Metco Ventures Inc., a private company owned by the Vice-President of Region 1 and a select few, to deliver MNC/Health Canada initiatives in Alberta. This Metco agreement was not brought forward to the MNA Provincial Council before it was signed. In fact, the MNA only recently received a copy of this agreement. Since it is readily apparent to other MNA Provincial Council members and I that the Vice-President of Region 1 is now in a conflict of interest, we have asked the MNA Judiciary Council to review this matter prior to taking any further steps at the MNA Provincial Council level. Unfortunately, while this is taking place, the few who are beneficiaries to this Metco agreement are traveling the province and "consulting" with select individuals, rather than the MNA engaging all MNA regions and citizens.

In organizing regional sessions in Alberta, the MNC through its consultant claims to be acting in the interest of Métis students and the Métis people of Alberta – yet it has consistently shown that it is not prepared to involve the MNA in any meaningful way in the development of these initiatives. The MNA is accountable to the Métis people of Alberta, not a consultant from Ottawa, a private company or a hand-picked few who agree with the positions of David Chartrand.

It should also be noted that both the Presidents of the Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) and Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) do not agree with what the MNC has done. In order to resolve this issue internally, I have asked the MNC President to call a meeting of the MNC Board of Governors. Unfortunately, because of how the MNC's bylaws are structured, the MNC President, combined with President Chartrand, can stop that meeting from happening at this time. I will continue to push for a meeting of the MNC Board of Governors; however, while I am continuing to resolve this internally, the MNA is also bilaterally engaging the federal government to see how this situation can be addressed.

Finally, I want to stress that the MNA has always been and will continue to be a strong supporter of the Métis Nation. We are a Founding Member of the MNC. Our frustration does not lie with the Métis Nation as a whole. Our frustration lies with the actions of specific individuals in positions of power who have decided that they know better than the democratically elected leadership of Alberta Métis. As I outlined above, we are not alone in our frustration. Both the MNBC and MNO are fully supportive of the MNA's position on this matter.

Over ten years ago, I was elected on a platform of increasing transparency and accountability within the MNA. I believe over the last decade, we have built a stronger MNA together. Our efforts have been recognized by governments and others from across the country. As such, I do not believe we should compromise what we have built in Alberta to appease the MNC, David Chartrand or the self-interests of Ottawa consultants.

I will continue to seek an agreement with Health Canada in respect of these health initiatives and I believe we will ultimately be successful. The individuals who have benefited for short-term gains and politics will be held to account for their actions. The struggle will be difficult, but the issue is critically important for the future of the MNA and the Métis Nation. I believe it would be a grave error on our part to allow the arrangement the MNC has negotiated with Health Canada to set a precedent for other federal departments to follow. If we show solidarity, I am confident that we will achieve our goal.

Sincerely,  
*Metis Nation of Alberta*



Audrey Poitras  
President

Cc: MNA Provincial Council  
MNA Elders Council  
MNA Locals