

This status update was co-drafted by the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, The Open Door Montréal, Resilience Montreal, Southern Quebec Inuit Association, Indigenous Street Worker Project, First Peoples Justice Centre of Montreal, Exeko, and the Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY NEEDS - CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

STATUS UPDATE: MAY 20, 2020

Thank you

We recognize that public authorities are working tirelessly to prevent the spread of this virus, and for this, we are grateful for your commitment and dedication, including the weekly meetings with the CIUSSS du centre-sud-de-l'île-de-Montréal, the City of Montreal, the SPVM, and the Direction régionale de santé publique.. We are also grateful for the important financial support that we have received from Indigenous Services Canada and Service Canada. The NWSM would like to extend special thanks to CIUSSS social workers, Emily Brunton and Simon Beauregard, as well as CIUSSS Supervisor, Annie Arevian for their exceptional efforts and support over the last few weeks and for fighting for the NWSM's health.

To protect our most at-risk community members, we call on public authorities to:

1. **Delay all deconfinement strategies** until the epidemic has been controlled, rates of infection are no longer increasing, and adequate testing is being provided. In the event that the provincial authorities officially lift the provincial state of emergency, we recommend that the City of Montreal request Quebec's permission to maintain its own state of emergency.
2. While sustaining the temporary emergency services that have been created so that they remain operational in the longer term, **fulfill our repeated requests for adequate services**, including but not limited to:
 - 2.1. **Providing or continuing to provide existing and additional temporary emergency shelters** until the pandemic has passed. When relocation is necessary, consider placing the shelters near resources normally utilized by the Indigenous homeless community to reduce unnecessary travel by public transport in order to reduce the risk of transmission. This should include adapted autonomous social housing as well as housing with alcohol management programs and housing adapted for those with reduced autonomy, in the form of

- hotel rooms, apartments or a dedicated site for tents from which people have the choice to self-isolate, yet can come and go as they please with no surveillance;
- 2.2. **Conducting un-policed on-site testing** in shelters, centres, and outdoor gathering spaces for community members and staff (see specifically point 5);
 - 2.3. **Ensuring qualified cleaning services with public-health-approved supplies** to control the spread of the virus in non-profit centres and shelters serving the homeless population. Thus far, the NETWORK has organized disinfection/cleaning services for a few Indigenous-serving organizations but we are not equipped to maintain such services in all the centres and shelters serving our community in Montreal;
 - 2.4. **Providing additional emergency/replacement workers** in shelters and centres so that they can continue operating at full capacity. For instance, the Native Women's Shelter of Montréal has been forced to temporarily close its doors due to many workers having contracted the virus.
3. Recognize, collaborate, and support the **entirety of Indigenous-serving organizations as a single COVID-19 outbreak site** in order to prevent further spread of the virus. Our clients and workers are all interconnected as they frequent many organizations and gathering places.
 4. **Co-create a concrete plan with Indigenous-serving organizations** for the safety of all Indigenous people in Montréal, including families who need to isolate together, mothers and children, and people in the justice and carceral systems. This plan must consider the set of complex issues faced by those without homes, those with mental health issues, addictions, intergenerational trauma, etc.
 5. Offer **multiple on-site and un-policed testing** in shelters, centres, and other community spaces. Thus far, we have been told that testing is not a priority partly because there is not enough space in the publicly-run shelter 'Abris du Voyageur' which is the dedicated shelter for homeless individuals waiting for their tests results. We have also been informed that testing is not the most effective way to prevent the spread of the virus. Nonetheless, until we receive **clear directives and an effective plan of action concerning protective measures, which have been adapted to the Indigenous community reality**, we continue to request widespread on-site testing in shelters, centres, and other community spaces.

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6. Retroactively **annul any infractions under the *Public Health Act* associated with articles 123(8) and 139**, which have been given to our Indigenous community members living in homelessness and/or front-line workers during this pandemic. Moving forward, place a **moratorium on the ticketing of individuals living in homelessness, as well as front line workers** so long as the pandemic crisis persists.
7. To **collect and share statistics** regarding the spread of the virus within the **Indigenous community** in Montreal. As it stands, official demographic data concerning Indigenous people in publicly run shelters and testing sites have remained unavailable. We are therefore unable to have a full picture of the effects of the virus on our marginalized community.

Our shelters, centres, and community spaces are confronted with on-going hardships, which go far beyond the existing obstacles faced by non-Indigenous organizations and individuals at this time. We are increasingly preoccupied with our current reality, and fear becoming the epicenter of this pandemic in both Quebec and Canada. Going forward, it is imperative that we create and implement protective/supportive measures specifically adapted to the Indigenous community.

PORTRAIT OF THE CURRENT REALITY

To this end, and in the spirit of shedding light on the **seriousness of the current situation**, it is imperative that we provide a detailed portrait of the reality on the front line.

- A. To date, the organizations serving the Indigenous community have not been provided a clear plan of action to protect and support Indigenous peoples without private homes and thus, do not have the option to practice social distancing and voluntary isolation. In order to respect the public authorities' social distancing directives, our organizations have had to limit their capacity, all the while remaining inadequately supported. While we acknowledge some actions taken by the City and the CIUSS in supporting the creation of new emergency spaces in Cabot Square, at Dawson College, and at the Little Burgundy Sports Centre, many of our principal requests have not been met in a timely manner, nor have they taken into consideration the unique circumstances of the Indigenous community in situations of homelessness.
- B. The Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux (CIUSSS) du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal has repeatedly refused our requests for targeted

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on-site testing in shelters, centres, and outdoor gathering spaces like Cabot Square (these requests date back to March 26, 2020). In Montréal, Médecins du Monde has been ready to operate mobile testing since mid-April, yet access to testing material was refused upon request. Indigenous community members continue to face barriers when getting tested and when accessing the trajectory of public services, such as hotel rooms and other isolation services. Rather than make testing a priority, we are informed to improve basic measures such as social distancing, hand washing, wearing masks, etc. However, no clear directives have been given as to the ways in which this would be possible for those for whom basic **sanitary** measures **are already** near impossible to **follow or access**.

- C. There has been an increase in aggressive and targeted policing interventions towards Indigenous community members. This has contributed to increasing judicialization and stigmatization of Indigenous people, particularly those living in states of homelessness. On May 5th, the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal made a complaint against the SPVM on the ground of systemic discrimination and racial profiling of an Indigenous woman on May 3rd, 2020, and a formal complaint was subsequently [filed](#) to the Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse du Québec.
- I. We have seen an increase in criminalization, ticketing, aggressive intervention, and arrests of those living on the streets, as well as front-line workers serving this community. Since March 27th, we have been actively requesting a moratorium on the ticketing of homeless individuals under articles 123 (8) and 139 of the *Public Health Act* due to the fact that most do not have a place to practice voluntary isolation and social distancing. We request that public health authorities work in tandem with policing by implementing a health orientation to exclude homeless people and those that work with them from all civil reprimands associated with these infractions.
 - II. After an Indigenous street worker was arrested and subsequently ticketed whilst working on the front line, the City of Montréal and the SPVM are exclusively pressuring Indigenous outreach workers to report their locations to the SPVM at the beginning of each shift. The City of Montreal has insisted that organizations who receive municipal funding should “collaborate” with this request. It is crucial to note that non-Indigenous outreach workers have not been asked to inform police of the locations of their activities, suggesting Indigenous-targeted practices. We are preoccupied by increasingly discriminatory measures.

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- E. We are uncomfortable with Quebec’s decision to proceed with deconfinement measures whilst the spread of the virus in our sector is only beginning to peak. Rather than effectively respond to the emergency, loosening confinement measures will instead dramatically increase the risk of contamination. [Montreal is currently the epicentre of the COVID-19 contagion in Canada, and Quebec is the world’s seventh deadliest COVID-19 epicentre](#). More specifically, the provincial public authorities must take into account how the pandemic affects the various, often marginalized, communities; universal decision-making disregarding the Indigenous community is harmful.
- F. Since March 19th, we have repeatedly communicated our requests and recommendations with the goal of getting ahead of the spread of the virus, and protecting the Indigenous community living in homelessness from contracting the virus. We are aware of the crisis in Quebec’s CHSLDs and are fearful of falling into similar circumstances. We have called upon provincial and municipal authorities for immediate action and support, but received insufficient and disappointing responses to these requests. While some important steps have been taken, the community requires significant and more long term support until the pandemic is truly over. In fact, due to a COVID-19 outbreak, despite requests for help for over two weeks, the NWSM had to [close its doors](#) on May 14th, 2020, forcing its residents to relocate into hotel accommodations. We remain fearful that other Indigenous-serving shelters and centres will soon follow suit.

CONTINUED EFFORTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has enhanced the existing hardships faced by the Indigenous community, and the lack of resources available for basic human necessities have put Indigenous people living in homelessness in a particularly precarious position. As such, Indigenous-serving organizations operating during the pandemic have maintained continuous contact to collectively try to address the needs of the most vulnerable community members. These organizations include the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal, the Southern Quebec Inuit Association, the First Peoples Justice Centre of Montreal, Resilience Montreal, the Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK, the Open Door Montréal, the Indigenous Support Workers Project and many more.

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Since the inception of the Stay at Home Orders on March 15th, 2020, community organizations have asked for a clear action plan and requested essential services for our community. Whilst some assistance has been provided and certain services financed, other essential help has repeatedly been refused, and consequently, is leading to dire consequences. More importantly, whilst we recognize the particularity of the pandemic situation, we are increasingly preoccupied that the Indigenous community is an afterthought in the planning process, and that the current response demonstrates violations of our community's foundational human rights to life, security, and equality.

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