



ICC PRESS RELEASE

INUIT

CORONAVIRUS AND OTHER HEALTH RISKS AMONG INUIT

March 3, 2020 – Anchorage, Alaska – As the world community initiates response to increasing number of coronavirus outbreaks, ICC expresses concern about how our rural, remote communities are potentially at much higher risk and exposure to such epidemics due to the chronic lack of basic infrastructure, including lack of sewer and running water in many of our communities.

The spread of the coronavirus highlights the urgent need to remedy the profound infrastructure deficit in Inuit Nunaat that contributes to vulnerability and underlies the health challenges experienced by too many of our people. Inuit communities historically experienced devastating loss of life due to lack of immunity to preventable diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis, and other viruses and diseases. The lethal impacts of disease were compounded by the absence of the resources and infrastructure required to effectively prevent and respond to them. The basic conditions that contributed to vulnerability in the past continue to exist in too many of our communities today, contributing to a high prevalence of tuberculosis, respiratory infections, and greater susceptibility to other viruses and diseases.

Despite being the original inhabitants of some of the most affluent countries in the world, gaps in basic infrastructure continue to contribute to severe health risks. Overcrowding, food insecurity, lower life expectancy, and a high prevalence of tuberculosis are among the inequities experienced by our people that are linked to poor infrastructure. Many homes lack running water and a flush toilet. Many more depend on aging and deteriorating piped and haul systems. These conditions contribute to severe and multiple illnesses, including invasive pneumococcal disease that are among the highest in the world. Household overcrowding has numerous interrelated adverse impacts, from mental well-being to physical health.

ICC calls on governments to close the infrastructure gaps throughout Inuit Nunaat through major new investments in our communities, prioritizing basic infrastructure such as housing, water, and sewer. And, ensuring that this investment supports climate resilient infrastructure critical for our communities that are dealing with the most significant impacts of climate change. This is the only way to create social and economic equity, support population health, and reduce vulnerability to virus and disease. In addition, when designing local, regional and national response and preparedness to the coronavirus and other infectious diseases, governments must acknowledge the challenges that Inuit communities face. Because of these conditions, combined with looming threats such as the coronavirus, Inuit leaders across the Arctic are concerned about the compounded threats to our basic health and well-being and cultural integrity.

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The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an Indigenous Peoples' Organization (IPO), founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of 180,000 Inuit from Alaska (USA), Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life. In regard to climate change, we believe that it is crucial for world leaders and governments to recognize, respect and fully implement the human rights of Inuit and all other Indigenous peoples across the globe.