TORONTO ABORIGINAL SUPPORT SERVICES COUNCIL

March 23, 2020

COMMUNIQUE TO: GOVERNMENTS, FUNDERS, and FRIENDS

ON BEHALF OF: TASSC COVID-19 COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TASK FORCE

On behalf of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) we are writing to express our collective need for emergency funding to support COVID-19 relief and recovery for organizations who are actively working across the city to continue to provide services to urban Indigenous people in Toronto.

COVID-19 is putting tremendous pressure on our most vital Indigenous community services and we need the support to continue to operate.

We are seeking relief to support the continuation of the following critical services to urban Indigenous people in Toronto.

Current Community Services Being Offered *(with minimal to no contact in line with Public Health recommendations and directives):*

- Daily meals for community members
- Meal delivery for Elders/seniors
- Shelter and housing support continuity
- Daily shelter within hotels
- Food Hampers, food banks, food cards
- Children's activities and supplies
- Online engagement and programming
- Supplies for babies
- Traditional medicines and traditional teas
- Hygiene Supplies and sleeping bags
- Gloves masks and sanitizers distribution
- Central coordination
- Call/text number and email for community access: 647.957.8372 and support@tassc.ca
- Community communications and support across Social Media Channels
- TASSC COVID-19 Collective Response Task Force – meetings 3x per week

Current Efforts:

1. Council Fire Native Cultural Centre has been providing daily meals to hundreds of people downtown along with the provision of food deliveries to Elders and seniors, medicinal teas, food cards, food bank services and supplies to community members and food supports across the GTA. They have also purchased hotel rooms for underhoused and homeless community members so they have a place to go during the day to be safe and warm. Council Fire offers virtual programming and many initiatives to keep community busy and engaged and employed.

2. Aboriginal Legal Services continues to service individuals via phone. They have court workers available at the respective courts in the GTA. Aboriginal Legal Services continues to provide Gladue reports and Gladue letters.

2. Native Child and Family Services is providing food hampers, gift cards and deliveries across the city and mental health and addictions support, domestic and intimate partner violence support, telephone (as well as online) engagement, case management and system navigation, cultural support (e.g. virtual access to elders as well as traditional medicines).

3. Native Canadian Centre continues to operate by offering meals to go for the community and by offering hygiene packs, sleeping bags and telephone and online supports.

4. Gabriel Dumont is coordinating self-isolation supports, including groceries, kids activities items, financial and Traditional services for the well-being of the community.

5. Native Women's Resource Centre has provided over 50 hampers to community and to support the residents of Elm Street's YWCA program for Indigenous families. Traditional healers continue to provide one on one support via telephone and we've provided grocery gift cards for the community. The Centre will support agencies providing and delivering services.

6. Toronto Inuit Association is providing country food/game, food and supplies to the Inuit community and beyond through city-wide deliveries.

7. 2-Sprited People of the First Nations is providing supports, supplies and food deliveries to members of the 2-Spirit community and beyond.

8. Native Men's Residence is offering emergency shelter services, housing services and outreach services are still being offered to Indigenous homeless people in Toronto.

8. Wigwamen Incorporated, Native Men's Residence, Nishnawbe Homes Inc., Gabriel Dumont Non-Profit Housing Inc., Anduhyaun and Native Child and Family services of Toronto all continue to provide safe housing and shelter supports to service and house some of the most vulnerable members of the community. They are also are available to the community to support in any way we they are asked.

9. Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy was offering harm reduction kits left in their lobby to Indigenous people downtown. OAHAS was providing lunches/food provisions, but we had to end the services due to staff illness. For members with up-to-date contact information, they've moved to general wellness calls/chats to help individuals feel less isolated.

10. Miziwe Biik and the Urban Indigenous Education Centre are continuing to provide services in the capacity of online and via phone calls and emails.

11. Anishinabe Health Toronto continues to provide critical health and traditional services online and in person as needed.

12. ENAGB Youth Services continues to support youth through social media, phone calls and financially.

13. TASSC has supported with supplies and food distribution and coordinating efforts and communications to the community.

14. Association for Native Development in the Performing & Visual Arts/Arts Indigena (ANDPVA) is developing online watch parties to pay Indigenous artists who are having a hard time financially due to the cancellation of gigs.

14. The Metis Council and Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society are working to support keeping the circle strong.

The Issue:

Ontario is the most populous province in the country for urban Indigenous people, with 86% of Indigenous people live off-reserve. Toronto is home to the largest native population in Ontario at an estimated 80,000 people *(Our Health Counts 2016*).

Toronto's Indigenous coalition; TASSC has 18-members (Indigenous led non-profits and vital social support agencies) and these 18-agencies are serving the members of Toronto's 80,000 Indigenous residents. There are over 20 Indigenous social service providers in the city and we are not operating at full capacity with increasing COVID-19 related pressures. We need support now.

Current Critical Needs:

- **Volunteers and drivers**
- **Restaurant linkages and partnerships across the city**
- **Hotel room blocks for our homeless and precariously housed**
- **Food and supplies**
- **Safety equipment; gloves, masks, sanitizer**
- **To provide minutes for phones through vendors like Chatr and Freedom Mobile for low-income individuals to stay socially connected**
- **Meal delivery options through vendors like Uber Eats**
- **Food cards and Pre-Paid Credit Cards**
- **Telephone and online Indigenous specific mental health supports**
- **OW and ODSP interim increases**
- **Parent relief, activity and online and device access options**
- **Rent and eviction prevention/forgiveness guarantees**

We are collectively fielding hundreds of requests daily for supports most primarily for (but not limited to) food provision and daily meals and food delivery supports. Of the 18-member organizations that make up TASSC, most all service agencies are fully operational at this time and being re-deployed to manage rapidly changing demands. We need support to continue to ensure the needs of the urban Indigenous community are being met and we cannot do this without the support of our government, private and philanthropic and community allies and friends.

The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council is seeking immediate relief in the raising $500,000.00 for interim-measure recovery funds and help with supplies acquisition and advocacy efforts for the aforementioned critical needs areas.

Statement of Financial Need:

Agency	Estimated Financial Need as of March 23, 2020
2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations	$25,000.00
Aboriginal Legal Services	$10,000.00
Gabriel Dumont Non-Profit Homes Inc.	$20,000.00
Miziwe Biik Employment and Training	$10,000.00
Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto	$25,000.00
Na Me Res (Native Men's Residence)	$50,000.00
Native Child and Family Services of Toronto	$50,000.00
Native Canadian Centre of Toronto	$50,000.00
Nishnawbe Homes Inc.	$30,000.00
Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre	$100,000.00
Toronto Inuit Association	$20,000.00
Wigwamen Incorporated	$10,000.00
Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council	$20,000.00
ADNPVA	$20,000.00
Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy	$10,000.00
Support to Non-TASSC Member Agencies	$50,000.00

TOTAL: $500,000.00

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As members of Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC), we are doing our part to avert the catastrophic spread of COVID-19. We know that this virus is ever-increasing not only in Ontario but in the core of downtown Toronto and greater GTA.

While most of our community members and clients find themselves in the downtown area, there are many more that we service on the outskirts of the city. Our clients, who are marginalized, the homeless, and those at risk of homelessness by the very nature of their circumstance depend upon the support services of our collective agencies.

This pandemic has made it difficult for us to organize as it brings additional challenges to our agencies who are already annually underfunded. This new extraordinary demand generated by COVID-19 now requires our agencies to purchase and access to protective equipment, medical equipment, food, transportation, supplies, sanitization… and the list continues.

As doing our part increases; to maintain the new standards invoked by the Province and City it is imperative that immediate financial assistance be made.

Please contact Lindsay Kretschmer at: 647.293.5352 or lkretschmer@tassc.ca to direct financial contributions, support and/or inquires.

In Kindness and Unity,

Lindsay (Swooping Hawk) Kretschmer
Executive Director

On Behalf Of:

The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)

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Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
Toronto Inuit Association
Wigwamen Incorporated
Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
Toronto & York Region Métis Council
Urban Indigenous Education Centre
Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy

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