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Ilisaqsivik Society
General Delivery
Clyde River, NU X0A 0E0
www.ilisaqsivik.ca

April 7, 2020

Dr. Michael Patterson
Chief Medical Officer of Health for Nunavut
Department of Health
Government of Nunavut
Box 1000, Station 1000
Iqaluit, NU
X0A 0H0

RE: REQUEST FOR SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION IN CLYDE RIVER

Dear Dr. Patterson,

We are writing to discuss how we can collaborate with your department and the Government of Nunavut to address the Covid-19 pandemic.

We welcome the aggressive measures implemented by the Government of Nunavut to reduce as much as possible the arrival of Covid-19 into the Nunavut Territory. These have been critical steps in ensuring we prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our communities, which as we all know are extremely vulnerable give the epidemic of tuberculosis in the Territory and the socio-economic conditions in the communities.

At community level, we believe that communities will be at the forefront of fighting the pandemic. While we still have no cases in Nunavut, we cannot be complacent, and we would like to work with Government Nunavut to develop emergency readiness plans for the communities.

Ilisaqsivik has been working See Change over the past 2 years to address TB at the community level. This experience is proving valuable as we work with our Hamlet Council, Mayor, and other local organizations on preparedness and prevention in Clyde River related to Covid-19. In Clyde River we have already been working on implementing a series of measures based on the WHO guidelines. These include:

- creating an interagency COVID response team with the Hamlet and other actors in Clyde River;

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- ensuring that correct and culturally appropriate prevention and care information (as posted on GN pages and NTI/ITK) is provided at community level through a dedicated Clyde River Covid-19 Preparedness community Facebook page;
- a daily Covid-19 briefing prepared for the Hamlet and other senior community leadership;
- ongoing communications to community members (through radio, dedicated Facebook page) emphasizing physical distancing, hand washing, and other prevention measures;
- limiting and monitoring entry to the Northern Store and enforcing use of hand cleaning before entry;
- responding to community questions, and engaging with community regularly;
- supporting our most vulnerable community members with regular food hampers and disinfectant materials for each home, and emotional support using our network of Ilisaqsivik counsellors;
- hosting a radio talk show with our Clyde River TB project coordinator who is trained on Covid-19 prevention measures;
- initiating a program to support community members to make their own masks and encourage their use;
- developing online workshops to train community members on basic prevention;
- creating a network of community workers how can help with contact tracing and active case finding;
- closing down of our hotels and cancelling non-essential bookings;
- identifying spaces in the community for isolation should we have confirmed cases; and
- identifying spaces in the community for super spreaders and also to help support high density home.

We believe these could be useful and replicated in other communities and would be pleased to collaborate with you to make sure other Nunavut communities are ready in the event of a case of Covid-19 reaching them.

Please find attached a 391 word commentary: **Communities will win the fight for COVID-19 and TB: A Radical Framework for Community First.**

In this piece, we explain the critical importance of a community-based approach to COVID-19 in Inuit communities, which are uniquely vulnerable in this outbreak. In these resource-limited communities, an outbreak of COVID-19 would compound existing vulnerabilities such as poverty, food insecurity and namely, the Tuberculosis epidemic that the Inuit have been battling for decades.

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Building on this Framework, we want to work with you to create a situation where we have a strong, coordinated public health system in Nunavut that responds to community leadership. At the community level, we know our needs and capabilities best, we know local priorities, resources, and the specific contexts of where we live and how our community operates. This puts us in the best position to lead with a community-based approach. In fact, leading is our right within the Inuit democracy and within Inuit self-determination. The public health system as a function of public government has a duty to respond to community leadership. We call upon you to work with us to advance this special collaboration and work together for our community and families.

COVID-19 continues to take more lives in Canada each day, threatening to overwhelm health systems across the country and around the world. As such, it is more important than ever that vulnerable communities in Canada both have adequate resources to fight the outbreak, *and* have the support and response of public health to work together on prevention and treatment strategies.

Additionally, we are writing to encourage the use of GeneXpert for Nunavut. Given the circumstances, the current testing and length of time it takes is not ideal in Nunavut. Fast diagnostic turnaround times are critical in a rapidly evolving pandemic.

To maximize the health and safety of our community members, we recognize how important testing for the virus is. Global experience of Covid-19 shows that testing is key to anticipating and preventing the spread of the virus especially where there are no cases. This is all the more critical for Nunavut's isolated and remote communities with additional challenges such as overcrowded housing and inadequate health services to deal with an outbreak.

We are very heartened to learn that a new Covid-19 test has been approved by Health Canada which can be used in GenXpert machines. We have attached a brief backgrounder on the test and its use.

We would like to work with you to acquire GenXpert machines for Nunavut in order to conduct Covid-19 testing as soon as possible. We are already connected with Inter Medico who is the supplier and are able to move quickly on this. The machines will also be useful for TB and other testing post pandemic, so it has even greater value for Nunavut.

We are taking this initiative to contact you because our Health Centre has made it clear they are not able to take an active part in community emergency readiness planning at this time and

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that they can only participate actively at your direction. However, we support their efforts and we will collaborate where possible with them and continue to always inform them and loop them in to everything that is happening.

We look forward to your response to our request and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laimikie Palluq
Chair, Board of Directors
Ilisaqsivik Society