

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **NUNATUKAVUT SAYS MINISTER HAGGIE’S APOLOGY MUST BE MORE THAN WORDS: IMMEDIATE HEALTH SUPPORTS AND IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

**HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, LABRADOR, December 15, 2020**– NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) President Todd Russell today issued the following statement in response to Provincial Health and Community Services Minister John Haggie’s recent statement in the House of Assembly when asked a question about the Medical Transportation Assistance Program (MTAP):

“We were extremely disappointed to hear Minister Haggie’s response to a question about MTAP, which is accessed by many of our people living in NunatuKavut. During his response, Minister Haggie stated that *“we have a generous medical transportation system allowance as it were, or benefit, in this province, and I would argue there is discrimination in favour of Labradorians.”* The tone and substance of these remarks demonstrate a lack of empathy and fulsome understanding of the challenges faced by NunatuKavut Inuit and Labradorians in general. While MTAP does provide some assistance, it certainly cannot be characterized as generous. It does not come close to meeting the needs of our people when having to travel long distances to access medical services. As well, the process to apply to the program is onerous and cumbersome and it takes months for a reimbursement.

The serious inadequacies of MTAP is why NCC used our own source revenues to put in place an NCC Medical Transportation Program in January 2020. We have been intentional about ensuring this program is easy to access and many costs are covered up front for those not able to wait for reimbursement. Feedback on our program has been overwhelmingly positive. NCC’s program does, however, have limitations and more resources are critically needed. Even with this additional assistance, many individuals and families in NunatuKavut must still avail of personal loans and get help from family and friends.

NunatuKavut Inuit and our communities are currently not included under the federal First Nations and Inuit Health Branch programming, which includes Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB). Many of our communities also face urgent health needs that are further exacerbated by existing food, water and heat insecurities. The COVID-19 global pandemic has only highlighted and shone a light on the inequities and needs that exist in our territory.

We are aware of Minister Haggie’s apology and this is an important step if we are to continue to work toward reconciliation. Premier Furey has made it clear that reconciliation is a top priority of his government. We also took note that Minister Haggie committed to doing better and we have a real opportunity for him to put those words into action. We ask for a re-commitment from Minister Haggie and his department to find solutions wherein the MTAP can assist in making the NCC Medical Transportation Program sustainable. This would be vital in allowing NCC to continue supporting the urgent and pressing health needs of our members. This and other needed health care supports would help improve the health and well-being of our people. NCC looks forward to making meaningful progress on these matters.”

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