

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **NUNATUKAVUT COMMUNITY COUNCIL SAYS IMMEDIATE ACTION ON AIR AMBULANCE SERVICES IN LABRADOR ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY**

**HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, LABRADOR, April 19, 2021**– NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) President Todd Russell today issued the following statement in response to a very serious medical situation involving an elder member who waited almost 36 hours for medical transportation:

“I was informed of the situation with Howard (Hob) Russell as it was unfolding. From the outset, there was frustration expressed by his immediate family, who were desperately pursuing all avenues to facilitate his travel to a hospital in St. John’s or another location for the critical medical care he needed. I also engaged with LG Health and provincial officials to see what help could be extended and have raised this issue with the Premier directly. Unfortunately, this is not a single or isolated incident in our communities. Our people have to travel by air ambulance for urgent medical attention and NCC has heard similar stories of frustration and tragedy.

NCC calls upon Premier Furey and his government to take immediate action to undertake a thorough investigation into this matter. We also ask for a formal review of the air ambulance system, which is very clearly failing the people of NunatuKavut and all residents in Labrador. The review should include NCC, other Indigenous groups and the voices of those who have been directly affected by the inadequate air ambulance services. We ask the Premier to treat this review with the level of priority and attention that it requires as a lifesaving service. Changes must be made to ensure that our people can access the timely and urgent care they need during a medical emergency.

This is another unfortunate example of the serious inequities that exist in our territory around health services. 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. Engaging in a meaningful conversation with NCC on how to address these inequities would be another important step toward reconciliation. And it would go a long way in helping improve the overall health and well-being of our people and communities.

On behalf of NCC, I extend our thoughts and prayers to Howard, his family and all other families who are facing serious health issues at this time.”

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