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**A message from the All Nations Health Partners Ontario
Health Team Clinical Advisory Committee:**

Kenora's Healthcare System on brink of collapse

September 3, 2024, Kenora, ON – The healthcare system in Kenora is facing a crisis due to severe physician shortages and an unsustainable care model.

The All Nations Health Partners Ontario Health Team (ANHP OHT) region currently relies on a small group of general practitioner physicians to provide the breadth of primary care services in both Kenora and surrounding First Nations communities as well as acute services such as emergency medicine, inpatient care, obstetrics and anesthesia amongst others.

Due to outdated and fractured physician service agreements, Kenora has lost several physicians to Manitoba and other provinces. And despite the ANHP investing in collaborative recruitment initiatives, we have not been successful in bringing new physicians to the region. Our local physician group is in crisis with the loss of yet another physician and impending retirements, which will leave thousands of patients without primary care. The Emergency Department (ED) at Lake of the Woods District Hospital is on the brink of closure, and the physician funding for First Nation communities expires within the next few months, threatening to further exasperate the health inequities already experienced by the Indigenous population.

Dr. Sean Moore, Chief of Staff at Kenora's hospital explains "The situation is dire. Lake of the Woods District Hospital's current reliance on locum physician fails to provide the continuity of care that a stable, locally staffed ED would offer. The critical shortage of physicians we are experiencing has created a situation which is unsustainable and without urgent intervention, there will be ED closures. This would be absolutely devastating for the region."

Access to physician care is not just an issue faced within the City of Kenora, but a consistent barrier faced within the surrounding First Nation communities. With continuous access to care being a prominent issue in the communities, this continues to compound the stress of the Emergency Department as members cannot always see a doctor in their home community and have to rely on ED visits for basic care.

Dr. Jillie Retson, the Medical Director of Kenora Chiefs Advisory states “We have worked so hard over the last few years to provide physician services in First Nations communities, who experience large health disparities and chronic illness. Many of these physicians have built strong and trusting relationships with communities over the last few years. We now risk having to pull these physicians out of First Nations communities if we do not have a long-term funding solution in place. We have been working collaboratively with partners on a solution that will provide a long-term and sustainable services.”

The ANHP OHT Clinical Advisory Committee (a physician and clinical network working to transform the health care system) has proposed an innovative, cost-effective solution that aligns with the Ministry of Health’s strategic objectives. Dr.’s Jillie Retson and Shannon Wiebe, who co-chair the Committee want to see the Ministry of Health support a new rural generalist care model that directly addresses the crisis and meets the complex needs of Kenora’s population. The model is designed to provide continuous health care services and establish a competitive compensation plan for all rural generalist physicians.

The Kenora healthcare crisis demands immediate attention and action. The All Nations Health Partners Ontario Health Team has presented a viable, sustainable solution that meets the needs of the community while aligning with provincial health strategies. This is about protecting the lives and well-being of the people of Kenora.

The ANHP OHT Clinical Advisory Committee is calling on stakeholders, including political leaders, healthcare organizations, and the broader community, to come together and ensure that Kenora’s healthcare system remains resilient, equitable, and capable of serving all its residents. ***How can you help?*** Please reach out to Minister Greg Rickford to voice your concerns about the dire physician shortage, risk of Emergency Department closure and help advocate for solutions:

<https://gregrickfordmpp.ca/contact/>

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