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News Release

## AFN Yukon Regional Office

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### AFN Yukon Region responds to Yukon Government's declaration of a Substance Use Health Emergency

**Whitehorse, Yukon – The AFN Yukon Region has released the following statement after the Yukon Government declared a territory-wide Substance Use Health Emergency**

The Yukon Government has declared a Substance Use Health Emergency and committed to taking immediate short, medium and long term actions to address this health crisis. Following the announcement, Yukon First Nation Chiefs met with the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Carolyn Bennett to stress the immediate need for community-focused government support. In their conversation with Minister Bennett, Chiefs emphasized the need for urgent action and investment that directly meets the specific needs of communities and those citizens whose daily lives are affected by mental health and addictions issues.

“We are in devastating times. Far too many families and communities in the Yukon continue to be affected by the tragic losses and pain due to the deep-seeded mental health and addictions issues impacting people across the Yukon. First and foremost, on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations and the AFN Yukon Region, we extend our deepest sympathies and condolences to the many families, friends, and communities. We have all been touched by this ongoing crisis,” Regional Chief Adamek shared, “our people need help, and they need it now.”

“This message cannot fall on deaf ears; addiction, mental health and wellness issues need to be dealt with immediately, and by every level of government. The lives we are losing are our children, friends, colleagues, parents, and grandparents. What matters right now is strong action and the mobilization of immediate resources from the governments’ directly to Yukon First Nations. For so many citizens and families, this is a matter of life and death, and although it is painful, we cannot turn a blind eye to this reality. As a leader in my community, and as a human being, I need this message to be heard by the federal government, and territorial government, loud and clear,” said Deputy Naa Sháade Héni Alex Oakley of the Teslin Tlingit Council.

“We must invest in land-based healing, the support and guidance of Elders, medical and wellness professionals who are trained to understand the complexities of intergenerational trauma, and supports that facilitate healing our connections to the land, languages, cultures, and our communities and families,” explained Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Council Chief Roberta Joseph.

“There are critical investments required to fund year-round, sustainable healing support to address harm reduction, education and prevention programs. This includes the availability of nasal and at-home naloxone kits, widespread drug testing, more investment in Community Safety Officer Programs, and on-the-land healing options. It means the expansion of mental and physical health care options being made available to people whether they live in the Yukon or away from home, for all our people,” said Chief Nicole Tom of Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. “These supports need to be sent to communities directly because they are the ones who are hurting. The citizens struggling with addiction and mental health, as well as their partners, friends, grandparents, parents, siblings and children - these are the people on the ground, everyday, who are suffering and who need to see and feel government support,” Chief Tom explained.

This health crisis has been ongoing with long-standing impacts in First Nation families and communities for many years. The AFN Yukon Region welcomes the territorial government’s acknowledgement and willingness to take these mental health and addictions issues seriously, and looks forward to working with federal partners to address the urgent and long-term needs of communities.

Regional Chief Adamek said, “it is going to take the efforts and support from *everyone* to address this crisis. We all have a role to play in coming together - from citizens and community leaders to all levels of government, regionally and nationally. As Northerners and as First Nations, one of the greatest strengths is our interconnectedness. No matter what we are facing, we are stronger together.”

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