



# Mushkegowuk Council

12 Centre Road, P.O. Box 370, Moose Factory, ON P0L 1W0  
Phone: 705 658 4222 Fax: 705 658 4250

## *Press Release*

### **Mushkegowuk First Nations enhancing their response to illegal drug and alcohol crisis.**

(January 24, 2024 - Moose Factory ON) Mushkegowuk Council has approved funding to support Kashechewan, Fort Albany, Moose Cree and Attawapiskat First Nations to respond to an escalating illegal drug and alcohol crisis that is devastating their communities.

The funding, approved at a meeting of Mushkegowuk Chiefs held earlier this month, will help stem the flow of illegal drugs, enhance bylaw enforcement measures and establish a Regional Community Safety Project which will include efforts to address drug and alcohol addiction issues within these communities.

“This major development and investment will hopefully make more changes for a better quality of life for all community members, especially for those suffering with addictions and wanting help with changing their lifestyle to move on with their healing journey,” explained Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Leo Friday.

“When discussing the proposals and the state of our nations, the Mushkegowuk Chiefs had no hesitation with approving the major funding. It was evident that ‘unity’ was a major part of the discussion. There is an acknowledged need for the communities to move forward on this together.”

In November 2017, the Mushkegowuk Council of Chiefs declared a regional state of emergency due to the increasing distribution of illegal drugs within its communities and the devastating impacts arising from substance abuse including alcohol.

“Since 2017, the supply, demand and use of illegal drugs (including abuse of prescription drugs) and alcohol continues to escalate and is the leading cause of criminal activity, violence, premature deaths, destruction of families and cause life-long hardship for our elders, innocent children and families in the Mushkegowuk communities,” said Friday. “It’s basically destroying our Cree way of life.”

Mushkegowuk Council has been working with the Ontario Regional Coroner's Office to determine death rates associated with the use of illegal drugs within the region. According to preliminary findings released by the Coroner's Office in December 2023, Mushkegowuk First Nations drug toxicity death rates for the period 2019 to 2023 were triple the Ontario average.

"The use of illegal drugs and alcohol continues to create serious major challenges for our community governments, policing services, health-care system, schools, child welfare services, housing programs and social services," said Friday.

"In some way or another, every community member is affected. The illegal drug and alcohol trade has taken over our communities. It's a serious disease. Its big dirty business being brought in our communities by criminals from the south and it's killing us.

"Our region is in a very serious crisis and we need to continue working together on taking action."

Deputy Grand Chief Amos Wesley concurred, adding, "We need to work with the people that are involved with the use of illegal drugs and alcohol. We don't want them to go to jail, we want to help them, and in order to do that, we need to provide them with more healing services.

"We also acknowledge and commend the service providers that are out there trying to help the people suffering from illegal drugs and alcohol but they too need more support. Their programs and services are underfunded and need emergency support to implement more effective strategies to reduce the illegal drug trade in our communities. It is our responsibility as leaders to take action."

During the recent pandemic, several coastal Mushkegowuk First Nations declared their own states of emergency. Despite their community-based strategies to provide healing programs for community members, the crisis remains at very critical levels.

Mushkegowuk Council is a regional governing body representing the communities of Attawapiskat First Nation, Chapleau Cree First Nation, Fort Albany First Nation, Kashechewan First Nation, Missanabie Cree First Nation, Moose Cree First Nation, and Taykwa Tagamou Nation.

For more information, contact Vern Cheechoo, Chief Executive Officer, Mushkegowuk Council

Phone: 705-268-3594, ext. 301

Cell: 705-360-3858

Email: [verncheechoo@mushkegowuk.ca](mailto:verncheechoo@mushkegowuk.ca)