



## Dene National / Assembly of First Nations Office (NWT)

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: DIRE DENTAL CARE IN DENENDEH- GOVERNMENT OF THE NWT FAILS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

**JUNE 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 –DENENDEH** – Government administrative negligence of dental care in NWT Indigenous communities has reached crisis levels, says Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine. Many Dene communities have had no local dental care for over three years, some lacking service since before the COVID-19 outbreak.

“I am concerned that lack of dental care will further undermine people’s overall health in our communities,” said Chief Antoine. “It is shocking that Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories have neglected their obligations to deliver dental care that is so badly needed.”

Canada pays for dental services through its Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program. The GNWT contracts dentists to provide community-based services. The GNWT issued Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for four regions in March at the last minute before contracts expired. The GNWT cancelled RFPs for the Sahtu and North Slave regions, and there are currently no announcements for contracts for the Deh Cho or Mackenzie Delta regions. Thousands of people in these regions now have only emergency service, requiring medical travel.

"There has been no communication from the GNWT about this," Chief Antoine added, "It is a pathetic effort all around." Chief Antoine believes a second-class, colonial dental care system has reached the breaking point. " I suspect that we have no dentists going to communities. Fewer bidding on dental contracts because facilities badly need maintenance, dentists are not paid as well as elsewhere, including Yellowknife, " he said. "It would not be that way if equal service to all was the goal."

NIHB's fees are lower than insured services, and many of the GNWT’s community facilities must be better equipped and maintained. "Governments say they are serving Dene people, but the reality is no service until things are so bad you need emergency care, maybe lose your teeth," Chief Antoine said. "Right now, we don’t even get the services Canada currently pays for. It is negligence, and it is a disgrace. "The Dene Nation demands urgent action to bring community dental services to a standard acceptable to all citizens of Turtle Island.

-30-

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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*“Upholding and Protecting the Rights and Interests of the Dene Nation”*

## **ADDITIONAL FACTS AND RESOURCES**

- The GNWT sets the number of days per year for dental services in each community.
- Covid-19 restrictions caused service cancellations in some communities that were not restored when the government restrictions were lifted.
- NIHB does not cover some dental services typically covered by insured programs, such as those provided to employees by governments and many businesses.
- Under previous contracts, dentists providing service in NWT communities were not paid for travel or setup time, which would be unnecessary in a regular clinic.
- Travelling dentists do cleanings and basic services that hygienists would perform in a regular clinic. For these services, NIHB fees are at a hygienist's rate.

Canada Dental Benefits NIHB Guide: <https://sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1579538771806/1579538804799>

NWT-Nunavut Dental Association: <https://www.nwtndentalassociation.ca/>

GNWT Employee Dental Plan Booklet: [https://my.hr.gov.nt.ca/sites/myhr/files/green\\_shield\\_benefit\\_booklet\\_-\\_gnwt\\_employees.pdf](https://my.hr.gov.nt.ca/sites/myhr/files/green_shield_benefit_booklet_-_gnwt_employees.pdf)

GNWT Metis Health Benefits Program: <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/supplementary-health-benefits/metis-health-benefits>