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On Dec 10th International Human Rights Day, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission calls for a renewed commitment to human rights in the response to COVID-19

On International Human Rights Day, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission calls upon governments and decision-makers to renew their commitment to ensuring that our response to the COVID-19 pandemic centres human rights principles.

Today, the Commission released an update to its April 8th Report entitled *A human rights based approach to the COVID-19 pandemic: Principles and Actions*.

“We are taking stock of the first ten months of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and identifying key areas for action to ensure that our provincial response complies with fundamental human rights principles,” said Karen Sharma, A/Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Manitoba, the Commission has been monitoring the response to the pandemic and has heard from many community members representing older Manitobans, racialized communities, people experiencing poverty and houselessness, people with disabilities, incarcerated peoples and other *Code*-protected groups. These community members are concerned that certain aspects in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic are having a negative impact on their human rights, and have raised the following immediate needs:

- That steps be taken to mitigate the significant disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 on Indigenous peoples in Manitoba.
- That individuals residing in congregate living facilities, including personal care homes and correctional facilities, should not experience an erosion in their human rights, including their right to have their basic needs met and their right to access health care and essential services on an equal level with others.
- That steps be taken to ensure that any protocols or decisions made with respect to the allocation of limited critical care services during the COVID-19 pandemic conform with human rights law, including the fundamental principle of non-discrimination.
- That enforcement measures should not disproportionately impact racialized communities, people experiencing houselessness and poverty, and people with disabilities.
- That steps be taken to address the impact of COVID-19 on people who use substances, including steps to ensure that people who use substances have access to harm reduction services and resources, access to a safe supply of

substances and medication, and are not negatively impacted by enforcement measures.

- That public health measures aimed at containing the transmission of COVID-19 do not result in an erosion of the equality rights of persons with disabilities.
- That decisions related to the distribution of vaccines be driven by efforts to protect the most structurally disadvantaged communities, including older peoples, persons with disabilities, incarcerated peoples, Indigenous and racialized communities, and people facing houselessness.
- That steps be taken to immediately publicly release disaggregated data on COVID-19 and equity indicators, including race and ethnicity identifiers, so that our health system and community stakeholders can identify populations at heightened risk of contraction or transmission of COVID-19, and deploy health resources in a manner that ensures equitable access to public health protections for all Manitobans.

“While we focus on vaccine distribution and pandemic recovery planning, it is critically important that we do not lose sight of those communities that are still struggling with the disproportionate burden of this illness,” said Sharma. “We call on governments and decision-makers to centre these actions and principles in their responses to the pandemic, to ensure we build back from COVID-19 stronger together.”

For a copy of the report, please visit www.manitobahumanrights.ca

For media inquiries, please contact hrc@gov.mb.ca.