

Background

QUESTION PERIOD NOTE**NOTE POUR LA PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS**

Date:	September 29, 2000
Classification:	FNIHB PROTECTED / PROTÉGÉ DGSPNI

Title/Titre:

**SOCIAL DYSFUNCTION IN THE INNU COMMUNITY OF UTSHITMASSITS
(DAVIS INLET), LABRADOR - UPDATE**

Subject - Highlights/Sujet - Points saillants:

What is Health Canada doing to address the continued social dysfunction in Davis Inlet?

Source/ Source:

FNIHB Official/ représentant de la DGSPNI

Suggested Reply/Réponse suggérée:

- **Health Canada continues to provide assistance and resources to Davis Inlet to facilitate Innu-designed approaches to healing, including counselling and crisis intervention.**
- **The new solvent treatment center in Sheshatshui will help Davis Inlet to deal with ongoing social issues.**
- **A joint committee - the Mushuau Innu Healing Committee - composed of federal and provincial officials and co-chaired by the Chief of Davis Inlet and senior federal officials, has also been established to develop a comprehensive action plan to address current and longer term impacts of the health and social problems faced by this community.**
- **Work continues on the relocation of Davis Inlet community members to an area where better infrastructure will be in place to support the healing process.**
- **Santé Canada continue de fournir de l'aide et des ressources à la communauté pour faciliter l'application des principes de guérison innus, y compris les services de counseling et les interventions**

d'urgence.

- **Le nouveau centre de traitement de l'abus de solvants de Sheshatshui permettra à Davis Inlet de faire face à ses problèmes sociaux.**
 - **Un groupe de travail mixte, composé de cadres fédéraux et provinciaux, et présidé par le Chef de Davis Inlet et des cadres supérieures fédéraux, a été mis sur pied afin d'élaborer un plan à long terme pour traiter les principaux problèmes de santé et les problèmes sociaux auxquels la communauté de Davis Inlet doit faire face.**
 - **Les efforts continuent pour réinstaller les membres de la collectivité de Davis Inlet dans une région dotée d'une infrastructure mieux conçue pour appuyer le processus de guérison.**
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Background - Status/ Contexte - Situation:**SEPTEMBER 27, 2000 UPDATE**

There has been a deterioration in the situation at Davis Inlet in the last several days. In particular:

- As a result of a dispute over the results of a job selection process, representatives of one faction in the community went on a rampage and vandalized many public buildings including the Health Commission offices;
- To date there are no reports of violence directed at people although at least two residents have reported hearing shots fires;
- Last week federal and provincial officials of most stakeholder departments met in St. John's to develop a new strategic approach to the social problems in Davis Inlet. At the meeting officials agreed to focus on: (1) restoring law and order in Davis Inlet; (2) ensuring a safe service delivery environment; (3) recommending to Minister Nault that the Innu be registered and reserves be created; and (4) instituting third party management in Davis Inlet both to regain financial and program accountability and to use the process as a vehicle for capacity-building among the community leadership.

Regional officials have been advised that CBC is in the community, so media coverage can be expected.

In addition you should be aware that, on October 17, 2000, the Auditor General of Canada will table his report on the audit of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) with respect to the Davis Inlet Relocation Project. The report will be critical of two aspects of the project: (1) cost overruns and delays in the physical relocation; and (2) failure to address the "social pathologies" in the community. Health Canada is indirectly implicated in the report in that this Department is one of the lead stakeholders in healing-related activities surrounding the relocation. A full briefing note, media lines and Qs&As are being prepared in anticipation of this event.

GENERAL

The Mushua Innu of Utshimassits describe the multiple dysfunctions within their community as being attributable to several inappropriate external interventions, including the church and governments in general, but specifically to programs such as education, the justice system and health and social services. Furthermore, unlike almost every other Aboriginal community, the Mushuau Innu have had to adjust to the full influence of a different society within a single generation.

In this light there is a basis for their claim that the loss of their traditional beliefs and values, the undermining of their culture, the decline of the influence and role of the

elders, their separation from the land and sense of self-sufficiency, and the idleness associated with a sedentary lifestyle in an isolated community, all have contributed to the serious problems impacting individuals and their families. These include high rates of alcohol abuse by adults (up to 80%), child neglect, suicides, sexual abuse, domestic violence, abuse of solvents by youth and the failure to correct substandard and unhealthy living conditions. The gravity of these problems was dramatized by the deaths of six neglected children in a house fire in 1992 and by the near death of a group of children sniffing gasoline in 1993.

SOLVENT ABUSE

In reaction to the solvent abuse crisis of 1993 the Federal Government provided both immediate measures (placing 19 children in a healing program) and longer term measures including extensive training of Innu people as addictions counsellors and intervention workers, additional resources for health-related professionals, and enrichment of community programs for recreation and sport. The agreement of the Federal Government to relocate the community represents an expenditure of more than \$100 million but, more importantly, a challenge to ensure that the various forms of social dysfunction are not transported to the new community.

After an initial delay, the work on basic community infrastructure is now underway. The complexity and magnitude of the capital project are, not unexpectedly, using up a great deal of the attention and energy of both community leaders and government officials.

As a result, the community of Utshimassits at the present time is a mix of achievement and pressing problems. The relocation project has brought employment opportunities. The welfare caseload is low and there is no shortage of money for individuals and families. On the other hand, there is a continuing problem with alcohol and solvent abuse, family neglect including the supervision of children, vandalism, and the deterioration of family and community properties.

To address the social and health problems, the Region has worked closely with Sheshatshiu, the other Innu community in Labrador, to put in place a residential, community-centred healing program for the treatment of families and individuals. This centre which opened May 2000 plays an important role in the healing of youth from Davis Inlet.

Efforts to improve the recreational programs in Davis Inlet as an approach to decrease the incidence of gas sniffing are currently underway.

A community-based working group with representatives from Health Canada, DIAND,

HRDC, Newfoundland and Mushuau Innu has been tasked with planning for and funding the various components of the Innu Healing strategy for 2000/2001. Over the preceding months, Health Canada (FNIHB) staff have been negotiating with Davis Inlet representatives on the nature of the additional healing programs and the level of funding the department will support this year. Agreement in principle has been reached and the Innu are in the process of preparing the proposal on which the funding is to be based. A fund of over \$400,000 has been established in the Atlantic Region for this purpose.

LEADERSHIP

Davis Inlet has been plagued by a lack of good, continuous leadership. With the election for Chief likely to be called for October, there will have been four Chiefs in that community in the space of 15 months. This has been detrimental to the development of well-functioning governance structures to guide the healing process and this political discord has focussed much of the community's attention away from more pragmatic issues.

Several months ago the community's Healing Coordinator left Davis Inlet for another position in Goose Bay. This has left a major gap in the leadership of health programming in the community which has not yet been filled. In addition, there are rumours circulating in the community that several more important members of the Davis Inlet staff will be leaving shortly. This has affected project momentum and will further slow down the progress in the community.

A tripartite committee involving multiple federal and provincial partners as well as community leaders has been established to focus on community healing. It is tasked with identifying and supporting measures to make the existing community a place of healthy living in anticipation of the relocation to a new site. Because of the community's preoccupation with other issues, and the loss of the community's Healing Coordinator, this committee has not met since last Spring.

ACCOUNTABILITY AUDIT CONCERNS

As a result of an audit of the Mushuau Innu contribution agreements of 1998/99 received in June 2000 it has become apparent that accountability is becoming an issue in Davis Inlet. To address this, staff have taken a number of steps including initiating discussions with the Innu leadership, strengthening the reporting requirements in the contribution agreement and deciding to fund "additional" programs as projects rather than on an ongoing basis to ensure that accountability requirements are met before additional funds flow to the community.

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