



For Immediate Release: March 17, 2022

## Statement on the Death of Heather Winterstein

On December 9, 2021, Heather Winterstein, a young Indigenous woman, went to the emergency room at St. Catharine's General Hospital, suffering from pain and feeling unwell. After being sent home with Tylenol, the pain became far more severe and Heather called for an ambulance. After finally being taken back to the ER, she was left in the waiting room, unattended and unmonitored, until she collapsed and died. Heather, who was 24 years old, died from Necrotizing Fasciitis (Strep A), a condition that is entirely preventable if treated properly.

Heather was an Indigenous woman with family ties to Six Nations (Cayuga). Our community mourns her passing and the Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council expresses our deepest condolences to her family and loved ones.

Heather's family has justly called for a coroner's inquest and an investigation without delay into the hospital's apparent neglect of Heather. SNGREC is adding our voice to theirs in supporting this call. There are numerous important questions that need to be answered, both for Heather's family and for the public. Why was her pain ignored? Why are stories like hers so common? There must be a full analysis done of why the system failed Heather Winterstein, and how this can be prevented in the future to protect all Indigenous people seeking medical care.

Medical treatment must never be denied to anyone, but freely given to everyone from all walks of life, races, and cultures. Anything less is sub-standard care. This is not the first time we have heard stories of Indigenous people being neglected and mistreated while seeking medical care and as a result, many Indigenous people harbour mistrust towards the healthcare system. This is not acceptable. Persistent concerns about anti-Indigenous bias in the healthcare system must be taken seriously and addressed, and comprehensive measures taken to prevent any further mistreatment and loss of life.

Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council condemns the neglectful treatment of Heather Winterstein and fully supports the call for an investigation into the Niagara Health System and Niagara EMS and a coroner's inquest. Furthermore, we call upon all levels of government to take meaningful action to address anti-Indigenous bias in our healthcare system.

Our thoughts, prayers, and good medicine will continue to remain with Heather's family as we join them in calling for justice for Heather Winterstein.

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