



# Ontario Native Women's Association

December 18, 2017

Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hepburn Block  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Hoskins,

I am writing to you regarding my concern for Delilah Saunders, a 26-year old Inuk woman seeking access to a life-saving liver transplant in Ontario, and more broadly on the experience of unique systemic discrimination in the health care system in Ontario, which Indigenous women and girls experience.

Denying imperative healthcare on the basis of prior or current health status, including conditions resulting from the consumption of alcohol, is unacceptable. As Amnesty International noted last week, denying this necessary treatment to Delilah is both “discriminatory and inconsistent with Canada’s international human rights obligations.” Particularly concerning is the fact that Delilah’s health was compromised previously by acetaminophen, which she used to cope with pain stemming from poor dental health, caused by limited access to adequate dental care in her home province (Newfoundland and Labrador).

Heartbreakingly, her relapse into alcohol use was triggered by her traumatic experience testifying at the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in October. There were too few adequate services available to her after her testimony in Membertou. Given Ontario’s commitment to reconciliation and improving outcomes for Indigenous women and girls, the Province’s move to avoid the provision of necessary supports for Delilah is alarming.

Additionally, Delilah’s specific case is emblematic of broader health inequity experienced by Indigenous peoples in Ontario, namely that Indigenous people experience disproportionately poor health outcomes caused by the continuing impact of colonialism on their lives.

As a partner to your ministry at the Urban Indigenous Health Table, we have worked together in the spirit of reconciliation and co-development to undertaking work to alleviate impacts like this on Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. Your government has undertaken many initiatives to end the systemic violence and marginalization of Indigenous people in Ontario,

[www.onwa.ca](http://www.onwa.ca)

Head Office: 150 City Road • P.O. Box 15-684 City Road • Fort William First Nation, ON P7J1J7 •  
Toll Free: 1-800-667-0816 • Phone: (807) 577-1492 • Fax: (807) 623-1104

and I ask that you take special consideration to review how transplant policies, and other health policies that may include the refusal of care, may be unfairly impacting Indigenous peoples, who may use alcohol or other substances to cope with the experiences of colonialism.

I offer the support of ONWA to your ministry to undertake this important work in a timely manner. Please contact Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, Executive Director, at [cmcyrette@onwa.ca](mailto:cmcyrette@onwa.ca) to discuss follow-up actions required.

Respectfully,



Dr. Dawn Harvard  
President

cc: Family and Friends of Delilah Saunders  
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau  
The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier, Government of Ontario  
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
The Honourable Dr. Jane Philpott, Minister of Indigenous Services, Government of Canada  
Trillium Gift of Life Network  
The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres  
The Métis Nation of Ontario  
The Native Women's Association of Canada  
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada

[www.onwa.ca](http://www.onwa.ca)

Head Office: 786 Grand Point Road • P.O. Box 15-684 City Road, Fort William First Nation, ON P7J1K3 •  
Toll Free: 1-800-667-0816 • Phone: (807) 577-1492 • Fax: (807) 623-1104