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NEWS RELEASE

VON MEETS WITH MANITOBA GRAND CHIEFS TO DISCUSS FIRST NATIONS HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 15, 2007 (Ottawa, ON) — A positive step to address community health issues for First Nations in Manitoba was taken on May 14, 2007, when Ted Fontaine, National VON Canada Board member and Dr. Judith Shamian, President and CEO of VON Canada, met with Grand Chief, Chris Henderson, Southern Chiefs Organization Inc., Frank Whitehead from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Colon Bailey from the Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin.

“We all know of the critical health issues that Canada’s First Nations People are facing – they are dire and their needs are immediate. I am proud that VON is taking a leadership position to partner with the communities in Manitoba to identify the specific issues so solutions can be found,” says Ted Fontaine, VON Canada Board member.

The meeting with the Manitoba Grand Chiefs follows an historical Memorandum of Understanding, signed on May 8, 2007, by National Chief Phil Fontaine, Assembly of First Nations, Ms. Janice McCallum, Chair of the VON Canada Board of Directors and Dr. Judith Shamian, President and CEO VON Canada, committing the two organizations to undertake joint efforts in the development of strategies and initiatives intended to advance and improve First Nations’ health status.

The Grand Chiefs in Manitoba met with VON Canada to start a dialogue and solicit views on needs and issues in Manitoba communities. Some of the key issues include the lack of nurses to provide the scope of care necessary to meet the needs of First Nations People; lack of transportation and poor access to care; mental health and concerns over increasing health issues – specifically chronic disease i.e. diabetes and heart disease.

It is vital to understand the determinants of health in these communities. Many of the realities in Manitoba First Nations communities include poverty, poor housing, lack of access to healthy and nutritious foods and damaged environments - water, land and wildlife. All of which create a situation that threatens the health of First Nations People.

VON and the Manitoba Grand Chiefs have forged a relationship which will continue to develop as together they build strong partnerships with non-governmental agencies to improve the health and quality of life for First Nations People in Manitoba.

VON is dedicated to being a leader in the delivery of innovative comprehensive health and social services and to influencing the development of health and social policy in Canada to improve the health of all Canadians, including its First Nations People. VON is a national health organization and registered charity offering a wide range of community health care solutions that meet the needs of Canadians from coast to coast. VON is committed to continuous quality improvement and is accredited by the Canadian Council of Health Services Accreditation.

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