



The uncharacteristically warm weather in southern Manitoba has continued into the new year and I hope everyone is getting outside and continuing to responsibly protect themselves and those around them. I'm proud of all the Citizens who've listened to the guidance of your Métis Government by staying close to home and sticking to the COVID-19 guidelines.

Traditionally, the Métis Nation values being able to get together and celebrate holidays and occasions of importance. Due to COVID-19 we cannot gather, and I know this is hard for many. Citizens are missing their families and friends. I thank you all for being careful during the Christmas season, a time when many of us look forward to spending time with loved ones, celebrating the season and enjoying the aromas from the kitchen. Because of your care and caution, the new year has started with lower infection rates in the south. This trend and the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines give us hope that we are moving as a province toward the right pathway.

Canada has stated that we may not see full vaccination until December of this year. Your Métis Government will not allow the provincial government's ongoing refusal to include us in their Indigenous plan for vaccine rollout pass unnoticed. We are actively talking with the federal government and raising awareness in the media about our needs and the province's poor planning. We will keep fighting to get vaccines earmarked for our Elders and other vulnerable community members, and for inclusion in the province's Indigenous plan.

Pallister continues to try and mislead and deceive Manitobans, and indeed all Canadians, by blaming the province's inefficient vaccine rollout on the fact that his government is consulting the Métis. This is simply not true. We have not been included in any meaningful committees or conversations to date. The only committee we've been invited to handle the communications strategy. There is no way we can create an effective communications strategy to encourage vaccination, without being included in the vaccine deployment strategy.

Recently, we also announced that we will be offering a Métis-specific testing site for our Citizens in and around Winnipeg. This testing site offers our people faster test results, allowing them to return to their families and workplace faster than before. To get a test done, Citizens must contact the MMF ahead of time, by calling 1-833-390-1041. We'll assist you with making an appointment and tell you where you need to go for the test.

Since the province has yet to sign a data-sharing agreement with your Métis Government and is not telling us when our Citizens get COVID-19, we hope to use the data from the testing site to know when our Citizens are sick, so we can work with their families and provide wraparound services and support.

In spite of our efforts, we remain in the dark about the province's plan for the Métis people. We have been talking with several federal ministers to ensure that they are aware of the lack of a COVID-19 plan for our people. These ministers have communicated their support of our demand to include a distinct approach for the Métis people in Manitoba's vaccine rollout strategy. I am hoping that I will be able to provide you with some positive updates on this in the coming weeks.

The big game season for our Métis Harvesters has now come to a close, in accordance with our Laws of the Harvest. Having written and published laws around our harvest is so important – not only does it allow us to share our traditions, it also allows us to share sustainable harvesting practices with Manitobans.

Congratulations to the Captains of the Hunt and the Métis Citizens for a successful, sustainable, and safe big game season. They made sure our Elders and vulnerable community members received meat from the harvest and don't have to worry about food security during this pandemic. It's this kind of community spirit that makes the Métis who we are.

We are proud of all our Citizens who participated in the Conservation Moose Harvesting Initiative in the Duck and Porcupine Mountains. The province tried to scare our people into hiding and not going out to practice our inherent right to Harvest, but they failed. I thank all the Harvesters who went out with pride and showed everybody what it means to be Métis.

Of course, as noted earlier, big game season and the Conservation Moose Harvesting Initiative closed on January 15. As we move forward, we are going to be working toward conducting our own moose population surveys and working with the First Nations to create a joint Indigenous-led wildlife authority. I look forward to being able to provide more reports on this in the near future.

Let's continue to honour and celebrate our traditions. I also know that more and more of our people are waking up to their heritage and the sacrifices of their ancestors – I look forward to continuing to build your Métis Government to help all our Citizens in all aspects of their needs.

I can't end this message without again thanking our Local and Regional leadership and staff, who've continued to work hard to keep the Métis Nation safe and supported. I would also like to thank the MMF's COVID response team for starting 2021 by working just as hard for our Citizens as they did last year. Not just safe but fed and well.

To date, your Métis Government has made and delivered more than 10,000 hampers to our Métis families and Elders to make sure all Citizens have enough to eat, even in the middle of a global pandemic. The hamper team plans to continue delivering hampers with an eye to delivering more in the coming months.

Thank you, the Citizens of our Nation, who believe in your Métis Nation and your Métis Government. Stay safe, look after each other as much as you can from a distance, and be confident we'll keep fighting for you.

If there's something you need to keep safe and well during this time, reach out to your Métis government. We have your back.

MMF Support Line helps Métis Citizens cope with mental health problems

MENTAL WELLNESS SUPPORT LINE

The Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) is pleased to announce the launch of a toll-free Mental Health Wellness Support Line that will operate from 7 am to 11 pm daily.

1-833-390-1041
7AM to 11PM Daily



Last month, the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) launched a toll-free Mental Health Wellness Support Line for Métis Citizens operating from 7 am to 11 pm daily, with plans of an eventual extension to 24 hours a day.

The Support Line was created to address hardships that have surfaced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Since the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MMF has been on the front line, offering economic, social, and other supports to our Métis Elders, students, families, entrepreneurs, and vulnerable Citizens,” said Frances Chartrand, MMF Minister of Health & Wellness, in a December 16 news release.

“Though mental health has always been a part of the strategy – from hampers to our wellness checks we have been conducting – we now have a dedicated line to support our Citizens. We hope that with this additional support, Métis Citizens will feel supported and comforted by their Métis Government and access this crucial resource,” said Minister Chartrand.

In the release, the MMF acknowledged that many individuals are experiencing increased mental anguish in addition to dealing with pre-existing mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression, as well as an increase in alcohol and drug consumption.

“We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes to lives, including changes to daily routines, financial stress, and social isolation,” said Minister Chartrand.

“As a result, individuals may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, and loneliness, as well as mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression.”

Minister Chartrand referred to a 2013 study regarding depression, anxiety disorders, and health care utilization in the Manitoba Métis population conducted by the MMF in collaboration with the University of Manitoba as a follow-up to the 2010 “Metis Atlas.” The report found that “Métis are 1.2 times more likely to have anxiety disorders, and 1.3 times more likely to be diagnosed with substance abuse compared to all other Manitobans.”

The report states that “The lack of differences in health services use suggests that Métis may not be receiving adequate treatment for depression and/or anxiety disorders at the primary care level. This finding may suggest that Métis are diagnosed later and because of that require hospitalization.”

“All of these factors clearly identified the need for culturally relevant Mental Wellness Supports,” said Minister Chartrand.

The Support Line is operated by a Manitoba-based Métis-owned Therapy Corporation, which offers Citizens culturally appropriate mental health supports in both English and French. The service is available to all MMF Citizens, including Youth and Elders.

“Mental health issues do not discriminate on age,” said Minister Chartrand. “Youth are adapting to distance learning and losing their extracurricular activities, and our Elders are also being forced to adapt to staying home and not

being able to visit loved ones or go out and enjoy their favourite activities at Active Living Centres and Halls.”

Minister Chartrand said there has been a steady response from Citizens, with the number of callers varying depending on the day of the week and time of day. The age of the callers has ranged from Citizens in their 20s to those in their late 70s. There have been an equal number of male and female callers.

“The primary issues Citizens are calling about include depression, anxiety, challenges relating to physical health, and isolation,” said Minister Chartrand.

The Support Line is completely confidential, and the therapists do not share any identifying information about the callers.

“They report anonymized data only including whether the individual is calling from an urban or rural area, the region they are calling from, the caller’s gender and age, and the broad reason for the call,” said Minister Chartrand. “This information serves to inform other programs or services that our Citizens require. We are never made aware of the caller’s name, address, phone number, or the details of any conversation. It is very important that our Citizens are confident that their personal Health Information is being kept confidential.”

Minister Chartrand added, “This line was developed with the specific needs of Métis Citizens in mind. Please take full advantage of this service.”

The Support Line can be reached toll free at 1-833-390-1041 between 7 am and 11 pm daily.

MMF allows non-binary gender identity option on Citizenship and Harvester cards



The MMF's decision to include a non-binary option on Citizenship and Harvester cards was sparked by activism from the Two-Spirit Michif Local, whose logo is shown here.

In December 2020, the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) announced that Métis Citizens will now be able to identify as non-binary on their Citizenship and Harvester cards. The MMF Cabinet unanimously adopted the resolution, making the MMF the first Métis Government in the Homeland to allow a gender-neutral option on identity cards.

"This is an important step that will further advance the rights of the Métis Nation," said MMF President David Chartrand in a December 18 news release. "With this resolution, we hope that our Métis Citizens who do not identify as male or female will embrace this as a welcome into our Community and our Nation."



The Two-Spirit Michif Local's Executive Committee (L-R): Chantal Fiola (Secretary-Treasurer), Charlotte Nolin (Vice-Chair), and Nicki Ferland (Chair).

"The MMF has always encouraged our People to believe in themselves, and be proud to be themselves," said President Chartrand. "We want our Citizens to be themselves and not have to hide or be denied their identity. We want this resolution to remind all our 2SLGBTQ+ Citizens that you are embraced in our Community and your Métis Government, and we are proud of who you are."

The decision was also sparked by activism from the Two-Spirit Michif Local, the first local for Métis 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in the Homeland, which has registered over 30 Citizens since it formed in 2019. The Local has hosted a beading workshop, offered community support funding for 2SLGBTQ+ Métis Citizens to alleviate pressure during the recent holiday season, and is planning a Two-Spirit Michif National Summit, which is on hold until the end of the pandemic. The Local also plans to offer language workshops, ceremonies, and other cultural programming for Citizens, as well as opportunities to gather virtually.

"We strive to provide a safe and welcoming home for 2SLGBTQ+ Métis Citizens," said Nicki Ferland, Chair of the Two-Spirit Michif Local. "We are a space where 2SLGBTQ+ Métis Citizens in Manitoba can have a voice on Métis and 2SLGBTQ+ matters, and contribute to decision-making in our Nation."

"I would like to commend the Two-Spirit Michif Local leadership for their continued activism on behalf of our 2SLGBTQ+ Citizens," said President Chartrand in the release. "The MMF has been on the leading edge of this topic for a number of years among Indigenous



peoples. All Canadians must have their basic Human Rights respected."

"Our local executive was surprised and heartened by the unanimous vote in support of this historic resolution," said Ferland. "Several of our local members were instrumental in championing non-binary gender identity on MMF identification cards. It is no small thing to have your gender identity recognized and affirmed by your government. We are so grateful to President Chartrand and the entire Cabinet for their leadership and support on 2SLGBTQ+ matters. We would also like to acknowledge (Minister of Citizenship & Natural Resources Leah LaPlante), who brought the resolution to Cabinet."

"The MMF has been a great supporter of the Two-Spirit Michif Local and 2SLGBTQ+ Métis Citizens, generally," added Ferland. "For example, the MMF provided generous financial support to the 2018 regional two-spirit gathering hosted by Two-Spirited People of Manitoba in collaboration with founding members of the Two-Spirit Michif Local. We look forward to continuing to work together to support the needs and interests of 2SLGBTQ+ Métis Citizens in Manitoba."

The MMF's announcement also comes after federal and provincial governments adopted gender-neutral options on official government-issued identification. The federal government announced a new gender "X" option on Canadian passports in June 2019, and the provincial government announced a non-binary option on birth and death certificates in April 2020 in response to a 2019 ruling from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

All Citizens who already have their cards can request to have their card changed and reprinted at no cost to them. Citizens who would like to change their gender identity on their Citizenship or Harvester cards can contact the MMF's Central Registry Office at 204-586-8474 or their MMF Region.

MMF launches Commercial Fisher Net Program

The Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) is offering fishing nets to Manitoba Métis commercial fishers as a way to reduce operating costs during a challenging time. Through the MMF Commercial Fisher Net Program, the MMF will provide Métis commercial fishers up to 10 nets each for a total of up to 1,000 nets given out through the program.

“We have about 250 nets right now, so we’re giving up to five nets away to as many commercial fishers as we can, and then the rest will be given out once next order comes in,” said Jenny Ruml, Fish and Fish Habitat Coordinator for the MMF’s Energy, Infrastructure and Resource Management department.

Donovan Boudreau, a Métis commercial fisher in St. Laurent, has received five nets through the MMF Commercial Fisher Net Program.

“Starting off, I only had like 10 nets, and these extra nets that I’m getting from the MMF are going



Donovan Boudreau, a Métis commercial fisher in St. Laurent, has received five nets through the MMF Commercial Fisher Net Program.

to really help me out,” said Boudreau, who fishes pickerel on Lake Manitoba. “It’s going to help me out that way, having more nets and bringing me in more fish.”

The single mono nets are 100 feet long, with 10 different mesh sizes available:

- 3 7/8 x 30
- 4 x 10

- 4 x 12
- 4 x 16
- 4 x 20
- 4 x 30
- 4 ¼ x 10
- 4 ¼ x 12
- 4 ½ x 16
- 2 ¼ x 20

Ruml said the demand for the program has been high since its launch at the beginning of January, with over 117 applications to process. “There’s been a huge response and everyone’s really excited,” she said. “I hope that they’ll be patient with us as we’re rolling the program out.”

The MMF Commercial Fisher Net Program was also created in response to the numerous challenges commercial fishers have experienced in the last few years.

The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) stopped purchasing fish in March 2020 due to a drop in demand from COVID-19-related closures. Located in Winnipeg, the FFMC buys, processes, and markets freshwater fish caught for commercial sale in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories from over 1,700 fishers. While the FFMC did reopen for the winter season of 2020, commercial fishers were unable to sell fish during the summer months – to one of the only market streams for commercial fishers in Manitoba.

“A lot of their challenges have come from the closures of FFMC; this is their livelihood, and if FFMC isn’t buying, then it is challenging for them to make a living,” said Ruml.

The federal government provided financial supports for fishers through the Fish Harvester Benefit and Grant Program. The application period for the first benefit payment ran from August to October 2020.

“It’s been really tough on them this year, and in the past couple of years, with market prices decreasing,” said Ruml.

Additional supports

The Commercial Fisher Net Program comes in addition to the MMF’s \$4.4-million Métis Community Business Fund, which provides COVID-19 economic relief to Métis community collectively-owned businesses and microbusinesses, including fishers, that were previously ineligible for COVID-19 economic relief. Announced in September 2020 in partnership with the Louis Riel Capital Corporation (LRCC), an MMF affiliate, the fund provides a \$10,000 non-repayable financial contribution distributed from the federal government’s Indigenous Community



Boudreau fishes pickerel on Lake Manitoba.

Business Fund to eligible Manitoba Métis-owned and controlled businesses.

Through the MMF Entrepreneurship Initiative, facilitated by the LRCC, the MMF also offers a Commercial Fishers Program, providing up to \$25,000 in capital, while also providing a non-repayable grant up to 25 per cent of the maximum loan amount of \$5,000. The open loan includes flexible payment terms up to 60 months and can be paid down at any time with no penalty for additional principal payments. Through the initiative, the LRCC can also provide guidance and advice to any Métis fisher that would like to expand their business or put together a business plan.

For more information on these additional programs and to apply, visit lrcc.mb.ca, call 204-589-0772, or email info@lrcc.mb.ca.

To apply for the MMF Commercial Fisher Net Program, please email Jenny Ruml at jenny.ruml@mmf.mb.ca, or call the MMF at 204-586-8474.