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## MAJOR BLITZ AGAINST INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN PUVIRNITUQ AND SALLUIT

**Kuujjuaq**, **June 11**, **2018** – Health care workers and nurses took to the streets in Puvirnituq and Salluit as part of a major blitz against infectious diseases in both communities.

Nunavik's Health Committees, community health teams, the Inuulitsivik Center and the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services united their efforts to address two recent outbreaks in Nunavik.

Teams composed of community health workers and nurses went door to door to offer screening for tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases. During three blitz interventions in Salluit and Puvirnituq the health teams also picked-up expired medication and surveyed the population on various health topics. Most houses and workplaces were visited as part of a vigorous community response to recent infectious disease outbreaks.

"Can we mobilize the community to decrease the transmission of infections? I think the answer is yes. Not only that...but community mobilization is something Inuit know how to do. It's a great strength that we have," said Tommy Saviadjuk, a medical interpreter in Salluit.

In Nunavik, when infections are detected, the teams in place have reached very high standards in terms of delivering treatment to individuals who are known to be contagious (For example: 94% for gonorrhea, 100% for syphilis, 100% for active TB).

The challenge facing Nunavik communities is to rapidly detect infections when they first appear. This is particularly true of infections that most often have no or few symptoms, like syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and tuberculosis in sleeping or early phases. After public health officials and stakeholders in Salluit and Puvirnituq met to analyse the data and best practices in other regions, a decision was made to take an aggressive stand against infectious diseases and to involve everyone.

"It's been amazing seeing this activity unfold; the response of both communities was remarkable. Not only did almost everyone agree to get tested, most people expressed pride in participating. This activity is something we definitely want to offer to all the communities in the future!" said Linda Godin, Director of Nursing at the Inuulitsivik Center.

Barriers to care include fears regarding confidentiality; in communities where everyone knows each other, just walking in the clinic may require a dose of bravery. Stigma may also be associated with certain infections. During the recent door to door blitz, both the old and the young participated in great numbers in the screening initiatives to allow detection of those infected but also to show that getting tested is normal and to lift the stigma on those who seek care.

"This is about making our community healthier, yes, but it's also about changing mentality. There is a lot of stigma around some infections, that stigma needs to end. People who get checked and get treated are not the problem: they are the solution," said Kulu Tukalak a member of the Health committee in Puvirnituq.

The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services is a public agency created in 1978 under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. It is responsible for nearly the entire Quebec territory located north of the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel in terms of the provision of health and social services for the inhabitants of the 14 communities.

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Source: Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

For information: Rhéal Séguin

Communication Officer, NRBHSS

Tel.: 819 964-2222 or 1 844 964-2244 ext. 223

Cell.: 418 564-6974

rheal.seguin.ciussscn@ssss.gouv.qc.ca