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PRESS RELEASE – EMBARGOED TO 4PM (EST) on 2016 MAY 19TH

Canadian Society of Circumpolar Health Calls Attention to the High Rates of Suicides in the Canadian North

HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, NL - The paper published in the *American Journal of Public Health* on 2016 May 19th on suicide mortality in Newfoundland and Labrador revealed substantial disparities in suicide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in the province. The results showed that over a 17-year period, the suicide rate in Newfoundland was 8 deaths per 100,000 person-years; by contrast, the age-standardized suicide rate in Labrador Inuit communities (Nunatsiavut) was 165 deaths per 100,000 person-years, which was 20 times higher than the rate in Newfoundland. Similarly, for the Innu First Nations communities in Labrador, the age-standardized suicide rate was 114 deaths per 100,000 person-years. This was 14 times higher than the suicide rate in Newfoundland. This study's results are similar to other research that has consistently shown high rates of suicides in northern and Indigenous populations in Canada and elsewhere in the circumpolar world.

This study further underscores the need to close the gap on the persistent health inequity in northern Canada. Dr. Jong, President of the *Canadian Society of Circumpolar Health*, believes it is important to provide evidence to governments and health and social service agencies that draws attention to urgent public health issues. "It is necessary to place resources where they are most needed and where we have the opportunity for the biggest impact" says Dr. Jong.

He further explained that it is critical that federal and provincial stakeholders collaborate with Indigenous governments, organizations and communities to integrate community knowledge and research evidence to improve health. He commented, "Today, I am hopeful because we have a federal government that is placing emphasis on reconciliation. We also have a new provincial government in Newfoundland and Labrador with the potential to collaborate with federal counterparts and Indigenous groups in Labrador to bring about progress. I hope both the federal and provincial health ministers will find time to visit Labrador."

Dr. Jong stated that communities in Labrador and elsewhere in the North have developed innovative solutions to promote mental wellness and resiliency. "We need to long-term

investments and collaborative partnerships to help sustain local initiatives and foster policy reform.” Dr. Jong noted that organizations such as Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) have taken a leadership role in suicide prevention by advocating for interventions that acknowledge the impact of residential schools and community relocations, while also building on community strengths and providing equitable access to mental health care. ITK is currently preparing a National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy, set to be released in summer 2016.

Dr. Jong concluded by stating, “Suicide is preventable. I am convinced that by working together we can find solutions rooted in justice and equality, that both foster hope and create better futures for youth and communities across the North.”

To access the article:

Pollock, N. J., Mulay, S., Valcour, J., & Jong, M. (2016). Suicide rates in Aboriginal communities in Labrador. *American Journal of Public Health*. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303151

<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/>

Media guidelines for reporting on suicide:

We encourage any media coverage on suicide to follow the internationally recognized guidelines for reporting:

<http://reportingonsuicide.org/wp-content/themes/ros2015/assets/images/Recommendations-eng.pdf>

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Background:

The Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health is a charitable organization dedicated to promoting research, exchanging knowledge and fostering greater awareness and responsiveness to the health issues of circumpolar people.

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