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INCLUDE THE NEEDS OF DISABLED PERSONS AS A MAJOR AGENDA ITEM IN THE UPCOMING NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NATIVE HEALTH.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare has agreed to convene a National Conference on Native Health, and plans are already in motion to hold this conference in 1982. The Special Committee is concerned that the agenda of this conference include the needs of disabled Native persons as a central focus. There are three reasons for this:

Inevitable Connection: There is enough evidence to demonstrate the direct relationship between poor health conditions and the widespread incidence of disability among Native people. In fact, it is estimated that in some Native communities, more than 40% of the population lives with a disability of some kind. Therefore, in talking about health problems and solutions, the conference must inevitably discuss the needs of disabled Native persons.

Cost Evaluation: The key to major progress in eliminating the incidence of disability among Native persons lies in increasing the effectiveness of preventive health services in Native communities. The Federal Government is presently going through a period of cost evaluation of its

health care programs for Native people. The Special Committee is worried that this evaluation will favour the curative side of health care over the preventive, because it is easier to measure the cost effectiveness of care given to disabilities which do occur than of care which prevents them from happening. By making the needs of disabled Native persons a central agenda item, the importance of preventive health care will be underscored at the conference.

Wholistic Approach: The natural tendency of traditional western medicine is to treat the health field as something separate from social, economic, political and cultural considerations. Yet within Native communities, it is obvious to anyone who has visited or lived within them, that the high incidence of health and disability problems, are direct consequences of these other factors.

Therefore, the analysis of Native health issues must start from an attitude which incorporates a wholistic view of community conditions. The Special Committee feels that by focussing on the needs of persons who are disabled, the conference will

be able to maintain an understanding of health issues which takes into account an individual's relationship with all aspects of daily community life, and how these either support or undermine healthy lifestyles.

Representation: With these considerations in mind, the Committee recommends that the official participation in the conference should be extended to representatives of Native people who can speak knowledgeably about all aspects of community life, including housing, employment, education, transportation and recreation—as well as about matters related strictly to health services.

