



Press Release: Aug. 7, 2007

Inuit Health Survey starts in Nunavut **Coast Guard Icebreaker *Amundsen* arrives in Sanikiluaq**

(SANIKILUAQ, NUNAVUT) – The Canadian Coast Guard Ship *Amundsen* arrived on schedule dropping anchor today in the Nunavut community of Sanikiluaq in Hudson Bay’s Belcher Islands.

The *Amundsen* had left port on the first leg of its 3-leg medical and scientific voyage from Quebec City on July 26 as it made its way around the Hudson Bay’s Nunavik region towards the Belcher Islands, located in the southeast corner of the bay.

Among its observers was the President of the Nunavut Association of Municipalities – Mayor Elisapee Sheutiapik of Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. She thanked the hamlet’s people for such a warm welcome to the Health Survey team in their first community.

She also thanked the captain and crew of the *Amundsen* for bringing the ship safely to harbor. The Mayor of Sanikiluaq, Eli Kavik, indicated the community would welcome the Health Survey team and the crew of the *Amundsen* with a local feast, throat singing, traditional dancing and even a hip-hop performance. “We are excited that the *Amundsen* is coming here to Sanikiluaq, the first tour in Nunavut,” he said.

Mayor Sheutiapik said that the community of Sanikiluaq was in full support of the health survey, noting it would bring numerous benefits in the future, including improved health care to the isolated 750-member community, the only inhabited island community in an area of 13,000 square kilometers.

“This is an incredible example of Inuit and non-Inuit working together, using northern understanding and traditional knowledge and southern methods and scientific knowledge,” she said.

“I believe it is incredibly important because of the vital information we will get from it.

“Inuit will receive so many benefits about their health that we can learn to find a way that will prevent us from having poorer health. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The results from those Inuit households selected for the survey will tell you a lot about health in your community and in your age group,” said Sheutiapik, noting the results can be used to lobby the federal government for a better health care system.

Dr. Geraldine Osborne, Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health, Department of Health and Social Services, GN states that “while this is a very useful research study it is also important to remember that it does not replace but rather complement the medical services available at every health centre in Nunavut”.

About 12 per cent of adult Inuit will be tested and asked to answer a questionnaire dealing with nutrition, food access, household overcrowding and mental health. The total of respondents Nunavut-wide ensures the study will be scientifically accurate. An advance team of people, working with community research assistants, has been in the community for the past two weeks to set-up appointments for the ship, where participants will be transferred for a 3-hour visit by barge or helicopter depending on the weather and sea conditions.

Meanwhile, in the Kivalliq community of Rankin Inlet, residents have noticed a flurry of activity as organizers of the Inuit Health Survey have arrived for a training session in the next few days. Land team members – groups of 3 research workers including a registered nurse – will travel ahead of the ship to prepare communities for the *Amundsen's* arrival in the next seven weeks and to administer the health and household questionnaire.

Among the specialized tests aboard the *Amundsen* are tests for high blood pressure, stroke, heart risk and diabetes. Particularly diabetes has affected many aboriginal communities in Canada and researchers and medical professionals are evaluating and monitoring its prevalence in Inuit communities, says Professor Grace Egeland, principal investigator for the Inuit Health Survey.

“We are concerned about this possibility of Inuit becoming more susceptible to these kinds of diseases. At the same time, we hope this study will give us a sense of how they have coped and survived so well in the Arctic – a testament to their ingenuity and ability to adapt to changing conditions,” said Professor Egeland of McGill University.

After consultation with northern groups, especially NAM, it was determined that all of Nunavut would be surveyed, along with Inuvialut participation in Nunakput next year and that of Nunatsiavut in Labrador. The study is the largest ever in Nunavut, and almost the largest in the circumpolar world, except for Greenland which is also surveying its indigenous people.

“We are very excited,” said Professor Egeland. “Reaching this point has been the culmination of a lot of hard work by dedicated staff at McGill and the Centre of Indigenous People’s Nutrition and Environment and our northern partners, especially at NAM, the Government of Nunavut’s Health and Social Services Department and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc,” she said.

In the community of Arviat, an advance team also arrived in the past 10 days, to help community research workers prepare that community and smaller hamlets along the coast for the arrival of the *Amundsen* this month.

The *Amundsen* will travel to Baffin communities in September and the Health Survey crew will finish in Arctic Bay.

The Inuit Health Survey is funded by the Government of Canada through International Polar Year funding. The survey’s partners also include Arctic Net.

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For more information during the week of August 6th , contact Professor Grace Egeland at Inns North In Rankin Inlet at (867) 645-4955 or Gary Gee, health survey communications manager, at the Siniktarvik Hotel in Rankin Inlet (867) 645-2807 or Allison Flynn, Communications Officer, McGill University at (514) 398-7698.

