### 2 Nunavik residents die with COVID-19

The health board did not

identify the two people nor

did officials say when they

died. But officials said nei-

ther had any significant con-

tact with anyone currently in

like to extend its condo-

lences to the families, the

community and those close

to those who passed away,"

Since the beginning of

the pandemic, there have

been 41 cases of COVID-19

among Nunavik residents;

one of those is considered

had lived in a Montreal

long-term care facility for

many years died of the virus

in April 2020, though she

wasn't counted in the re-

A Nunavik woman who

the news release states.

"The NRBHSS would

the region.

Residents were infected with the virus in hospital in the south

**Nunatsiag News** 

Two Nunavik residents infected with COVID-19 have died, the region's health board announced Feb. 25.

Both residents were hospitalized in the south for other health issues and were infected with COVID-19 while in hospital, the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services said in a news release.

The health board said it couldn't confirm if the two Nunavimmiut died as a result of the virus, but because both residents had the virus at the time of their deaths, they will be counted among those who have died of COVID-19.

These are the first two official COVID-19 deaths of Nunavik residents.

gion's statistics.

Just over 4,000 Nunavimmiut have been vaccinated against the virus so

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, an unusual cough, difficulty breathing, a loss of smell or taste, nasal congestion or a sore throat, should call the region's COVID-19 health line at 1-888-662-7482 or their local health centre.



Nunavik health officials say two Nunavik residents infected with COVID-19 have died in a southern hospital. (File photo by Sarah Rogers) ውርልት ላ ማላ የኮርጋር ሲት ዕና ኦናኮር ኦናጋር ᠘ᢩᠵᢆᠣ ᠘ᡶᢩᠵᢆᠣ ᠣᡏ᠙᠘᠊᠘-13-L ᠙ᡎᢋᡧ᠙ᡊᡧᡚᡧᡚᡧ᠐᠙ᡊᡏᠮ 'b' ዾ፞፞፞፞፞ፚ ዻ፟፞ኇ፞፟ኇ፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞ኇፙፙዺኌኈ፝Γ፝૰. (ዻን፞፞ዾዀ፝፟፟፟፟፟ጏዺነፅ ሰጐ ካፚና ና፞ንጚነ)

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# Nunavik's cost-of-living program over budget

Sarah Rogers

Nunavik's cost-of-living program is facing a \$3.9-million deficit after most of its subsidy measures went over budget in 2020, the Kativik Regional Government's treasury department told regional council during meetings last week.

Between 2019 and 2025, the Quebec government will pay \$115 million in subsidies to Nunavik — or roughly \$19 million a year — to help offset the high cost of living in the region.

The Kativik government administers that funding through six measures: elders' assistance, airfare reduction,

country food support, harvesting equipment and household appliances, and gasoline as well as food and other essentials.

Most of those programs exceeded their budgets last year, said the regional government's treasury department director, Chahine Noujeim.

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Not surprisingly, the airfare reduction program stayed under budget in 2020, due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions. Nunavimmiut only claimed \$200,000 of its annual \$600,000 budget last year.

But the Kativik government must work to balance those budgets before the Quebec funding agreement

Dage Lebente

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ends in 2025, Noujeim said.

"We have to tackle this now," he told regional councillors. "Otherwise, we'll be forced to cut these programs later on."

The department wouldn't release its individual subsidy budgets for 2020, pending an April audit.

In the meantime, the Kativik government has met with Makivik Corp. to come up with a plan to keep those subsidies under budget this year, with the goal of maintaining the measures as much as possible.

The harvesting equipment program, for example, went 25 per cent over budget last year, Noujeim said. Under that measure, Nunavimmiut can claim up to 40 per cent of the cost of equipment or household appliances up to a maximum of \$400.

Going forward, the Kativik government is proposing to stop accepting claims once the subsidy has reached its budget for the year.

That may not be an option for some of the region's other subsidy programs, like its food subsidy, which accounts for 60 per cent of Nunavik's cost-of-living funding.

"This is the measure that is helping the most," Noujeim said.

That subsidy won't change, he said, until they have seen the newest assessment from Laval University researchers who are tracking data around cost-of-living

measures and needs in Nunavik.

That research is what helped secure the region's cost-of-living funding from Quebec in the first place.

In 2016, Laval researchers tracked spending across the region and found that Nunavimmiut pay 48 per cent more for store-bought food than residents of southern regions, and up to 23 per cent more for transportation, clothing and personal care.

### 'There's still a lot of work to be done'

That price monitoring program is ongoing. Latest research looks at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pricing in Nunavik.

Laval researchers presented the results of their latest research to Kativik government council Feb. 24 It shows that the prices of certain grocery items increased in Nunavik during lockdown measures between March and May 2020.

Laval researcher Gérard Duhaime acknowledged that those increases were "slight" and comparable to increases seen globally, as measures like sanitization and distancing drove up costs.

"But even with the costof-living subsidies, these gaps are still there," Duhaime told regional councillors. "We're still not at the same price as other regions in Quebec.

"There's still a lot of work to be done."



—Legal Services Board of Nunavut—

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