To: Local Authorities and First Nations’ Governments

RE: Group Lodging during COVID-19

By way of this memorandum, the Province is providing clarification to assist Local and First Nation’s Governments in planning to respond to emergencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective as of 19 March 2020 until rescinded, EMBC is strongly advising against the use of Group Lodging facilities under the Emergency Support Services (ESS) program to support those evacuated from their homes due to floods, fires or other emergencies.

The British Columbia Emergency Management System (BCEMs) provides direction to response priorities, the first three being:

1. Ensure the safety and health of all staff and responders
2. Save lives and reduce suffering
3. Protect the public

This measure is being undertaken in alignment with the BCEMs priorities and recommendations for gathering size provided by the Provincial Health Officer. This will limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19, which has the potential to impact our responders, evacuees and the general public.

What is a Group Lodging Facility? A Group Lodging facility is a location designated by a Local or First Nations’ Government which provides dormitory style accommodation for people displaced from their homes as a result of an emergency or disaster. Group lodging facilities are usually in a community centre, school gymnasium or arena.

What are alternative options for lodging during large scale events? If evacuees are unable to source their own lodging, EMBC recommends the use of hotels for evacuee lodging needs. It is recognized that some hotels may be operating at reduced capacity or closed altogether in response to the COVID-19 situation. Local and First Nations’ Governments should monitor these closures and work to identify potential lodging gaps to their respective EMBC Regional Office. EMBC will work with Local and First Nations’ Governments, Hotels and Tourism British Columbia to arrange alternative operations options for these facilities. EMBC will assist with making block bookings and arranging payments to hotel suppliers as noted below. If no other accommodation options are available, LA/FN Governments should work with PREOCs/EMBC Regional staff and the health system to ensure evacuees are supported in accordance with current health measures.

Are other categories of ESS support impacted by this? Evacuees housed in alternative lodging options may require a different support delivery mechanism to ensure health and safety are protected. ESS
responders should follow recommendations provided by their Local or First Nations’ Government, WorksafeBC and Provincial Health Authorities. EMBC will continue to provide direction and clarification as the situation evolves.

**Are cost recovery mechanisms available from the Provincial Government for alternative lodging arrangements?** Local and First Nations’ Governments should not be encumbered by the response costs of these alternative facilities. Local and First Nations’ Governments should work with their respective EMBC regional office or activated Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC) to arrange alternative accommodations, including arranging for financial reimbursements.