



OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Federal Pre-Budget Submission | 2019

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Summary of Recommendations

1. Grow the infrastructure and capacity of Friendship Centres to strengthen their roles as key economic drivers in their communities, best positioned to propel the urban Indigenous workforce forward in the coming generation.
2. Commit to a housing rights framework that includes concrete action on urban Indigenous housing needs led by urban Indigenous service providers, recognizing that safe and adequate housing for all urban Indigenous people is the foundation to fuller participation in communities and will lead to economic stimulus.
3. Strengthen the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Strategy to meet urban Indigenous communities' needs by supporting high-quality supports and interventions that connect Indigenous people to the changing economy.
4. Invest in a national strategy to end violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ community members that is co-developed with Indigenous partners and focused on culture-based supports, education and training opportunities, and income security that will lead to empowerment and self-determination.
5. Engage Indigenous organizations in the co-development of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. This framework must centre on the principle of Indigenous control and support quality culturally relevant child care in urban Indigenous communities.
6. Co-develop legislation that supports sustainable investments into Indigenous languages revitalization in urban centres.
7. Reorient the approach from a 'nation to nation' relationship with Indigenous people to one in which UNDRIP serves as the sole basis for any federal framework regarding the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights.

Introduction

The 28 Friendship Centres across Ontario are driving change in their communities and growing their local economies. Their potential for growth represents an untapped opportunity to increase Canada's competitiveness and international reputation as a nation that invests in Indigenous innovation and Indigenous-led community development.

The Friendship Centre Movement in Ontario contributes to more engaged and prosperous urban Indigenous communities. Friendship Centres contribute to community prosperity through advancements in Indigenous social innovation and community wellbeing, greater workforce participation, and economic growth. Longitudinal studies have revealed the generational impact that Friendship Centres have had in Ontario. In 2007, the Urban Aboriginal Task Force study found that 22 percent of urban Indigenous people in Ontario had moved out of poverty to become middle income earners.¹

These results point to the incredible impact that the Friendship Centre movement has had on the national landscape. This is also what sets our organization apart. Friendship Centres are a vital part of strong and vibrant multi-generational urban Indigenous communities. They are change-makers in their communities. As culture-based service delivery experts, Friendship Centres are uniquely positioned to drive change that achieves measurable results and contributes to Canada's competitiveness.

About the OFIFC

Founded in 1971, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) works to support, advocate for, and build the capacity of member Friendship Centres across Ontario.

Emerging from a nation-wide, grass-roots movement dating back to the 50's, Friendship Centres are community hubs where Indigenous people living in towns, cities, and urban centres can access culturally-based and culturally-appropriate programs and services every day. Today, Friendship Centres are dynamic hubs of economic and social convergence that create space for Indigenous communities to thrive. Friendship Centres are idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals, they are sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are, and they are safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports.

¹ Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, et al. (2007). "Urban Aboriginal Task Force: Final Report." 60. Retrieved from: <http://www.ofifc.org/publication/urban-aboriginal-task-force-ontario-final-report>

In Ontario more than 85 per cent of Indigenous people live in urban communities. The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly-growing population through programs and initiatives that span justice, health, family support, long-term care, healing and wellness, employment and training, education, research, and more.

Friendship Centres receive their mandate from their communities, and they are inclusive of all Indigenous people – First Nation, Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit, and those who self-identify as Indigenous.

Pre-Budget Submission 2019:

Grow the Infrastructure and Capacity of Friendship Centres

By investing in Friendship Centres, the federal government will be unlocking the potential of local economies that include a strengthened urban Indigenous workforce and more engaged community. Across Ontario, the spaces and land bases that Friendship Centres occupy require investments to ensure that they meet the growing needs of urban Indigenous communities and can accommodate the increasing involvement of non-Indigenous partners.

As it stands, Friendship Centres are struggling to meet service demands and build on partnership opportunities with infrastructure that the urban Indigenous community has long outgrown. Specific and targeted investments toward larger and more adequate Friendship Centre facilities, cultural and recreation spaces, education infrastructure improvements, health and safety upgrades, retrofits, repairs, and enhancements are needed. By growing the infrastructure and capacity of Friendship Centres, the federal government can take an active role in improving conditions for Indigenous communities that will result in economic stimulus.

Include Urban Indigenous Priorities within a Housing Rights Framework

By enshrining the right to housing in legislation, the federal government has an historic opportunity to transform structural and systemic barriers that prevent or preclude urban Indigenous people from fully realizing this right on an individual and collective basis. The trend toward increased urbanization of Indigenous people in Canada mirrors the trend experienced by Indigenous people globally. This phenomenon has meant that in Canada, urban Indigenous people experience homelessness and are under-housed in such magnitude that the crisis inhibits urban Indigenous people's full participation in their communities, education and training, the local labour force, and as a result, the national economy.

Access to safe and adequate housing for all urban Indigenous people is the foundation to fuller participation in communities and will lead to economic stimulus. A tailored solution that responds to the global movement toward urbanization and includes urban Indigenous housing delivery expertise will set the federal government apart from other nations on the international stage. As the government considers its legislative approach, it is recommended that the government engage directly with urban Indigenous people, communities, organizations and governance institutions to ensure that urban Indigenous priorities are included. Additionally, we would reassert the importance of developing a National Urban Indigenous Housing Strategy through meaningful and strategic engagement with urban Indigenous people, communities, organisations and governance institutions.

Strengthen the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Strategy

The renewal of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ISETS) presents an opportunity to strengthen our education to employment supports in Friendship Centres and to ensure greater outcomes. We believe that a focus on high quality pre-employment training and education supports through the delivery of ISETS will have a significant impact in urban Indigenous communities. Study after study has shown that closing the postsecondary education gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will result in tremendous returns to society as a whole, including increased revenue from economic activity as well as cost savings in health, corrections, and other social costs. A comprehensive study by the National Indigenous Economic Development Board found that closing the economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people would result in a \$27.7 billion increase in Canada's GDP.²

By supporting high-quality educating and training supports and interventions that connect Indigenous people to the changing economy, ISETS can be positioned as a strategic lever to both improve the economic conditions of Indigenous people while also bettering the national economy and Canada's competitiveness.

Invest in a National Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ Community Members

As the national Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women completes its mandate, the OFIFC recommends the establishment of a national advisory and implementation body that includes representation by Indigenous partners with expertise in the area of ending violence in communities. A national advisory and implementation body would be responsible to co-develop with government a national strategy to end violence against Indigenous women and girls that is informed by the results and recommendations of the National Inquiry.

² National Indigenous Economic Development Board. 'Reconciliation: Growing Canada's Economy by \$27.7 Billion.' Retrieved from: http://naedb-cndea.com/reports/naedb_report_reconciliation_27_7_billion.pdf

The OFIFC urges the federal government to begin engaging with Indigenous partners on the structure and mandate of a national advisory body in an effort to act swiftly as soon as the National Inquiry completes its final recommendations. It is recommended that the government invest in a national strategy to end violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ community members that is co-developed with Indigenous partners and focused on income security, economic stability, and culture-based supports that will lead to empowerment and self-determination.

Co-develop, Implement and Invest in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework

A national child care strategy, including investments in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCCF), is key to increasing gender parity in the labour market and growing the national economy. In Ontario, every \$1 in child care spending generates \$2.27 in economic output.³ Additionally, research has shown that the single most important investment into gender equality is the establishment of a national universal child care program that guarantees universally affordable and accessible child care.

The IELCCF presents an opportunity to support the expertise of urban Indigenous service delivery experts like Friendship Centres in the development of culturally responsive child care systems within the fabric of the Friendship Centre Movement. In order to support a culturally-relevant approach to child care delivery, it is recommended that as part of the IELCCF the federal government prioritize increasing Indigenous early year's educators, training culturally competent early year's educators and administrators, creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and increasing urban Indigenous-focused early year's funding to Indigenous organisations.

Support Indigenous Languages Revitalization

It is critical that the federal government draft legislation that supports concrete and sustainable investments into Indigenous languages revitalization including acquisition, learning, and curriculum development that are critical to their survival within this generation. Support for the important role that Friendship Centres play in promoting, preserving and enhancing Indigenous languages within an urban context should be prioritized within national Indigenous language revitalization efforts.

³ Robert Fairholm, Economic Impacts of Early Learning and Care (Milton: The Centre for Spatial Economics, 2011).

Reorient the Approach to a ‘Nation to Nation’ Relationship with Indigenous People

It is necessary for the federal government to take an approach to a framework for Indigenous rights that holds legitimacy for the high number of Indigenous people and communities who remain unrepresented through an exclusive ‘nation-to-nation’ relationship model. Conceptions of Indigenous nationhood limited to the political categories of “First Nations, Métis and Inuit” replicate colonial structures and fail to reflect the cultural diversity of Indigenous nations, Indigenous people’s right to self-determination, and the reality of the Indigenous governance landscape in urban communities. Furthermore, this approach stymies non-Indigenous Canadians’ understanding of Indigenous people’s cultural diversity, traditions, and contemporary histories.

In the province of Ontario, 85 percent of Indigenous people live off-reserve, in cities and towns. The Friendship Centres in Ontario support this large and growing contingent of Indigenous people who practice their cultures and exercise their rights within an urban context. The trend of increased urbanization holds true across Canada. Urban Indigenous communities today are multi-generational in origin and may organise themselves in distinct ways that reflect culture-based approaches to governance and their inherent rights to self-determination, as affirmed and recognized in UNDRIP. The OFIFC therefore recommends that UNDRIP serve as the sole basis for any federal framework regarding the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights.