

# **Submission for Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**



**By: Chiefs of Ontario**

**August 7, 2020**

## **Introduction**

The Chiefs of Ontario are continually seeking opportunities to establish and build healthy functioning relationships with both the Federal and Provincial governments. By working collectively with Ontario First Nation communities and all levels of government, the goal is to build prosperous and healthy First Nation communities in Ontario. Through this pre-budget submission, the Chiefs of Ontario is seeking to enhance sector-based investments that will facilitate continued growth and development to achieve healthy, functional and economically stable communities, creating an environment for effective dialogue and ability to achieve mutual goals. The following recommendations in the following submission indicate only some of the many additional supports and needs of First Nations in Ontario.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Federal Affairs Sector**

- **Recommendation 1:** The Government of Canada provides a special social infrastructure investment of \$250 million over 3 years to upgrade, enhance, and support research on broadband and connectivity infrastructure for First Nation communities in Ontario.

### **Education Sector**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government implement \$271 Million to upgrade current education facilities and replace schools that are over 50 years old.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government increase funding in the amount of \$12 million per year for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) in the Ontario region with a commitment to support the growth escalator for the PSSSP.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government increase funding in the amount of \$3 million per year for the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program in the Ontario region.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the government immediately separates education capital from the Community Infrastructure Capital Budget and restricts the use of this budget to education capital projects exclusively.

## **Health Sector**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$530 million for First Nations Health Infrastructure.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$1.65 million for Mental Health and Addictions.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$1.5 million for Data Management.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$71 million for Ontario First Nations Digital Health.

## **Emergency Management Sector**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$3.15 million for Equipment and Materials purchases.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$1.5 million for Training Programs.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$650,000 for Regional Technical Forums.

## **Rationales**

### **Federal Affairs Sector Rationale**

The current COVID-19 experience has exposed the significant lack of reliable internet, bandwidth and connectivity issues which continues to impact First Nations on many social and economic levels. A strategic investment to enhance and upgrade, replace and plan for broadband and connectivity will improve educational, healthcare, entrepreneurship and employability opportunities and outcomes as we adjust to a new reality and remote workplace situation. The ability to access reliable internet has become a human right and the need for a national Indigenous broadband strategy on the development and implementation for the most vulnerable communities has become essential.

It is important that this investment for Ontario First Nations be offered outside the current Universal Broadband program with a refreshed eligibility criteria to support efforts on an individual community and regional scale for First Nations. This investment would allow for those communities in a position to upgrade, or enhance, to do so, while others in earlier stages the opportunity to plan. This investment would complement current provincial efforts through the ICON program, on enhancing and upgrading broadband and connectivity in Ontario that is already in place.

### **Opening Statement on Ontario First Nation Education Needs in Ontario**

There is an urgent and immediate need for additional investments in capital and infrastructure funding to support First Nations education to alleviate safety concerns and provide funding for renovations, new schools and teachers.

### **Education Sector Funding Investment Rationale**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

*That the government implement \$271 Million to upgrade current education facilities and replace Schools over 50 years old.*

A recent analysis undertaken by the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation (OFNTSC) indicates that First Nations in Ontario requires a minimum of \$271 million to upgrade current education facilities and replace schools over 50 years old. This figure does not take into account those communities that wish to have a school constructed in their community.

**Recommendation 2:**

*That the government increase funding in the amount of \$12 million per year for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) in the Ontario region with a continued commitment to support the growth escalator for the PSSSP.*

The Ontario Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Regional Office had an estimated \$10 million shortfall for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) funding. A shortfall of this magnitude affects approximately 892 prospective and existing First Nations post-secondary education students in Ontario.

This problem will persist in future years and requires a long-term solution. Lack of resolution towards this issue creates instability and prevents First Nations from planning adequately, ultimately threatening students' ability to succeed. Ontario needs a commitment to continue to support the growth escalator, without that there will be a major disruption to First Nations students and prospective students in Ontario. This would include lower enrollment, potential dropouts, and financial, emotional and mental stress on First Nations students and families. Therefore PSSSP funding must be increased

**Recommendation 3:**

*That the government increase funding in the amount of \$3 million per year for the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program in the Ontario region.*

Over the past 30 years, Ontario has worked to ensure that First Nations are represented in post-secondary education and institutions. Over the years Ontario has received relatively stable amounts of funding, though it has been recognized that while funding has been stable it has not kept pace with the development that has taken place in Ontario. The \$1.6 million cut will critically limit the growth of Indigenous education in Ontario. The options provided by Indigenous Services Canada penalize Ontario for its size and development and unfairly penalizes First Nations students in the Ontario Region.

Funding must be increased beyond restoring funding to previous levels. An additional \$3 million per year for the Post-Secondary Partnerships program will allow greater growth of First Nation driven and culturally relevant learning and improve outcomes for First Nations post-secondary students in Ontario.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

*That the government immediately separates education capital from the Community Infrastructure Capital Budget and restricts the use of this budget to education capital projects exclusively*

It is recommended that ISC immediately separate education capital from the Community Infrastructure Capital Budget and restrict the use of this budget exclusively to education capital projects. Further, it is recommended that alternatives to cash financing of First Nations schools, including debt financing and public-private partnerships be explored as mechanisms to reduce the capital backlog. Finally, ISC must make the funding amounts, as outlined in the OFNTSC analysis of capital funding requirements for First Nations in Ontario, available as soon as possible.

The capital regime within the Federal system does not separate capital funding for education from other capital funding for community housing and infrastructure. Education facilities as a category of the National Priority Ranking Framework used by the federal government are unable to attain a “Priority One” classification. Figures provided by ISC Ontario region indicate that overall the First Nations in Ontario received 12.3% of the 2017-18 allocation of Targeted Infrastructure Treasury Board Vote 10 Budget even though we have 22% of the First Nation population. Moreover, during that time, First Nations in Ontario only received 1.9 % of the total targeted allocation for education.

#### **Health Sector Funding Investment Rationale**

##### **Recommendation 1:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$530 million for First Nations Health Infrastructure.*

Climate change has made it difficult to transport materials into the northern remote communities and this causes high costs for delivering materials. Opioid crises in communities have risen and there is a need to have more programs, wellness centres, and nursing stations that are equipped to handle these crises. There is a need for specialized mental health workers and nurses to assist with overdoses. These workers need to be grounded in the communities so that communities can heal.

**Recommendation 2:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$530 million for First Nations Health Infrastructure.*

There is a greater need for harm reduction measures and crisis response services at the First Nation community level across Ontario as new and emerging trends in dangerous drug use are placing a strain on existing services. The opioid crisis in First Nations in Ontario is impacted by the lack of sufficient services and preventative measures. There is a need to have more culturally based services and mental health service providers to deal with this crisis.

**Recommendation 3:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$1.5 million for Data Management.*

Funding is needed for community consultation on the development of the First Nations Health Research and Data Management Centre. There is a need for processes that support sovereignty and governance over First Nations' data, locally and regionally.

**Recommendation 4:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$71 million for Ontario First Nations Digital Health.*

The most common requirement is the lack of sustainable funding. The systemic absence of a comprehensive strategy to conceptualize and operate effective funding programs is a barrier to initiating, launching, and sustaining any First Nation eHealth initiative. Fragmentation in funding contributes to excessive effort and redundancy developing funding applications, soliciting meetings with potential funders, and reworking failed applications. This ultimately deters and demoralizes communities and distracts them from the real work of launching worthy projects that can contribute to the overall goal of optimizing care to First Nation communities.

## **Emergency Management Sector Investment Rationale**

### **Recommendation 1:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$3.15 million for Equipment and Materials purchases.*

First Nations Emergency Services have historically been underfunded and do not meet the needs of communities to appropriately respond to emergency situations. The \$3.15 million would go towards the Bulk Fire Equipment Purchase Program, the Community Fire Prevention Material Purchase Program, the Water Treatment Plant Remote Monitoring Equipment Program and the Bulk Fuel Storage Remote Monitoring Equipment Programs.

### **Recommendation 2:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$1.5 million for Training Programs.*

Adequate levels of training are still lacking for those working in First Nations Emergency capacities. The \$1.5 million would go towards Emergency Management Training (Peace-time disasters) Programs as well as the Operations & Maintenance Training Programs. These training programs would help to ensure that emergency responders skills and knowledge are up to date, allowing for better response to emergencies and greater community safety.

### **Recommendation 3:**

*That the government provide funding in the amount of \$650,000 for Regional Technical Forums.*

Regional forums are essential for connecting with First Nations communities across the province to ensure specific needs are being met. The \$650,000 would support the Regional Technical Housing Forum Program, Regional First Nations Technical Service Forum Program, Regional Water & Wastewater Forum Program, and the Regional Asset Management Forum Program. These forums allow for voices to be heard, best practices to be shared and are essential for ensuring the health and safety of First Nations.