

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



**August 5, 2020**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government create a \$3.6 billion capital fund for Indigenous Institutes to ensure Indigenous people have a safe place to learn, rebuild, and commence their journey to economic recovery and employment through education, training, reskilling, and upskilling.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government invest \$120 million over two years in an Indigenous Institutes Digital Infrastructure Program to improve the capacity to deliver required services and on-line learning, due to COVID-19.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government increase annual investments to the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program by \$120 million to support resiliency, the capacity to respond to emergency expenditures, and sustainable programming.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the government create a new Online Learning Fund for the Indigenous Post-Secondary sector for students to successfully pivot to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Recommendation 5:** That the government expedite delivery of the Universal Broadband Fund and the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, with priority for Indigenous communities to support and sustain online learning and remote work environments as part of COVID-19 pandemic recovery and beyond.
- **Recommendation 6:** That the government provide adequately resourced and responsive training programs to support reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning.

## **I. Introduction**

There are over 60 Indigenous Institutes in the Canadian post-secondary landscape, endorsed and/or mandated by First Nation leadership as early as 1971, providing Indigenous Education. Indigenous Education can be broadly described as the skills, experiences and insights of Indigenous people that are applied to maintain or improve their unique livelihood, traditions and languages; passed down from generation to generation; and interwoven with cultural values.

Indigenous Institutes (IIs) in Ontario have worked collaboratively since 1985. Their proven ability to deliver education grounded in Indigenous knowledge and languages with high success rates led to their recognition through the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017. Inherently Indigenous, from curriculum and student services to staff, Indigenous Institutes are a critical piece to the national efforts to rebuild the economy.

Kenjgewin Teg is mandated by eight First Nation communities in Northern Ontario to provide community-based Indigenous education; Indigenous knowledge and languages is foundational within Kenjgewin Teg's lifelong learning vision.

Kenjgewin Teg offers recommendations that highlight how Indigenous Institutes are key partners in Canada's COVID-19 economic recovery due to our unique capacity to engage with Indigenous people and advancing education, training, reskilling, and supporting sustainable labour market participation.

## **II. Support Infrastructure for Indigenous-Led Education and Economic Recovery**

As Canada seeks to reopen the economy and retool business operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, historically high unemployment rates in First Nations and the long-standing differences in socio-economic rates between Indigenous peoples and Canadians will grow larger if new ways of doing business and new investments in skills, education and training are not made in Indigenous-led education. In a recent 2020 report, it is reported that the 2008 recession severely impacted Indigenous employment.<sup>1</sup>

In another 2020 report issued by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), approximately 1.7 million people or 5% of the Canadian population self-identify as Indigenous (First Nation, Inuit and Métis). Adjusting from 2016 census data, as of 2020, one 1 of every 13 people in Canada, younger than 18 years old, are Indigenous. Inequality gaps are larger in rural Canada when compared to urban areas, with approximately 60% of Indigenous people living in rural regions. For example, the gap in rural unemployment rate is 5 percentage points higher than in urban areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada (2020)

Education is paramount to creating a resilient workforce and sustainable communities and it is well-established that post-secondary graduates earn considerably more than those who do not have a post-secondary education. The premium generally remains – or even grows – throughout an individual’s career, resulting in sizeable differences in lifetime earnings (Frenette, 2019).

A 2018 Council of Ministers of Education report re-affirms that high-school dropout rates among Indigenous youth remain high with low transition rates from secondary to post-secondary education. Only 4 out of 10 on-reserve youth receive a grade 12 diploma compared to 9 out of 10 non-Indigenous youth; 44% of Indigenous people attain post-secondary credentials compared to 63% for non-Indigenous people.

Indigenous-led education is the best way forward to support Indigenous learners and their success. Community-based learning opportunities provided by Indigenous Institutes include literacy and basic skills, secondary, post-secondary, and professional development and collectively represent critical components of lifelong learning systems.

**Recommendation 1: That the government create a \$3.6 billion capital fund for Indigenous Institutes to ensure Indigenous People have a safe place to learn, rebuild, and commence their journey to economic recovery and employment through education, training, reskilling, and upskilling.**

Canada’s robust plan to recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19 needs to include strengthening the Indigenous Institutes sector. Canada’s current COVID-19 Economic Response Plan provides for the protection of assets to ensure economic recovery can occur. Individuals, businesses and other sectors have been supported with additional investments but support for Indigenous Institutes in the post-secondary sector have been overlooked.

Financial investments in Indigenous Institutes, as part of Canada’s stimulus strategy ensures Indigenous students continue to have culturally relevant and safe places to learn and pursue a career; enhance all Indigenous Institutes’ ability to advance Indigenous Education and Indigenous-led research for internally driven solutions; and better equips Indigenous Institutes to innovatively respond to future skills development needs and changing labour market demands.

Indigenous Institutes are instrumental to the survival, continuance and repatriation of Indigenous languages and ways of knowing and being; improved participation, success, and educational attainment; advancing reconciliation; and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples as set out in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. For example, Kenjgewin Teg offers a diploma in Anishinabemowin Early Childhood Education, a program situated with balanced perspectives in child development for educators. Accredited programs such as the Anishinabemowin Early Childhood Education program which are inclusive of an Indigenous worldview in teaching and learning are Kenjgewin Teg’s strengths as a community-based and mandated learning organization.

**Recommendation 2: That the government invest \$120 million over two years in an Indigenous Institute Digital Infrastructure Program to improve the capacity to deliver required services and on-line learning because of the global COVID-19 pandemic.**

Access to a stable digital infrastructure environment and its platforms is critical for the business sector to recover from a pandemic environment; to support evolving labour market and business sector needs, the Indigenous Institutes post-secondary education sector equally and critically requires the same stable digital infrastructure investment. Targeted digital infrastructure investments for Indigenous Institutes will sustain Indigenous Education with untapped potential to increase enrolment, training, and labour market participation.

Indigenous learners have high interest and success in programs based on experiential learning; since the COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing measures have disproportionately impacted these programs for learners. Innovative use of technology-assisted resources supporting adaptive learning strategies in program areas can be implemented with additional investments while respecting traditional Indigenous knowledge protocols. New financial investments supporting a common data and reporting solution capable of meeting complex accountability and reporting needs of Indigenous Institutes is also critical.

Kenjgewin Teg continues to support skilled trades labour market shortages in its new Anishinabek Skills, Innovation and Research Centre. Innovation and digital infrastructure investments which support teaching and learning are key features to the development of alternative learning modalities for the skilled trades.

**Recommendation 3: That the government increase annual investments to the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program by \$120 million to support resiliency, the capacity to respond to emergency expenditures, and sustainable programming.**

Indigenous Institutes are safe places for Indigenous learners which support personal identity recovery and act as critical starting points supporting economic development of First Nation communities. Indigenous Institutes are also starting points that launch careers for First Nation community members who live both on and off reserve. To critically respond and continue to adapt to continuously changing internal and external needs of learners, communities, and labour shortages of employers, there is an urgent need for increased investment in the severely underfunded Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP) accessed by Indigenous Institutes.

The PSPP initiative currently promotes program delivery and development of Indigenous Institutes through a competitive process. For 2020-2021, Ontario region has been asked to accept a 35% funding decrease to accommodate funding shifts in other regions. This decrease will only exacerbate the capacity of Indigenous Institutes in Ontario to critically respond.

Demand for Indigenous labour is rising due to a growing Indigenous economy; calls for diversity, equity and inclusion measures are demanded; and recent commitments by Canada to increase procurement to Indigenous firms from 0.32% to 5% now exist. To respond and support this demand, Indigenous Institutes will expand programming that prepares graduates in multiple sectors with skills sets that meet both current and future Industry needs.

Increases to the PSPP initiative accessed by Indigenous Institutes will result in many Indigenous Institutes' learners and graduates continuing their studies in a broad range of professions including trades, health, business, social service, and education. Graduates of Indigenous Institutes are gainfully employed in these various sectors within First Nation territories and play a key role in supporting, building, and sustaining the people and lands of Indigenous communities.

### **III. Support Indigenous Post-Secondary Access to Virtual Learning and Economic Recovery in Indigenous Communities**

**Recommendation 4: That the government create a new Online Learning Fund for the Indigenous Post-Secondary sector for students to successfully pivot to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Recommendation 5: That the government expedite delivery of the Universal Broadband Fund and the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, with priority for Indigenous communities, to support and sustain online learning and remote work environments as part of COVID-19 pandemic recovery and beyond.**

Several government departments and services are mandated to support and enable technology adoption, high-speed internet, and operation and maintenance of digital infrastructure. Investments need to be fast-tracked to ensure the road to recovery leaves no Indigenous community behind. Virtual engagement tools supporting business and learning is critical.

Indigenous Institutes are reporting significant digital challenges due to an immediate switch to online teaching and learning. Key challenges include computer and internet access. An emergency Online Learning Fund equivalent to \$3,000 per student will allow Indigenous students to acquire essential equipment and services for online learning and will complement innovative digital teaching and learning strategies at Indigenous Institutes.

Similarly, access to broadband in rural Northern Ontario, which includes Manitoulin Island, currently pose considerable challenges for effective and efficient remote workplaces and learning engagement opportunities because of inadequate broadband infrastructure and services. Expedited delivery of the Universal Broadband Fund and

the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program with priority for Indigenous communities can immediately address this need.

#### **IV. Expand support for Reskilling and Upskilling**

**Recommendation 6: That the government provide adequately resourced and responsive training programs to support reskilling and upskilling and that creates an effective balance of income support.**

Skills quickly become obsolete. Evidence suggests that most of 2030's future jobs haven't been invented yet. Individuals must develop lifetime skills that enables continuous adaptation, innovation, flexibility and problem-solving capacity. Education and training should not preclude an income. Additional investments in the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program and wrap-around supports such as childcare, transportation, and other supports are essential. Expanding eligibility to all workers under the Canada Training Benefit supports a more inclusive strategy and support for lifelong learning.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Canada's competitive future is dependent on a knowledge economy. Indigenous youth remain Canada's fastest growing demographic. Improving educational attainment outcomes and labour market participation of Indigenous Peoples has tremendous potential to help Canada recover from a global pandemic and improve productivity of growth of the national economy with inclusion of a highly trained and skilled Indigenous workforce. According to a 2019 report "Can't Go it Alone", increased labour market participation rates of Indigenous peoples can contribute almost \$11 billion to Canada's Gross Domestic Product by the year 2040 - a substantial return on Indigenous education investments.