

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESPONSE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS AND  
NORTHERN AFFAIRS:

COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: FROM CRISIS TOWARD MEANINGFUL CHANGE

**INTRODUCTION**

The Government of Canada thanks the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs for the report and appreciates the efforts that have been made to ensure that Indigenous peoples' needs are highlighted and reported on through this pandemic.

As a government, we are deeply concerned with the risks that COVID-19 presents for Indigenous and northern communities. As the pandemic continues to rage across Canada, increases in cases in Indigenous and northern communities are particularly alarming due to long-standing socioeconomic gaps that place these communities at greater risk for severe outcomes related to infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government of Canada has been working in partnership with Indigenous leadership in communities and organizations, as well as with provinces and territories, to implement measures that respond to the risks arising from the pandemic and ensure that no one is left behind. In Saskatchewan, for example, ISC has been supporting community-driven COVID-19 response efforts including: enhanced contact tracing, guidance to support safe school re-opening and community gatherings, and promoting cleaning and disinfection practices to prevent virus transmission.

This Government has made significant commitments to advancing reconciliation and has worked in partnership to advance self-determination, close persistent socioeconomic gaps faced by Indigenous communities and individuals, and to address systemic racism. Significant transformational changes in this regard have included legislation, such as the *Indigenous Languages Act*, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, and the current bill to affirm the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a universal, international, human rights instrument with application in Canadian law and provide a framework for the Government of Canada's implementation of the Declaration.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic happened in the midst of these changes and the Government of Canada continues to work hard to prioritize the transformation of services in close collaboration with Indigenous partners.

Given the intertwined nature of the individual 42 recommendations of the Report, the Government Response is provided via 12 cross-cutting categories that better align to whole-of-government priorities and initiatives. The Government Response is not an exhaustive list of all actions and initiatives undertaken, but introduces specific examples of what Canada is doing to date to address the recommendations raised by the Committee. Included in the specific

---

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the tabling of this response, the status of the UNDRIP bill will be updated if necessary.

examples is the action taken by the Government of Canada from the start of the pandemic in consideration of the many unique challenges faced by Indigenous communities as a result of COVID-19. From the beginning of the pandemic to the announcements of Budget 2021, the Government of Canada has committed over \$4.2 billion to provide Indigenous-specific COVID-19 related supports. Budget 2021 committed an additional \$18 billion of which \$1.2 billion is to continue immediate COVID-19 supports, and the remainder is to continue to address longstanding gaps that have been exacerbated by COVID-19. One of the key flexible COVID-19 related supports is the Indigenous Community Support Fund which was created to be accessible as of April 1, 2020. It has had a cumulative investment of \$1.8 billion<sup>2</sup> to: prevent the spread of COVID-19; provide surge capacity when needed; support elders and at-risk community members; provide mental health assistance and emergency response services; address food insecurity; and support children. This funding also supports Indigenous communities and organizations across the country to provide leadership with the flexibility needed to address their respective unique and immediate needs in response to COVID-19.

In addition to this funding, priorities and commitments were established in the mandate 2019 and supplementary mandate 2021 letters of the Minister of Indigenous Services and other ministers whose portfolios contribute to Indigenous priorities, as well as in: the Speech from the Throne 2020; the Fall Economic Statement 2020; and Budget 2021 that work together to address the connections between the health of individuals, social determinants and the environment in which they live. These commitments and priorities seek to address various social determinants for Indigenous peoples: infrastructure gaps in Indigenous communities; overcrowded housing and housing in need of repair; the elimination of long-term drinking water advisories on reserve; high rates of underlying health conditions; need for access to health care services and vaccines; food insecurity; need for services for women and girls experiencing violence; unemployment; poverty; systemic racism and the legacy of colonialism that all contribute to increased risks for Indigenous populations and greater risk of significant impacts from infectious diseases and pandemics.

Measures that the Government of Canada has been taking to address the determinants of health and health gaps related to COVID-19 follow within the specific responses to the group of recommendations that follow.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Indigenous Community Support Fund was announced on March 18, 2020 with a \$305 million investment. Since that time there have been multiple other investments for the Fund: \$75 million in May 2020; \$305 million in August 2020; \$380 million in November ; and an additional \$760.8 million announced through Budget 2021. On top of these investments, in December 2020 the Government announced that \$30 million of the \$100 million Emergency Food Security Fund was being transfer to ISC from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and was distributed through the Indigenous Community Support Fund.

## Government Response to Recommendations

**Address the need for adequate housing and telecommunications, water and wastewater, and health care infrastructure in Indigenous communities during and after the pandemic (recommendations 1 to 7) and consider measures to leverage infrastructure projects to stimulate the post-pandemic recovery in Indigenous communities (recommendations 40, 41 and 42)**

### Infrastructure:

The pandemic has exacerbated the impacts of infrastructure gaps (including maintenance measures and health care facilities) which place Indigenous communities more at risk to infectious diseases and pandemics compared to other communities in Canada. Infrastructure gaps have hindered responses to the pandemic that are in compliance with public health guidelines (e.g., physical distancing, self-isolation and hand washing).

Long before the pandemic, the Government of Canada had been working hard to address some of these longstanding infrastructure issues and continues to do so. Recently, significant investments made through Budgets 2017 and 2019 continue to support First Nations fundamental infrastructure on reserve until 2026–2027, inclusive of energy, connectivity, roads and bridges, structural mitigation against natural disasters, fire protection, culture and recreation facilities. Further, the Fall Economic Statement in 2020 announced \$25.9 million in 2020-21 to accelerate the Government's 10-year commitment to close the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities by supporting the co-development of infrastructure plans with Indigenous partners, which will help pave the way to address critical needs in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation communities. Budget 2021 went further by announcing distinctions-based investments of \$6.0 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22, with \$388.9 million ongoing, to support infrastructure in Indigenous communities, including:

- \$4.3 billion over four years, starting in 2021-22, for the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Fund, a distinctions-based fund to support immediate demands, as prioritized by Indigenous partners, with shovel-ready infrastructure projects in First Nations, including with modern-treaty and self-governing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation communities.
- \$1.7 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22, with \$388.9 million ongoing, to cover the operations and maintenance costs of community infrastructure in First Nations communities on reserve.

Throughout this pandemic, Canada has also worked with communities to identify and support local surge health infrastructure needs, including to enhance screening, triaging and isolation in case of an outbreak.

National infrastructure programs complement core dedicated funding. This includes investments in drinking water and wastewater systems in First Nations and in Inuit Nunangat through the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund and the Investing in Canada Infrastructure

Program, as well as investments in energy security, broadband connectivity, transportation, and culture and recreation facilities. Additionally, under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, health and education facilities are eligible when they benefit Indigenous populations by advancing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

In response, to the pandemic, the Government of Canada has announced several measures to enhance and accelerate infrastructure funding to help communities respond to the challenges of COVID-19. This includes:

- A new temporary COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure stream, with over \$3 billion available in existing funding to provide provinces and territories with added flexibility to fund quick-start, short-term projects that might not otherwise be eligible under the existing funding streams. Under this stream, Indigenous recipients are eligible for up to 100% in federal cost share funding from the program.
- The acceleration of \$2.2 billion in funding in 2020 under the federal Gas Tax Fund. The Gas Tax Fund includes dedicated funding for First Nations, the Métis Settlements in Alberta, and communities in Inuit Nunangat.
- \$150 million for better ventilation in public buildings to help reduce the risk of aerosol transmission of COVID-19. ISC and CIRNAC will deliver \$30 million of the funds to projects that directly benefit First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

### Housing:

Having access to adequate housing or shelter is a key social determinant of health. Canada has been actively addressing gaps in housing in Indigenous populations to ensure that no one is left behind, however these gaps have been a longstanding issue that require long-term solutions past the pandemic.

Since 2016, the Government of Canada has supported the co-development of three distinctions-based housing strategies that aim to reduce overcrowding and improve household infrastructure contributing to better health outcomes, including reduced incidences of respiratory diseases. Budget 2017 announced \$240 million for housing in Nunavut, \$36 million for Northwest Territories and \$24 million for Yukon. In addition, through Budget 2018, Canada invested \$600 million over three years for First Nations housing, \$400 million over 10 years for Inuit-led housing and \$500 million over 10 years for Métis Nation housing.

With respect to First Nations housing on reserves, Canada has invested more than \$1 billion to the construction or renovation of more than 21,000 homes since 2016.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporations' Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI), created in October 2020 has exceeded its initial target of creating up to 3,000 new affordable homes for vulnerable Canadians. The RHI will now support the construction of more than 4,700 permanent affordable units for Canadian families, including 1,806 units for Indigenous peoples (38% of all units). The Government of Canada also continues to work in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations to advance the co-developed National First Nations Housing Strategy, which was endorsed by the Special Chiefs Assembly on December 5, 2018. This collaboration ensures that

housing and infrastructure reforms target a long-term approach that supports the transition to First Nations care, control and management of housing, in a way that respects regional differences and First Nations' readiness.

In order to ensure that organizations supporting people experiencing homelessness had the tools and interventions needed to prepare, prevent and manage their response to COVID-19, the Government of Canada invested over \$400 million in 2020-21 under Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy (Designated Community, Indigenous Homelessness, Territorial Homelessness, and Rural and Remote Homelessness funding streams). Of this amount, the Government invested over \$56 million specifically to support Indigenous communities' responses to COVID-19.

It is important to note that Indigenous organizations can also collaborate with recipients of COVID-19 funding under other Reaching Home funding streams, including the Designated Community, Territorial Homelessness, and Rural and Remote Homelessness funding streams, to provide services to Indigenous peoples.

#### Internet and broadband:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of access to stable high-speed Internet; this need will last beyond the pandemic. During this pandemic, many people, businesses and services have shifted their activities and operations online to comply with physical distancing requirements, making stable high-speed Internet connectivity necessary to participate in society. All communities, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis require high-speed Internet to access social connectivity, educational resources, economic development opportunities, emergency services and efficient healthcare delivery; however, access to the Internet and to broadband still varies across Indigenous communities. According to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's 2020 Communications Monitoring Report, only 35% of First Nations reserves have access to high-speed Internet at a speed of 50/10 Megabits per second (Mbps), compared with 99% of urban households and 46% of rural households.

Since 2016, the Government of Canada has been investing in First-Nations-led initiatives such as the Pathways to Technology project in British Columbia that benefited eight communities, by bringing broadband connectivity to unserved or underserved First Nations communities. ISC has invested over \$57 million under the banner of the First Nations Infrastructure Fund for 24 connectivity projects (two of which are through Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Connect to Innovate program). ISC is actively engaged with federal partners toward meeting National Connectivity objectives (98 percent of access by Canadians by 2026; 100 percent by 2030). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the First Nations Infrastructure Fund has supported faster Internet speeds on reserve of 50 Mbps download/ 10 Mbps upload and has funded seven connectivity projects worth \$1.1 million.

In addition to this, CIRNAC is working to address Internet and broadband issues in Nunavut. Of the \$19.6 million in immediate funding provided in 2020 to support the Government of Nunavut, Inuit communities and organizations in their response to the pandemic, \$1.3 million is

allocated to expand Internet bandwidth in support of education, remote health care and community response.

Budget 2021 proposes to provide an additional \$1 billion over six years, starting in 2021-22, to the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) to support a more rapid rollout of broadband projects. This incremental funding will allow the Government to move even faster, working with provinces and territories and other partners, to connect Canadians as quickly as possible. In total, including proposed Budget 2021 funding, \$2.75 billion will be made available through the UBF to support Canadians in rural and remote communities, including Indigenous communities. The Government's investments will connect 98 per cent of Canadians across the country to high-speed Internet by 2026, with the goal of connecting all Canadians by 2030. Under the UBF, the Government of Canada established a Pathfinder Service to support applicants, particularly smaller ones and Indigenous communities, to build partnerships, point to potential sources of funding, and navigate the application process. The UBF also includes \$50 million to improve mobile services in areas that will benefit Indigenous peoples.

#### Water and wastewater:

Working in partnership with First Nations communities to improve on-reserve water and wastewater infrastructure, and expanding access to clean drinking water are priorities for ISC, and the Government of Canada has made a commitment to clean drinking water for First Nations on reserve – this commitment remains as strong today as the day it was made.

Significant work has been undertaken in partnership with First Nations since November 2015. More than \$4 billion has been committed in water and wastewater since 2016, of which \$1.5 billion was announced in Fall 2020 to help accelerate the work being done to end all long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves, to better support the operation and maintenance of systems, and to continue program investments in water and wastewater infrastructure. \$309.8 million in acceleration funding has been committed to support projects addressing delays and contributing to lifting the advisories as soon as possible. Of the amount committed, over \$2.5 billion has been invested – infrastructure has been repaired, expanded, or replaced, training has been strengthened across the country, and additional funding for operations and maintenance is being allocated to communities. Partnering with First Nations, 106 long-term drinking water advisories have been lifted as of April 30, 2021 and more than 600 water and wastewater projects have been funded.<sup>3</sup> Further, 180 short-term advisories have also been lifted, ensuring clean drinking water to First Nations and preventing these from becoming long-term.

#### Health infrastructure:

Throughout this pandemic, the Government of Canada has worked with communities to identify and support local surge health infrastructure needs to screen, triage, and isolate in case of an outbreak.

---

<sup>3</sup> These figures will be updated prior to the tabling of the report.

COVID-specific Indigenous infrastructure supports include \$59 million for First Nations to adapt their on reserve community infrastructure to ensure that buildings meet public health and safety measures (e.g., adding hand washing stations, purchasing personal protective equipment for staff, installing signage and barriers to promote physical distancing, and doing safety checks and upgrades to existing ventilation systems). The Government of Canada is also funding temporary infrastructure solutions, hotel rentals or other spaces, and providing support to re-tool existing community spaces to meet immediate needs. As of March 2021, ISC has implemented 631 solutions to support isolation, screening and assessment, or accommodation facilities in response to COVID-19, including 432 temporary structures procured, rented, or deployed, with 53 of those structures stockpiled in regions for rapid deployment to communities as needed.<sup>4</sup>

Budget 2021 committed \$107.1 million over three years, beginning in 2021-22, to continue efforts to transform how health care services are designed and delivered by First Nations communities, \$354 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, to increase the number of nurses and other medical professionals in remote and isolated First Nations communities, as well as \$125.2 million over four years, beginning in 2022-23, to continue to support First Nations communities' reliable access to clean water and help ensure the safe delivery of health and social services on reserve. These funding commitments reinforce the Government's ongoing commitment to improve access to high-quality and culturally appropriate health care for Indigenous peoples.

#### Leveraging Infrastructure to Stimulate the Economy:

The above mentioned infrastructure investments include emergency measures to adapt existing infrastructure to address COVID-19 related needs, but also short- and long-term measures that are the result of planning with Indigenous partners to facilitate closing gaps. A key aspect of careful planning for infrastructure investments is in recognizing that they also can contribute to economic development within communities.

The aforementioned Budget 2021 announcement of \$4.3 billion dollars over four years for the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Fund is a good example of investing in shovel-ready projects that will help stimulate economic recovery. In addition, there are long-term investments that are intended to have significant economic benefits that can also be leveraged in the COVID-19 recovery. Key among them includes the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Initiative recently announced by the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which aims to be a part of addressing the infrastructure gaps in Indigenous communities as well as creating jobs and revenue for communities. This initiative is targeting \$1 billion in investment toward Indigenous community-based projects across five priority areas: clean power, green infrastructure, public transit, broadband and trade and transportation, that are vital to economic growth and environmental protection.

Other recently announced initiatives will support post-pandemic recovery through infrastructure investments in Indigenous communities. The recently launched Green and

---

<sup>4</sup> These figures will be updated / finalized prior to tabling of the report.

Inclusive Community Buildings Program will invest \$1.5 billion to improve the places where Canadians gather, access services, and connect with others in the community, while saving energy, cutting pollution, and offering thousands of good jobs. In addition, Budget 2021 committed to provide \$1.4 billion to top-up the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to support projects, such as wildfire mitigation activities, rehabilitation of storm water systems and restoration of wetlands and shorelines. Both of these initiatives include a minimum of 10% of funding dedicated for Indigenous recipients.

Long-term infrastructure projects that have economic elements are also supported and advanced through the work the Government of Canada does with Indigenous partners, such as the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, launched by CIRNAC in September 2019. The Framework sets out a long-term, strategic vision that will guide the Government of Canada's activities and investments in the Arctic to 2030 and beyond and will better align Canada's national and international policy objectives with the priorities of Indigenous peoples and Arctic and Northern residents.

The Framework was co-developed with Indigenous, territorial and provincial partners, including Inuit. It includes a co-developed policy statement and an International chapter. In order to respect and support Inuit self-determination, the Inuit Nunangat chapter was developed independently as an Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee deliverable. This chapter will help guide how Arctic and Northern Policy Framework goals and objectives are implemented in Inuit Nunangat.

In addition, two territorial governments, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, have independently drafted and released chapters setting out their priorities for new investments and approaches in areas such as economic development, infrastructure, and post-secondary education. The governments of Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have also developed and released a pan-territorial chapter that articulates their common challenges and opportunities. Additional partner chapters could be developed and released in the future, to share other partners' vision and priorities.

CIRNAC and ISC are working with partners to advance transformation and increase self-determination. For example, ISC has provided \$3.1 million to support the development of the First Nations Infrastructure Institute. The Institute could provide standards and capacity supports for Indigenous-led procurement and management of infrastructure through a life-cycle approach. This Institute is part of the way forward to ensuring that Indigenous communities continue to have access to institutional capacity support for infrastructure. ISC is also working with 10 First Nation organizations across the country to develop institutions that are looking to take over departmental responsibilities for infrastructure services (e.g., the Atlantic First Nation Water Authority).

Through short-term, shovel-ready projects that will stimulate recovery, combined with longer term infrastructure planning that is developed with Indigenous partners, based on their



priorities, these infrastructure investments take important strides towards closing the infrastructure gap, as well as strengthening Indigenous economies and communities.

**Identify and address needs for personal protective equipment, rapid testing, COVID-19 data and surge capacity in Indigenous and northern communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (recommendations 8 to 11)**

Public health:

Personal protective equipment (PPE) has been critical to the pandemic response to protect frontline and health care workers, as well as the general public. ISC procures and maintains a stockpile of PPE and hand sanitizer to support health and other essential services in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and settlements in the event of a health emergency, such as COVID-19.

In October 2020, the Government announced a further \$205.6 million to support First Nations communities, which included \$59 million to adapt existing community infrastructure on reserve to meet the needs of the pandemic, such as hand washing stations, PPE, cleaning supplies and upgrading ventilation systems. In November 2020, the Government announced further funding to address immediate needs in Manitoba (\$61.4 million), Saskatchewan (\$68 million), Alberta (\$52 million) and Nunavut (\$19.4 million), which included funding for the provision of PPE for primary care staff (e.g., nurses, paramedics and community workers). In addition, the Government of Canada recognizes the need for isolation hubs in Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Yellowknife for people entering northern regions. In response to this, \$30.7 million (Fall 2020) has been provided to the Government of Nunavut to support the costs associated with operating the four hubs in 2020-21, as well as: ensuring adequate capacity and resources to limit the spread of the virus; address regional challenges related to the pandemic; and work to keep Nunavut residents safe for measures related to costs associated with isolation centers, enforcement, and the protection of northerners in Northwest Territories.

The Government of Canada will continue to support Indigenous communities through the current crisis and into recovery. Budget 2021 allocated \$478.1 million to support the ongoing public health response to COVID-19 in Indigenous communities.

The Government of Canada recognized the need to ensure COVID-19 rapid testing approaches are available to northern, remote, and isolated communities. The Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC's) National Microbiology Laboratory supported the establishment of 234 northern, remote, and isolated testing sites across Canada, deploying 419 testing devices and over 100,000 tests, as well as supporting seven deployments and providing direct support for more than 100 community outbreaks.

Data:

The collection of data about off-reserve First Nations people, as well as in Inuit and Métis communities, falls within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. However, not all provinces and territories collect disaggregated data based on Indigenous identity and race. As a result, there is currently no single authority responsible for gathering and sharing COVID-19 data related to

First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and the data being reported is fragmented. Having access to timely, accurate and complete data is needed for an evidence-informed response to the pandemic.

ISC is working with Indigenous organizations, provincial ministries and research organizations on arrangements to share information in the context of research and programs on COVID-19 as well as to improve First Nations health data held by provinces through data linkages, and related research and statistical analyses purposes.

Budget 2021 identifies an investment of \$73.5 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to continue work towards the development and implementation of a First Nations Data Governance Strategy. Budget 2021 identifies an investment of \$8 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to support Inuit and Métis baseline data capacity and the development of distinctions-based Inuit and Métis Nation data strategies. These investments will help ensure that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis have the data they need to manage the COVID-19 crisis, to respond effectively to future crises, and to increasingly take over a wide range of service delivery responsibilities

Through the PHAC, the coordination of COVID-19 data related to Indigenous communities is being supported by the collection of case data by provinces and territories, who then report case data via the National COVID-19 Surveillance Program. For example, analyses of COVID-19 cases among Inuit individuals are being conducted and validated with the jurisdictions from which the data was received, and aggregate data resulting from this analysis is being shared with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. PHAC has initiated the synthesis of existing evidence about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations in Canada, with input and feedback from members of National Indigenous Organizations.

PHAC is also funding the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, in collaboration with the National Collaborating Centre for Infectious Diseases, to coordinate a national online survey pertaining to pandemic-era health service impacts and needs related to sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections among First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations.

### **Continue evaluating and funding permanent emergency management officer positions at the community level (recommendation 12)**

Difficulties with human resources and administrative capacity negatively affect the ability of communities to be responsive in times of crisis. Budget 2019 provided \$43.7 million over five years to support permanent Emergency Management Coordinator positions, with \$12.98 million ongoing funding from 2024-25, which will result in approximately 96 new emergency management coordinator positions by 2023-2024. The Government of Canada continues to work with Indigenous partners to identify gaps in the current model through which such positions are funded, and to explore the accessibility of the funding. As a result of ISC's partnership approach during COVID-19 with the First Nations pandemic response teams, the Government is looking at how we can build on this going forward.

**Recognize and address the causes of vaccine hesitancy among Indigenous Peoples, and ensure the safe and equitable access to culturally appropriate health and social services by all Indigenous Peoples (recommendations 13 and 14)**

As of April 30, 2021, ISC is aware of at least 661 communities with access to vaccinations underway in First Nations, Inuit and Territorial communities; 369,497 doses have been administered, and of that 107,596 were second doses.<sup>5</sup> Based on Statistics Canada's 2020 population projections, over 59 per cent of adults in First Nations communities, as well as over 72 per cent of adults living in the territories, have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

ISC recognizes that there is history of mistrust of the healthcare system in Canada among Indigenous peoples due to the longstanding impacts of colonization and anti-Indigenous racism. This mistrust can impact vaccine confidence and lead to vaccine hesitancy. The Government of Canada works with a wide range of partners to support the development and dissemination of culturally safe information for Indigenous peoples to make informed decisions about their health care. This includes providing COVID-19 vaccine information in various Indigenous languages, working with Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous organizations to provide culturally safe vaccine sites, and the sharing of best practices related to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government of Canada recognizes that the work of Friendship Centres and other organizations serving urban Indigenous peoples has been crucial during this pandemic. These organizations have been providing PPE, temporary handwashing stations, meal and food delivery, and cultural supports, among other measures. ISC and the National Association of Friendship Centres co-chair the First Nation, Inuit, Métis Living in Urban and Related Homelands Vaccine Task Group with membership from Indigenous organizations, federal, provincial and municipal partners. The Task Group seeks to share information and coordinate approaches in order to facilitate timely and culturally safe access, including the unique planning and delivery processes of COVID-19 vaccination specifically for First Nations, Inuit and Métis living in urban settings.

ISC's COVID-19 vaccine communications strategy is being developed in partnership with Indigenous partners to support greater vaccine confidence. The primary principles of this strategy are fostering Indigenous COVID-19 vaccine champions, supporting distinctions-based communities with information, creating a strengths-based approach and messaging, working with existing and new partners, and use of Indigenous languages. ISC is also amplifying vaccine communications documents and social media content developed by Indigenous partners. Notable successes include the use of Indigenous trusted sources (e.g., Elders, Chiefs, Health Care Providers) in social media, print media, posters and radio/television media to promote

---

<sup>5</sup> Data on vaccines will be updated prior to tabling of this response as will the corresponding date (at the beginning of the sentence)

vaccine confidence. ISC also promotes the need for cultural safety training for provincial vaccination programs who serve Indigenous rural and urban communities at various tables.

Canada has been working closely with provinces and territories, First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, the National Association of Friendship Centres and other urban community services and organizations to support current planning efforts including, identifying challenges and opportunities for increasing vaccination for Indigenous peoples, no matter where they live and making the vaccines more available in locations that are welcoming and accessible to them. This includes partnerships with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Province of Ontario and the Canadian Rangers to expand vaccine rollout into northern and remote communities through Operation Remote Immunity. Significant work has been done to mitigate concerns around vaccination. The Government has worked with Indigenous leaders and organizations to ensure messaging was developed that would resonate within communities.

Following the death of Ms. Joyce Echaquan in a Quebec hospital in September 2020, the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw presented a brief to the governments of Quebec and Canada, entitled “Joyce’s Principle” that aims to ensure that all Indigenous peoples have equitable access, without discrimination, to all health and social services, as well as the highest attainable standard of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. ISC’s funding of \$2 million to the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw and the Conseil des Atikamekw de Manawan, Joyce’s community, advances their work and advocacy for the implementation of Joyce’s Principle. The Government of Canada has also provided \$4 million to the National Consortium of Indigenous Medical Education to help increasing access to care that is culturally safe and free from discrimination through a focus on improving: the experiences of Indigenous peoples in medical school admissions as well as education and medical practice in six priority areas (assessments of Indigenous studies; cultural safety and anti-racism during medical school admissions; the addition of anti-racism learning modules; improving Indigenous faculty recruitment and retention as well as increasing admissions of Indigenous students into medical school).

In addition, federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous representatives have been participating in a national dialogue on anti-Indigenous racism in health care faced by Indigenous peoples across Canada. Indigenous leaders, health professionals and experts as well as provincial and territorial governments were invited to participate and all acknowledged the racism that exists, and that changes are needed to bring about reform.

Key themes that emerged included the need to build trust through concrete measures to prevent and address anti-Indigenous racism in health care in Canada and that change needs to be rooted in a recognition of the importance of the land, culture, language, and Indigenous-led health approaches. The work ahead will build upon efforts already underway in jurisdictions to ensure that health systems are culturally inclusive, responsive, appropriate, and demonstrate cultural humility. Provinces and territories remain committed to working with local Indigenous communities, organizations, and leadership on this critical issue. Another dialogue will be held

in spring 2021 to pursue discussions related to postsecondary health education, cultural humility training, Indigenous approaches to health, and patient navigation.

A significant amount of work remains to be done. ISC continues to support Indigenous governments and organizations in delivering programs that will increase community safety and well-being through horizontal coordination of existing federal investments and increased flexibility to respond to local needs. On January 28, 2021, the Government of Canada invited provinces and territories as well as First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and healthcare organizations and representatives to renew their commitment to eliminating racism. At the core of this commitment is the development of response strategies to anti-Indigenous racism led by each level of government and key organizations who play an important role in healthcare delivery. The Government of Canada is committed to continuing the implementation of the recommendations from key reports. This includes *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care*, the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, and the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.

Budget 2021 provided \$126.7 million over three years, to take further action to foster health systems free from racism and discrimination where Indigenous peoples are respected and safe. This funding will support patient advocates, health system navigators, and cultural safety training for medical professionals.

National and regional Indigenous organizations, with support from ISC, will engage Indigenous peoples, including health experts, knowledge keepers, provincial and territorial governments, and others to inform how Indigenous health legislation could support the delivery of high-quality health care for all Indigenous peoples. \$15.6 million over two years (Fall 2020) has been allocated to support this initiative.

**Take immediate actions to address the mental health and wellness crisis in Indigenous communities (recommendations 15, 16 and 17) and establish a program to support land-based mental health initiatives (recommendation 18)**

Prior to the pandemic, many Indigenous communities were already dealing with a mental health, wellness and substance use crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated that crisis. Indigenous youth are being affected in unique ways. Funding for First Nations and Inuit mental wellness has increased every year since 2015, with a current annual investment of about \$450 million through ISC's Mental Wellness Program to support community based mental wellness services. Funding decisions are made in partnership with First Nations and Inuit, and communities have the flexibility to direct-fund mental wellness services that respond to their unique needs and priorities, including land-based mental health, wellness, and substance use prevention and treatment activities. These investments are guided by strategies developed by and with First Nations and Inuit partners, including Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in People in Canada

(2011), the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (2015), and the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy (2016).

Mental wellness services support includes: substance use prevention and treatment programs; supports for former Indian Residential School Students and their families, former Indian Day School Students, and for those impacted by the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; local multidisciplinary Mental Wellness Teams; crisis intervention; and life promotion / suicide prevention initiatives. In addition, surge funding of \$82.5 million (August 2020) has been provided for mental health and wellness support in the context of the pandemic. Additional COVID-19 funding has provided support for important Indigenous-led responses, such as NAN Hope, which provides community driven, culturally appropriate and timely mental health and addictions support to members of the 49 First Nations communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Territory.

Since 2015, the Government has invested over \$5.5 billion to improve health outcomes in Indigenous communities. These investments have increased access to timely and culturally appropriate medical care and mental health services for Indigenous peoples and supported distinctions-based priorities. Additional supports of \$186.8 million have been provided to address the immediate COVID-19 supportive care and home-based services needs for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Building on that, and to ensure Indigenous peoples can access high-quality health care, Budget 2021 announced \$1.4 billion over five years, and \$40.6 million ongoing, to maintain essential health care services for First Nations and Inuit, and to continue work to transform First Nations health systems. This includes \$354 million over five years to increase the number of nurses and other medical professionals in remote and isolated First Nations communities. Through Budget 2021, the Government announced an investment of \$597.6 million over three years, starting in 2021-22 for a distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategy with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.

For some First Nations youth, services delivered through First Nations Child and Family Services (CFS) play an important role in their mental health and well-being. Recognizing this, important policy changes were made to the program to account for the pandemic environment. The First Nations CFS program continues to cover the costs of services delivered by First Nations CFS agencies, provinces and Yukon to youth in care who have reached the age of majority during the pandemic (where in normal times, those reaching the age of majority would be considered to have 'aged out' and no longer be eligible for programs and services). Budget 2021 announced \$1 billion over five years, with \$118.7 million ongoing, to increase support under the First Nations Child and Family Services Program. This funding includes providing an additional two years of supports to First Nations youth who reach age of majority to transition successfully to independence. The announced funding will also support First Nations communities not served by a delegated First Nation agency for prevention activities to help First Nations children and families stay together, within their communities through the Community Well-being and Jurisdiction Initiative, as well as to continue to implement orders from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

The Government is also continuing to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in developing their own child and family services models that reflect their values and traditions

under the *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. Budget 2021 announced an additional \$73.6 million over four years, to support the implementation of the Act.

### **Identify and address gaps in the enforcement of First Nations bylaws (recommendation 19)**

Local policing, other than First Nations policing programs, is a provincial and territorial responsibility and therefore, cooperation and collaboration between First Nations, provincial and federal governments would be necessary to identify and address gaps in the enforcement of First Nations bylaws. Current Indigenous policing services are supported through funding agreements with provincial and federal partners and Indigenous police services are subject to provincial legislation and oversight. All police services in Canada have enforcement discretion as to which applicable laws and how and when they will be enforced in a particular situation. Current Indigenous policing service agreements provide for an emphasis on the enforcement of Indigenous laws and respect for Indigenous culture and traditions.

First Nations have the implicit legal authority under section 81, 83 and 85.1 of the *Indian Act* to enforce and prosecute bylaw infractions, however, many First Nations indicate that they do not have sufficient resources to hire and train Band Bylaw Officers or hire prosecutors to prosecute offences under the *Indian Act*.

While Indigenous communities are strongly encouraged to obtain their own independent legal advice with respect to the development and enactment of their bylaws, ISC and CIRNAC provide key advisory supports, guidance and expertise on the development and implementation of community-based bylaws. A shift to community-led policing is being supported by Public Safety Canada.

Indigenous communities, like all communities in Canada, should be places where people and families feel safe and secure. A well-funded, culturally sensitive, and respectful police service is also essential for community safety and well-being. Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$861 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, and \$145 million ongoing, to support culturally responsive policing and community safety services in Indigenous communities. This includes \$43.7 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, to co-develop a legislative framework for First Nations policing that recognizes First Nations policing as an essential service. It also includes \$103.8 million over five years, for a new Pathways to Safe Indigenous Communities Initiative to support Indigenous communities to develop more holistic community-based safety and wellness models, assist First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities and partners (on- and off-reserve) in realizing approaches to community safety outside of existing federal mandates and authorities.

### **Establish a mechanism to improve coordination and action by all governments during national public health emergencies such as the current pandemic (recommendation 20)**

ISC maintains networks of Regional Medical Officers, Regional Communicable Disease Emergency Coordinators and Health Emergency Management Coordinators, who meet regularly. These networks include partners from the Assembly of First Nations, British Columbia's First Nations Health Authority, and Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority. The networks were long established before COVID-19, and continue to meet regularly throughout the pandemic.

Additional working groups and partnership tables have been implemented throughout the COVID-19 response, including two COVID-19 vaccine working groups and regular bi-lateral meetings with Deputy Ministers of Provincial and Territorial Indigenous Affairs.

A number of federal partners, including the PHAC, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), ISC and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, continue to work in collaboration with communities, provinces and territories in an effort to assess and respond to on-going community needs, and supports. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the CAF has assisted numerous vulnerable Indigenous communities across the country. The CAF provided compassionate and responsive medical care in numerous communities experiencing significant outbreaks, to include support to Indigenous long-term care facilities and alternate isolation accommodations. Further, the military provided support to COVID-19 testing sites, delivered food and supplies, and communicated public health measures in effect. It also supported vaccine rollout efforts by contributing personnel, including medical teams, Canadian Rangers, and air assets to facilitate access to remote communities.

### **Take immediate action to support access to traditional food and ensure food security during the pandemic (recommendation 21)**

The pandemic is affecting food security in many ways, including by impeding hunting and fishing, and access to traditional food. There is a clear link between food security and health; the impacts of the pandemic on food security are particularly concerning given that Indigenous peoples and northerners experience high rates of food insecurity.

Beginning in the early months of the pandemic, supports for communities and businesses have included:

- \$25 million through Nutrition North Canada (NNC) to increase subsidies in the North so families can afford much-needed personal hygiene products and nutritious food. NNC works with Indigenous partners and other federal departments to identify communities that have become eligible for this subsidy.
- up to \$100 million in emergency funding through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Emergency Food Security Fund to distribute to Canadian food banks and other national food rescue organizations to help improve access to food for people, including Indigenous communities, experiencing food insecurity in Canada due to the pandemic. In October 2020, an additional \$100 million was announced to further support food security. ISC was provided with \$30 million from this funding to bolster food security as part of its Indigenous Community Support Fund, including \$464,000 to temporarily help



urban Inuit organizations address increased food security faced by Inuit in the south due to COVID-19.

- \$1.8 million committed by the Government of Canada as part of its Nunavut response, to support food security needs including those households that are isolating.
- \$15 million over 5 years starting in 2019-2020 is being provided through the Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund, to support community-led projects for local and Indigenous food production systems with an emphasis on innovative and practical solutions to increase food security across the north.
- \$50 million was announced in June 2020 for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Surplus Food Rescue Program, to address urgent, high volume, highly perishable surpluses created because of restaurant closures during the pandemic. Indigenous groups were eligible applicants for this food redistribution initiative. Three of the nine funded projects focused exclusively on redirecting surplus food to Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Nunavut facing food insecurity. In total, the funding amount of these three projects is just over \$12.6 million.

Budget 2021 provides \$163 million over three years to support food security working directly with Indigenous partners, including in Inuit Nunangat. Further, in Budget 2021, the Government of Canada announced up to \$140 million in 2021-22 to top up the Emergency Food Security Fund and Local Food Infrastructure Fund to prevent hunger, strengthen food security in our communities, and provide nutritious food to more Canadians.

### **Ensure that Indigenous students have the resources they need to continue their education during the pandemic (recommendation 22)**

The Government of Canada is committed to working collaboratively with Indigenous partners to support Indigenous control of Indigenous education so that Indigenous students have access to the same high-quality education services and opportunities as all young Canadians. With temporary school closures and classes primarily shifting to online, education has been impacted by the pandemic across the country, including for Indigenous children from the early learning years through to post secondary levels. To support this commitment, and continue to build long-term economic resilience, the Government of Canada has since before the start of the pandemic, and especially during the pandemic, been working with Indigenous community leadership and regional and national organizations, as well as directly with Indigenous partners to support their decision-making processes in relation to matters of education.

The Government of Canada has provided more than \$1.8 billion to Indigenous communities and organizations to help prevent, prepare and respond to the spread of COVID-19 through the Indigenous Community Support Fund. Under this program, a number of education-based activities were supported to provide online learning supports to ensure Indigenous students were able to obtain the resources needed to continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The allocated funding provided to support these activities included, but is not limited to, the following: devices for children and mature students to learn remotely, support

for culturally relevant online learning programs, and funding for remote tutoring programs for those in need.

#### Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care:

In June 2020, \$120.7 million was announced to help Indigenous early learning and child care facilities safely operate during the pandemic, including implementing enhanced cleaning protocols, hiring additional staff, and offering training. This investment supports over 35,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation children who access culturally relevant Indigenous early learning and child care programs and is co-managed through existing early learning and child care partnerships. As a part of this funding, in consultation with the National Aboriginal Head Start Council, the PHAC has allocated \$8.8 million in new emergency funding to ensure sites are able to adequately respond to enhanced municipal health safety requirements (i.e., health screening, increased sanitation protocols, separate program entrances for shared facilities), temporarily adapt services to keep children and families safe (i.e., increased focus on outdoor programming, virtual programming, home-based learning kits, food hampers to replace breakfast/lunch programs, retrofits to allow for social distancing, lower child/educator ratios) and increase referral support for at-risk families seeking social services (housing, food security, health services, domestic safety, and psychological support).

#### First Nations Kindergarten to grade 12:

In 2020, the Government of Canada committed \$12 million to support required retrofits needed for schools to follow public health guidelines and \$100 million in COVID-19 supports for the 2020-21 school year. Through Budget 2021 a further \$112 million in education supports have been announced to extend COVID-19 support so children on reserve can continue to attend school safely, through the provision of PPE for students and staff, laptops and purchases of e-learning software to support online learning, and more teachers and other critical staff including custodians.

In 2019, the federal government implemented a new, co-developed policy and funding approach to better support the needs of First Nations students on reserve. Budget 2021 has also proposed to invest \$726 million over five years, starting in 2021-22 to enhance funding formulas in critical areas such as student transportation; ensure funding for First Nations schools remains predictable from year to year; and increase First Nations control over First Nations education by concluding more Regional Education Agreement. In addition, Budget 2021 announced \$350 million over five years, starting in 2021-22, to expand access to adult education by supporting First Nations people on reserve who wish to return to high school in their communities and complete their high school education.

#### Post Secondary Education

In 2020, \$25.9 million in immediate supports to Indigenous post-secondary institutions has been provided to address increased costs and financial uncertainty resulting from the pandemic. This includes supports to retain staff, automating services to process student applications and registrations, adapting courses for online learning, and implementing public

health and safety measures for in-person services. An additional \$75.2 million was invested to increase existing distinctions-based support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation students pursuing post-secondary education. This support was continued through Budget 2021, with \$150.6 million over two years, starting in 2021-22, to support Indigenous students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the Inuit and Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategies. Budget 2021 also committed \$26.4 million in supports to Indigenous post-secondary institutions for pandemic-related supports.

**Support Indigenous businesses and provide financial supports to First Nations operating under the *Indian Act* regime (recommendations 23 to 28) and ensure that emergency COVID-19 programming is flexible, needs-based and easy to access by Indigenous communities and businesses (recommendations 36 to 39)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Indigenous communities and businesses. Public health measures have affected many of the revenue sources, such as community-owned business revenues, property taxes, and revenues from leased properties, which communities use to support service delivery and pay loans which have been taken out to support community, economic development, and jobs. The Government of Canada is encouraged by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers' efforts to date in supporting community capacity development through various programs and services for Economic Development Officers and has recognized the need to support business since the beginning of the pandemic.

The Indigenous Community Support Fund provides a flexible and needs-based approach to emergency COVID-19 programming, through flexible terms and conditions that ensure that it best meets the contextual needs of each First Nation, Inuit, and Métis community. This means that communities have discretion to decide how to use emergency support funding for a wide range of eligible expenses, such as for PPE, perimeter security, food security, mental health supports and vaccine rollout.

Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) continues to reimburse fixed costs for businesses forced to reduce or halt operations due to COVID-19 measures. CanNor provided \$31.2 million in support to multiple sectors in the territories, including Indigenous-owned small and medium-sized enterprises, during the pandemic through the Northern Business Relief Fund, and the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund. These funds reimbursed fixed costs for businesses that were forced to reduce or halt operations due to public health measures. Furthermore, through the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, CanNor also provided \$11.8 million to offer a greater range of financing to northern small and medium-sized enterprises through support to Community Futures Networks in Nunavut and Northwest Territories and relevant stakeholders in Yukon.

The mandate letter for the Minister of Public Services and Procurement includes a commitment to “work with the minister of Indigenous Services and the President of the Treasury Board to create more opportunities for Indigenous businesses to succeed and grow by creating a new target to have at least five per cent of federal contracts awarded to businesses managed and

led by Indigenous Peoples.” The five per cent target seeks to leverage Government spending to help grow Indigenous businesses and improve the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous communities.

Budget 2021 announced \$87.4 million over five years and \$18.6 million ongoing to modernize federal procurement and create opportunities for specific communities by diversifying the federal supplier base. This will in part support efforts to meet Canada’s target of five per cent of federal contracts being awarded to businesses managed and led by Indigenous people.

Further, Budget 2021 will incorporate accessibility considerations into federal procurement, ensuring goods and services are accessible by design. To this end, Public Services and Procurement Canada will develop new tools, guidance, awareness, and training for federal departments, including improving data capture, analytics, and reporting. Budget 2021 also proposes to leverage supplier diversity opportunities through domestic procurement, such as running competitions open to businesses run by Canadians from equity deserving groups.

In addition, working in partnership with Indigenous business associations and communities, the provision of distinctions-based financial supports to assist Indigenous businesses has been provided since the early months of the pandemic. An initial \$306.8 million was allocated (April 2020) to help small- and medium-sized Indigenous businesses. Further to this, a distinct measure in the form of \$133 million was provided (June 2020) that included \$16 million for the Indigenous tourism industry, in recognition of the continuing impacts of COVID-19 on tourism and related industries (e.g., accommodations and food services, as well as arts, entertainment/recreation, transportation and retail sectors). The remaining \$117 million supported local Indigenous economies, including community-owned businesses; this later came to be known as the Indigenous Community Business Fund. As part of COVID-19 emergency supports, \$11.8 million in alternative financing was also provided for northern/Indigenous businesses. Budget 2021 allocated \$117 million in 2021-22 to renew the Indigenous Community Business Fund to help to support a sustainable economic recovery. Funding will ensure First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation communities can continue to provide services and support jobs for their members through collectively owned businesses and microbusinesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ISC has also established a customized funding agreement model to facilitate the creation of a new Repayable Contribution program to provide COVID-19 support to Indigenous businesses. The National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA) and the five Métis Capital Corporations have all played a critical role in the overall administration of this funding support. The Indigenous Growth Fund (IGF), announced in Budget 2019, will extend new debt financing to Indigenous entrepreneurs. Managed by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, the fund reached its first close of \$150 million on April 14, 2021, with an investment of \$50 million from the Government of Canada, \$50 million from the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), and remaining commitments made by Export Development Canada (EDC) and Farm Credit Canada (FCC). The IGF will invest capital in participating Aboriginal Financial Institutions, who will provide loans to entrepreneurs. In addition to the IGF, BDC supports more than 700 entrepreneurs with over \$350 million

committed in debt financing. The Bank offers targeted solutions through the Indigenous Banking Unit, including a customized financing product with the Indigenous Entrepreneur Loan.

First Nations living on-reserve face unique circumstances related to the *Indian Act*. There are also combined impacts of the *Indian Act* and the current pandemic on First Nations finances. Budget 2021 announced \$33.4 million in 2021-22 for the First Nations Finance Authority pooled borrowing regime. This will establish a First Nations Finance Authority Emergency Fund which will provide repayable financial support for borrowing members not only encountering difficulties now due to COVID-19 but also during future widespread economic shocks. In addition, these funds will enable the First Nations Finance Authority to launch a Commercial Paper Program that will lower interest rates for First Nation borrowers so they can secure more manageable funding

In order to ensure Indigenous businesses are part of the recovery and that Indigenous economies experience long-term growth, the Government of Canada is providing supports for Indigenous-led businesses. Budget 2021 invests \$42 million over three years, to expand the Aboriginal Entrepreneurship Program; directly supporting Indigenous-led businesses and help Indigenous communities generate wealth by improving access to capital and business opportunities. Budget 2021 also proposes to provide \$2.4 million in 2021-22 to the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada to help the Indigenous tourism industry rebuild and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Currently, only 36 per cent of Indigenous-led businesses are owned by women. To address this and make sure women entrepreneurs are empowered in the economic recovery: Budget 2021 proposes to invest \$22 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to support the NACCA's Indigenous Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative by providing tools, services, and resources to increase the number of Indigenous women entrepreneurs. This funding would support NACCA in achieving its target of increasing the number of Indigenous women entrepreneurs who access financing.

### **Support northern air carriers during the pandemic and provide a definition of "northern" (recommendations 29, 30 and 31)**

Air carriers are a lifeline to northern and remote fly-in communities. There are unique needs that come with operating and sustaining air transportation in northern Canada. This was one of the factors that underpinned the Government of Canada's supports for essential air access to remote communities including:

- \$206 million to support the regional air transportation system and businesses through the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, of which \$2.6 million will be apportioned to the territorial governments for northern air transportation priorities and will continue to support air carriers as need arises.
- \$3.6 million to Yukon, \$8.7 million to the Northwest Territories, and \$5 million to Nunavut in May 2020 to support maintaining a reliable air network focused on the supply of food, medical supplies, and other essential goods and services for remote and fly-in communities.

- Establishing a \$75-million funding program for the federal contribution for the first six months and maintaining these essential services through an investment of up to \$174 million over 18 months under the Remote Air Services Program to continue to support essential air services.

As for the definition of “northern” the Government of Canada is aware there is not a common regional boundary and this has been considered in the development of the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. The Framework takes an inclusive and flexible approach to the geographic scope of Canada’s Arctic and Northern regions. Federal departments and agencies will continue to have the flexibility to develop eligibility criteria at the program-level, based on existing program authorities and program objectives. This will allow a targeted approach for Arctic and Northern policies and programs. Given the sheer size of the region, the interests and needs of partners differ from community to community. The realities in the north that Whitehorse faces are not the realities of Kuujuaq in Quebec, nor Iqaluit in Nunavut.

**Ensure that Métis, urban Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous women and girls are supported through the pandemic (recommendations 32 to 35)**

Métis settlements are in a challenging financial situation, and Indigenous women, children and LGBTQ2S+ people are particularly at-risk during this pandemic. The Government of Canada is working to ensure that the pandemic does not compromise the Métis settlements’ way of life.

Discussions between the National Association of Friendship Centres and ISC regarding their long term funding requirements will continue, inclusive of ongoing program needs for culturally safe health service delivery for Indigenous peoples living in urban and related homelands.

The Government of Canada is committed to the development and implementation of the National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. The Fall Economic Statement provided \$724.1 million to support a Comprehensive Violence Prevention Strategy to expand culturally relevant supports for Indigenous people facing gender-based violence, as well as support new Indigenous shelters and transition housing across the country. ISC is working with Pauktuutit to support Inuit specific shelters.<sup>6</sup> This is in addition to:

- Funding of \$44.8 million over five years announced on May 29, 2020 to build 12 new shelters: 10 shelters in First Nations communities on reserve across the country, and two in the territories. The Government will also provide \$40.8 million to support operational costs for these new shelters over the first five years, and then \$10.2 million annually ongoing; and
- \$10 million announced in May 2020 for COVID-19 supports for First Nations shelters.

---

<sup>6</sup> Prior to the tabling of the report, if the Federal Pathway has been launched, the following text (or other text approved by Communications) will be added here: “In addition, the *Federal Pathway to Missing and Murdered Women and Girls and Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA + People*, a whole-of-government initiative representing Canada's contribution and support to the National Action Plan, was launched on xx 2021 ”.

Budget 2021 laid out a plan that will build on progress and remain accountable to communities, families, and survivors across Canada. To end the national tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, a new approach is needed—one that addresses the root causes of violence, that recognizes the scope of the problem, and one that factors in the different experiences of Indigenous peoples from coast-to-coast-to-coast. This work is anchored in four interconnected thematic areas from the national inquiry: culture, health and wellness, human security and safety, and justice and is a first step towards the transformative changes necessary to address the impacts of colonial practices that have facilitated violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Actions to address this tragedy must be broad in order to address the socioeconomic root causes including loss of culture and languages, poverty and the need for access to housing, and the need for community safety, food security, employment, education, health care, infrastructure, and the many threads that tie the fabric of society together. As such, Budget 2021 announced \$2.2 billion over five years, beginning in 2021-22, for a number of related supporting initiatives that help build a safer, stronger, and more inclusive society, such as:

- \$36.3 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, and \$8.6 million ongoing to CIRNAC, to enhance support for Indigenous women’s and 2SLGBTQQIA+ organizations, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are reflected in all aspects of decision-making that impacts their lives. This proposal responds directly to the MMIWG Call for Justice 1.8, which calls upon governments to provide core and sustainable funding to national, regional, and local Indigenous women’s and 2SLGBTQQIA+ organizations.
- \$861 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22 and \$145 million ongoing to support culturally responsive policing and community safety services in Indigenous communities.
  - This includes supports for First nations policing and the co-development of a legislative framework for First Nations policing, that recognizes First Nations policing as an essential service; and
  - \$103.8 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, for a new Pathways to Safe Indigenous Communities Initiative to support Indigenous communities to develop more holistic community-based safety and wellness models (described in more detail under recommendation 19).

## CONCLUSION

Again, the Government of Canada would like to thank the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs for their work on this issue. The response is by no means an exhaustive list of all the actions that are being undertaken at the national, regional and provincial-territorial levels to address not only the impacts of COVID-19 but also the long-standing socioeconomic gaps in Indigenous communities. Rather, the response represents an overview of the Government's efforts to improve the socioeconomic well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada and an ongoing commitment to continue these efforts. Throughout the pandemic, Indigenous leaders have taken decisive actions to protect their communities and we have worked together as partners; we must build on this as we look to transform service delivery going forward. As mentioned in the Introduction and as recognized by witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee, it is only by continuing to work in true partnership with Indigenous peoples, leaders and organizations that we will be able to address the root causes of health and socioeconomic inequalities for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

At the time of the writing of this response we are not yet through the COVID-19 pandemic; the third wave is taking a toll across the country, including in Indigenous communities. Even with vaccine prioritization for Indigenous peoples, the Government of Canada recognizes that we must remain vigilant to: diligently monitor the unfolding situation, listen to the needs and priorities identified by Indigenous leadership, and continue to respond by providing effective support.

A year into the pandemic we have learned many lessons, most significantly around the strength and leadership that Indigenous communities were able to demonstrate when they received flexible support. Since the beginning of the vaccine rollout we have seen a high vaccine rate and a significant drop in cases. However, there are still lessons to be learnt, and it will be important to reflect on the experience from the crisis to understand how those lessons must be applied to some of the transformational work that began before the pandemic to advance reconciliation and close gaps.

In spite of our best efforts, the pandemic will likely exacerbate some known gaps, and has and will continue to draw attention to some areas of systemic weakness, many of which have been identified by the Committee in its report. The Government of Canada will need to remain vigilant to ensure that Indigenous communities and peoples are included in recovery measures and that progress towards closing the gap is not lost.