

COVID19: Funding supports for Indigenous Peoples

- **Our top priority is the health and safety of all Canadians, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis.**
- **We recognize that many Indigenous communities face unique challenges in addressing COVID-19 and we continue to work in conjunction with provinces and territories to ensure essential supports and resources are in place.**
- **In addition to supports available to all Canadians, we have also created supports specific to the needs of Indigenous peoples, including \$380 million for the Indigenous Community Support Fund and \$285.1 million to support the public health response in Indigenous communities.**

General COVID-19 Response Funding

- **We have allocated \$100 million for areas of federal responsibility, including for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to plan and respond to public health needs arising from COVID-19, with an additional \$285.1 million to support the ongoing public health response to COVID-19 in Indigenous communities.**
- **We have also allocated \$380 million for the Indigenous Community Support Fund which includes \$215 million for on-reserve First Nations and self-governing communities, \$45 million for Inuit regions; \$30 million for Métis Councils; and \$90 million for regional, urban, and off-reserve Indigenous organizations.**

Family Violence & Shelters

- **\$10 million has been allocated for emergency family violence prevention shelters on-reserve and in Yukon to support women and children escaping violence.**
- **We are providing \$44.8 million over five years to build 12 new shelters, 10 in First Nations communities on reserve and two in the territories.**

- An additional \$40.8 million will be provided to support operational costs for these new shelters over the first five years and \$10.2 million annually ongoing.
- A further \$1 million a year ongoing, starting this year, will support engagement with Métis leaders and service providers on shelter provision and community-led violence prevention projects for Métis women, girls and LGBTQ and two-spirit people.

Northern

- We are providing supports for communities and businesses in the North including providing an additional \$25 million to Nutrition North Canada to increase subsidies so families can afford much-needed personal hygiene products and nutritious food.

Indigenous Businesses

- \$306.8 million has been allocated to help small and medium-sized Indigenous businesses, and to support Aboriginal Financial Institutions that offer financing to these businesses.
- Financial support for Indigenous businesses will be provided through Aboriginal Financial Institutions, and administered by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association and the Métis capital corporations in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada.
- On June 11th an additional \$133 million in funding was committed to help Indigenous businesses, including \$16 million for the Indigenous tourism industry, through the pandemic and into recovery.

Post-Secondary Education

- An additional \$75.2 million will be provided in 2020-21 to increase existing distinctions-based support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation students pursuing post-secondary education.

On-Reserve Income Assistance Program

- **\$270 million was provided to supplement the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program to address increased demands on the program, which will help individuals and families meet their essential living expenses.**
- **This will also help hire additional staff to better serve First Nations communities and connect individuals to other government programs.**

Substance Use - General

- **Our Government recognizes that substance use can have devastating effects on individuals, families and communities and their general health and well-being.**
- **We are currently investing \$425 million annually for community-based services to address the mental wellness needs of First Nations and Inuit.**
- **This includes a recent investment of \$200 million over five years to support substance use and prevention and treatment services.**
- **We remain focused on supporting long-term investments that improve the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.**

If pressed on COVID-19 and substance use:

- **We recognize that many Indigenous communities face unique challenges in addressing COVID-19, some of which can lead to increased stress and substance use.**
- **The funding announced for Indigenous communities as part of Canada's COVID-19 response can be used to support access to mental wellness services.**
- **We are working with partners to implement distance approaches to service delivery such as tele- and video-counselling for substance use services and other existing programs.**
- **The Hope for Wellness Help Line continues to offer crisis intervention services by telephone or chat, with surge capacity investments provided for additional counsellors.**
- **We are also working with Indigenous partners to promote additional resources for Indigenous youth, and to develop an online platform to support community-based mental wellness teams.**

If pressed further on restricted access to First Nations communities during COVID-19

- **Our Government recognizes that COVID-19 can result in increased stress and substance use and that more supports are needed.**
- **This is why the Government of Canada's Indigenous Community Support Fund investments can be directed towards these needs to keep existing services available while access in and out of some communities has been restricted to prevent the spread of COVID-19.**
- **The Assembly of First Nations passed a motion to support communities to use the approaches they need.**
- **AFN will not call on provinces to close liquor stores. Ongoing discussions on this issue will continue.**

Tracking of Opioid Use :

- **Our Government recognizes that the opioid crisis continues to have devastating impacts on Indigenous communities nationally, and that quality data is an important part of a comprehensive approach to drug control.**
- **I know that there are significant data limitations on how Indigenous peoples are affected by this crisis and we are working with partners to overcome these limitations.**
- **We will continue to work with First Nations and Inuit, provincial and territorial partners to explore ways to collectively address opioid-related issues.**

Background

Indigenous communities across Canada are disproportionately impacted by the opioid public health crisis and in particular, First Nations in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. The Assembly of First Nations has reported that some First Nations communities are experiencing an epidemic, with as many as 43% to 85% of the communities' population addicted to opiates (Assembly of First Nations Resolution no. 82/2016 and no. 68/2017). In spring 2017, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada started to track suspected opioid overdoses in 153 participating First Nations communities. The Department continues to work with partners from across the country to improve data collection and reporting, and to better understand how this crisis is affecting different populations

The Government of Canada has announced significant financial investments to help address the crisis. Budget 2018 is providing \$200 million over five years (2018/19 to 2022-23) and \$40 million per year

ongoing to support new investments in substance use prevention and treatment services for First Nations and Inuit including funding to address the ongoing opioid crisis. The investment will support up to: an additional 25 opioid agonist therapy sites offering wraparound services; an additional 75 on the land activities; enhanced services across a network of 45 federally funded treatment centres; and, major renovations at over 20 of these centres. Indigenous Services Canada allocated this fiscal year over \$425 million towards culturally relevant and community-based mental wellness supports for First Nations and Inuit that aim to: provide treatment, reduce risk factors, promote protective factors and improve health outcomes associated with mental wellness.

Indigenous Services Canada provides several services along the drug misuse continuum.

1. Through the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program, coverage is provided to registered First Nations and recognized Inuit for:
 - Methadone, buprenorphine/naloxone (i.e. Suboxone and generics), slow release morphine and injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT) for the treatment of opioid use disorder. To promote client safety, clients receiving these treatments are enrolled in the Client Safety Program formerly known as the Prescription Monitoring Program. Prior to providing coverage for buprenorphine/naloxone, the NIHB Program confirms that the community has infrastructure for the safe storage and handling of the medication.
 - Naloxone, used to treat overdoses, both Injection and nasal spray (Narcan);
 - Medical transportation benefits for clients to access supervised treatment for opioid use disorder (e.g. methadone, Suboxone). The client's ongoing need for travel is reviewed every six months
 - Up to 22 hours of professional mental health counseling every 12 months, with additional hours as required.

2. In addition to coverage provided under the NIHB Program, in facilities where ISC provides primary care services in First Nations communities, naloxone injection is available for administration by health care professionals to reverse the effects of the overdose. There is also a limited supply of naloxone nasal spray (Narcan) in Nursing Stations that is available to community members at no charge. Injectable naloxone is listed in the Branch's Nursing Station Formulary as a "must stock" medication.

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Mental Health and Substance Use - Regional Issues

Blood Tribe:

- **Our Government remains concerned by the opioid overdoses in Blood Tribe.**
- **In Blood Tribe, our Government has provided funding for the provision of naloxone, opioid agonist treatment with wrap around services and mental health supports, contributed to the on-reserve Overdose Prevention Site from March to May 2018. We have also provided funding for additional youth beds in the Safe Withdrawal Management Site.**
- **These interventions have contributed to a reduction in overdose events in Blood Tribe.**
- **We will continue to work with the community on this, especially during this COVID pandemic.**

If pressed on Blood Tribe :

- **We are continuing to support Blood Tribe in their approach to address this crisis. Naloxone kits are available and we are working across Governments to minimize the impact.**
- **Six mental wellness teams operating in communities in Alberta are available to respond to crises as they emerge.**
- **ISC remains in continuous contact with the community to ensure necessary supports are in place during this COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **In addition, ISC is currently engaging with the community to support enhanced capacity to screen, assess and isolate members through the potential rental of hotel space and the procurement of a mobile screening unit.**

Montreal Lake Cree:

- **We remain concerned by reports of substance misuse reported by the Montreal Lake Cree Nation.**
- **The community is leading a comprehensive, culturally grounded approach to address the harms of crystal meth that includes prevention and awareness, suicide assessments, 24/7 Crisis Response Teams, and land-based treatment programs.**
- **The community has developed a five-year Crystal Meth Reduction plan, including the opening of The Little Red Healing Lodge which remains open to community members during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **ISC has provided funding support for a community detox project in the amount of \$280,000 for the 2020/21 fiscal year.**
- **We continue to support the community's efforts for long-term solutions.**

If pressed efforts in Montreal Lake Cree Nation during COVID-19:

- **We continue to work closely with partners to ensure there is no gap in service during the COVID-19 crisis, including in the implementation of their strategic approach to addressing Crystal Meth challenges.**
- **The community's Detox program is running at full capacity and the additional resources needed in light of COVID-19 are being supported.**
- **ISC has provided funding support for a community detox project for the 2020/21 fiscal year and also COVID-19 public health funding support for surge capacity during the pandemic.**
- **Patients with Methadone and Suboxone continue to receive support through the program. Community-employed nurses and Mental Wellness Teams are also providing support.**

If pressed on North Spirit Lake:

- **Our Government remains concerned by instances of substance misuse reported by North Spirit Lake and recognizes the devastating impacts this can have on community members.**
- **An opioid addiction program which includes aftercare, counseling and education was launched in the community in November 2019. We are also working alongside partners to ensure access to other substance misuse programs and mental health counselors.**
- **An additional nurse was sent to the community to provide support to the addictions program, primary health care nursing services, and emergency and urgent care.**

If Pressed on Saskatchewan:

- **We remain concerned by instances of substance misuse in the community/communities and recognizes the devastating impacts this can have on community members.**
- **Last December, my department – in partnership with the FSIN – participated in a forum to increase awareness and hear first-hand from communities about their challenges and solutions in how to address crystal methamphetamine and opioid usage in their communities.**
- **We are working closely with First Nations to support Nation-led, culturally grounded, comprehensive community-driven efforts across the mental wellness continuum that includes prevention, harm reduction, treatment and healing.**

If pressed on supports in Saskatchewan during COVID-19

- **We continue to work closely with partners and remain committed to ensuring there is no gap in service in supports to address substance misuse in Saskatchewan.**

- **Mental Wellness Teams & Addictions workers have developed extensive networks for peer mentorship and information sharing across Saskatchewan.**
- **The teams have found workable alternatives to supporting community members while still respecting directives put in place by the Saskatchewan Health Authority.**
- **The department has provided support and information for community staff and residents when challenges related to COVID-19 have been identified.**

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Mental Health & Wellness

- **We are focused on supporting long-term investments that improve the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.**
- **We are currently investing \$425 million annually for community-based services to address the mental wellness needs of First Nations and Inuit.**
- **This supports the provision of mental health services by 63 local, multidisciplinary mental wellness teams in 344 communities.**

Jordan's Principle & Hope for Wellness Line

- **Last year, ISC also funded \$172.1 million dollars for requests for mental health services for First Nations children through Jordan's Principle.**
- **We also fund the Hope for Wellness Help Line which offers crisis intervention services by telephone or chat. Since its creation until the end of May 2020, there have been 31,657 calls and 5,215 Chats reported.**

If pressed on restricted access to First Nations communities during COVID-19

- **Supporting mental wellness during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is essential.**
- **Substance use treatment, prevention, and aftercare services are continuing where possible while respecting COVID-19 public health physical distancing measures.**
- **Counselling, cultural supports, and other forms of treatment are available through telehealth and on-line platforms.**
- **Treatment centres and community-based programs are also ensuring medication availability for opioid agonist therapy (OAT).**
- **We will continue to work with partners to ensure mental wellness supports are available for communities.**

Indigenous Economic Recovery

- **We have been listening to Indigenous leaders on their needs related to rebuilding the Indigenous economy.**
- **We have heard from many leaders on the elements that would support Indigenous communities and businesses to recover from the financial impacts of the pandemic and strengthen the Indigenous economy in the coming years.**
- **We will continue to listen and solicit ideas from all interested parties as plans are developed over the coming months.**

If pressed

- **This pandemic provides us with the opportunity not to simply recreate what was in place, but to work with Indigenous business leaders to build a better and stronger economy than was in place before.**
- **We can seize this opportunity and increase Indigenous participation in the economy and share the wealth of this country more equitably.**
- **I would welcome ideas for the revitalization of the Indigenous economy and the building of resilience of Indigenous businesses from all members of the House.**