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News Release

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PANDEMIC-FOCUSED PROVINCIAL BUDGET MISSES THE MARK ON CRITICAL FIRST NATIONS ITEMS

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.)

The provincial government tabled its 2021 Budget on April 20th, under the title, "A Stronger BC, For Everyone," with key investments addressing the immediate and long-term impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some historic investments are planned, including a new Strategic Investment Fund, InBC, $500 million in funding towards mental health and addictions services, targeted investments to address the ongoing opioid crisis, and $45 million to respond to the recommendations of the *In Plain Sight* report on systemic anti-Indigenous racism in the healthcare system.

While Budget 2021 rightly focuses primarily on pandemic response and recovery, it unfortunately lacks significant, new First Nations financial commitments, including funding geared towards the implementation of the MMIWG Action Plan and Calls for Justice; overall advancement in the Indigenous justice sector; cannabis strategy and legalization; wild salmon conservation and aquaculture; emergency management and reform of the Emergency Program Act (EPA); and forestry reform, including old growth management.

"Glaring omissions in the new provincial budget, including how monies will be spent on the BC *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* implementation, are cause for concern for First Nations in BC," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee, continuing, "lack of a mention of the MMIWG2S crisis, despite increasing domestic violence rates amidst COVID-19, is especially worrying. The Province must make these priorities."

"We do acknowledge and appreciate the Budget's significant health-related investments, particularly those that address the opioid crisis, mental health supports, and implementing the *In Plain Sight* report," stated Robert Phillips, FNS Political Executive. "However, First Nations reinforce the importance of the need to include the significant investments necessary to ensure fulsome and timely implementation of Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples Act across government. We hope the Province will still focus on its work with First Nations on the other identified important priority areas."

"We welcome investments into COVID-related support and recovery. However, beyond that, Budget 2021 includes high-level investments that are targeted toward Indigenous peoples with no detail provided to understand how these monies will be divided up," stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC. "For example, how much funding will be spent on the costly and critical work of alignment of laws with the UN Declaration, as directed in the Declaration Act, of which there remains no concrete process that we are aware of? Is BC making any investment in a provincial action plan to implement the Calls for Justice? We are disappointed there is no mention of investment in sustainable old growth management that respects First Nations Title and Rights - we had thought based on the fall 2020 campaign messaging that this was a priority for the NDP government."

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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