



Regional Chiefs Update

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ECONOMIC SECTOR

Updates/Activities

The Economic Sector focuses on economic development, trade, revenue options, labour force and human resources development, agriculture and connectivity. This Sector also coordinates AFN efforts for First Nations persons with disabilities and social finance and social innovation. In the past several years, the Chiefs-in-Assembly have passed national resolutions on the importance of resource revenue sharing, new investments, labour market and skills training, e-community, procurement, inter-nation trade, agriculture, wealth creation and sustainability.

Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government is providing a 75 per cent wage subsidy to eligible employers for up to 12 weeks, retroactive to March 15, 2020. This subsidy would be available to eligible employers that see a drop of at least 30 per cent of their revenue. Eligible employers would be able to apply for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy through the Canada Revenue Agency's My Business Account portal as well as a web-based application. This emergency subsidy is designed for all Canadians. As such it should be available for First Nations businesses, too, however it is unclear at this point if there will be differences in how this will apply for First Nations employers/business on reserve. For more information on this program please visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/news/2020/04/the-canada-emergency-wage-subsidy.html>

Connectivity

With the impact of COVID-19 on accessing workplaces and markets in-person, the use of the internet has become critical and access to affordable broadband equally as important. Canada's Budget 2019 made \$1.7 billion dollars available for the increase in capacity to serve the most rural and remote regions of Canada. The \$1.7 billion is spread across three areas, Connect to Innovate (CTI) program, Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and "The Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) led by the Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) Canada department. The Universal Broadband Fund was created to support the Government of Canada's "High Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy," which calls for every Canadian to have minimum internet speeds of 50/10 Mbps, and aims to provide up to \$6 billion of investments for rural broadband over the next ten years. The Universal Broadband Fund was created to support broadband projects across Canada and to provide funding for those projects. Currently, the UBF is in the development stage before opening to applications, and ISED is looking for input from First Nations and the AFN in order to make the fund more accessible for First Nations. Canada's Budget 2016 committed \$500 million until 2021 for a new broadband program. ISED created Connect to Innovate (CTI) program for the investment of the \$500 million to bring high-speed



internet to rural and remote communities in Canada. Of the accepted applications, 190 of them were categorized as Indigenous applications.

Bill C-81 the Accessible Canada Act (disabilities)

Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act, became law in Canada on June 21, 2019. The AFN is developing a First Nations strength-based approach to building distinct First Nations accessibility legislation. The AFN recently held several national engagement sessions about Bill C-81 and human rights and to build awareness on upcoming engagement sessions within regions and with FNPWD and First Nations governments.

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing Bill C-81 planned sessions in First Nations have been postponed and alternative engagement approaches are being considered. The government is preparing to implement Bill C-81 and create an Accessibility Commissioner to enforce the law; a Canadian Accessibility Standards Development Organization (CASDO) and other developments. Due to the COVID-19, the CASDO has postponed their official launch scheduled for April 6, 2020, in Toronto. <https://www.canada.ca/en/accessibility-standards-canada/campaigns/annual-public-meeting.html#celebrate> The AFN continues to monitor the federal governments approaches on Bill C-81, as well as Canada's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The AFN completed a submission in 2019 to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNSR).

Social Innovation and Social Finance

In 2017, the Government of Canada committed to developing a Social Innovation and Social Finance (SI/SF) Strategy to inject funding into tackling persistent socio-economic and environmental challenges. The 2018 federal Fall Economic Statement announced elements of a Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy. Canada committed up to \$755 million over 10 years, starting in 2020-2021. Canada's first year of social innovation headlines are available at https://sicanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Building-our-foundations_-_SI-Canada%E2%80%99s-first-year.pdf The AFN developed a draft Summary Paper and a draft policy paper that incorporated dialogue from First Nations technical tables, regional and local First Nations, a roundtable and updates to leadership tables. A literature review, an environmental scan, a cost benefits analysis, and legal context were also prepared to help inform the paper.

In line with AFN Resolution 94/2019, the AFN is advocating that an additional \$150 million interim funding for 3 years from the federal SI-SF Fund to ensure sustainable benefits for First Nations-led initiatives to be followed by appropriate funding for a 10-year strategy. This serves as a starting point, recognizing that the true socio-economic gaps are far greater. In this work, the AFN cites the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Agenda 2030 to "leave no one behind".



With COVID-19, socially innovative approaches and other forms of financing will be needed to find ways to First Nations existing and potential workers and employers.

Upcoming Events

- Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing Bill C-81 planned sessions in First Nations have been postponed and alternative engagement approaches are being considered. The AFN is exploring alternative social media tools/ options in view of the COVID-19 to safely/ respectfully engage with First Nations on Bill C-81/ human rights.
- The First Nations Technical Working Group on Human Resources Development (TWG) and sub-TWG are coordinating follow-up teleconference meetings with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) on the flexible needs to close out fiscal year 2019-2020 and start of 2020-2021.



EDUCATION SECTOR

Updates/Activities

COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and not being able to meet in person, the National Indian Education Council (NIEC) will attend weekly meetings via Zoom on select topics. On March 30, 2020, the NIEC met via Zoom to provide regional updates on how their education systems have been affected by COVID-19 as well as discuss learning resources.

Federal Budget

The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the 2020 federal budget release. It is expected to be released at the end of April 2020. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) has stated that the COVID-19 pandemic will also affect the critical paths and program delivery for education programs.

National Indian Education Council (NIEC)

The NIEC made the following recommendation on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program 2020-2021 Guidelines: Support the *Post-Secondary Student Support Program and University and College Entrance Preparation Program: National Program Guidelines 2020-2021* as seen on March 24, 2020.

Education Partnerships Program (EPP)

The EPP 2020-2021 call for proposals has been open since the beginning of March and was set to close March 31, 2020. Due to Covid-19, ISC has informed First Nation partners that the call will remain open until the end of April. There is concern that this will result in a delay in funding. The EPP working continues to amend the *Terms and Conditions* and program guidelines for 2021-2022 to support regionalization and a flexible partnership model. Factors to determine to regional funding allocation methodology are being discussed at this time.

Education Infrastructure

The Education Infrastructure Working Group (EIWG) is engaging in policy review on the School Space Accommodation Standards and reviewing provincial comparability standards. Additional policy review is required on the School Priority Ranking Framework, teacherages standards, enrollment projections and average number of students in classrooms. Research on a First Nations education infrastructure capital assessment is currently underway.



Youth

The AFN Education sector is working on an implementation guide to showcasing the Carriers of Hope *Calls to Action* and a video showcasing the *Raised Voices: Carriers of Hope* event. The Calls to Action include calls for First Nations, schools, teachers, students, and leaders.

High Cost Special Education Program (HCSEP)

The Assembly of First Nations Symposium on First Nations High Cost Special Education scheduled for April 29-30, 2020 has been postponed. The AFN Education sector has commissioned a comprehensive research report, including costing gaps under the current program and new funding models for high cost special education on-reserve and recommendations for policy change. The report will model both a regional and national lens. The consultant has started to contact regions to gather an understanding of the true cost of high special education.

Upcoming Events

- **April 7, 2020** NIEC Weekly meeting (PSE focus) – Zoom conference call
- **April 14, 2020** NIEC Weekly meeting (EPP focus) – Zoom conference call
- **April 21, 2020** NIEC Weekly meeting (Minister points focus) – Zoom conference call



ENVIRONMENT SECTOR

Updates/Activities

Relying upon the leadership and direction of a Chiefs Committee – the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment (ACE) – the Environment Sector functions to enhance the exercise of First Nations’ self-determination and jurisdiction within a broad environmental context.

Climate Change

Since the passing of Resolution 05/2019, *Declaring a First Nations Climate Emergency*, the Environment Sector has begun to advance several priorities: The development of a First Nations-led National Climate Strategy; and hosting a National First Nations Climate Gathering on March 3-4, 2020, in Whitehorse, YT. The National Climate Gathering was an overwhelming success with over 300 participants. At the Gathering, a conceptual outline of the First Nations “Climate Lens” – three concentric circles attributed to context, impacts, and action – was introduced to guide the proceedings and on-going strategy development. Follow-up is ongoing. The Joint Committee on Climate Action (JCCA) has finalized its second Annual Report, outlining five key areas of future work for 2020, and has provided it to the National Chief and Prime Minister. However, all further meetings have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is working to establish its post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which will set global targets for 2030, and influence the future role of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of the Convention and, in particular, the future of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions (WG8J). However, CBD meetings have also been postponed for the time being.

Species at Risk

The First Nations Advisory Committee on Species at Risk (FNACSAR) has focused on the implementation of the proposed Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation. Included under the new Pan-Canadian Approach is recognition of the threat posed by Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).

Conservation

Canada recently increased its conservation ambitions committing to a target of protecting 25% of lands and waters by 2025. Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and the recognition of Indigenous leadership in conservation are expected to contribute significantly to achieving these growing ambitions.



Environmental Health

The Food, Environment, Health, and Nutrition of First Nations Children and Youth (FEHNCY) study has paused its pilot study work due to the COVID-19 crisis. However, the FEHNCY team was recently informed of new funding to support expansion of the study to include the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

Upcoming Events

- **April 20-22, 2020** - Joint Committee on Climate Action (JCCA) meeting – Ottawa, ON - ***POSTPONED***
- **May 12-13, 2020** - Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment (ACE) meeting – Ottawa, ON - ***POSTPONED***



FISHERIES SECTOR

Updates/Activities

Current changes in Fisheries

AFN implemented a Work from Home contingency plan for all employees effective Monday, March 16, 2020. Fisheries sector has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response. A few Inland Working Group members returned home to immediate quarantine having attended the Prospectors and Developers Association Convention on March 1-3, 2020 in Toronto prior to the Inland Working Group. PDAC reported that On Wednesday March 11, 2020 we learned that an attendee at PDAC 2020 tested positively for COVID-19 upon returning home to Sudbury, Ontario. Since then, Toronto Public Health confirmed that the individual associated with the PDAC 2020 Convention, from Sudbury, was not infectious at the conference.

COVID Impact on FFMC

The Freshwater Fisheries Marketing Corporation has notified First Nations inland fishers in NT, AB, MB and SK of suspending its buying services for their fish as of March 21, 2020 due to the COVID-19 Emergency Response. FFMC has also laid off 80% of staff associated with its operations. A briefing note has been sent to the National Chief's office on this subject. It is unclear how this associated CERB will be applied to First Nations fishers.

Climate Change Gathering

The Fisheries sector assisted the AFN Environment Sector's national Climate Change Gathering held on March 3-5, 2020 to discuss the Climate Change in the marine environments from the First Nations perspectives. The side event on Marine Climate Change was hosted in partnership with Oceana.

Inland Fisheries Working Group Meeting

NFC's Inland Fisheries Working Group met on March 11-12, 2020 in Ottawa, ON to follow-up on the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) and its work with Dene, Metis. The FFMC Interlocutor, Kevin Anderson, attended the meeting to hear directly from working group members about the concerns First Nations have with the monopoly of the FFMC and other related issues affecting fisheries.

AFN Workshops

AFN Fisheries sector held a second pair of workshops on the changes to the Fisheries Act and on Indigenous Knowledge Protocols in Halifax, NS on March 3-6, 2020. AFN has postponed the third pair of workshops that was scheduled to take place in Vancouver, BC on March 17-20, 2020 due to concerns arising from the COVID-19 crisis. These workshops will be rescheduled to take place in the coming months.



Upcoming Events

- June 2-5, 2020 - AFN National Fisheries Forum - Fredericton, NB - **POSTPONED**
The event is tentatively scheduled for the end of September at the same venue.
More information will be shared in the coming months.



HEALTH SECTOR

Updates/Activities

Response to COVID-19

The AFN Health Sector has been working with AFN Communications to provide updated and relevant pandemic information for First Nations. As we are working remotely, the AFN Health sector is using technology to connect with our governing and technical tables and for meetings with Federal officials.

CCoH/FNIHB

The Health Sector has been coordinating weekly teleconference calls/Zoom meetings for the CCoH/Health Technicians and Senior Management at the FNIHB to update on how FNIHB is supporting FN communities. There tri-weekly ZOOM meetings with the Chair of the CCoH and Health staff to monitor daily news and follow-up on teleconference matters.

Health Sector Communications

The Health Sector has been creating fact sheets on Covid-19 for First Nations communities, which include topics like: How Covid-19 is Transmitted; Mental Wellness during the Pandemic; Smoking and Covid-19; Cyber Security. The Health Sector has also been sharing government-wide updates and documents that pertain to First Nations as well as preparing daily updates on the scope of Covid-19 in Canada, and monitoring First Nations cases as the data becomes available.

Mental Wellness

The Mental Wellness Committee was to meet April 7-8, 2020, to discuss suicide strategies in regions. However, this meeting has been postponed until further notice. This work will be led by Dr. Carol Hopkins from Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (TPF) and Dr. Brenda Restoule from First Peoples Wellness Circle (FPWC). This information gathered would feed into a national life promotion/suicide prevention strategy that is relative to age groups across the lifespan. However, with impact of COVID-19 (travel restrictions, dedicated response efforts) this meeting is postponed until further notice.

In response to COVID-19, information sheets have been created that are directed at certain groups affected by COVID-19. The purpose of these sheets is to provide tips and considerations for mental wellness during these stressful times and will done at the guidance of partners where needed. This activity is ongoing.

Non-Insured Health Benefits

The AFN Health Sector has been maintaining contact with FNIHB regarding policy changes and updates related to NIHB and COVID-19, which includes developing fact



sheet/information document on NIHB as it relates to COVID-19 and maintaining connection and updates with NIHB Navigators.



HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE and EMERGENCY SERVICES SECTOR

UPDATES/ACTIVITIES

SAFE DRINKING WATER

Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Project

AFN continues to conduct work pertaining to AFN resolutions, the last resolution 14/2019 endorsed the *Refined Preliminary Concepts for Repeal and Replacement of the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act* (Preliminary Concepts). The resolution endorsed the Preliminary Concepts as a working document to inform an affirmation and assertion process with the Government of Canada to produce joint recommendations on a framework to repeal and replace the SDWFNA. The resolution calls on the AFN to conduct follow up engagements with First Nations in 2020, however due to Covid19, the AFN will monitor when these engagements can safely begin. To prepare for this engagement, the AFN provided funding to the Regions to hire Regional Water Coordinators to support this engagement plus the engagement of a First Nations Long-Term Water Strategy. \$49,000 is available until March 31st, with an additional \$49,000 after April 1st, 2020. AFN will host a tele-conference with these Coordinators after April and will provide all supporting background documentation on work to date. The Coordinators will work collaboratively with the AFN National Water Coordinator and Water Unit Staff to ensure effective outreach, coordination, facilitation, communication and prepare documentation and reports for the AFN.

First Nations Long-Term Water Strategy

The AFN met with over 100 First Nation water experts from across Canada over five two-day sessions in the fall of 2019. The outcomes of these sessions resulted in 36 key concepts which were presented at the AFN National Water Symposium held November 2019, and feedback heard from this session also fed into a final report entitled Preliminary Table of Contents for a First Nations Long-Term Water and Wastewater Strategy Post 2020-21, as a working document to inform future engagement with First Nations across Canada. This final report was endorsed through AFN Resolution 78/2019, which calls on AFN to urge the federal government that any long-term strategy for First Nations regarding critical infrastructure must be developed by First Nations, to seek sufficient resources to support further engagement and present back to the 2020 Annual General Assembly. The Resolutions also supported the implementation of a National Indigenous Youth Water Collective. The AFN has provided the 36 key concepts to Indigenous Services Canada to include as part of their Memorandum to Cabinet process, calling for a First Nations led process. The key concepts are not an exhaustive list rather intended to identify main priorities for future discussions and greater engagement with First Nations in the future. The AFN will set



up future First Nations Long-Term Water Strategy engagements with First Nations when it is safe to do so.

HOUSING

4th National First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Forum and Tradeshow

From March 10-12, 2020, close to 350 people attended the 4th National First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Forum and Tradeshow (the Forum) held at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. The National Chief Perry Bellegarde and Regional Chief Hart, the Assembly of First Nations' housing and infrastructure portfolio holder, provided participants inspiration and encouragement to continue the important housing and infrastructure work on behalf of First Nations. The Forum shared the focus equally between housing, operations and maintenance and asset management. Henry Lickers, a long-time environmental advisor and the first Indigenous Commissioner of the International Joint Commission, spoke in plenary session to traditional knowledge First Nations can draw upon to better plan for climate change effects on housing and infrastructure on First Nations. The twenty workshops highlighted cutting edge work in a wide range of issues. A good percentage of plenary and workshop time focused on the contributions of the urban Indigenous housing providers who are willing to collaborate with First Nations to better house their members living away from the community. The Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, spoke to participants by recorded video and Pam Damoff, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, presented in-person and took questions. Indigenous Services Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) led a well-attended workshop that provided an overview of their housing programs and their budgets. The Forum provided valuable input into the on-going work preparing for a major Memorandum to Cabinet expected in less than a year that is expected to make transformative change in the Federal Government's First Nations housing policy. The following data provides a numerical overview of the National Forum: number of First Nations participants 277; number of Chiefs in attendance 21; number of AFN staff in attendance 33; and number of vendors 24. Overall attendance is considered very good notwithstanding the World Health Organization declared Covid19 a world-wide pandemic on March 11, the second day of the Forum.

HOMELESSNESS

AFN Proposal Accepted

The AFN's proposal was accepted by ESDC Re: *National First Nations Homelessness Action-Plan On and Off Reserve Action Plan Phase 1* (\$2,241,600) to undertake research and coordinate regional engagement on homelessness & co-development of changes to ESDC's Reaching Home program. The Sector is currently awaiting amendment to current agreement.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Planning must go on in COVID-19

First Nations Infrastructure operations are now vulnerable to COVID-19 impact as an Indigenous Communities Support Fund was part of the recent ISC \$305 million announcement. First Nations must prepare for back-up planning in the event of COVID-19 illnesses to Infrastructure operations staff. Business Continuity Plans are required to ensure there is no disruption to the vital Infrastructure services in First Nation communities across Canada.

Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Policy

The draft AFN O&M Policy has been circulated to an experts' group for comments. The input has pointed away from an out-dated ISC O&M Policy for funding assets on First Nations. Instead, the desired direction is now towards a holistic approach to Asset Management. New funding regime system and financing ideas are needed for a new approach to First Nations Infrastructure. More discussion on O&M and Asset Management was front and centre on the agenda at the 4th AFN National Housing and Related Infrastructure Forum. The draft AFN O&M policy was presented for discussion and input. Asset Management Planning awareness, engagement and implementation for all First Nations covered during the Forum, service providers and industry showcased in presentations and by exhibitors on the Tradeshow floor. Much follow-up to be done from our great forum participation.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

AFN ISC Emergency Services Program Review Meeting

The AFN has met with ISC and reviewed its program funding model to have it align with other units and AFN sectors for a more stable funding approach in line with a five (5) year program funding model. Also discussed was the AFN - ISC relationship, EMAP proposals, the introduction of the Chiefs Committee on Emergency Management and the development of the First Nations Emergency Management Strategy to promote the move to First Nations care and control of First Nations driven emergency management regimes. Also discussed was the AFN EM Forum, and various reporting requirements.

Chiefs Committee on Emergency Management (CCEM)

AFN Emergency Services has cancelled its Strategic Planning Session with the Chiefs Committee on Emergency Management on First Nations Emergency Management scheduled for March 24-26, 2020 in Winnipeg, MB, due to COVID-19. The Strategic Planning Session was to look at the drafting and development of a Strategic Plan for the transfer of care and control of First Nations emergency management as per the Department of Indigenous Services Act. This has been cancelled until further notice. The CCEM will now be advocating 5 emergency management related resolutions concerning 03/2015 – *First Nations involvement in Emergency Preparedness*, 94/2017 – *Support for the Immediate inclusion of First Nations in the Development of the*



Emergency Services Agreements, 83/2019 – First Nations Control of Emergency Management, 84 /2019 – Call for Emergency Operations Emergency Management Planning in First Nations, and 85/2019 – Support for a Proposed First Nations Training Institute on Emergency Management.

Inventory of Emergency Management Capabilities

The Inventory of Emergency Management Capabilities in Indigenous Communities is now approaching completion; however, data is still required for Ontario and Manitoba; the Inventory project is not expected to continue under the new Public Safety Minister; and a report is currently being developed for presentation on to Ministers on a date to be confirmed.

Upcoming Events

- March 25-26, 2020 - Capacity and Skills 'Think Tank' - **CANCELLED**
- March 24-26, 2020 – CCoEM Strategic Planning Session - Winnipeg, MB - **CANCELLED**



LANDS, TERRITORIES AND RESOURCES SECTOR

Updates/Activities

The AFN Lands, Territories and Resources Sector (LTR) is focused on supporting First Nations inherent rights, title and jurisdiction by advocating for changes to key federal policies, such as the Additions to Reserve policy (ATR), Specific Claims policy, Comprehensive Land Claims policy (CLCP), and the Inherent Right to Self-Government (IRSG) policy. The LTR sector works closely with the AFN Chiefs Committee on Lands, Territories and Resources (Chiefs Committee), which provides technical and political advice across several rights related files.

Specific Claims

Beginning in 2019, the AFN undertook a national dialogue process with First Nations on what a fully independent specific claims process should look like. Sessions were held in Vancouver, Fort St. John, Six Nations, Thunder Bay, Edmonton, Halifax, Quebec City, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. The AFN also accepted written submissions that will be included as part of a final report on the dialogue process. The final report, which will include options for moving forward, will be provided to Chiefs-in-Assembly for review and consideration by July 2020. Currently the AFN and its technical representatives on the Joint Technical Working Group are working to review the dialogue materials and finalize the report.

Additions to Reserve (ATR)

Canada's Additions to Reserve policy (ATR) and process is a critical tool for addressing outstanding lawful obligations such as specific claims, while at the same time supporting the growth and development of First Nations communities and economies. The process has long been a barrier to both reconciliation and community development because it is extremely time consuming, lacks adequate resourcing and/or support at all levels, and can be easily frustrated by third parties, such as municipalities or provinces.

To help address these ongoing concerns, the AFN is advocating for a joint AFN – Canada process on ATR policy reform, which would include policy review, gaps analysis, and recommendations to expedite the process. The split of the department into ISC and CIRNAC (C-97) has potential implications for ATR, because it separates policy and operations between Indigenous Services Canada and CIRNAC, and requires both Ministers to sign off on a final ATR submission. The AFN will be seeking to gather more information about the potential impacts of C-97 on the ATR process in the coming months.

Comprehensive Land Claims and Inherent Right to Self-Government

The AFN is continuing to advocate for the development of a First Nations-driven process to replace the Interim Comprehensive Land Claims (CLCP) and Inherent



Right to Self-Government (IRSG) policies. Prior to the 2019 federal election, the AFN submitted a multi-year proposal that would provide funding to support a First Nations driven process to replace the CLCP and IRSG with policies or approaches that are consistent with a recognition of First Nations rights, title and jurisdiction. This is consistent with AFN Resolution 25-2019, *Support for a First Nations Led Engagement Process on Nation Building*, which rejects federally imposed processes and approaches to the recognition of Indigenous rights, title and jurisdiction, and calls for a First Nations driven process. The proposal was not accepted. Following the re-election of the federal Liberal government, Minister Bennett received a 2019 Mandate Letter which includes a commitment to ‘work with First Nations, Inuit and Metis to redesign the Comprehensive Claims and Inherent Rights Policies.’ The AFN is advocating for the development of a joint AFN – CIRNAC policy review process in 2020 that could jointly identify areas of concern and potentially inform a more expansive First Nations led reform of the CLCP and IRSG.



LANGUAGES AND CULTURE SECTOR

Updates/Activities

The *Indigenous Languages Act* (the Act)

The Act received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019. The majority of the Act came into force on August 29, 2019. The remaining sections – which relate to the establishment of the Office of the Indigenous Languages Commissioner (OCIL), regulations, and Independent and Parliamentary reviews of the Act – will come into force on October 1, 2020, or, if a Commissioner of Indigenous Languages is appointed before October 1, 2020, on the day on which the Commissioner is appointed. View the Act here: www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-91/royal-assent.

Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program (ILCP)

Applications to the new ILCP program doubled this year (2020-2021 fiscal year). This provides evidence of the necessity of increased funding. In response to COVID-19, the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) amended existing recipient agreements to provide more flexibility for program delivery. For those that identified a need to move their work to the next fiscal, the deadline was extended to March 31, 2021. Recipients were able to adapt their program activities and carry over funds, if required. For more information, please visit: www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/aboriginal-peoples/languages.html.

Implementation of the Act

The Minister of DCH's mandate letter prioritizes the Act and commits the Minister to continuing to “fully implement the *Indigenous Languages Act* in order to preserve, promote and revitalize Indigenous languages in Canada, with long-term predictable and sufficient funding to support the implementation of the Act.” The Joint Implementation Steering Committee – with representatives from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), DCH, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and Métis National Council (MNC) – continue to meet regularly to discuss the implementation of the Act, including:

- Developing a New Investment Framework for Indigenous languages;
- Strengthening Indigenous languages entities;
- Supporting education and lifelong learning/multifaceted approaches;
- Advancing a Whole-of-Government conformance with the intent of the Act;
- Advancing Federal/Provincial/Territorial cooperation;
- Supporting coordination of First Nations languages efforts;
- Developing regulations;
- Planning for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages;
- Communications planning;
- Establishing the OCIL;



- Supporting the appointment of the Commissioner;
- Examining translation and interpretation approaches; and
- Supporting evaluation and monitoring approaches for the three-year Independent Review and five-year Parliamentary Review.

National Indigenous Languages Symposium

The AFN is working with DCH, ITK, and MNC to facilitate a symposium that will bring together language experts, Elders, knowledge keepers, and learners to provide guidance on the implementation of the Act. This is expected to include key principles, recommendations, promising practices/models and next steps. The event is not intended to act as a consultation. Options for the organization of the event are being explored in consideration of current public health concerns related to COVID-19.

Consultations on the Implementation of the Act

The DCH is developing a distinctions-based Consultation Strategy in response to the statutory requirements within the Act to consult on adequate, sustainable and long-term funding (s. 7) and the appointment of the Commissioner and directors (s. 13 and 16.1). The primary focus of the consultations will be on (1) an Indigenous Languages Investment Framework and (2) establishing the OCIL. Other implementation questions requiring further consultation include: s. 45 (1) on regulations and s. 49 (2.1) in relation to the five-year Independent Review of the Act. Discussions on the design, delivery, and implementation of these consultations are taking place in consideration of public health concerns as related to COVID-19. Safety is of utmost importance during this time.

International Decade of Indigenous Languages

An International Decade of Indigenous Languages was announced by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on December 18, 2019. Planning should begin soon to maintain momentum leading up to the launch of the Decade in 2022, including the need to develop a national action plan to ensure tangible outcomes emerge from the Decade.

Resources

A Guide to An Act respecting Indigenous languages: A Tool for First Nations Language Revitalization is a resource designed to support efforts to reclaim, revitalize, preserve and strengthen First Nations languages. It is available on the AFN website at: <https://www.afn.ca/policy-sectors/languages-and-culture/>.

Upcoming events and meetings

First Nations are finding creative ways to continue their language learning virtually during this time of physical distancing. For example, the #virtualtea social media campaign encourages people to connect with speakers virtually to speak and share in their language in a safe way. Some have translated terms and symptoms related to



COVID-19. Please share any initiatives happening in your region. The AFN has also ensured available translated materials and audio files on COVID-19 are available on: <https://www.afn.ca/coronavirus/#link>.



RESEARCH AND POLICY COORDINATION SECTOR

The Research and Policy Coordination Sector oversees a number of projects including: The New Fiscal Relationship, Parliamentary Advocacy, the AFN-Canada MOU Process, and the Indigenous Peoples' Space.

Updates/Activities

The New Fiscal Relationship

On June 10, 2019, the Joint Advisory Committee on Fiscal Relations (JACFR) submitted its Interim Report for Engagement – *Honouring our Ancestors by Trailblazing a Path to the Future* – to the National Chief of the AFN and the Minister of Indigenous Services (ISC). The report also was the subject of a dialogue session at the Annual General Assembly (AGA) in Fredericton, New Brunswick on July 21, 2019, and was provided in kits to all delegates at the AGA. Resolution 24/2019, passed during this Assembly, calls on members of the JACFR, the AFN and ISC to engage extensively with First Nations about this interim report, and bring their findings back to Chiefs at the AGA in July of 2020. While some additional engagement activities have been conducted, the engagement plan and products continue to be developed by the JACFR. The JACFR met in Ottawa, February 26-27, 2020 to continue this work. For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, Eighty-five (85) First Nations are receiving the New Fiscal Relationship (NFR) Transfer (formerly known as the 10-year grant). The NFR Transfer is an alternative to contribution agreements for transferring funds between Canada and First Nations. It increases predictability by providing ten years of guaranteed funding, with an annual escalator that matches inflation and population growth. Any unspent funds can be carried forward into the next fiscal year and all funds received under the NFR Transfer can be applied to the priorities set by the First Nation. This will help First Nations plan their own futures and apply funding to the greatest needs or best opportunities for that First Nation. The NFR Transfer also increases First Nations control by eliminating program terms and conditions, recipient audits, and compliance reviews, as set and conducted by Canada. The NFR Transfer also decreases the reporting burden on First Nations governments, with 92% less data to be provided to Canada than is currently required under contribution agreements. First Nations not currently participating in the NFR Transfer received a letter asking for expressions of interest to participate for the 2020-2021 fiscal year and those interested First Nations are being contacted to complete the process to qualify for the NFR Transfer beginning in fiscal year 2020-21.

Parliamentary Advocacy

On March 13, 2020, the House voted to suspend Parliament for 5 weeks in light of COVID-19. This included previously scheduled breaks of March 16-20, 2020, and April 6-17, 2020. As such the budget announcement scheduled for March 30, 2020, will now be delayed. On March 25, 2020, several MPs returned to pass an aid package bill



worth \$107 billion to help Canadians struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The legislation boosts access to employment insurance and other programs that will flow money to workers and businesses in need. The House is scheduled to resume on April 20, 2020. However, given current events, this may be subject to change. When the House returns to business, the AFN will continue to monitor progress on the following draft pieces of legislation:

Number	Title	Sponsor	Last Stage Completed
C-5	<u>An Act to amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code</u>	Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, David Lametti	Second Reading; In Committee
C-6	<u>An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action number 94)</u>	Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, David Lametti	First Reading
C-201	<u>An Act to develop a national school food program for children</u>	Don Davies – NDP	First Reading
C-207	<u>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (presentence report)</u>	Majid Jowhari – Liberal	First Reading
C-213	<u>An Act to enact the Canada Pharmacare Act</u>	Peter Julian – NDP	First Reading
C-215	<u>An Act respecting Canada's fulfillment of its greenhouse gas emissions reduction obligations</u>	Kristina Michaud – Bloc Québécois	First Reading
C-230	<u>An Act respecting the development of a national strategy to redress environmental racism</u>	Lenore Zann – Liberal	First Reading
C-232	<u>An Act respecting a Climate Emergency Action Framework</u>	Leah Gazan – NDP	First Reading



C-237	<u>An Act to establish a national framework for diabetes</u>	Sonia Sidhu – Liberal	First Reading
C-240	<u>An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (voting age)</u>	Don Davies – NDP	First Reading
S-208	<u>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (independence of the judiciary)</u>	Senator Kim Pate	First Reading
S-212	<u>An Act to establish International Mother Language Day</u>	Senator Mobina S.B. Jaffer	First Reading
S-214	<u>An Act to amend the Criminal Records Act, to make consequential amendments to other Acts and to repeal a regulation</u>	Senator Kim Pate	First Reading

AFN-Canada MOU Process

On December 15, 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded to the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) call for a high-level mechanism to discuss First Nations' priorities by agreeing to a process for dialogue with the AFN. The MOU is a simple agreement to meet a minimum of three times a year, with one of those meetings chaired by the Prime Minister. Current priorities for dialogue include the following. On February 28, 2020 the AFN facilitated a meeting of senior officials to prepare for a future meeting between the AFN and the Prime Minister under the MOU (date TBD). The AFN discussed new and existing priorities the MOU including:

- Policing and Community Safety
- Indigenous Languages
- Implementation of the UN Declaration
- Implementing the Calls to Action of the TRC
- The New Fiscal Relationship
- Joint Law and Policy Review (the 4 Policies)
- Closing the Gap (Child and Family Services)
- A National Treaty Commissioner's Office
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- Climate Change
- Restorative Justice



- Infrastructure
- Health

Indigenous Peoples' Space

The AFN is continuing to work with partners to develop a vision for the future use of the Indigenous Peoples' Space. Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 29/2019, *100 Wellington Street* continuing the AFN's mandate to determine the most effective use of the 100 Wellington Street. Resolution 29/2019 also directed the AFN to make sure that the appropriate protocols with the Algonquin Nations are engaged and to ensure equal Algonquin involvement. The AFN is proactively engaging with all project partners to begin discussions on partnership agreements. The AFN is pursuing resources to advance Resolution 29/2019 and the continuation of the project. For more information, please see the AFN website: <https://www.afn.ca/indigenous-peoples-space-building-the-future-together/>



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Social Development sector works to advance the rights of First Nations by advocating for social policy and service delivery that is holistic, culturally-based and sustainable. Through this advocacy, our sector promotes First Nations control and jurisdiction in the areas of child and family services, Jordan's Principle, social programs such as income assistance and assisted living, and early learning and child care.

Updates/Activities

Child and Family Services

Work on the Quebec Constitutional Reference and the Federal Class Action to compensate victims of the First Nations Child and Family Services system in Canada remains ongoing. On March 16, 2020, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) issued a letter determining that access to compensation for victims of discrimination of Canada's First Nations Child and Family Services program can be gained when the individual reaches the provincial/territorial age of majority. It further determined that compensation will be available to individuals who entered care prior to January 1, 2006 but remained in care after that date, and that compensation will be paid to the estates of deceased individuals who otherwise would have been eligible. On March 25, 2020, the National Advisory Committee on First Nations Child and Family Services met by conference call. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) provided an update on the National Recipient Guide and Prevention Directive. The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy also provided an update on their phase two research to recommend a new performance-based funding model in First Nations Child and Family Services. On March 27, 2020, the Consultation Committee on Child Welfare met by conference call. Updates were provided on the Family Violence Prevention Program, Claims Process Appeals, Reallocation Policy, and COVID-19 planning. On March 29, 2020, ISC informed First Nation Child and Family Services agencies that during the COVID-19 outbreak First Nations youth who would normally age out of care will continue to receive the supports they need. As an exceptional measure, from at least March 9, 2020 to September 30, 2020, ISC will continue to cover the eligible maintenance costs to First Nations child and family services agencies who are currently providing services to youth who would normally be aging out of care during this period. The AFN had planned a Leadership Forum on First Nations Child and Family Services, to take place in early April 2020. However, given the COVID-19 outbreak, the event has been rescheduled to September 2020.

Jordan's Principle

Between July 2016 and January 31, 2019, more than 533,000 products, services and supports were approved under Jordan's Principle. The Jordan's Principle Operations Committee (JPOC) held a teleconference on March 26, 2020 to discuss the COVID-19



outbreak in relation to Jordan's Principle. JPOC also discussed payment coordination and processing, case conferencing, group requests, and child and family services use of Jordan's Principle. JPOC further discussed a proposed communications strategy and an update on Jordan's Principle data.

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Income Assistance

The Technical Working Group on Social Development (TWGSD) met through conference call on March 18, 2020. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) provided updates on the Income Assistance, Assisted Living, and Long Term Care Programs. ISC also shared information on Federal Social Benefits uptake, particularly the Canada Child Benefit, and indicated they may pursue work to increase uptake. The TWGSD discussed Canada's Economic Response Plan to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, particularly income support for those who have lost their jobs and/or who are now facing higher expenses. There was also much interest in the announced \$305 Indigenous Community Support Fund, though details are limited at this time. Dan Wilson from the AFN Policy Sector provided an overview of the announced social and financial supports and collected input to provide recommendations to the government.

Poverty Reduction

The TWGSD was planning to meet with the National Advisory Council on Poverty (NACP) during the March 18th meeting, but the NACP meeting was postponed. The TWGSD identified the scope of the study on poverty reduction mandated by AFN Resolution 98/2019, *Poverty Reduction for All First Nations in Canada*. The TWGSD determined that the study must take a holistic approach to poverty, beyond just financial, when determining First Nation-specific indicators and measures of poverty. The TWGSD also advised that the study consider poverty at different levels, for example individual level, family level, and community level. A proposal for this study is being drafted and will be shared back to the TWGSD for comment.

Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)

The AFN is monitoring provincial, territorial and First Nations responses to COVID-19 in relation to ELCC and is in communication with the National Expert Working Group on First Nations ELCC to provide support where needed. The new federal priorities for ELCC include before- and after-school care expansion, affordability, support for early childhood educators, and a secretariat on pan-Canadian ELCC. These priorities were to be discussed at the March 2020 First Ministers' Meeting; however, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the meeting was postponed.

Upcoming Events

- **April 6, 2020** - Chiefs Committee on Child and Family Services and Self-Determination – Teleconference