

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS REPORT, TITLED, “EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES”

Introduction

The Government of Canada thanks the Committee for this critical study and agrees with the Committee’s seven recommendations, including to provide the majority of the reports according to the established timelines. The Government of Canada will continue to demonstrate its firm commitment to this important work through collaboration with First Nations partners to increase resiliency to emergency events.

The Government of Canada welcomes and appreciates the Committee’s attention to the important issue of emergency preparedness. First Nations communities, are disproportionately affected by the increasing frequency and intensity of emergency events as a result of climate change. The Government of Canada is committed to working with First Nations communities, as full and equal partners, to ensure their communities have the capacity to adapt to and mitigate the risks of climate change.

The Government supports Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination and will continue working collaboratively with partners to improve access to high-quality services and to support the capacity of communities to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency events. In order to adhere to the Government of Canada’s responsibilities for on-reserve lands, Indigenous Services Canada’s (ISC) Emergency Management Assistance Program (EMAP) provides emergency management resources directly to on-reserve First Nations communities and other eligible recipients.

On November 15, 2022, the Auditor General of Canada’s (AG) report on Emergency Management in First Nations Communities was tabled in Parliament. The AG report has seven recommendations that highlight important gaps in ISC’s efforts to provide emergency management supports to First Nations communities.

Steering Committee on ISC’s Actions to Address Auditor General of Canada Performance Audit Recommendations on Emergency Management

Almost every recommendation in the Committee’s report and in the AG’s 2022 Report underscores the importance of ISC working in collaboration with First Nations. In alignment with the recommendations and in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), a Steering Committee was created with the intention of serving as an avenue for co-development between ISC and First Nations, specifically First Nations communities’ members who have professional knowledge of emergency management in the First Nations context. This advisory body of 12 First Nation emergency management practitioners was stood up on October 12, 2023, and meets every two weeks. Members provide their feedback on the development and implementation of actions to address the AG’s recommendations to improve outcomes for First Nations communities.

Recommendation 1:

That, by January 15, 2024, Indigenous Services Canada must provide the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report, outlining the progress made by the department, in collaboration with the First Nations, in identifying the risks related to emergencies and the costs of preventing and potentially responding to them. A final report should also be presented, explaining the new approach for allocating project funding based on this identification of needs and risks. The final report should also confirm that the new approach and funding measures have been implemented by April 30, 2024.

Response:

The Fall 2022 AG's report titled, "*Emergency Management in First Nations Communities*," found that ISC was not using a risk-based approach to ensure funding was being directed to First Nations communities that need it most. It recommended that ISC should work with First Nations to implement a risk-based approach to inform program planning and decisions on where to invest in preparedness and mitigation activities to maximize support to communities at highest risk of being affected by emergencies.

The Government agreed with this recommendation, highlighting its commitment to implement a risk-based approach to inform funding decisions.

The Government agrees with the recommendation and provided an interim report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on January 15, 2024, outlining the progress made to date (letter in Annex A). The Government has also agreed to provide a final report by April 30, 2024, explaining the new approach for allocating project-based funding and confirming its implementation.

Recommendation 2:

ISC must provide the Committee with reports showing the number of structural mitigation projects funded during the preceding fiscal year in First Nations communities, and for which amount, as well as the structural mitigation projects that are still not funded by 30 April of each year from 2024 to 2028.

Response:

In the *Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Report 8*, the AG stated that as of May 2022, there were 112 unfunded and 72 unreviewed structural mitigation projects in First Nations across the country.

The Government has accepted the recommendation of the AG to work with First Nations communities to address the backlog of eligible unfunded structural mitigation projects and unreviewed structural mitigation projects to effectively allocate resources and reduce the impact of emergencies on First Nations communities.

- After completing the initial review of the unfunded structural mitigation projects in November 2023, it was determined that 52 projects remained a priority for First Nations communities, with a total estimated cost of approximately \$96.3M.
- ISC is currently reviewing the 72 unreviewed structural mitigation projects to determine their eligibility. Once the review has been completed, projects will be prioritized and integrated into the First Nation Infrastructure Investment Planning (FNIIP) process.

As indicated in the Management Response Action Plan to the AG's report, the Government is committed to addressing these outstanding unfunded and unreviewed structural mitigation projects.

The Government agrees to provide an annual progress report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts from 2024 to 2028. The report will include the number of structural mitigation projects funded in First Nations communities, the amount of funding expended by ISC for these projects in the preceding fiscal year as well as the number of projects that remain unfunded from the unfunded and unreviewed list of projects identified in the AG's report. However, the proposed reporting timeline of April 30, for providing the annual progress report is not optimal as it does not align to the Government of Canada's reporting cycle for actual expenditures. Canada recommends moving the due date of the annual progress report to July 15 as this will follow the sign-off of the Letter of Representation by Department Officials (i.e., Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer) and fully ensure that expenditures reported will then be considered final.

Recommendation 3:

ISC must provide the Committee with a report indicating whether the departmental and regional emergency management plans have all been updated by January 31, 2024.

Response:

The AG found that ISC did not have an updated emergency management plan at the departmental and regional levels, as required under the *Emergency Management Act*. It recommended that ISC should regularly update outdated departmental and regional emergency management plans and take immediate action to develop regional emergency management plans for the three regions that do not have them.

The Government agrees with this recommendation highlighting its commitment, in collaboration with First Nations, to review and update the department's national Emergency Management Plan and regional plans.

The Government provided a report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on January 15, 2024 (letter in Annex A).

Recommendation 4:

ISC must provide the Committee with a report on the changes to the number of emergency management coordinators and the reasons for these changes by April 30, 2024.

Response:

The AG found that while ISC had provided a total of \$26.9 million to First Nations communities and organizations for about 190 full-time or part-time emergency management coordinators, the department did not identify how many additional emergency management coordinators were needed by First Nations. The AG recommended ISC should determine how many emergency management coordinator positions are required and allocate funding for these positions on the basis of risk and need. This will ensure that First Nations have sustained capacity to manage emergencies.

The Government agreed with this recommendation and the department is exploring additional opportunities to support more positions to First Nations communities, on the basis of risk.

The Government agrees to provide a report by April 30, 2024, on the changes to the number of emergency management coordinators and the reasons for these changes.

ISC has an annual budget of \$12.96 million to support Emergency Management Coordinator positions within First Nations communities and Tribal Councils. This funding was introduced in 2019 to support 96 notional positions funded at \$135,000 each. The amount is intended to cover the salary, training, travel, and other administrative costs of the position. In some areas the positions are also referred to as Directors of Emergency Management and Emergency Preparedness Coordinators. When introduced, these positions were allocated on a regional basis according to the EMAP funding formula. This formula divides funding between regions based on factors such as the First Nations population, number of communities, the cost of past emergency events, and the frequency of past events.

In order to account for regional specific First Nations needs and interests, the delivery of this funding has varied from region to region. Since there are more First Nations communities than there are funded positions, a number of strategies have evolved to create the maximum possible benefit for the maximum number of communities. In some regions, funding for Emergency Management Coordinator positions is split, creating multiple part-time positions out of the original notional Emergency Management Coordinator position. In other cases, Emergency Management Coordinator positions are hosted in Tribal Councils which then provide their services to each of the Tribal Council's member communities.

Recommendation 5:

ISC must provide the Committee with reports on multilateral emergency management service agreements with First Nations and the provinces and territories, on wildfire agreements, and on the development of evacuation service standards by 30 April of each year from 2024 to 2027. Furthermore, the Committee strongly encourages ISC to develop service standards by April 2025, rather than the timeline set out in its action plan (April 2027).

Response:

The AG found that the department did not establish emergency service agreements that covered all First Nations communities. Further, the AG found the department had not established multilateral emergency management service agreements nor wildfire agreements to cover all First Nations. Finally, the AG found that ISC had only established evacuation service standards in one region. It recommended that ISC establish emergency management service agreements and wildfire agreements in all jurisdictions that include First Nations. The AG also recommended that ISC establish mutually agreed-upon evacuation service standards in the jurisdictions that lack such standards and increase support for First Nations-led approaches to emergency management.

The Government agreed with the AG's recommendation, highlighting its commitment to engage and work in partnership with First Nations and emergency management partners to establish comprehensive emergency management service agreements. These agreements will include mutually agreed-upon service standards, and increase supports for First Nations-led approaches to emergency management.

The Government agrees with the Committee's request to provide a progress report by April 30, 2024, on multilateral emergency management service agreements with First Nations and the provinces and territories. It has also agreed to provide an update on wildfire agreements, and the development of evacuation service standards. A progress report will be provided by April 30, 2025, that will include service standards followed by progress reports on April 30, 2026, and April 30, 2027.

Currently, Canada has eight bilateral emergency management service agreements with provincial and territorial governments and non-governmental organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross. These agreements were put in place to provide support to First Nations during emergency events comparable to those within the same jurisdiction. This could include supports during evacuations such as food and lodging as well as transportation and assistance to reintegrate back to the community post emergency.

The Government is taking concrete steps to transform emergency management for First Nations namely through the development of new multilateral emergency management service agreements. Negotiations of these service agreements include First Nations as full and equal partners from the onset and will result in end products that clearly reflect their vision and aspirations according to their individual context. This context will shape what level of support each jurisdiction would provide to First Nations during emergency events with a focus on promoting First Nation self-determination.

The Government has identified opportunities to engage with First Nations and provincial and territorial governments across all jurisdictions, having created a roadmap in each towards a multilateral service agreement. The Government will continue to prioritize the advancement of multilateral service agreements in a way that ultimately supports First Nations' right to self-determination.

Region-specific strategies are being developed to promote the uptake of new multilateral service agreements, based on direct engagement with First Nations in all jurisdictions. This direct engagement will allow the Government of Canada to better tailor its approach based on the direction and priorities of First Nations. To address this, ISC has developed regional engagement plans and funding is available for First Nation-led engagement. For instance, in 2022-2023, the Government of Canada provided \$1.8 million to First Nations, Tribal Councils,

and Indigenous Representative Organizations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to lead engagement with their membership on their vision for emergency management and develop their own proposals and models for First Nations-led emergency management.

The Government regularly meets with partners to discuss the outcomes of these engagements. There are also numerous emergency management forums being planned across the country over 2024-2025 where the Government will have the opportunity to further engage with partners to work collaboratively on new multilateral service agreements. The Government continues to identify opportunities to engage with First Nations and provincial and territorial governments across all jurisdictions and will continue to prioritize the advancement of multilateral service agreements in a way that ultimately supports First Nations' right to self-determination.

Recommendation 6:

ISC must provide the Committee with a report presenting the new indicators used by the Emergency Management Assistance Program to measure the progress made against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by March 31, 2024.

Response:

The AG found that the EMAP lacked adequate performance indicators that would allow it to assess progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The AG recommended that ISC should develop performance indicators to allow the department to measure progress against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Government agreed with this recommendation highlighting its commitment to improving program indicators to better measure progress against the United Nations' SDGs.

The Government agrees to provide a progress report by March 31, 2024, presenting the new indicators used by EMAP.

During the time of the AG audit, the Program had 60 performance indicators, and subsequent decommissioning reduced this number to eight. Following assessment, 52 indicators were decommissioned, considering factors such as the absence of reliable data sources, redundancy with other indicators, and relevance to the Indigenous Community Support Fund program, which was developed to support Indigenous communities to prevent, prepare and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and is no longer active.

In response to these findings, ISC has undertaken a strategic initiative to align the remaining eight program indicators with the United Nations SDGs. This realignment emphasizes the Government's commitment to a global framework, focusing on specific SDGs, including Goal 1—end poverty in all its forms everywhere, Goal 3—ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, Goal 9—build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, Goal 11—make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, and Goal 13—take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

To further enhance the comprehensiveness of our program assessment, ISC is actively involved in the development of new indicators across various dimensions of the EMAP. This process includes a thorough examination of each area to ensure a well-rounded understanding that aligns seamlessly with the program's outcomes. ISC is evaluating the effectiveness of existing data sources and identifying areas that require the creation of new, meaningful indicators.

The goal is to cultivate indicators that not only align with the UN SDGs but also offer a nuanced and comprehensive overview of the program's impact. By covering multiple dimensions of the EMAP, these indicators will contribute to a more robust assessment of program outcomes, facilitating continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving challenges. As ISC navigates this ongoing process, the focus remains on creating indicators that meet the highest standards and contribute to the overall effectiveness and resilience of the EMAP in collaboration with First Nation partners.

The Government will provide the Committee with a report on these new indicators by March 31, 2024.

Recommendation 7:

ISC must provide the Committee with a report by 15 January 2024 explaining how the department:

- 1) defines what is meant by comparable services for First Nations;*
- 2) monitors the services provided to First Nations to ensure that they are comparable to services provided to non-Indigenous communities, are culturally appropriate, and address the needs of marginalized groups; and*
- 3) identifies and addresses shortcomings by monitoring emergency management service agreements and conducts lessons-learned exercises.*

Response:

The AG found that ISC did not fulfill one of its key roles of ensuring that emergency services provided to First Nations were comparable to non-First Nation communities culturally appropriate and addressed the needs of marginalized groups as well as undertaking lessons learned exercises.

The Government agreed with this recommendation highlighting its commitment, in collaboration with First Nations, to review and update the department's national Emergency Management Plan and regional plans.

The Government agrees with the recommendation and provided a final report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on January 15, 2024 (Letter in Annex A).

CONCLUSION

The Government of Canada thanks the Committee for its study of the AG's Report and these recommendations. The Government of Canada will continue to demonstrate its firm commitment to this important work, in collaboration with First Nations partners to support their efforts to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the increasing incidence and severity of emergency events, ultimately resulting in enhanced community resiliency.

ANNEX A

Letter from the ISC Deputy Minister with Three Reports Submitted on January 15, 2024, to the Standing Committee on Public Affairs

John Williamson
Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

January 15, 2024

Dear Mr. Williamson:

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) is pleased to provide electronically, in both official languages, the progress reports requested before or by January 31, 2024, pursuant to Recommendations 1, 3 and 7 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Account's Report 34 titled, *Emergency Management in First Nations Communities*, tabled on November 27, 2023.

I would like to preface our response by noting that the *Steering Committee on ISC's Actions to Address Auditor General of Canada Performance Audit Recommendations on Emergency Management* informs our work to address the recommendations in the Auditor General of Canada's 2022 report titled *Report 8, Emergency Management in First Nations Communities*.

Almost every recommendation in the aforementioned reports of this Committee and the Auditor General reference ISC working in collaboration with First Nations. As such, in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), a steering committee was created with the intention of serving as an avenue for co-development between ISC and First Nations, specifically First Nations communities' members who have professional knowledge of emergency management in the First Nations context. This advisory body of 12 First Nation emergency management practitioners was stood up on October 12, 2023, and meets every two weeks. Members provide their feedback on the development and implementation of actions to address the Auditor General's recommendations to improve outcomes for First Nations Communities.

Recommendation 1: On the risk-based allocation of resources

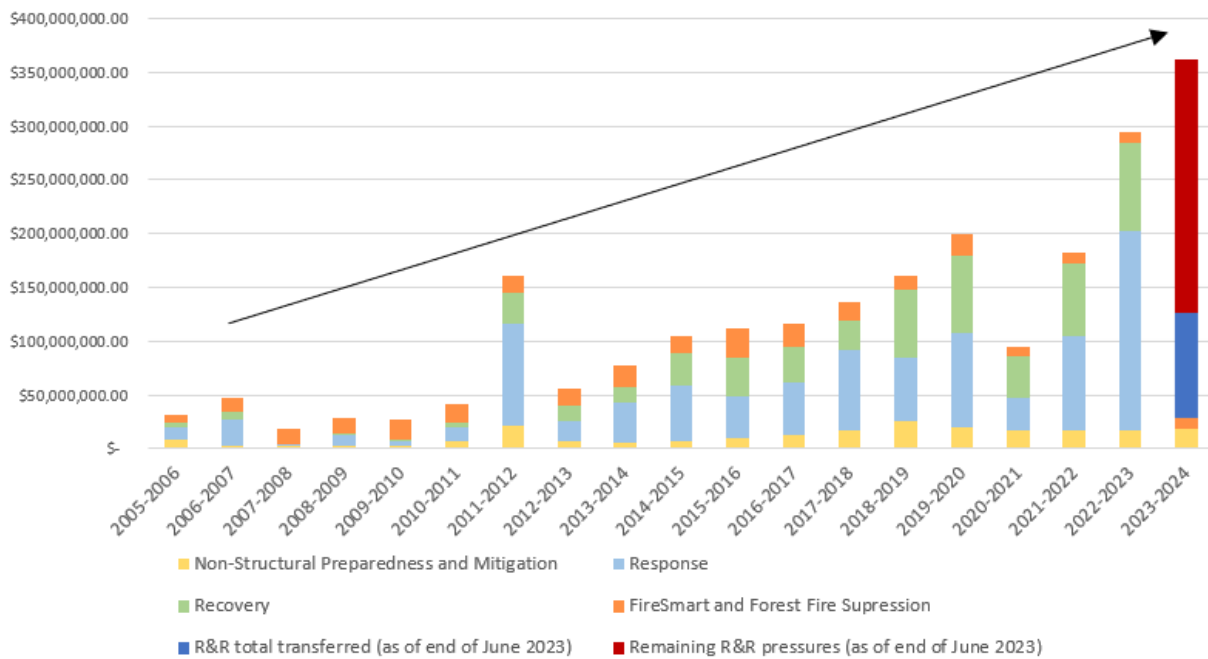
That, by 15 January 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made by the department, in collaboration with the First Nations, in identifying the risks related to emergencies and the costs of preventing and potentially responding to them. A final report should also be presented by 30 April 2024 explaining the new approach for allocating project funding based on this identification of needs and risks. The final report should also confirm that the new approach and funding measures have been implemented.

Response:

Background

ISC acknowledges that there has been a trend of spending on response and recovery activities to emergency events that exceed spending dedicated to those of preparedness and mitigation. As noted in the AG's report, the former outstripped the latter by 3.5 times during the period of 2018-19 to 2021-22 as illustrated in the table below.

EMAP Funding Program Totals by FY, 2005-Present



ISC notes the benefits of increased spending on preparedness and mitigation efforts, as highlighted in Public Safety’s [2019 Emergency Management Strategy for Canada](#), where for every \$1 invested in preparedness and mitigation, \$6 can be saved in emergency response and recovery costs. In an era of ever-increasing frequency and intensity of emergency events, greater efforts must be focused on the preventative side of emergencies not only to reduce potential costs but to reduce the impact of emergencies and their negative mental and social effects on First Nations communities.

Overall, First Nations communities are at much higher risk than non-First Nations communities. First Nations are more likely to be evacuated as a result of an emergency event due to their comparative geographic proximity to areas with a higher risk of floods and wildfires as opposed to off-reserve communities. For example, 80% of First Nations communities are located in areas of wildfire risk. According to Canada’s National Adaptation Action Strategy, while on-reserve populations represent just over 2% of the Canadian population, they make up almost 40% of the total evacuees due to emergency events. First Nations communities also face challenges in recovery activities due to socio-economic factors potentially affecting their capacity, coupled with the psychosocial effects and accompanying lost economic opportunities. This social dimension of risk highlights that, while the likelihood of an emergency event might be similar throughout a region, impacts strongly depend on the level of vulnerability.

Update

To gain a better understanding of its current risk-based approach at the regional level, ISC developed a survey and received feedback from its regional offices and its First Nations partners. The survey results revealed that 50% of ISC regions apply a risk-based approach to their funding decisions. All ISC regions identified the need for a more robust and targeted risk-based approach to assist in their funding decisions leveraging a wide variety of available tools and data. Finally, many underscored that a risk-based approach lies first and foremost at the First Nation community level given their unique context and circumstances.

ISC also consulted with other federal government departments such as Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), Public Safety Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) to deepen its understanding of existing risk-based approaches. ISC also reached out to First Nations partners to gain a better understanding of their thoughts on a potential formula, and how a new formula would address community needs.

The results of these consultations are shaping the department’s risk-based approach, which when updated, will make it easier to identify communities at the highest risk of emergency events. ISC is co-developing a more robust and comprehensive new risk-based approach that leverages existing data and tools such as flood and wildfire forecasts as well as socio-economic,

demographic, geographic, and historical data. This approach seeks to maximize the effectiveness of mitigation and preparedness funding by focusing on First Nations communities at the highest risk of being impacted by emergency events.

For example, ISC has developed a list of the highest-risk First Nation communities. This list allows the approach to focus not only on the current context but also provides some insight, through a socio-economic lens, into a community's potential emergency response capability. Another example of ISC's new approach is an existing risk tool: the Climate Risk Index (CRI). This was developed by CIRNAC's First Nation Adapt Program using available forecasting data from sources such as Natural Resources Canada, as well as the ISC Emergency Management Assistance Program's (EMAP) database with over 15 years of information on First Nations communities' emergencies. This tool ultimately provides a risk scoring index for various emergencies such as floods and wildfires in each First Nation community.

First and foremost, the engagement of First Nations is required to implement this approach. The department is discussing the new risk-based approach with the Steering Committee and other partners to ensure the approach that will be implemented meets the challenges that First Nations have outlined during engagement, and the concerns included in the Auditor General's report. The proposed approach was presented to the co-led First Nations Steering Committee on two occasions in December 2023. Feedback was integrated into the approach, including the need to consider the unique context and circumstances of every First Nation community in assessing risk.

Starting on April 1, 2024, this new co-developed risk-based approach will be implemented in all ISC regions to ensure more consistency where risk clearly informs all regions' funding decisions. Additionally, in select ISC regions, a pilot program will be launched where a percentage of each region's current preparedness and mitigation funding allocation will be dedicated to their highest-risk communities. Results of the pilot will inform programming across all regions in subsequent years.

A final report, fully explaining the risk-based approach and confirming its implementation, will be presented to this Committee by April 30, 2024.

Recommendation 3—On departmental and regional emergency management plans

That, by 31 January 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report indicating whether the departmental and regional emergency management plans have all been updated.

Response:

Background

Section 6 of the *Emergency Management Act* (2007) outlines the Emergency Management responsibilities of each Minister accountable to Parliament for a government institution to identify risks that are within or related to his or her area of responsibility—including those related to critical infrastructure—and to prepare Emergency Management plans to address those risks. Departmental plans help clarify roles and responsibilities, as well as outlining actions to support the efforts of First Nations to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency events.

As per the Auditor General's audit, ISC's current Emergency Management Plan has not been updated since 2017 and does not reflect the department's current mandate and approach to working with First Nations. The audit noted that this includes ISC's regional emergency management plans which either had not been updated regularly or did not exist.

Update

Over the course of the Summer 2023, ISC undertook a review of existing regional emergency management plans and developed a draft template intended to be used by the regional offices to support the development and revision of their respective regional emergency management

plans. As per the Auditor General's recommendation, the department sought to ensure the alignment of the template for the regional emergency management plans with the National On-Reserve Emergency Management Plan.

In the Summer and Fall of 2023, ISC reviewed and updated the National On-Reserve Emergency Management Plan to reflect the departmental structure and mandate as well as the shift to an all-hazards emergency management approach. To support this, ISC conducted internal and external engagements. The revised plan will reflect this all-hazards approach including two aspects of health emergencies: (1) public health emergencies and (2) health aspects of natural disasters. In addition, the updated plan will also demonstrate the increased role and responsibility of the ISC Regional Communications directorate through a crisis communications response approach. Finally, ISC validated the updated draft of the National On-Reserve Plan with Public Safety Canada, given its responsibilities under Section 4.1 of the EMA. Going forward, ISC will use its previous engagement with First Nations partners to guide its work and continue to engage with the First Nations Steering Committee to ensure that we are addressing First Nations issues, with the goal of finalizing the national plan before April 1, 2024, as per ISC's Management Response Action Plan.

Regional offices are updating their Regional Emergency Management Plans by January 2024. Regions will also engage with external partners on their plans in Winter 2024 with the aim of finalizing them by April 1, 2024. During this period, the plans will be considered interim, but functional. ISC is also committed to reviewing the plans on an ongoing basis, every two years.

Recommendation 7 —On the quality of emergency management services

That, by 15 January 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report explaining how the department:

- 1) defines what is meant by comparable services for First Nations;*
- 2) monitors the services provided to First Nations to ensure that they are comparable to services provided to non-Indigenous communities, are culturally appropriate, and address the needs of marginalized groups; and*
- 3) identifies and addresses shortcomings by monitoring emergency management service agreements and conducts lessons-learned exercises.*

Response:

Background

One of ISC's key roles in emergency management is to provide funding directly to First Nations and service providers, such as provinces and territories (PTs) and third parties such as the Canadian Red Cross, who then provide "boots-on-the-ground" emergency services to First Nations. Currently, the reporting from these service providers does not provide ISC with the information required to assess whether emergency services are comparable to non-Indigenous communities, are culturally appropriate, address the needs of marginalized groups, or include lessons-learned exercises. Therefore, meeting this recommendation requires close collaboration with service providers and First Nations.

Historically, ISC's EMAP has committed to ensuring that First Nations have access to emergency services comparable to those available in municipalities of a similar size and circumstances in their respective province. This has generally been understood as EMAP's reimbursement of eligible expenses meeting or exceeding what PTs provide in off-reserve areas. This has been accomplished with EMAP reimbursing 100% of eligible expenses with wide-ranging eligibility as well as providing First Nation advance payments to ensure the funding support needed is readily available.

Update

Through the Management Response Action Plan to the Auditor General's report, ISC provided an action plan for addressing this recommendation. This report provides an update on ISC's progress, as of December 2023.

1. ISC committed to working with its regional offices to do a review of current practices and determine the extent to which existing reporting requirements are effectively monitoring services provided, including comparability to non-Indigenous communities, culturally appropriate services, meeting the needs of marginalized populations, and lessons-learned exercises.

ISC has completed this review and, building on the findings of the Auditor General's Report, found that:

- ISC regional offices do not currently have a definition of "comparable EM services for First Nations in relation to those available to municipalities of similar size and circumstance in each jurisdiction," and they do not receive reporting from service providers on whether aspects of on-the-ground emergency management services are comparable to non-Indigenous communities.
 - Most ISC regional offices do not currently assess whether emergency management services provided to First Nations are culturally appropriate or address the needs of marginalized groups, although some did so in an ad hoc, anecdotal, or case-by-case basis. Most ISC regional offices do conduct lessons learned activities after emergencies, but there is room for improvement in formalizing lessons learned, such as using consistent methods, recording them, building them into the reporting cycle, and conducting analysis to assess shortcomings and ways to improve.
2. ISC committed to supporting First Nations to develop their own Emergency Management service standards.

Based on recommendations from regional offices and the First Nations Steering Committee, ISC will address comparability to non-Indigenous communities by supporting First Nations regionally to develop their own emergency management service standards, which will be integrated into multilateral service agreements. This addresses concerns that due to socio-economic inequities and differences in governance and responsibilities between First Nations and municipalities, providing comparable services (outputs) may not conclude in comparable results (outcomes). For example, in a community with inadequate infrastructure and emergency management coordinator positions, the same funding as provided to a municipality is unlikely to result in the same outcomes. This is also aligned with ISC's work in other key priority areas, where comparable services are being considered as substantive equality, whereby: First Nations have access to emergency services comparable to those in non-Indigenous communities; First Nations are to have control over their emergency services; and First Nations may exercise their right to deliver emergency services through service delivery models designed by them to suit their needs.

Multilateral service agreements provide an opportunity for First Nations, with the support of ISC and PTs, to develop First Nation-led emergency management service standards that are region-specific, reflect realities of their socio-economic circumstances, are culturally appropriate, and meet the needs of marginalized community members. That said, in recognition that multilateral agreements will take several years to negotiate and finalize, ISC is working with the First Nations Steering Committee to co-develop national interim service standards in order to ensure that emergency services are more culturally appropriate and better address the needs of marginalized groups. ISC will invite service providers to meet interim service standards until First Nation-led service standards are finalized through the development of multilateral agreements.

ISC is in the process of soliciting feedback on such service standards. It is expected that interim service standards will be ready to share for implementation in April 2024.

3. ISC committed to engaging First Nation partners to seek their input on how to best conduct lessons-learned activities and measure whether emergency services are comparable to Indigenous communities, culturally appropriate, and address the needs of marginalized groups. ISC also committed to developing a report template whereby service providers can conduct lessons learned on how services can be improved, including to be more culturally appropriate and better address the needs of marginalized people.

Throughout Fall 2023, ISC has been working with the First Nations Steering Committee in order to co-develop solutions. Based on advice from the Steering Committee, as well as ISC regional offices, ISC is developing after action reports guidance and templates. This will expand and formalize existing lessons-learned activities. Service providers will be invited to develop after action reports after emergency events to facilitate routine assessments of what went well, what could be improved, and next steps/recommendations. This will include an assessment of whether and how services provided were culturally appropriate and addressed the needs of marginalized groups. Service providers will be encouraged to seek input from First Nations staff, such as Emergency Management Coordinators, when filling out after action reports in order to limit bias in self-reporting, and to follow privacy and ownership, control access and possession guidelines. ISC is recommending that it will review all reports to analyze overall trends and ways to improve and will report back to First Nations and service providers on an annual basis.

It is expected that the after-action report guidance and template will be ready for implementation in April 2024.

We trust that the Committee finds this information useful for their work. The above responses illustrate the Government of Canada's commitment to ensuring First Nations communities can thrive and be resilient. The Department is committed to providing the remaining reports requested in the Committee's report under the prescribed timelines.

Should the Committee have any further inquiries, please contact John Beaudoin, Acting Senior Director, Legislative, Parliamentary and Regulatory Affairs Directorate, Indigenous Services Canada, john.beaudoin@sac-isc.gc.ca; 343-998-2373.

Sincerely,

Gina Wilson

Canada