



National Association  
of Friendship Centres  
Association nationale  
des centres d'amitié

## **Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2020 Budget**

**Submitted by: The National Association of Friendship Centres**

**Recommendation 1:** That the Government of Canada renew and enhance the sunsetting Friendship Centre funding at a minimum of \$53 million per year for the next 10 years.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Government of Canada make a minimum of \$1.8 billion investment in urban Indigenous infrastructure funds for Friendship Centres, to stimulate local economies, economic growth, and community care and recovery.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Government of Canada allocate \$41 million dollars per year for a minimum of the next 10 years to support working families and enhanced services to children and youth.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Government of Canada provide an initial investment of \$5,000,000 over 5 years for Friendship Centre capacity to develop a National Urban Indigenous Health Framework.

## **Friendship Centres are Long Standing and Trusted Community Organizations**

Friendship Centres are Canada's most significant network of urban Indigenous service providers and are a lifeline for many Indigenous people living in urban environments. Since the 1950s, Friendship Centres (FCs) have offered and continue to offer Indigenous culturally-relevant, wrap-around community supports. The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) represents over 100-member local FCs and Provincial/Territorial Associations (PTAs) in every Province and Territory in Canada, except Prince Edward Island.

FCs are community-owned and operated and serve rural, remote, northern, and urban communities, and serving all distinctions, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, regardless of status or place of residence. FC programming is highly tailored to specific communities, offering support for urban Indigenous people, by urban Indigenous people. Last year our members served 1.4 million people across over 1,200 programs in 238 buildings. Collectively, FCs employ over 2,700 people. Many FCs provide specialized programming for children, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Today, approximately 75% of the Indigenous population across Canada (for municipalities over a population of 1,000) lives in urban, rural, remote, and northern communities, and figures vary regionally up to 85%. FCs serve these communities without the funding levels that acknowledge the depth and breadth of the extent of and needs of urban Indigenous communities. The extraordinary efforts of FCs are often carried out with a systemic lack of resources and infrastructure investment. Despite the funding deficiencies, FCs continue to be on the front lines, providing support and leading the way in program and service delivery to urban Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast.

### **Investing in Friendship Centres advances Canada**

***Recommendation #1:*** NAFC recommends that the Government of Canada renew and enhance the sunseting Friendship Centre funding at a minimum of \$53,000,000 per year for the next 10 years.

The current Friendship Centre funding sunsets in 2022. For FCs to continue their vital work that benefits all of Canada, Friendship Centre funding must be renewed and enhanced for a minimum of 10 years. Now, more than ever, urban Indigenous people need safe, consistent access to the wraparound employment, childcare, housing, skills training, and other supports offered by FCs. Investing in FCs is a means to ensuring that this segment of Canadian society gets back on their feet at the same rate as everyone else.

FCs have been highly responsive and agile in supporting their communities throughout this global pandemic, including by acting as information hubs; distributing food and essential supplies; and leading or joining task forces to address the needs of the most vulnerable. This crucial and unparalleled service delivery has continued and has adapted to work in the context of COVID-19.

Ultimately, comprehensive, and disaggregated data is needed to truly measure the impact of the pandemic on urban Indigenous communities and how effective FCs have been, but going forward, FCs continue to have a role in preventing and containing future emergencies.

FCs are a significant employer of Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women: their economic stability is in an even more critical state than it was pre-pandemic. This precarity can be directly attributed to Canada's continued refusal to develop an urban Indigenous action plan based on its own population data. Further, COVID-19 response has substantially decreased revenue and any financial cushions as regular fundraising and/or social enterprises have been put on hold, programming costs have increased; new roles/positions have been created (such as COVID coordinators); facilities have had to be retrofitted or renovated to allow for physical distancing, there is more demand for services, increased costs such as gas, transportation, and so on.

Among the systemic barriers hampering the ability of FCs to provide care was the Government's distinctions-based approach to distributing COVID-19 relief funds, which left many urban Indigenous communities "unseen". This approach has had grave implications for urban Indigenous pandemic responses, especially in the early days of the pandemic, an issue that NAFC raised repeatedly. Urban Indigenous people are left in jurisdictional limbo as neither the provinces/territories nor the federal government initially took primary responsibility for providing consistent emergency support funds to the ground in urban Indigenous communities. Jurisdictional wrangling has no place in Indigenous people's access to safety and services, especially during a pandemic. FCs answered the call and responded heroically with little funds and no guarantee of federal or provincial financial support.

The federal government will not see a true and full pandemic recovery without strategic investments in communities that were hit the hardest by COVID-19. By investing in Friendship Centres, Canada will ensure that they are fully including Indigenous people living in urban settings in its recovery, thereby ensuring that all of Canada recovers.

### **Federal Investment in Urban Indigenous Infrastructure: A Catalyst to kickstart the Economy**

***Recommendation 2:*** *That the Government of Canada make a minimum of \$1.8 billion investment in urban Indigenous infrastructure funds for Friendship Centres, to stimulate local economies, economic growth, and community care and recovery.*

FCs provide essential, culturally relevant, and life-saving programs and across the country, despite substantial, historic, and systemic infrastructure deficits. These infrastructure deficits include physical space for providing services, safe and affordable housing, transportation for urban Indigenous people, and technological and connectivity infrastructure. Filling these infrastructure gaps not only allows for supporting the devolution of services to Indigenous people and their organizations, but also advances Indigenous autonomy and self-determination.

Every day, FCs respond to the lack of accessibility to services from mainstream service providers. Barriers to these services include systemic racism, poverty, and a need for wholistic, wraparound care that is truly responsive to urban Indigenous needs. Existing funding set aside for Indigenous infrastructure is insufficient to meet current urban Indigenous needs that make up for the historic lack of investment. Infrastructure funding largely flows to provinces/territories who determine whether or not, and, if so, how much urban Indigenous people or organizations benefit from or receive funding.

Based on initial infrastructure assessment, NAFC calculates a minimum of \$1.8 billion for urban Indigenous infrastructure. These infrastructure funds include: upgrades, retrofits, renovations, and purchases for health and safety, energy efficiency, accessibility for urban Indigenous physical environments; advancing Indigenous-owned and operated urban Indigenous community housing initiatives; urban Indigenous transportation; and technological (hardware and software), connectivity infrastructure.

Pre-pandemic, FCs were living in an infrastructure deficit – with many needs going unmet. With most FCs adjusting their service provision to respond to vulnerable community members with specific service needs, these deficits have been exacerbated to the point of emergency.

Investing in the infrastructure and capacity of local and regional FCs gives the federal government an opportunity to meet the needs of all Indigenous communities, regardless of location, which will result in economic stimulus. By resourcing FCs, Indigenous peoples living in towns and cities of all sizes can receive the care and support they need from a network and community they trust. This support will, in turn, capacitate individuals and communities to engage with the world and the economy again as we move into a post-COVID-19 time. Properly equipping and resourcing FCs to appropriately respond is one way to contribute to restarting the economy.

### **Friendship Centres help get Families Back to Work and Endow the Development of urban Indigenous Children and Youth**

***Recommendation 3:*** *That the Government of Canada allocate \$41 million dollars per year for a minimum of the next 10 years to support working families and enhanced services to children and youth.*

As the Government works to restart the economy, NAFC's extensive network can provide a natural remedy to address gaps in education, youth supports, childcare, and help families return to work and back on their feet. FCs have the expertise to quickly launch programming and develop a coordinated response within our current program models and partnerships.

Despite being one of the fastest growing populations in Canada, and having distinct and intersecting needs, urban Indigenous children and youth have no national action plan, framework for advancement or ongoing program. Access to education, supports and services to the already vulnerable Indigenous youth population is a right to be taken seriously. The COVID-19 pandemic

exposed the gaps and exacerbated urban Indigenous young people's interactions with homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty. FCs are well-positioned to provide much-needed support and deliver high-quality, culturally relevant programs and services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth, now and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

NAFC is on the front line with urban Indigenous youth across the country, constantly working to build capacity, leadership and mentorship skills through culturally relevant programming, job training, and related wraparound supports. As families begin to return to work, what FCs can do to care for children and youth in their communities cannot be overlooked. Additional resources are needed so that FCs can safely provide daycare, before and after school programming, and day camps, for children and youth, and helping families get back on their feet.

### **Health supports for Urban Indigenous People create a more Equal Canada**

***Recommendation 4:*** *That the Government of Canada provide an initial investment of \$5,000,000 over 5 years for Friendship Centre capacity to develop a National Urban Indigenous Health Framework.*

For urban Indigenous people, service gaps persist in the areas of health and wellness, and particularly for individuals with specialized needs. Indigenous people continue to face barriers to accessing quality, trauma-informed, culturally safe health care. While the Government of Canada does not directly provide health care services, it does have responsibility for Indigenous people regardless of residency and ensuring continuity of care. Currently, health services for urban Indigenous people are provided on a piecemeal basis that varies in quality and consistency. Yet, no national urban Indigenous health framework or action plan exists.

Women who have been subjected to forced sterilization, victims of human trafficking, Sixties Scoop survivors, child welfare survivors, and residential school survivors have all experienced diverse traumas with wide-ranging health impacts. Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals have further distinct health needs and face still more barriers to accessing care safely and free from harassment and violence.

FCs can play a stronger role in helping urban Indigenous people navigate their rights to health and Jordan's principle workers located in FCs can ensure individuals have access and are referred to care providers. Filling these gaps in capacity will contribute towards the Government of Canada meeting its commitment to equitable service delivery and equitable health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

### **Conclusion**

Too often, federal urban Indigenous policies and program designs are developed without adequate input from the experts in urban Indigenous realities. The federal government's engagement on a distinctions-based approach only has resulted in urban Indigenous perspectives

and layered identities being excluded or inadequately considered in the development and design of Indigenous policies and programs. NAFC holds that a truly intersectional response to Indigenous needs and barriers, now and post-pandemic, takes into account not only whether an individual is First Nations, Metis, or Inuit, but looks at their ability, geographic location, gender identity, sex, orientation, nation, place of residence, and cultural and spiritual beliefs.

As we continue with COVID-19 response, and eventually move to recovery, FCs will continue to need support to advocate for the wellbeing of urban Indigenous peoples and the FCs that serve them.

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