

**Written Submission on Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and
Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19**

Submitted to:
The Clerk of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs
(House of Commons, Ottawa)

Submitted by:
Dene Nation on November 26, 2020





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The Dene Nation has taken this opportunity to provide comments to the House of Commons in good faith. We trust that these comments will be considered in this process as it relates to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs' study of Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals through a Second Wave of COVID-19. This submission does not provide any formal consultation, consent, or approval by the Dene Nation regarding this study.

Introduction

National Chief Norman Yakeleya of the Dene Nation (Northwest Territories) was elected August 2018 on a platform of unifying the Dene, rebuilding the Dene Nation. National Chief Yakeleya believes that time is of the essence for elected leaders, as they continue to lead and manage through this pandemic.

The Dene Nation's Submission to the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, as heard through National Chief Yakeleya's Committee Testimony, is consistent with the points discussed internally as Dene and what has been discussed with other Indigenous governments, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), and finally, what has been discussed with Prime Minister Trudeau and his Cabinet.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic is about the health of the Dene people and the health of the economy that sustains us. As the Dene Nation and the Crown collectively manage our way through the second wave of COVID-19 and anticipate a possible third wave, a number of things are clear:

- The status quo is not enough;
- No one government can do this work alone;
- Unilateral decision making is counterproductive;
- This is a time that demands collaboration and co-governance;
- This pandemic has brought to light the shortcomings in our existing systems;
- Dene Nation communities are managing barely managing. Systems are stretched to the breaking point. People, especially caregivers, are exhausted; and
- The economy is in recession and the climate change challenges and extreme weather continue unabated.

“Upholding and Protecting the Rights and Interests of the Dené Nation”



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Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped create the conditions where it is clear that the only way ahead is through a collaborative, co-governance approach among Indigenous governments, Canada, and the GNWT; where issues of common concern can be discussed, and next steps agreed upon. For example, Dene Nation Chiefs are very concerned about the increased alcohol and drug abuse problems, in some cases leading to fatalities in the small communities, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic's related public health restrictions.

Much of the program funding and design for Indigenous people resides with the GNWT. Therefore, Indigenous governments are often reduced to being recipients of funding that may or may not meet their needs, as they do not have input into program design and implementation. The opportunity is present to revisit this arrangement, on a trilateral basis, to make it acceptable to these three governments, and to additionally promote efficiency, effectiveness and creativity in dealing with what are now almost intractable problems, such as housing, health, energy, and the economy.

Dene Nation & Government Cross-Collaboration

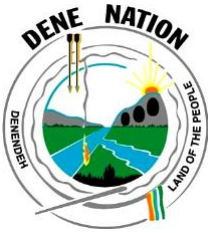
At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dene Nation made the case to Canada that the safest place for people in the small communities was on the land, rather than in their communities. Canada agreed and funding was provided to assist families to go out on the land in this common sense and innovative approach.

In addition to National Chief Yakeleya's Committee Testimony and the Dene Nation collaborating with Canada regarding on the land programming to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Dene Nation has included two papers for formal submission, which address the economy post-pandemic, as well as Indigenous Governance and the Canada Water Agency:

- 1) The Dene Nation recognized the need to rebuild the Northwest Territories' economy post-pandemic, and did so through a road map entitled, "Resetting the Sail: Dene Nation Post-Pandemic Economic Reset Plan April 2020" (see *Appendix A*).
- 2) The Dene Nation and the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) co-authored a paper entitled, "Resetting the National Sail: A Consideration Paper on Indigenous Governance and the Canada Water Agency" (see *Appendix B*).

The Dene Nation is a primary advocate for the creation of a territorial governance table where Indigenous elected leaders and those from the GNWT could gather and hopefully reach consensus on how to deal with issues of common interest. The Dene Nation is also advocating for a coordinated approach to the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework to be structured much the same way.

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Reconciliation

The current reality is not working. There will never be enough money if governments keep working with Indigenous governments as they always have, within the status quo. This is evident through social, health, and economic indicators. However, the changing of the status quo and governments working together solving issues of common concern begins with reconciliation.

There are three key requirements for this to occur:

- 1) Recognition of the difficult history of Indigenous people in Canada and that reconciliation is required between and amongst all parties;
- 2) Respect for each other and the process; and
- 3) Responsibility by all people to engage in this process because after 153 years, it is the only way forward.

The work of reconciliation is necessary, because know we are stronger together.

Conclusion

The job of elected leaders is to create the conditions for healthy people, a strong economy, and a vibrant environment. The way to create those conditions is through new co-governance arrangements.

Recommendations

- 1) That Canada and the GNWT join the Dene Nation and other Indigenous governments at a trilateral table to revamp the housing programs in the Northwest Territories to better address the critical housing shortage in NWT communities.
- 2) That Canada join with Indigenous governments and the GNWT at a trilateral table to review what worked and what didn't work in the first two waves of the pandemic, and make the agreed upon adjustments for the third wave.
- 3) That Canada fund the Dene Nation to develop a post-pandemic Economic Development Strategy for the Dene people of the Northwest Territories, to be used to guide participation in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework as a full partner.
- 4) That Canada fast track the creation of the Canada Water Agency using the same governance structure as has been recommended through Appendix B - for nothing else will matter if there is no water, or it is too degraded to use.

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