

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Honourable Patrick Weiler
Chair
Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs
House of Commons
OTTAWA ON K1A 0A4

Dear Colleague,

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, and on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am pleased to respond to the Thirteenth Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, entitled, *Braiding Learning and Healing: A Pathway to Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, tabled on May 8, 2024.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to thank the Committee and all those who appeared before the Committee, or who submitted briefs, for sharing their perspectives on improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students.

The Government recognizes that there remain persistent education attainment rate gaps that need to be closed. According to the 2021 Census, the population of youth between 18 to 24 years of age reporting a secondary school diploma or equivalency certificate and higher was 53 per cent for First Nations residing on reserve, 75 per cent for First Nations residing off reserve, 84 per cent for Métis and 51 per cent for Inuit, compared to 90 per cent for the non-Indigenous population in Canada. Similarly, the rate of post-secondary completion between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is disproportionate. According to the 2021 Census, 49 per cent of Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 years had completed a post-secondary qualification, with the most common being the completion of a college, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma. The overall rates of post-secondary completion between the ages of 25 to 64 were 45 per cent for First Nations people, 56 per cent for Métis and 34 per cent among Inuit, while the rate for the non-Indigenous population in Canada was 68 per cent.

Secondary and post-secondary education attainment gaps, as noted by the Committee, are rooted in the historic and contemporary impacts of colonialism, such as socio-economic marginalization, the legacy of intergenerational trauma from the residential school system, forced assimilation, and a lack of Indigenous-led educational systems. These educational attainment gaps have widespread implications and have resulted in systemic barriers for Indigenous children, their families and communities, as well as Indigenous Peoples' inclusion in the economy. The Government recognizes that many Indigenous people and communities continue to experience higher rates of intergenerational trauma, racism and discrimination with impacts on physical health, mental health, and educational attainment, as well as the cultural effects of language loss, erosion of spiritual practice, and the diminishment of traditional knowledge.

Educational attainment levels are a strong indicator of other socio-economic outcomes including employment, income, health and well-being.

Ensuring access to a quality education and the best possible outcome for Indigenous students is a priority for the Government. As noted by the Committee, the jurisdictional landscape for funding Indigenous education is complex, and different levels of government have various roles in supporting education for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in Canada. The federal government is responsible for funding elementary and secondary education for First Nations ordinarily resident on reserve; while for First Nations students in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, as well as First Nations ordinarily resident off reserve, Inuit, and Métis students, elementary and secondary education is provided by their respective province or territory. The federal government, provinces and territories all have a role in supporting Indigenous students in their pursuit of post-secondary education, and the federal government provides some supports for Indigenous post-secondary education as a matter of social policy. Complementary to this work on elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, the federal government also plays a large role in supporting Indigenous early learning and child care. **The Government affirms that all Canadian children deserve a real and fair chance to succeed, and that high-quality early learning and child care provides a solid foundation for future success. For Indigenous children and families, culturally appropriate programs that take into account the cultures, languages, traditions, values and customs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are crucial in creating a foundation for a child's cultural identity and sense of worth. The federal government also supports access to essential educational products, services and supports for First Nations and Inuit children respectively through Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative.**

While many of the recommendations put forward by the Committee touch upon the areas of responsibility of various levels of government, the focus of the response provided below represents that of the federal government, and therefore, is on areas specific to federal support. The Government, along with Indigenous partners, leverages relationships with the provinces and territories, including through working with the Council of Ministers of Education, to advance education outcomes for Indigenous students across Canada.

The Government is working with Indigenous partners to help improve student outcomes and address the education goals and priorities of communities. Several substantial measures have been taken in recent years to support the advancement of Indigenous education. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA) Action Plan*, published in June 2023, further confirms the Government's commitment to moving forward on the path to reconciliation. This work sets out a way forward to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the UN Declaration), including article 14, which highlights that Indigenous Peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, have the right to education without discrimination, and should have access to an education in their own culture and language. The UNDA Action Plan provides a roadmap for the Government to implement the UN Declaration in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Indigenous Modern Treaty Partners, including targeted measures in support of improving

Indigenous education outcomes. Canada has also committed to implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (including the education-specific Commission Calls to Actions 6-12) and continues to make efforts to address the national tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) by responding to the Calls for Justice from the MMIWG Inquiry, including Call for Justice 4.4, which calls for all governments to provide supports and resources for educational, training, and employment opportunities for all Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Additionally, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, released in 2019, contains specific education-related objectives in relation to Arctic and northern Indigenous peoples: “Close the gaps in education outcomes” and “Provide ongoing learning and skills development opportunities, including Indigenous-based knowledge and skills.” Further, the Minister of Northern Affairs’ independent Task Force on Northern Post-Secondary Education released its final report in 2022, which includes calls to action to reduce barriers to accessing post-secondary education in the North, and recommendations that highlight the need for measures to support the retention of elementary and secondary teachers, the strengthening of housing solutions and support for programming that emphasizes Indigenous languages and ways of knowing.

The Government’s response to the Committee’s recommendations has been grouped along the following five themes: 1) Federal funding in support of education; 2) Indigenous languages and cultures and Indigenous-led approaches to education; 3) Health and well-being; 4) Education infrastructure and connectivity; and 5) Indigenous self-determination and data and information sharing.

FEDERAL FUNDING IN SUPPORT OF EDUCATION (Recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 20, 24, 25)

The Government of Canada agrees that sufficient, flexible, predictable and long-term funding is important in the support of First Nations’ control of First Nations education for elementary and secondary education, and the principle of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation control over education through their distinctions-based post-secondary education strategies. This is necessary to increase Indigenous graduation rates across the country, and to work towards closing the gap in education.

The Government of Canada also recognizes the importance of ongoing collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provincial and territorial governments to improve the state of Indigenous education, including to increase Indigenous graduation rates. The Government of Canada will continue to work in close collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, as well as with the provinces and territories, including through the Council of Ministers of Education, and will continue to work to review the current funding models, in order to address the education needs and priorities of Indigenous communities and improve graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students.

Budget announcements since 2016 and the co-developed approach to transforming elementary and secondary education on reserve, as well as the co-development of distinctions based First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation post-secondary education strategies, have the overall objective of improving student outcomes and advancing access to high quality and culturally relevant

education.

In 2017, the Government of Canada established distinctions-based Permanent Bilateral Mechanisms with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation representatives to identify joint priorities and co-develop policy options. Education is a top priority under the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee and Canada-Métis Nation Accord, and both are co-developing federal policies on Inuit and Métis elementary and secondary education. The Assembly of First Nations-Canada Memorandum of Understanding on Shared Priorities is not the primary forum for discussions on First Nations elementary and secondary education, as those priorities continue to be advanced through other negotiation and partnership tables. Similar to the Permanent Bilateral Mechanisms, the Intergovernmental Leaders' Forum brings together the Prime Minister, key federal Ministers, and Modern Treaty and Self-Government partners on an annual basis to address matters of concern and to advance shared priorities. Language revitalization was discussed as a priority issue at the most recent Forum in May 2024, with all parties recognizing its central role within culture, heritage, and identity.

The Government of Canada commits to reporting back to the Committee within one year to provide an overview of the different types of agreements that are currently in place for Indigenous education (sectoral agreements, regional education agreements and land claims agreements that address education); and on the status of the negotiations with Métis partners on potential agreement(s) for self-governance in Métis education.

Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care

In 2018, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council and the Government of Canada jointly released a co-developed Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework with the goal of helping to strengthen early learning and child care programs for Indigenous children and families, providing Indigenous children with the best possible start in life. Initial investments of \$1.7 billion over ten years were announced in Budget 2017 to support the implementation of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. The 2020 Fall Economic Statement announced making this funding permanent at 2027-28 levels. Budget 2021 committed \$2.5 billion over five years and \$542 million per year ongoing. Additionally, to ensure these programs continue to grow along with the communities they serve, program funding will increase by 3 per cent each year starting in 2027-28. Through partnerships with Indigenous governments and organizations, federal funding is strengthening the quality of community-based culturally appropriate programming, with investments reaching over 35,000 children in:

- 463 child care sites in First Nations and Inuit communities;
- 405 Aboriginal Head Start programs on reserve; and,
- 134 Aboriginal Head Start programs in urban and northern communities.

At the outset of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Transformation Initiative,

calculations for distinctions-based envelopes were allocated on a per-capita basis, using 2016 Census data for children aged 0 to 6 for First Nations (regardless of where they live), Inuit (regardless of where they live) and Métis in the Homeland (five western provinces and the Northwest Territories), adjusted to reflect a start-up factor for Métis and a remoteness factor for Inuit. These adjustments reflected the higher costs associated with delivering services in the North and, for Métis, reflect that this was a new area of federal programming.

In addition, a portion of funding was dedicated to the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program to sustain the program and facilitate collaboration with Regional Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Partnership Tables in support of Indigenous-led, comprehensive and coordinated programs and services for Indigenous children, regardless of where they live. Distinctions based funding envelopes are intended to support a range of Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care priorities, including enhancing program funding for Head Start and daycares and can be directed on and off reserve, in and outside Inuit Nunangat, and across the Métis Homeland.

Allocation formulas at the national, regional and community level are developed with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners. Work is currently underway to develop a new long-term National First Nations funding formula for Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care. Building on the successes of the existing Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework and Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, Budget 2021 outlined new investments to build a high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system across Canada. The Government is providing nearly \$30 billion between 2021-22 and 2025-26. Of this, \$27.2 billion will support transfers to provinces and territories. Combined with previous investments, as of 2025-26, the Government of Canada will provide a minimum of \$9.2 billion each year, ongoing, for early learning and child care and Indigenous early learning and child care. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care investments are to complement provincial-territorial investments and form an integral part of a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system to increase the availability of high-quality, culturally appropriate and accessible programs and services to Indigenous Peoples.

Elementary and Secondary Education

First Nations on reserve

In April 2019, a co-developed funding and policy approach was implemented that transformed elementary and secondary education to better meet the needs of First Nations students on reserve, leveraging Budget 2016 investments of \$2.6 billion. The approach replaced several outdated proposal-based programs with improved access to core funding through interim regional funding formulas that use provincial comparability as a base, and ensure stable, flexible, predictable, and sustainable funding. This approach also includes additional national common investments, such as language and culture programming, full-day kindergarten for children aged four and five, and before- and after-school programming.

As part of this co-developed, transformed approach to funding First Nations elementary and

secondary education on reserve, regional education agreements are a cornerstone to supporting First Nations control of First Nations education. The agreements respond to the education goals and priorities set by participating First Nations communities, supporting enhanced multi-year planning, and facilitating greater progress toward service transfer, self-determination, and closing the gaps in education. To date, ten regional education agreements have been signed that support approximately 25,000 elementary and secondary First Nations students across Canada. This includes the First Nations Education Council's regional education agreement in Québec, for which Budget 2022 invested \$310.6 million over five years to better support elementary and secondary student outcomes. This also includes two regional education agreements in Alberta: Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Education Authority and Sunchild First Nation Regional Education Agreement; five agreements in Saskatchewan: Athabasca Denesuline Education Authority, Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation Education Authority, Whitecap Dakota Tripartite Regional Education Agreement, Treaty Education Alliance, and the East Central First Nation Education Authority; one agreement in New Brunswick: Elsipogtog First Nation Education Authority; and one agreement in British Columbia: British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement.

This work has been further supported through Budget 2024 invested \$649.4 million over two years for elementary and secondary education on reserve, as well as Budget 2021 investments of \$1.7 billion over five years and \$300 million ongoing, which supports refinements to the funding formulas for elementary and secondary education in critical areas, ensuring funding remains stable from year to year, concluding more regional education agreements, and expanding access to adult education. This transformed approach has resulted in a 98 per cent increase between 2015-16 and 2023-24 in funding for First Nations elementary and secondary education on reserve.

Canada continues to hold collaborative discussions with First Nations partners through regional technical tables to guide the implementation of this approach and identify and address First Nations' education needs. The principle of First Nations control of First Nations education guides all of ISC's work in this area. First Nations partners are best placed to make decisions about their education priorities, including how best to allocate resources to address the unique needs of the students in their communities. As such, First Nations have the flexibility to determine how resources are allocated for all of their elementary and secondary education programming needs, including in areas such as language and cultural programming, and the provision of salaries, including addressing teacher remuneration, recruitment and retention, as well as student-teacher ratios.

The ultimate objective of the Elementary and Secondary Education program is to close the gap in secondary school attainment between First Nations on reserve and non-Indigenous Canadians. In 2022-23, a new methodology was introduced to calculate the percentage of on-reserve First Nations students funded through the program who graduate from secondary school both "on time" and with "extended time." The new methodology responds to concerns expressed by First Nations and better aligns with the pan-Canadian graduation rate methodology developed by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada and published

annually by Statistics Canada. In 2022-23, the reported graduation rate within three years of entering grade 10 (“on time”) is 26 per cent and the graduation rate within five years of entering grade 10 (“extended-time”) is 44 per cent for First Nations on reserve. The 2022-23 national rate serves as a new baseline for performance measurement as the previous graduation rates were based on a less accurate methodology that was highlighted in the 2018 Auditor General’s report and by First Nation partners. In addition to the new graduation rate methodology, ISC also monitors the highest level of educational attainment achieved by the 18-24 First Nations on reserve population, as reported by Statistics Canada. Based on Census data, the attainment of a secondary school diploma or equivalency certificate and higher for First Nations on reserve age 18-24, has risen from 33 per cent in 2006, to 44 per cent in 2016, and 53 per cent in 2021.

A graduation rate is not the only indicator of student success, nor does it show what is necessary to help students succeed from grade to grade towards graduation. For instance, ISC also reports on students in First Nations administered schools who are taught at least one subject in a First Nation language. The actual results for this have increased year over year for three years, and is now at almost 94 per cent. ISC also reports on the number of First Nations under a transformative model (e.g., a regional education agreement or school board-like organization). The actual result for this has increased year over year for three years and is now 206, or 33 per cent of First Nations that are under a transformative model. This reflects First Nation control of First Nation education, and includes First Nation-defined performance measurement frameworks which provide First Nations the opportunity to share their own narratives.

ISC met its commitment to set targets by March 2023, as laid out in the 2022-23 Departmental Plan. These targets are included in the recently published 2022-23 Departmental Report on Results. The majority of ISC’s education results increased year over year, and new baselines were established with partners that better reflects First Nation control of education. In addition to setting and reporting against these targets, and the challenges faced by Indigenous partners during the COVID-19 pandemic, actual results for five of the eight performance indicators for education show increases from the previous year, including the number of First Nation students in full-day kindergarten.

In response to calls by First Nations across Canada and recognizing the critical need to address the closing of the high school attainment gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians, through Budget 2021, the Government of Canada committed \$350 million over five years to expand access to adult education by supporting First Nations adults ordinarily resident on reserve in all regions and in the Yukon and Northwest Territories looking to complete or upgrade their secondary education. Adult Education programming aims to ensure all First Nations across the country have access to supports for adult secondary education regardless of provincial levels of support. Adult education funding will contribute to closing the education attainment gap by supporting First Nations adults to complete or upgrade their secondary credentials and will further support First Nations’ vision of lifelong learning.

Inuit

Following the establishment of the Inuit Crown Partnership Committee in 2017, elementary and secondary education was identified as one of the thirteen priority areas for Inuit. Under the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, federal and Inuit counterparts have established the Education, Early Learning and Skills Development Working Group to collaborate on advancing Inuit elementary and secondary education priorities. The work to co-develop a federal policy on Inuit elementary and secondary education is a high priority for Inuit partners. The commitment to co-development work was reiterated at the May 2024 Inuit Crown Partnership Committee Leaders' meeting.

This co-development process is underpinned by the UNDA Action Plan Measure IN21 regarding Inuit elementary and secondary education, which reads as follows:

“In order to enable Inuit rights holders to exercise their right to establish and control their own educational systems and educational institutions, subject to any self-government agreement, the federal government will partner with Inuit Treaty Organizations in order to establish a policy on federal involvement, funding and other support for Inuit primary and secondary education.”

The Education, Early Learning and Skills Development Working Group has collaborated over the past year to identify the Inuit vision for elementary and secondary education. In February 2024, Inuit partners presented a preliminary draft of the policy for federal review. Collaboration and discussions between Inuit and federal partners are ongoing to refine the policy parameters and necessary implementation elements, including engagement with provinces and territories. To advance the work towards the co-development of the federal policy, ISC has recently confirmed funding to support Inuit capacity building.

Métis Nation

Following the establishment of the Canada-Métis Nation Accord in 2017, elementary and secondary education was identified as a priority. At the December 2022 Permanent Bilateral Mechanism Leader's Meeting, Indigenous Services Minister Hajdu and Métis National Council President Caron agreed to strike an elementary and secondary education Working Group comprised of the Métis Nation and federal government representatives. Since then, ISC, the Métis National Council and Métis Nation Governing Members have continued to work towards the advancement of key priorities, notably the co-development and eventual signing of an elementary and secondary education Sub-Accord, and the co-development of a federal policy on Métis Nation elementary and secondary education.

The signing of an elementary and secondary education Sub-Accord has been a long-standing objective for Métis Nation partners and will be a key outcome of the Elementary and Secondary Education Working Group's collaboration. Through this partnership the Government is working to co-develop a federal policy on Métis Nation elementary and secondary education. This is in line with the UNDA Action Plan Measure ME013, which is as follows:

“ In order to enable Métis citizens to access quality elementary and secondary education that is centered on Métis culture and upholds article 14 of the United Nations Declaration, which affirms the right of the Métis to establish and control Métis education systems and institutions, the federal government will establish, through co-development with the Métis, collaborative working relationships, policies and approaches to Métis elementary and secondary education”.

At the Working Group level, collaboration is ongoing to establish a common understanding of the Métis Nation vision for elementary and secondary education, which is critical to informing both the co-developed federal policy and Sub-Accord. As a first step to supporting Métis partners’ participation in this co-development process, ISC has recently confirmed funding to support Métis Nation capacity building.

Engagement with provinces and territories has been a recurring discussion point in working-level meetings with the Métis National Council and Métis Nation Governing Members. As this co-development process unfolds, the federal government will work closely with Métis Nation partners to jointly determine an appropriate strategy for provincial and territorial engagement.

Indigenous Post-Secondary Education

The Government of Canada recognizes that improving access to post-secondary education is critical to ensuring that Indigenous students have equitable opportunities to succeed in educational attainment, and that it will support their economic participation and prosperity going forward.

A distinctions-based approach to supporting post-secondary education is key to effectively responding to the unique needs of Indigenous students. This is why, in the spirit of partnership and co-development, federal investments in post-secondary education support the principle of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation control over education through their respective distinctions-based post-secondary education strategies.

Budget 2019 included \$320 million over five years to renew and expand funding for the First Nations Post-Secondary Student Support program, and \$7.5 million over three years to support First Nations engagement on the development of integrated First Nations regional post-secondary education models. In addition, Budget 2019 allocated \$125.5 million over ten years and \$21.8 million ongoing for a new Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy, and \$362 million over ten years and \$40 million ongoing for a new Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy. Budget 2024 announced an investment of \$242.7 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to renew funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support program.

Additionally, following investments from Budget 2019, First Nations and First Nations organizations have been conducting engagement on the development of First Nations regional post-secondary education models since 2020. These models are intended to enable transition from the current suite of post-secondary programs to holistic approaches that are more responsive to First Nations’ local priorities and needs, which could include identifying ways to

increase enrolment in programs offered near communities.

ISC's investments in post-secondary education complement those administered for all Canadians by Employment and Social Development Canada. For example, to minimize the financial burden and to support Indigenous learners' participation in post-secondary education, the Canada Student Financial Assistance program exempts students who self-identify as Indigenous from providing a fixed student contribution when applying for Canada Student Grants and interest-free Canada Student Loans. The Canada Student Financial Assistance program also exempts distinctions-based financial supports provided by ISC from a student's resources to ensure the receipt of this dedicated funding does not reduce access to the broadly available Canada Student Financial Assistance program supports. In addition, Budget 2024 invested \$8 million to Indspire in 2024-25 to continue investing in the education of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people for the long-term benefit of their families and communities. Budget 2024 also provided \$5.2 million over two years, starting in 2024-25, to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to support the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, which supports access to culturally appropriate post-secondary education that is accessible to Indigenous students in the North.

Discussions will continue with Indigenous partners on options that could help support programming that is sufficient, flexible, needs-based and predictable, so as to improve the post-secondary education experience for Indigenous students. Through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, Inuit and federal partners agreed to work toward a partnership to establish an Inuit-led university in Inuit Nunangat, which involves developing a partnership agreement that will explore mechanisms to create the university.

Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative

Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative respectively ensures that First Nations and Inuit children across Canada have substantively equal access to government products, services and supports, taking into account their unique circumstances, experiences and needs. Funding can help cover a wide range of health, social and educational needs, including the unique needs of First Nations and Inuit two-spirit and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual (2SLGBTQQA) children and youth and those with disabilities. Since 2016, Canada has committed nearly \$8.1 billion toward meeting needs of First Nations children through Jordan's Principle. In addition, Canada committed \$220 million over five years in Budget 2019 to ensure that Inuit children have substantively equal access to government services, taking into account their unique circumstances, experiences and needs, through the Inuit Child First Initiative, and Budget 2024 announced an additional \$167.5 million over two years, starting in 2023-24, to continue these supports.

Under both Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative, education requests made by families, caregivers and organizations on behalf of First Nations and Inuit children make up a significant portion of annual demand and approved funds (approximately 30 per cent). In 2022-23, 18,758 education related requests were approved, associated with \$329.3 million in funding for First Nations children, in addition to 789 education-related requests associated with \$29.6

million in funding for Inuit children. This funding has supported various education related needs, including educational assistant services/supports, educational related travel and tuition.

Most recently, the Government of Canada has announced its support for the co-development of a shared-responsibility model put forward by Inuit as the long-term approach to the Inuit Child First Initiative. This approach will enable Inuit partners and Canada to jointly deliver, administer and improve the initiative so that children can have better access to services, including education supports, going forward.

Canada will continue to work with partners to advance long-term approaches for both Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative, with the aim of enabling First Nations and Inuit children to benefit from more systematic and holistic, community-based approaches to accessing products, services and supports.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES AND INDIGENOUS-LED APPROACHES TO EDUCATION (Recommendations 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18)

The Government of Canada acknowledges the Committee's recommendations regarding the importance of supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, and the value in supporting the revitalization and integration of Indigenous languages, pedagogies, worldviews and community-supported, culturally relevant and land-based learning practices into education systems. These recommendations align with what the Government of Canada has heard from Indigenous communities, organizations and governments during the work underway in collaboration with Indigenous partners to respond to the UNDA Action Plan.

As mandated by the *Indigenous Languages Act*, Canadian Heritage supports Indigenous Peoples' efforts to reclaim, revitalize, maintain, and strengthen their languages through the Indigenous Languages Component of the Indigenous Languages program. The Indigenous Languages Component provides funding for community-driven activities, which can include the development of resources, including pedagogical tools such as instructional books in Indigenous languages, dictionaries, online tools, early childhood education lessons, and post-secondary education course modules. It also supports other education-related initiatives such as language and culture instruction and camps, language classes and learning resources, adult immersion and other learner activities.

Examples include the Otipemisiwak Métis Government in Alberta's five-year workplan for Michif revitalization, which uses a multifaceted approach that encompasses institutionalized education, traditional knowledge transmission, Indigenous knowledge systems, entrepreneur support, resource building, and formal documentation, alongside other initiatives. Specifically, the educational component aims to enhance the availability of Michif resources within and beyond Alberta's education system. This includes providing opportunities for existing curriculum to incorporate Michif language elements, supporting up to 100 educators.

Additionally, the workplan involves implementing a teacher training program to equip educators with the skills to teach Michif effectively, as well as supporting a community-based

teacher training program for revitalization and retention efforts.

Sections 8 and 9 of the *Indigenous Languages Act* allow the Minister of Canadian Heritage to conclude agreements with provincial or territorial governments, Indigenous governments and organizations to coordinate efforts to efficiently support Indigenous languages in Canada. This includes agreements to provide Indigenous language programs and services in relation to education, health and the administration of justice. Canadian Heritage established a tripartite Nunavut Partnership Table on Language and Education with the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which focuses on a long-term collective approach to achieve mutual language and education goals and strengthened coordination. Under this Table, a Tripartite Agreement was put in place to support increasing access to Inuktitut-language instruction in Nunavut, increasing and maintaining the number of proficient Inuktitut-speaking Inuit educators in the Nunavut education system, and increasing the number of fluent Inuktitut speakers in Nunavut. This initiative provides cohorts of Inuit educators across Nunavut with two years of Inuktitut certification and proficiency in teaching in Inuktitut and offers the possibility of laddering in the third and fourth years into a Bachelor of Education degree at Memorial University.

In 2022-23, Canadian Heritage concluded a three-year agreement with the National Association of Friendship Centres that supports assessing the needs of Indigenous urban populations. This includes identifying existing urban Indigenous language programs and initiatives; completing a literature review on Indigenous languages and urban spaces; conducting analysis as well as case studies on promising practices; and developing pilot projects in 30 Friendship Centers and provincial or territorial Associations across Canada. The project will also see the organization of a national gathering on Indigenous languages with experts and community authorities in the hopes of sharing knowledge.

Through Budget 2024, the Government is investing \$225 million over five years, starting in 2024-25, with \$45 million per year ongoing for Indigenous languages and cultures programs, in support of the *Indigenous Languages Act*. With these investments, the Government of Canada will have provided over \$1 billion dollars from 2019-20 to 2028-29 in support of Indigenous languages revitalization, which also includes \$167.2 million in annual ongoing funding.

Further, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, Canadian Heritage has introduced new funding models specific to First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation to support increased Indigenous autonomy over funding, flexible long-term funding and greater responsiveness to the priorities of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation.

Canadian Heritage will continue to work collaboratively with Indigenous partners on the ongoing implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act* and to further support Indigenous-led initiatives to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages.

In addition to the work of Canadian Heritage, ISC's new co-developed approach to funding elementary and secondary education on reserve provides First Nations schools with additional support for language and culture programming. Recognizing that language and culture are a

critical component of successful on-reserve education systems, ISC provides approximately \$1,500 per student per year intended to support language and culture programming in on-reserve schools. As part of its performance measurement framework, ISC's Elementary and Secondary Education program monitors the percentage of students attending First Nations administered schools who are taught at least one subject in a First Nations language. This percentage has increased from 82 per cent in 2019-20 to over 93 per cent in 2023-24. In the same year, approximately 94 per cent of students were also provided with culturally-based curriculum or land-based learning services.

Canada continues to hold collaborative discussions with First Nations partners through regional technical tables to guide the implementation of the new co-developed approach and identify and address First Nations' education needs. ISC supports First Nations' flexibility to apply culturally relevant curricula and various models of delivery for land-based education, recognizing the value that First Nations-led approaches to education optimize education outcomes, and better address students' needs including through restoring pride, a sense of identity and advancing self-determination. As a supplement to the core funding provided for elementary and secondary education on reserve, the First Nations and Inuit Cultural Education Centres program also supports First Nations and Inuit communities in expressing, preserving, developing, revitalizing and promoting their culture, language and heritage. Additionally, ISC released a major update to the School Space Accommodation Standards policy, with the review of the policy co-led by the Assembly of First Nations. The updated policy, effective April 1, 2023, addressed additional space needs within schools for the delivery of culture-based programming in support of First Nations students.

Regional education agreements are tailored to the local or regional context and outline First Nations design, implementation and management plans for their education systems, including funding required to achieve better student outcomes, which can include activities related to language and culture.

The Government of Canada also works with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation partners through the Permanent Bilateral Mechanisms process to identify joint educational priorities and co-develop policy options. ISC will continue to support advancing reconciliation and collaborating closely with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation partners to advance their education and language priorities, including Indigenous language instruction, culturally appropriate programming and recruitment and retention of Indigenous educators.

The Government of Canada's support for the distinctions-based post-secondary education strategies for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation students and post-secondary institutions may also increase access to post-secondary education programming related to Indigenous languages.

The First Nations Post-Secondary Education Strategy supports First Nations to provide financial assistance to eligible First Nations students through the Post-Secondary Student Support program. Funding assists First Nations students who are enrolled in eligible post-secondary programs, including those at First Nations-designated and directed institutions. The Strategy

also includes the Post-Secondary Partnership program, which supports First Nations established post-secondary education institutions and First Nations-directed community-based programming. This proposal-based program supports First Nations in defining their own partnerships with educational institutions to increase the availability of post-secondary education programs tailored to First Nations cultural and educational needs, which can include programming that supports Indigenous languages and socio-cultural studies.

ISC has been supporting Métis Nation post-secondary students since 2019 through the Métis Nation Post Secondary Education Strategy. Recipients under the Métis Nation-led strategy include the governing members of the Métis National Council and the Manitoba Métis Federation. In addition to funding for student financial support, the Strategy allocates funding to programs and services, including wraparound services to students and their families. These services can support the development of culturally relevant content or curricula, which may strengthen post-secondary education partnerships, networks, and current post-secondary education course offerings.

The Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy was designed specifically through engagement coordinated by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami in collaboration with the Inuit treaty organizations to ensure investments are best placed to meet the needs of Inuit post-secondary students. The Strategy is led by Inuit partners, and each initial recipient (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the four Inuit treaty organizations) determines the funding and selection criteria. The Strategy's components include student financial support, and programs and services that include wraparound services, cultural education and life-skills development. Programs and services may also support the development of culturally relevant content or curricula, which may strengthen post-secondary education partnerships, networks, and current post-secondary education course offerings. This Strategy also has components tailored to community engagement and national coordination.

To strengthen federal leadership against systemic racism and discrimination, Canada's new Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-28, which was launched on June 8, 2024, emphasizes that addressing racism is a shared responsibility which involves concrete action by provinces and territories to address racial discrimination in their respective jurisdictions and adds that through this Strategy, the Government will see active engagement with provinces and territories to work towards a fairer, and more inclusive Canada. In addition, building upon the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Network of Officials Responsible for Multiculturalism, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism, Canadian Heritage will establish a new Federal-Provincial-Territorial forum at the ministerial level that serves to enhance collaboration and potential synergies with other orders of governments to address systemic racism, inclusion, equity, and multiculturalism.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (Recommendations 2, 13, 14, 15)

The Government of Canada recognizes that there are many factors that contribute to and support student success, including health and well-being services from early child to adulthood.

Early Childhood

Canada agrees that early intervention and prevention to identify needs and provide adequate resources or medical interventions will better support children in optimizing their learning. ISC has several programs that support early intervention, prevention, and access to health services in early childhood, including vision care and oral health. The Maternal Child Health program supports community-based approaches to promote maternal child health, including case management, screening, assessment and referrals, as well as health promotion strategies. The Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program also provides opportunities for screening and assessment of children 0-6 years of age.

The Non-Insured Health Benefits program provides coverage for eligible clients (registered First Nations and recognized Inuit) with coverage for a range of health benefits, including vision care such as eye examinations, as well as corrective eyewear and repair, when these supports are not covered by provincial or territorial health insurance plans. Children under age 18 are eligible for a complete eye exam and corrective eyewear every twelve months or sooner when there is a change in the child's vision. In some cases, vision care providers travel into communities to provide these services. Transportation to attend appointments is covered when the service is not available locally.

The Government of Canada also recognizes the importance of oral health in relation to supporting education outcomes, as a child with poor dental health may be at higher risk for dental pain, heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory infections, which may impede learning. The Community Oral Health Services program, which includes the Children's Oral Health Initiative and dental therapy services, is a community-based program with a focus on the prevention of dental disease at an early age and the promotion of good oral health practices. Community Oral Health Services focuses on three target groups within First Nations and Inuit populations: children (a historically underserved segment of the population), their parents and/or caregivers, and pregnant women.

The recent Healthy Child Development program evaluation found that program staff play an important role in referrals and linkages with other programs and services, and that program participation was attributed to outcomes such as improved early intervention and prevention response (e.g., for people with addictions, for children flagged as "at risk") and access to screening, increased achievement of growth and development milestones among children, and increased school readiness.

Following an initial commitment to improve access to dental care, starting with children under 12 in families earning less than \$90,000 per year, in 2022 the Government of Canada launched the interim Canada Dental Benefit, which helped lower oral health costs for eligible families with children under 12 years old earning less than \$90,000 per year. A tax-free payment of \$260, \$390, or \$650 was available for each eligible child, based adjusted family net income. An attestation that the child did not have access to private dental insurance and proof of an appointment with an oral health care professional were required. The benefit provided up to two payments per child for dental care **between October 1, 2022 and June 30, 2024**. The Benefit helped over 450,000 children receive the dental care they needed.

Budget 2023 further invested \$13 billion over five years, and \$4.4 billion ongoing to implement the Canadian Dental Care Plan. The Canadian Dental Care Plan is intended to fill existing gaps in coverage and complement existing federal and provincial/territorial oral health programs, including the Non-Insured Health Benefits program. The Non-Insured Health Benefits program's dental benefit covers services, including diagnostic (e.g., exams and x-rays), preventive (e.g., sealants), restorative (e.g., fillings), endodontic (e.g., root canals), periodontal (e.g., scaling), removable prosthodontic (e.g., partial and complete dentures), oral surgery (e.g., extractions), orthodontic (e.g., braces) and adjunctive (e.g., sedation, general anesthesia) services. All registered Non-Insured Health Benefits clients are eligible for the dental benefits regardless of age, location, income level or other proxy measures of socio-economic need. The Canadian Dental Care Plan is helping to ease financial barriers to accessing oral health care for up to nine million uninsured Canadian residents with an annual family income of less than \$90,000, including indigenous populations. The Canadian Dental Care Plan has been launched in phases, with children under 18 now being eligible to apply. As of July 9, 2024, over 2 million Canadian residents are eligible under the Plan.

School Food

The Government of Canada agrees that school food programs provide an important service that positively impact health and learning and help children to reach their full potential in the classroom, leading to an improved quality of life and stronger communities. School food programs contribute toward building a foundation for healthy eating habits and ensuring that education is not hindered by a lack of access to healthy and culturally relevant food.

This is why Budget 2024 announced \$1 billion over five years to create a National School Food program, starting in 2024-25, to work with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners to expand access to school food programs. The Government will work with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners, including Inuit partners, to expand access to school food programs, with support beginning as early as the 2024-25 school year. The investment includes three funding streams: 1) Bilateral funding agreements with all provinces and territories to support expanded and improved school food programming; 2) Funding to First Nations on-reserve governments for school food programming for First Nations elementary and secondary students on reserve, as well as funding to all First Nations, Métis and Inuit Modern Treaty Holders and Self-Government agreement holders; and 3) Funding to convenors of Indigenous communities by distinction to support Indigenous school food engagement and capacity building.

In addition to the Budget 2024 announcement, on June 20, 2024, the Prime Minister announced the National School Food Policy. The Policy outlines the federal government's long-term vision for the delivery of the National School Food program and outlines the principles and objectives that will guide the federal government's work with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners to expand school food programming across the country. The National School Food Policy and Program are based on extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders from across Canada, including through bilateral conversations and roundtables,

and an online questionnaire seeking the views of Canadians.

The Government has a strong relationship with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and meets regularly through the Inuit Crown Partnership Committee and other forums to discuss Inuit School Food and food security. The Government engaged with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami throughout the school food engagement process and the organization's report on costing of a proposal for an Inuit Nunangat-wide school food program were taken into consideration in the design of the National School Food program. The four land claim organizations in Inuit Nunangat, which includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the western Arctic, Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec, and Nunatsiavut in Labrador, will be receiving funding from the National School Food program and they will be able to determine how best to deliver programming to support Inuit children.

Budget 2024 also announced \$62.9 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to renew and expand the Local Food Infrastructure Fund to support community organizations across Canada to invest in local food infrastructure, with priority to be given to Indigenous and Black communities, along with other equity-deserving groups. Part of the expansion will support community organizations to improve infrastructure for school food programs as a complement to the National School Food program.

Food security

In addition to acknowledging the importance of supporting food in schools, Canada recognizes food security as a critical, long-standing issue, and a key social determinant of health, that significantly impacts the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. The Government also agrees that addressing this complex issue requires working closely across federal departments with Indigenous partners and support for Indigenous self-determined approaches, as well as working with other levels of government and partners.

Food insecurity can have significant impacts on the physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of a child, often with lifelong effects. ISC supports healthy child development and healthy living programs and services that promote healthy eating and food skills, as well as improved access to healthy foods, including both traditional or country and store-bought foods. Through these programs and services, Indigenous communities and organizations have the flexibility to allocate funding as well as design and deliver a range of activities based on their unique needs and priorities. While the types of activities vary from community to community, activities often include on-the-land skills development (e.g., teaching hunting and fishing skills or preparing and cooking traditional food), community gardens, cooking classes, community kitchens, food box programs as well as school food program support.

Budget 2024 acknowledges the importance of advancing food security and affordability efforts. To help support Indigenous communities and households, Budget 2024 invested \$14.9 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to renew and expand the Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund to all regions of Inuit Nunangat to support local and Indigenous food production systems, including innovative northern food businesses, which contribute to food security in

the North; \$25.1 million over two years, starting in 2024-25, on a cash basis, to expand the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation program to assist Indigenous communities to safely access shellfish harvest for food, as well as social and ceremonial purposes; and \$2.8 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to implement the UNDA Action Plan measures to bolster the policy and engagement capacity among Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Inuit treaty organizations to co-develop legislative and policy options to facilitate the production, sale, and trade of traditional and country food.

Specific to Indigenous communities and households in the North, Budget 2024 invested \$23.2 million in 2024-25 to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada for Nutrition North Canada's subsidy program to lower the cost of nutritious food and other essential household items; and \$101.1 million over three years starting in 2024-25, to support the Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food program Fund and promote Indigenous communities in implementing culturally appropriate, local solutions to address food insecurity.

The Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, as mentioned previously, also oversees the Inuit Crown Food Security Working Group, which is guided by a joint work plan to help support food security measures in Inuit Nunangat in a partner-driven and culturally relevant way, including advancing school food policy. The Working Group leverages the contributions of multiple federal departments, as well as Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; Inuit Treaty Organizations; Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada; Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada; and the National Inuit Youth Council toward common objectives.

Mental Wellness

Experiences related to colonization, racism and discrimination have resulted in trauma and lower mental wellness outcomes for Indigenous people, families, and communities for generations. The Government of Canada recognizes that Indigenous-led, community-driven initiatives that reflect the cultural needs and aspirations of the people that use them are essential in improving mental wellness outcomes for Indigenous children and youth.

Mental wellness of Indigenous children and youth is a key priority for Indigenous leaders, organizations, communities and youth themselves. This is a priority shared by the Government of Canada. ISC works closely with national, regional and community Indigenous partners to support Indigenous-led, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed mental health, wellness and healing supports. This work is guided by key documents developed by Indigenous partners, namely the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework, Honouring Our Strengths, the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy, and We Matter's Pathfinding towards a Flourishing Future, an Awareness and Advocacy Guide.

Budget 2024 is providing \$630.2 million over two years, starting in 2024-25, to continue to support Indigenous people's access to mental health services, including through distinctions-based mental wellness strategies. Continued funding for mental wellness demonstrates the government's commitment to support and improve health equity, access to culturally appropriate health services and support for holistic approaches to healing, including community-based, culturally relevant and trauma-informed mental health services.

Federal investments in mental wellness include flexible funding to Indigenous communities to meet their unique needs and circumstances. This includes community-based supports; federally funded substance use treatment centres, including a network of ten First Nations youth residential treatment centres; trauma-informed health and cultural supports, and mental health counselling via the Non-Insured Health Benefits program. Funding also supports suicide prevention and life promotion for First Nations and Inuit youth through the National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy, and the Youth Hope Fund. In recent budgets, the Government of Canada has doubled mental wellness funding to approximately \$650 million annually, to support access to community-based services. Access to mental wellness supports for children and youth is also funded through Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative. For example, in 2022-23, ISC approved requests for mental health and wellness services submitted through Jordan's Principle totaling \$256 million.

Federal investments in mental wellness for Indigenous people residing off reserve include Integrated Youth Services models of care, which provide locally relevant, effective, youth-focused and integrated services directly within local communities. These "one-stop shops" offer various supports, including mental health and substance use services, primary care, sexual health and harm reduction services, youth and family peer support, social and community services, access to multidisciplinary teams, as well as support for navigating these systems of care.

All thirteen provinces and territories have developed or are developing an Integrated Youth Service network, with a pan-Canadian Indigenous Integrated Youth Service network in progress. There are approximately 90 hubs across Canada with about 50 more in development. These hubs offer these integrated and culturally safe services to youth aged 12 to 25 years, ensuring they are available as youth transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research and partners continue to work toward improving the delivery of youth mental health services in Canadian communities through Integrated Youth Services-Net, a pan-Canadian network of Learning Health System networks. Through this 'network of networks', research, evidence, data, and the lived experiences of youth will be used to improve health-equity and services delivery, and better health outcomes for Canada's children and youth. Integrated Youth Services-Net includes an Indigenous network aimed at developing a pan-Canadian, distinctions-based, integrated network representing the needs of Indigenous Peoples.

As part of its Working Together Plan, the Government announced it would be providing \$25 billion over ten years to provinces and territories via tailored bilateral agreements to address shared priorities, including mental health and substance use. All provinces and territories have proposed initiatives to address child and youth well-being, with initiatives ranging from the expansion of existing Integrated Youth Services models and other integrated service delivery models for mental health services, including in school and community settings, to the creation of student well-being teams, and multidisciplinary teams to provide intervention support for

First Nations youth.

Also, as part of the Working Together plan, the Government has committed funding to the Canadian Institute for Health Information for the purpose of working with provinces, territories, and data partners to develop common indicators related to these new Shared Health Priorities, including mental health. Among the indicators is the percentage of youth aged 12 to 25 with access to integrated youth services for mental health and substance use. Through Integrated Youth Services-Net, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is investing in pan-Canadian research and data infrastructure for Integrated Youth Services to enable reporting on this common indicator.

Budget 2024 announced \$500 million to create a new Youth Mental Health Fund to help younger Canadians access mental health care. The Fund will be designed to help community-level health organizations expand mental health care services and refer youth to broader networks of mental health support when they are needed.

To ensure the Youth Mental Health Fund responds effectively to the needs of youth across the country, the Government is working closely with a broad range of stakeholders, including community organizations that deliver mental health services to youth, academics, provinces and territories, Indigenous partners and youth stakeholders.

EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND CONNECTIVITY (Recommendations 12, 17, 19)

The Government of Canada agrees that a safe and healthy learning environment is crucial for students to achieve positive education outcomes, no matter where they live. The Government recognizes that housing is a key determinant of health and provides the foundation for improving socioeconomic outcomes, including education attainment. Schools are often the cornerstone of First Nations communities, providing students with a place to learn and grow while acting as a gathering place for community events and cultural activities. The Government also recognizes that Indigenous communities face unique connectivity challenges and accessing vital services like education and health services, requires a fast, dependable and affordable internet connection.

Housing

Recognizing that Indigenous Peoples continue to face unique challenges with respect to accessing safe, adequate and affordable housing, in addition to increased rates of homelessness, the Government of Canada is addressing these challenges through the National Housing Strategy, and more specifically, through complimentary co-developed distinctions-based housing strategies, the Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy and Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.

The Government of Canada has co-developed distinctions-based housing strategies with partners, which are now being implemented: the First Nations National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy, the Inuit Nunangat Housing Strategy, and the Métis Nation Housing

Sub-Accord. Lastly, the Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy was launched to address housing needs of Indigenous Peoples living in urban, rural and northern areas and will complement the three distinctions-based housing strategies. Since 2015, the Government of Canada has committed more than \$6.7 billion to support housing in Indigenous communities and a further \$4.3 billion to advance an Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing strategy in 2024-25.

Guided by the co-developed strategies, funding allocations for Inuit and Métis recipients are flexible to support projects as identified by the Indigenous government. Participating Inuit and Métis organizations undertook housing assessments to identify their needs and use the funding received accordingly. To date, the participating Inuit and Métis organizations have provided supports to their respective citizens to address affordability, sustainability and accessibility needs focusing on activities such as new constructions; repairs and refurbishes; down-payment assistance; and rent subsidies.

Following robust engagement with First Nations partners, a ten-Year First Nations National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy was co-developed by First Nations and federal partners. The strategy was endorsed by Chiefs in December 2018, and it outlines the longer-term path forward to transition the care, control and management of housing to First Nations. Led by First Nations, the strategy describes the main pillars for First Nations care, control and management of housing, including skills and capacity enhancement, and financing and funding.

While the Government of Canada provides funding to First Nations for safe and adequate on-reserve housing, First Nations plan, manage, design, prioritize and procure their own housing solutions. The strategy is designed to increase First Nations' access to sustainable housing that addresses their priorities, respects regional and cultural differences, and supports phases of action at a pace of transition suitable to First Nations based on their capacity and readiness. Co-development of the strategy and related products and processes with First Nations produced robust data and costing analysis relating to housing conditions on reserve.

In alignment with the existing First Nations on-reserve housing program, funds are disbursed to First Nations for their self-determined, on-reserve housing needs, meaning that First Nations have the flexibility to plan and design housing to suit the needs of their members, including students. Since 2016 and as of March 31, 2024, ISC is supporting the construction, renovation and retrofit of 19,244 homes, of which 9,431 are complete.

The Government of Canada also announced approximately \$4 billion to support Indigenous Peoples residing in urban, rural and northern areas. These funds are intended to complement the First Nations, Inuit and Métis distinctions-based housing strategies and investments made in housing for Modern Treaty and Self-Government agreement holders.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation supported comprehensive engagement led by First Nations, Inuit and Metis and Indigenous non-profit sector partners in early 2023, and the Budget 2023 funding for the Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy to help those in greatest need living in urban, rural and northern areas is currently in the

implementation phase and set to flow in 2024-25. This includes direct housing funding to distinctions-based partners to support their members, citizens and beneficiaries in urban, rural and northern areas, as well as to a new National Indigenous Housing Centre. Since housing is the foundation for so many other socio-economic determinants, including greater educational attainment, these measures will contribute to greater outcomes.

Reaching Home is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada through providing funding to urban, Indigenous, rural and remote communities to help them address their local homelessness needs. This program also supports the goals of the National Housing Strategy, in particular, to support the most vulnerable Canadians in maintaining safe, stable, and affordable housing and to reduce chronic homelessness by 50 per cent by fiscal year 2027-28. Supporting Indigenous Peoples living away from their communities in urban, rural, and northern areas are part of ongoing actions in solving the housing crisis as stated in Canada's Housing Plan and Budget 2024.

Education Infrastructure

First Nations own and operate education facilities on reserve and are responsible for managing projects to renovate or build new facilities. ISC provides funding to First Nations to build new schools, renovate, repair and expand existing facilities, and operate and maintain existing education infrastructure. ISC's Education Facility program provides funding to build and maintain federally or band-operated elementary and secondary education facilities and related facility services. Education infrastructure can include school facilities such as classrooms, gyms, science labs, sports fields, outdoor learning areas, home economics and shop facilities. Education infrastructure also includes dedicated housing for teachers on reserve. These infrastructure investments help First Nations optimize the life cycle of their assets, mitigate health and safety risks, ensure that assets meet applicable codes and standards, and are managed in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Since 2016 and as of March 31, 2024, ISC has invested \$2.18 billion of additional targeted funds (excluding operating expenses) to support 317 school-related infrastructure projects, 185 of which are complete. These projects will result in the construction or renovation of 230 schools benefitting approximately 38,000 students, 153 of which are complete:

- Construction of 73 new schools (benefitting approximately 18,000 students), 47 of which are complete;
- Renovations or upgrades to 157 existing schools (benefitting approximately 20,000 students), 106 of which are complete.

In addition to targeted funding, the program provides, through a permanent source of funds, an average of \$90 million annually to First Nation communities.

In support of the Government of Canada's commitment to closing the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities, ISC supported the Assembly of First Nations to undertake a comprehensive study of all infrastructure needs of First Nation communities on reserve. The report, which was released on April 9, 2024, indicated a need for \$349.2 billion to close the infrastructure gap in First Nations by 2030.

Budget 2024 announced \$545.1 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, for kindergarten to Grade 12 infrastructure to build and renovate safe and healthy learning environments for First Nations students. Investments in school facilities support the creation of quality learning environments that are safe and healthy, promoting better educational outcomes for students. These investments include new constructions, as well as additions, renovations and major repairs to existing schools in First Nations communities.

ISC will continue to modernize, streamline and improve its infrastructure programs and is exploring ways to better meet First Nations' infrastructure needs by increasing First Nations' control over decision making related to infrastructure.

In 2021, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada received \$1.3 billion over four years through the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Fund to support Modern Treaty and Self-Governing First Nations, Inuit Treaty Organizations, Métis partners, and Northern Indigenous partners for self-determined community-based infrastructure development.

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada supports the Government of Canada's commitment to close the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities complementing the core funding delivered by ISC, Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. While Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada does not normally fund education infrastructure, in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, an exception was made for Indigenous education facilities under the Department's Green and Inclusive Community Buildings program and the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program. Since 2016, Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada has invested over \$128 million in 42 projects to support Indigenous education infrastructure, including \$17 million under the Green and Inclusive Community Buildings program for the Pikangikum First Nation's Pikangikum Cultural Learning and Community Centre, \$10.8 million under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program for Kluane First Nations' Kêts'ádan' Kuç` (Burwash Landing School), and over \$25 million for 20 projects that support retrofits, repairs, upgrades and pandemic support infrastructure for schools under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure stream. Inuit and Métis were eligible under the COVID-19 Resilience Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program. The stream supported retrofits, repairs and upgrades for municipal, territorial, provincial and Indigenous buildings, health infrastructure and schools as well as ventilation improvement projects (also including education facilities).

Connectivity

The Government of Canada recognizes that access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet is crucial to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples living in rural and remote communities have opportunities to pursue distance education and online learning. In June 2019, the Government launched High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy, which commits to connecting all households to speeds of at least 50 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 10 Mbps upload by 2030, including households in Indigenous communities. To support its strategy, the Government has a suite of connectivity programs, including the \$3.225 billion Universal Broadband Fund, to help fund the expansion of broadband services in underserved areas. Working with Indigenous communities, Universal Broadband Fund projects have been announced as of summer 2024 that will connect over 40,000 Indigenous households, with nearly 15,000 Indigenous households already connected.

Since 2019, Canada's telecommunications regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, is funding up to \$675 million for the expansion of broadband services sourced from an industry levy. To date, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission has launched three calls for applications under the fund, including a call that focused on satellite-dependent communities and the three territories.

ISC also endeavors to help communities bridge the digital divide. Through the First Nations Infrastructure Fund, ISC provides funding to support connectivity projects, and leverages funding from other government departments, whenever possible. Since 2016 and as of March 31, 2024, ISC has invested \$97.3 million in targeted funds to support 52 connectivity projects, 33 of which are complete. As a result of these investments, provincial and territorial initiatives, and private sector investment, the Government of Canada is on track to exceed its connectivity target of connecting 98 per cent of Canadians by 2026 and connect all Canadians by 2030.

While expanding access to high-speed internet is the focus of these programs, the Government also recognizes the importance of affordability of internet services. For example, Universal Broadband Fund projects that offered lower retail pricing were assessed more favorably during the application intake period. As well, proposed pricing plans must be comparable to the range of prices in a given region and must remain in place for five years. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Broadband Fund has similar price criteria. In addition, the Government has a number of digital inclusion programs to help make the cost of internet service more affordable for families and seniors living on a low-income, and to bring computer equipment and digital skills to Canadians who face barriers to participating in the digital economy.

INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION AND DATA AND INFORMATION SHARING **(Recommendations 21, 22, 23)**

The Government of Canada agrees with the Committee that Indigenous-led and Indigenous-governed education systems, which enables access to culturally appropriate and quality education, achieve better results for Indigenous students. ISC continues to support self-determination and transfer of responsibility for education services to Indigenous partners, recognizing that education services designed by Indigenous Peoples and organizations for Indigenous students effectively support student success and the closing of education attainment gaps. The data gaps facing Indigenous Peoples are persistent and well-documented. At the same time, robust data that all parties can trust becomes even more important as service transfer progresses. Distinctions-based, disaggregated data that provides evidence of Indigenous Peoples' multidimensional needs and unique strengths is required for governments to effectively allocate resources to effectively allocate resources, and close socio-economic gaps. The data capacity needed to collect, govern, manage and use data effectively is important in ensuring that Indigenous governments and organizations can design and deliver effective programs, policies, and services for their peoples.

Indigenous self-determination

The *Department of Indigenous Services Act (2019)* outlines the responsibility of the Minister of Indigenous Services' for ensuring that education services are provided to eligible individuals as well as advancing the gradual transfer of departmental responsibilities to Indigenous communities, governments and organizations. Since 1972, the Government has supported First Nations' control of First Nations Education for elementary and secondary education. ISC also supports the principle of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation control over education through

their respective distinctions-based post-secondary education strategies. The Government's commitment to Indigenous self-determination and control of education is also demonstrated in the measures outlined in the UNDA Action Plan. This work sets out a way forward to implement the UN Declaration, including article 14, related to education.

As previously mentioned, the 2019 co-developed approach to funding elementary and secondary education was transformed to provide improved access to core funding through regional funding formulas to ensure stable, predictable and sustainable funding. Through this funding approach, the Government recognizes that First Nations are best placed to make decisions on how to allocate funding to advance their priorities to meet the needs of the schools and students in their communities. As such, First Nations have the flexibility to determine how funding is spent, including developing and implementing hiring strategies for education staff and management.

The Government of Canada recognizes that exercising the right to self-determination in education exists on a spectrum and the Government provides a suite of tools that can support Indigenous communities wherever they choose to exist on this spectrum. These tools are not mutually exclusive and are designed to be supportive of each other, either standalone solutions or stepping stones or precursors to one another. First Nations have outlined several conditions for successful transfer, including: that the transfer of services must be done through flexible, easy-to-establish administrative agreements that coherently complement or offer alternatives to other self-determination tools; that agreements provide sufficient, flexible funding for the delivery of services and the capacity to design and deliver them; and, that transfer discussions adequately identify human, financial and asset resources necessary to support partner success.

The co-developed approach also supports the development of regional education agreements that are tailored to the local or regional context and outline First Nations design, implementation and management plans for their education systems. Regional education agreements can be used to formalize an existing or new service-map (e.g., education system) between First Nation communities, education administrative entities, ISC, and, sometimes, provincial ministries of education. The agreements also reflect how the parties will work together to support the First Nations' specific educational priorities and are scalable based on community interest. ISC works with all First Nations that wish to pursue a regional education agreement as an avenue for advancing self-determination, improving educational outcomes and building educational capacity, at both the community and institutional level.

The Government of Canada's commitment to supporting the realization of First Nations control of First Nation education includes supporting First Nations in reclaiming full jurisdiction and assuming control over the delivery of education programs and services through self-government agreements and modern treaties. Self-government agreements and other arrangements are another avenue for Canada to partner with First Nations to advance the recognition of their right to self-determination and recognize their autonomy over the delivery of education programs and services to their communities. The effective and full implementation of these agreements is an integral component of the drive towards reconciliation, self-determination and bridging socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and other Canadian communities. Canada is currently implementing 27 modern treaties; 22 of the 27 include self-

government components. In addition, there are three stand-alone self-government agreements and ten sectoral self-government arrangements nine of which are sectoral education agreements in partnership with Indigenous governments, as well as some with provincial/territorial governments. The nine sectoral education agreements include Cowichan Tribes; Lil'wat Nation; ʔaq'am; Seabird Island First Nation; Ditidaht First Nation; Tsq'escen' First Nation; Squamish Nation; Mi'kmaq Education Agreement; and Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement.

There are over 170 active discussion tables across the country where the federal government is working with Indigenous partners to conclude modern treaties, self-government agreements and other constructive arrangements that advance the implementation of Indigenous rights and self-determination in many areas, including education. As negotiations are ongoing and new ideas are developed through collaborative and co-developed processes, the Government of Canada recognizes that a transformative shift in federal institution culture and approaches to implementation is required to build renewed nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown, and government-to-government relationships.

The Government has shifted to a collaborative approach, where new fiscal policy is co-developed with Indigenous governments. Canada's Collaborative Self-Government Fiscal Policy was co-developed with 25 self-governing Indigenous governments and came into effect in 2019. The fiscal policy is intended to provide fiscal resources to Indigenous governments to fulfill their responsibilities and to provide public services. It also supports measures to help close the social well-being gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In support of the principle of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation control over post-secondary education, ISC launched distinctions-based Indigenous post-secondary education strategies in 2019-20. Through the First Nations Post-Secondary Education Strategy, ISC supports advancing forthcoming First Nations' regional post-secondary education models. These models are intended to support First Nations control of First Nations education, enabling First Nations to tailor programming to their local or regional goals and priorities and the specific post-secondary education needs of the region (e.g., identify ways to increase enrolment in programs offered near communities). In parallel to these First Nations-led engagement activities, First Nations developed the 2021 First Nations Post-Secondary Education Policy Proposal through the Assembly of First Nations, to support First Nations in implementing their vision of post-secondary education in their community, territory, and/or region.

Data and information sharing in support of self-determination

The Government acknowledges and agrees with the importance of sharing information, lessons-learned and promising practices related to Indigenous self-determination in education. Canada also agrees and supports a partnership approach for data development, collection and sharing that respects co-development to ensure the information collected is relevant and meets the needs and priorities of Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, ISC continues work to reduce the reporting burden for Indigenous partners.

Supported by Budget 2021, the Transformational Approach to Indigenous Data initiative was launched in 2022 as a multi-year government commitment supporting First Nations, Inuit and Métis to develop the capacity they will need to collect, manage and use their own data for the benefit of their Peoples. As part of this initiative, work is underway at ISC to improve data sharing with Indigenous partners as a first step towards readying the department's data assets for the eventual transfer of services to Indigenous control. A key milestone under the initiative that was successfully launched in 2024 was ISC's Guide to External Data Sharing that facilitates a standardized departmental approach to data sharing with Indigenous partners, and which demonstrates Canada's continued support for the sharing of information to support Indigenous self-determination. The work carried out under this initiative directly advances Canada's commitment under Shared Priority 30 of the UNDA Action Plan to support Indigenous Data Sovereignty by streamlining timely sharing and access to federal data and information holdings with Indigenous partners, while respecting the privacy of individuals and federal privacy laws.

An Act to Provide for the Establishment of a National Council for Reconciliation requires Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to report to the future National Council for Reconciliation regarding funding for the education of Indigenous children on and off reserve; and, educational and income attainment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. Sharing this data complements other Government of Canada initiatives with regards to Indigenous data capacity.

ISC continues to work with First Nations on reserve to leverage data to support discussions around First Nations education needs and subsequent funding challenges. Regional education programs receive feedback from communities regarding the existing data collection instruments and education reporting, and this feedback is used to refine reporting tools and reduce reporting burden where possible. First Nations have access to their own data through the Education Reports and Analysis Solution and may extract and generate standard reports. The Education Reports and Analysis Solution depersonalizes data from the Education Information System to ensure privacy and allow for analysis and statistical reporting at the recipient, regional, and national levels. First Nations were engaged in defining the type of reports that would be most useful for their decision-making.

In addition, First Nations in regional education agreements work with ISC to co-develop their performance measurement frameworks that complement the ISC performance measurement framework to measure and monitor progress toward the fundamental changes that they have envisaged, and better align with the mandate of service transfer. As part of this, the agreement holder must make this information publicly available to their communities (e.g., annual reports posted to their website). As regional education agreements provide greater flexibility in how First Nations structure and operate their elementary and secondary education systems, it is expected to result in variability in the measurement of outcomes unique to their communities.

ISC regularly publishes information on educational attainment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. The Department's 2023 Report to Parliament includes information on the proportion of the population with a university degree, and on educational

attainment gaps among those 25 to 64 years of age with at least a high school education. In addition, ISC is developing a data and reporting strategy with provinces and territories, and Indigenous partners to fill data and knowledge gaps.

CONCLUSION

I would like to thank the Committee members for conducting this study, and express my gratitude to the witnesses and those who submitted briefs for sharing their knowledge and experiences. The above response is by no means an exhaustive summary of the dialogue and work being undertaken by the Government in close collaboration with Indigenous partners, to support access to a high quality and culturally relevant education for Indigenous students across Canada. It is by working closely with our partners, including Indigenous leaders, educators, and communities, that we have made progress in improving student outcomes and addressing the education goals and priorities of communities. The Government will continue its engagement with Indigenous partners, as well as with the provinces and territories, in order to advance Indigenous control of Indigenous education and to ensure the best possible outcomes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Hadju', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Honourable Patty Hadju. P.C., M.P.