



OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Federal 2023 Pre-Budget Submission

December 2022

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Recommendations:

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) recommends the following Budget 2023 investments:

1. The annualization of dedicated federal funding to support the core operations and capacity development of Indigenous Friendship Centres. Investments will stabilize essential service delivery and propel the Friendship Centre Movement forward.
2. The effective implementation of an Indigenous-led Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy announced in Budget 2022. The Strategy must be implemented immediately and funded to adequately respond to the housing crisis experienced across our communities.
3. Long-term, stabilized funding supports for the OFIFC's Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound program as a MMIWG2S+ National Action Plan direct response.
4. Facilitate the advancement of urban Indigenous-led child care spaces within the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System that meets the proportionate need in our growing communities.
5. The establishment of an annualized, flexible federal funding source for Indigenous Youth Initiatives in Friendship Centres to support young people to thrive in their communities.

Introduction:

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) represents the interests of 29 Indigenous Friendship Centres across Ontario. Census 2021 statistics indicate that most Indigenous people reside in urban and rural communities. Our communities' demographics are younger than the mainstream Canadian population and our communities are growing. In Ontario, 88% of Indigenous people live off-reserve in towns, cities, and rural areas.¹

Friendship Centres play a critical role in creating opportunity for urban Indigenous people to exercise their rights to access culturally relevant programs and services that meet their needs where they live, through dedicated urban Indigenous community spaces. Underlining the tie between the work and role of Friendship Centres and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), the Declaration sets out that Indigenous people have a right to organize "themselves for political, economic, social and cultural enhancement and in order to bring to an end all forms of discrimination and oppression wherever they occur"²

Articles 3, 5, 20, 21, and 23 of the UNDRIP outline the rights of Indigenous people to the development, administration and oversight of our own institutions and priorities. Indigenous Friendship Centres were formed as a grassroots response to decolonization and remain direct catalysts of Indigenous people's self-determination in the areas of education, culture, justice, housing, health, and healing. Friendship Centres have a proven and extensive track record in managing physical and social infrastructure and in contributing to the modern reconciliation era as decolonial spaces where relationships between Indigenous communities and settlers are made real in cities and towns.

In a difficult economic climate, Budget 2023 presents an opportunity for the federal government to leverage the expertise of Friendship Centres to make immediate impacts on reconciliation priorities. With this aim, we respectfully advance the following Budget 2023 recommendations:

1. Annualized Core and Capacity Funding for Indigenous Friendship Centres:

The issue:

Friendship Centres are chronically underfunded while being stretched thin and depended upon to deliver high caliber programming across multiple sectors. Friendship Centres in Ontario operate with an average of \$150,000/year in federal funding for core operations that must cover the salary of core staff, utilities, technology, database development, and building maintenance, among other core costs. These rates are stifling our movement and impeding the

¹ Statistics Canada. (2021). 'Census of Population: Focus on Geography Series, Ontario.'

² United Nations. (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

acceleration of tremendous impact across our communities. It is time to recognize the work of Friendship Centres on par with professionals in adjacent sectors.

For over three decades, the federal government recognized the critical role of Friendship Centres by funding a permanent Indigenous Friendship Centre Program nationally. In 2014, permanent, annualized core funding for Indigenous Friendship Centres was cut by the federal government. An application-based funding program replaced Friendship Centres' core funding and over the past decade, rates have not kept pace with the rate of growth, inflation, or community need.

Our recommended solution:

It is recommended that Budget 2023 introduce annualized, dedicated federal funding to support the core operations and capacity development of Indigenous Friendship Centres through the establishment of an Indigenous Friendship Centre Program federally. Investments will serve to stabilize essential service delivery and propel the Friendship Centre Movement forward.

To adequately serve growing urban Indigenous communities, a distinct Indigenous Friendship Centre Program that is designed, delivered, and managed by the Friendship Centre Movement is required. Such a program should be distinct from the federal Urban Programming for Indigenous Peoples (UPIP) and raise the bar for urban Indigenous service delivery. The OFFIC believes that an Indigenous Friendship Centre Program that is distinct from the UPIP will better reflect the pivotal role that Friendship Centres play in urban Indigenous communities.

Key elements of our proposed Indigenous Friendship Centre Program include:

- Core staffing enhancements to improve Friendship Centres' capacity to manage rapid program and service growth;
- Equitable salary enhancements that enable Friendship Centres to recruit and retain highly qualified staff;
- Increased operating funding that reflects the true cost of conducting business;
- The expansion of programs and services in ten new or existing Friendship Centres where communities are currently underserved; and
- Capital infrastructure investments to build, expand, and maintain existing infrastructure.

2. The effective implementation of an Indigenous-led Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy announced in Budget 2022

The issue:

The trajectory of the promised federal Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy, announced in Budget 2022, must be led by urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing experts who have the ability to immediately address the housing crisis in our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the extent of the housing crisis across Canada. At the core of the systemic underfunding of Indigenous housing is unwillingness to support Indigenous self-determination in the implementation of programs and initiatives that will solve the housing crisis in our communities.

In 2017 the federal government released the National Housing Strategy (NHS) did not leverage the substantial expertise of urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing providers across Canada. Instead, Indigenous-specific NHS investments have been made in partnership with National Indigenous Organizations at the exclusion of urban Indigenous housing providers and organizations. The lackluster results³ of NHS programs speak to the need for a radically new approach federally.

The majority of Indigenous people across Canada live in urban, rural, and northern communities where a network of experienced non-profit urban Indigenous-led housing providers and organizations already operates. Their community housing infrastructure is robust and under threat of the encroaching private housing market and the unrelenting housing crisis.

Our recommended solution:

The OFIFC is prepared to support the election promise of co-developing and implementing an Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy that is Indigenous-led and responds directly to the needs across our communities. We want to see immediate investments into a new process that directly involves urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing provider partners and have publicly signed onto the establishment of a coalition of partners dedicated to this aim.

The pandemic has demonstrated the power of urban Indigenous organizations in responding effectively to community needs. Friendship Centres are housing providers, housing sector navigators, and culture-based service delivery experts.

³ National Housing Council. 2022. 'Analysis of Affordable Housing Supply Created by Unilateral National Housing Strategy Programs – Research Report.' Retrieved from: <https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sites/place-to-call-home/pdfs/analysis-affordable-housing-supply-created-unilateral-nhs-programs-en.pdf>

Across Ontario, Friendship Centres are developing a multiplicity of housing solutions, but the lack of adequate and affordable housing is impeding our potential.

We are calling for a pathway to self-determination in housing that has been called for by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing,⁴ the HUMA Parliamentary Committee,⁵ and countless housing experts.⁶ Most critically, we are exercising our responsibility to maintain and strengthen housing within our communities as articulated within the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) Articles 21 and 23.

3. Long-term, stabilized funding supports for the OFIFC's Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound program as a MMIWG2S+ National Action Plan direct response

The issue:

The Final Report of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals demonstrated how poverty and colonization are the root causes of social issues that disproportionately affect Indigenous people. The OFIFC has advocated for annualized, stabilized funding for the OFIFC's Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program (UIHB) as a key pillar in response to the National Inquiry into MMIWG, recognizing that the Inquiry found that economic marginalization and exclusion, including the lack of adequate housing, featured prominently as a root cause of violence⁷ and that the program supports a high number of Indigenous women and children who have experienced or are fleeing violence.

⁴ On April 28, 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, in his opening address to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's (CHRA) 2021 Congress, urged the Canadian government to establish and fund an Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy. CHRA. (April 2021). 'CHRA 53rd National Congress on Housing and Homelessness.' Accessible at: <https://chracongress.vfairs.com/>

⁵ Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. (May 2021). 'Indigenous Housing: The Direction Home – Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.' House of Commons. Government of Canada. 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session. Retrieved from: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HUMA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=10983040>

⁶ CHRA Indigenous Caucus. (2020). 'An Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Strategy for Canada.' Retrieved from: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/HUMA/Brief/BR11000896/br-external/CanadianHousingAndRenewalAssociation-e.pdf>

⁷ The Final Report for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. (2019). Volume 1a. (439-445) Accessed: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a.pdf

Our recommended solution:

It is recommended that Budget 2023 introduce long-term, stabilized federal funding for the OFIFC's UIHB as a MMIWG2S+ National Action Plan direct response.

Participants in the program, who are Indigenous sole-parent women, are provided housing stabilization supports while they access training and post-secondary education. Upon completion of the program, participants have the skills to enter a career in a field that will provide a decent living wage and into a permanent housing situation. A process evaluation of the program has revealed that UIHB has been a positive life-changing program for participants who have experienced violence or are fleeing violent situations.

The program is changing Indigenous women's lives and will have a marked impact on Indigenous young people's futures, lifting families out of poverty and off of government assistance.⁸ Program participants include youth-aged mothers, families with institutional involvement with child welfare agencies or correctional services, families who have experienced homelessness, families who have experienced long-term reliance on social assistance programs, and families leaving institutional settings such as shelters. UIHB tackles these issues systemically through a culture-based wraparound approach to lifting families out of poverty.

We can act immediately to support the Friendship Centres' vision for culture-based housing solutions through the implementation of Indigenous-led transitional housing projects and the expansion of our UIHB Program – a best practice in the development of Indigenous-led transitional housing that connects program participants with the job market.

4. Facilitate the advancement of urban Indigenous-led child care spaces within the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System that meets the proportionate need in our growing communities

The issue:

Indigenous-led early learning and child care is vital to the safety, security and wellbeing of our communities into the future. In Ontario, urban Indigenous communities are at a severe disadvantage as the province has not indicated a commitment to Indigenous parity within the child care system. Indigenous priorities are not reflected in the agenda of the government of Ontario's Minister's Child Care Advisory Group (MCCAG) or the ministry's Canada-Wide Early

⁸ Raynard, Kelsey. (2022). 'Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound program celebrates first graduates.' Kenora Miner News. Retrieved from: <https://www.kenoraminerandnews.com/news/local-news/urban-indigenous-homeward-bound-program-celebrates-first-graduates>

Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Guideline and Funding Formula technical paper. The Ministry of Education's CWELCC Access and Inclusion Framework will not support any of the new 53,000 CWELCC funded child care spaces to be within urban Indigenous communities. Furthermore, urban Indigenous child care is largely administered by District Social Service Administration Boards and municipalities who are incapable of ensuring culture-based training, supports, and pedagogies.

The federal government, and specifically the Federal Child Care Secretariat, has created no mechanism to engage and collaborate with urban Indigenous partners on child care and early learning through the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. This lack of action is leaving urban Indigenous families behind. With the majority of planned expansion in Ontario happening in the public school system and enhanced support for the for-profit child care sector, thoughtful planning for an Indigenous-led system is required so that we are not building a tiered child care system that systematically underfunds Indigenous-led child care spaces.

As the window of opportunity for this historic implementation closes in, the federal government must ensure that urban Indigenous communities including Friendship Centres can participate equitably and change the landscape, increasing access to Indigenous-led early learning and child care across the province.

Our recommended solution:

For Friendship Centre communities, recovering child care responsibility is the centerpiece of our overall community development strategy to build healthy prosperous, and vibrant Indigenous communities in urban spaces across Ontario. The OFIFC has developed a comprehensive child care proposal which details a roadmap for Indigenous-led child care administered by the OFIFC and delivered by Friendship Centres that would ensure Indigenous families have access to quality, affordable and culturally relevant child care where they reside.

As Canada embarks on the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system, the federal government, must:

- commit to establishing an ongoing engagement mechanism with urban Indigenous partners like the OFIFC to advance the child care and early learning priorities of urban Indigenous communities.
- establish firmer expectations of provinces and territories when it comes to supporting culturally responsive, urban Indigenous-led child care and early learning centres at the community level. Both of these items must be entrenched in the proposed new federal child care legislation.

5. The establishment of an annualized, flexible federal funding source for Indigenous Youth Initiatives in Friendship Centres to support young people to thrive in their communities

The issue:

Indigenous young people within the Friendship Centre Movement have been without access to dedicated youth programming since the former Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth (CCAY) program was canceled federally. The COVID pandemic has had a destructive toll on Indigenous young people, contributing to higher rates of mental health issues, addictions, violence, and trauma. This is in addition to interruptions to access to culture, education, and safe community spaces.

As young people, especially those aged 16-29, reconnect with their Friendship Centres after difficult pandemic lockdowns, the need for uplifting, strengths-based programming for youth is a documented need across Friendship Centres.

Our recommended solution:

The federal government introduce an annualized, flexible federal funding source for Indigenous Youth Initiatives in Friendship Centres to support young people to thrive in their communities. In order to be responsive to the needs of Indigenous youth in the age range of 16-29, the fund should be flexible and focused very broadly on offering cultural connections, community involvement, and uplifting supports. To meet the needs of youth, major capital for the creation of safe spaces and land acquisition for land-based programming should be a component of the funding.