



**OFIFC**

Ontario Federation of  
Indigenous Friendship Centres

**2023 Pre-Budget Submission**

December 2022

## **Introduction:**

Ontario has been a leader in responding to the needs of urban Indigenous communities. Census 2021 statistics indicate that our communities' demographics are younger than the mainstream population and our communities are growing. In Ontario, 88% of Indigenous people live off-reserve in towns, cities, and rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Our 2023 pre-budget submission advances evidence-based recommendations to evolve our partnerships on childcare, child welfare reform, life-long care programming, and education policy.

## **Indigenous-led Affordable Child Care:**

The OFIFC has shared our 'Indigenous-led Child Care & Early Learning Proposal' with the province which lays out:

- 1) The transfer of administrative and management responsibilities of the municipalities for Indigenous-led child care and early learning programs to the OFIFC, including distribution of funding to Friendship Centres.
- 2) The expansion and enhancement of child care and early learning in Friendship Centres.
- 3) The development of an Indigenous-specific labour force strategy and investment in capacity building.

The OFIFC's proposal sets out a path for the province to increase the number of Indigenous-led child care spaces from approximately 547 to 1,757 – this proposed increase represents 1.4% of the 86,000 spaces Ontario has committed to building by the end of 2026. We recommend that Budget 2023 include the first phase of our proposal to move us toward meaningfully increasing access to Indigenous-led child care for Indigenous and low-income families in Friendship Centre communities. Our collaborative efforts can drive several overlapping priorities of urban Indigenous communities and the Ontario government including language and cultural revitalization, school readiness and success, strengthening outcomes for Indigenous women and girls, and supporting prevention work in the child welfare system.

## **Advancing Child Welfare Redesign:**

The OFIFC remains committed to working with the government on the Child Welfare Redesign Plan. Unfortunately, the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in care remains a growing crisis and the province continues to increase investments into the costly child protection system. Ontario's Public Accounts indicate increased provincial spending on child protection transfer payments by \$100 million over the past five years.

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

A central priority of the Child Welfare Redesign Plan is for the province to shift funding away from a harmful and intrusive child protection approach by moving towards a model focused on community-based prevention and early intervention. To advance this work, the OFIFC shared a Strategic Program Proposal with the province that aims to address existing gaps in services and improve access to prevention and early intervention programming for Indigenous children, youth, and families. The annual funding request to support 29 Friendship Centres is \$38,117,000 and would support a minimum of 189 full time positions in urban Indigenous communities across the province and enhance an additional 73 positions to address recruitment and retention challenges. The ministry's redesign plan must begin to shift resources away from its child protection approach and move it into community-based Indigenous prevention services.

## **Life-Long Care Expansion:**

Since 1995, the OFIFC's Life Long Care (LLC) program has enabled urban Indigenous seniors and folks with disability to age independently and with dignity in their own homes. The program offers visiting, social activities, homemaking, transportation, and service navigation among other services and has been identified as an alternative to costly long-term care facilities which often take Indigenous seniors out of their home communities and away from their families. With growing demands on the program due to population ageing, and gaps in home and community care and long-term care options, the LLC program is increasingly stretched and requires additional investment in staffing and material costs.

To build the capacity of the OFIFC's LLC program, Friendship Centres require at minimum two staff at every Friendship Centre across the province and increased salaries for staff recruitment and retention. Additionally, budget increases to meet client demand for food, transportation, and other essentials are urgently needed to keep up with inflation and the high cost of living. In total, the OFIFC is requesting \$4,966,670.00 in increased annual investment to meet community requirements.

## **Indigenous Education Reforms:**

The OFIFC has enjoyed a positive relationship with the province on education goals like the expansion and enhancement of the OFIFC's Alternative Secondary School Program (ASSP) and the launch of several new programs including the Culture Resource Coordinator program, the Indigenous language revitalization project, and others which have significantly improved our education capacity.

These advancements have been made despite a provincial Indigenous education policy which is outdated and requires reorientation. Indigenous communities have made significant strides in revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and building education infrastructure situated within our communities. Indigenous organizations like Friendship

Centres have a vision to evolve this work to ensure dynamic, self-determined approaches to education that reflect the priorities of communities. Friendship Centres want to centre Indigenous knowledge transmission in policy as a right and responsibility of urban Indigenous communities. A reframed Indigenous education policy must reflect the contemporary aspirations of Indigenous communities and chart our future. We look forward to working with the province on necessary reforms.

## **Expanding Urban Indigenous Postsecondary Education and Training**

Postsecondary education and Indigenous-led learning are important priorities for the Friendship Centre Movement. Born out of this priority is the creation of the Original Peoples Learning Centre (OPLC), which is an institute formed by member Friendship Centres and the OFIFC focused on postsecondary education, continuous learning, and research that is distinctly urban Indigenous and service oriented.

The OPLC currently offers two college certificate programs on Indigenous service delivery for Friendship Centre workers and we partner on a Masters of Social Work-Indigenous Trauma & Resiliency available through University of Toronto.

There is a new opportunity for the Province to better serve urban Indigenous people in Ontario through formal commitments responsive to the needs within postsecondary education, training, and continuous learning.

The next stage of development is advancement toward institutional accreditation under the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*. To support the OPLC in this phase, OFIFC is requesting an investment of \$300K over two years that will help accelerate OPLC's Business Plan development and accreditation readiness. As well as, \$450K for an OPLC-Friendship Centre collaborative project to develop new postsecondary programs over next three years.

## **Recommendations:**

It is recommended that Ontario's Budget 2023:

- Include the first phase of our 'Indigenous-led Child Care & Early Learning Proposal' to move us toward meaningfully increasing access to Indigenous-led child care for Indigenous and low-income families in Friendship Centre communities;

- Shift resources away from child protection agencies and move it into community-based Indigenous prevention services as outlined in the OFIFC's Strategic Program Proposal for Child Welfare Redesign.
- Support the OFIFC to serve Indigenous seniors to age at home and with dignity through the expansion and enhancement of the OFIFC's Life Long Care Program
- Earmark capacity funding in 2023-24 for urban Indigenous community consultations with Indigenous partners including the OFIFC, to inform necessary Indigenous education policy reforms; and
- Support urban Indigenous postsecondary education and training by investing in the Original Peoples Learning Centre to help advance institutional accreditation of under the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*