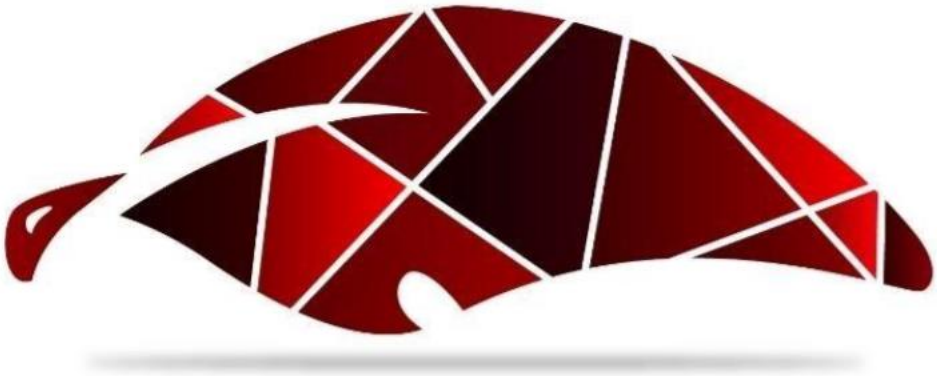

OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Federal Pre-Budget Submission September 2026

House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance
September 2026 Pre-Budget Submission

Recommendations:

1. Invest in Urban Indigenous Youth Economic Participation Through Mentorship
2. Strengthen Urban Indigenous Emergency Management Capacity
3. Strengthen Indigenous-Led Mental Health and Intergenerational Healing
4. Invest in the Trusted Source Partnership Program
5. Establish an Urban Indigenous Food Sovereignty Program
6. Invest in Urban Indigenous Child Welfare Prevention and Family Supports in Ontario
7. Invest in Expanding Friendship Centres Early Learning and Child Care Programs
8. Continue to Invest in Successful Cost-Sharing Initiatives that Support Public Safety and Advance the Indigenous Justice Strategy
9. Strengthen Indigenous-Led Prevention and Family Supports to Address Gender-Based Violence and address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ (MMIWG2S+) Calls for Justice
10. Invest in Indigenous Digital Heritage and Knowledge Preservation

Introduction
The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) welcomes the Government of Canada's continued commitment to Reconciliation. As Canada responds to ongoing trade and economic disruption, investments that strengthen local economies, support workers and expand economic participation are more important than ever. Friendship Centres are uniquely positioned to contribute to this work. As trusted, Indigenous-led organizations embedded in communities across Ontario, Friendship Centres connect Indigenous people in urban areas with employment, education, skills development, youth programming, and culturally grounded supports

With 88% of Indigenous people in Ontario living off-reserve, strengthening the Friendship Centre network is both a Reconciliation priority and an economic resilience strategy. Supporting Friendship Centres closes service gaps and responds to United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, and the Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.

Budget 2027 should build on investments and empower Friendship Centres to local economic development and long-term prosperity.

1. Invest in Urban Indigenous Youth Economic Participation Through Mentorship
Urban Indigenous youth are a rapidly growing demographic and face numerous barriers to employment. Meanwhile, Canada is experiencing labour shortages in multiple high-demand sectors. With federal investment, Friendship Centres, can support in developing urban Indigenous youth into the workforce of tomorrow through programming aimed at connecting youth with mentors to support their career growth.

Mentorship programs bridge employment and skills development gaps by connecting youth with trusted adults who assist with a broad range of knowledge including networking and industry knowledge, workplace social expectations, and life management skills that many Canadians take for granted. Beyond technical skills, young Indigenous people need access to those who have navigated the labour market's shifts firsthand. Labour markets shift constantly, and the ability to adapt is often learned, not taught. This expected volatility over one's professional career is especially true as artificial intelligence reshapes workplaces; a shift most school curriculums experienced, and one that youth without prior work experience have had little exposure to.

This new investment in mentorship would leverage the wrap-around services already provided by Friendship Centres as Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET) Holders. The knowledge and social capital of industry professionals in a culturally relevant program will thereby awaken an economically potent demographic into the heartbeat of Canada's workforce.

> *Cost Estimate:* $3.3 million annually
> *Policy Recommendation:* Include targeted labour-market supports for urban Indigenous young people to target critical gaps in the future labour force

2. Strengthen Urban Indigenous Emergency Management Capacity
Ontario's 2026 wildfire season has once again demonstrated the disproportionate impact of emergencies on Indigenous communities, with thousands of First Nations residents evacuated due to wildland fires.[1] Dedicated funding for urban Indigenous organizations would support the delivery and coordination of culturally appropriate emergency services for Indigenous people affected by evacuations and other emergencies. Funding would support emergency preparedness, evacuation coordination, communications, transportation, temporary supports and coordination with municipal, provincial and First Nations emergency-management partners.

Cost Estimate: $1.2 million annually, over three years

3. Strengthen Indigenous-Led Mental Health and Intergenerational Healing
The Government of Canada should supply stable, multi-year funding for Indigenous-led intergeneration healing and mental health services for urban Indigenous communities, including the Intergenerational Strength and Resiliency (ISR) Program. With the funding provided by Indigenous Service Canada, ISR was established to address the continuing and intergenerational effects of Indian Residential Schools. Funding reductions have already significantly reduced the program's delivery. Following a 92% reduction in funding, the number of active program sites decreased by 75%, the number of clients served decreased by 73%, and the number of cultural and health services delivered decreased by 85%. Reductions in federal investments have a significant impact on the delivery and capacity of culturally safe, community-based mental health and healing services.

Renewed investment would allow Friendship Centres to build on existing community capacity and provide dedicated staffing and culturally grounded programming. This investment would advance reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action by supporting Indigenous-led healing and recognizing the value of Indigenous healing practices.

Cost Estimate: $658,200 annually
Policy Recommendation: Establish a stable, multi-year federal funding approach for Indigenous led, culturally safe mental health and intergenerational healing services as an essential component of Canada's Indigenous health and reconciliation commitments

4. Invest in the Trusted Source Partnership Program
Pending legislative changes to eligibility for registration under the *Indian Act*, including changes proposed through Bill S-2, could result in thousands of Indigenous people becoming newly eligible for status.[2] Most of those impacted may live off-reserve and

[1] Indigenous Services Canada, Wildfire evacuation information for Indigenous peoples, 2026.

[2] Indigenous Services Canada, Government of Canada Moves Forward on Bill S-2, September 24, 2025. Retrieved from: https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/news/2025/09/government-of-canada-moves-forward-on-bill-s-2.html

have limited connections to their home communities. Friendship Centres serve as cultural and social hubs for urban Indigenous people and are well positioned to support newly eligible individuals through the registration process. The Government of Canada must make greater investments in the Trusted Source Partnership Program to fund urban Indigenous organizations, including Friendship Centres, to support individuals with status registration and Secure Certificate of Indian Status applications.

Cost Estimate: $2 million annually, over five years

5. Establish an Urban Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Build on the federal National Food Security Strategy by investing in Indigenous-led food security programs delivered through the OFIFC and Friendship Centres including, Wiisinadaa – Let's Eat! Beyond improving access to food, these programs contribute to overall community well-being by strengthening cultural identity, social connection, and economic participation. Indigenous-led programs support skill development, create employment opportunities, and promote local food enterprises while reducing reliance on emergency food supports. Investment in Indigenous-led food sovereignty initiatives would expand access to traditional foods while strengthening local food infrastructure including community kitchens, gardens, food storage, preparation and distribution capacity.

Cost Estimate: $1.2 million annually
Policy Recommendation: Establish dedicated federal funding for urban Indigenous food security and require meaningful engagement with the OFIFC and Friendship Centre network in the design and implementation of relevant food security initiatives.

6. Invest in Urban Indigenous Child Welfare Prevention and Family Supports in Ontario

Despite urgent calls for child welfare reform from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Indigenous children and families remain disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. As First Nations are increasingly asserting their inherent jurisdiction over child and family services under federal legislation, and First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies increasingly rely on the prevention services provided by Friendship Centres. Friendship Centres play a crucial role in addressing the distinct challenges faced by urban Indigenous families.

Federal investments would strengthen Friendship Centres' capacity to deliver Indigenous-led prevention programming, support families before crises occur, and build stronger referral and service partnership with First Nations child and family service agencies. This approach will strengthen Friendship Centres' capacity to assist off-reserve members navigating child welfare challenges and expand vital Indigenous-led prevention programs. Federal investments can sustain and elevate Friendship Centre prevention services for urban Indigenous children and families, including those from off-reserve First Nations.

Cost Estimate: $1 million annually through the OFIFC
Policy Recommendation: Include targeted support and strategies for urban Indigenous children, youth, and families involved with child welfare

7. Invest in Expanding Friendship Centres Early Learning and Childcare Programs

Build on federal investments through Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care and Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care but ensuring urban Indigenous families access and benefit from these systems. Currently, at least 13,000 childcare spaces are needed to meet the demand within urban Indigenous communities in Ontario alone. The coalescence of skills built through early learning and childcare favors the reduction of poverty and inequality by providing children with opportunities to succeed and be members of a skilled and educated workforce in the future. For the OFIFC, the objective is to enhance and expand urban Indigenous families' access to Indigenous-led childcare and early learning programming through Friendship Centres and within urban Indigenous communities.

Targeted funding would support the capacity of Friendship Centres to deliver and expand culturally appropriate, Indigenous-led early learning and childcare, address workforce and infrastructure barriers and increase access for urban Indigenous families. Closing this gap would provide a great return on investment and build a resilient economy with built-in safeguards.

Cost Estimate: $1.3 million annually
Policy Recommendation: Include targeted supports and strategies to build and strengthen the early learning and childcare workforce whilst removing structural barriers to facilitate greater number of urban Indigenous-led childcare operators

8. Continue to Invest in Successful Cost-Sharing Initiatives that Support Public Safety and Advance the Indigenous Justice Strategy

Friendship Centres are cost-effective partners in delivering culturally appropriate, community-based justice and public safety programs. Existing initiatives, including the Indigenous Courtwork Program (ICWP), help prevent unnecessary arrests and reduce time in custody, generating significant savings for the justice system. The 2023 Department of Justice evaluation estimated that the program saves $73 million annually.

Additional investment in community-based diversion, including the Indigenous Community Justice Program (ICJP), would strengthen alternatives to the formal justice system, improve outcomes for Indigenous people and families, and support successful re-integration. Continued federal-provincial cost-sharing would strengthen Indigenous-led justice services and advance implementation of the Indigenous Justice Strategy.

Cost Estimates: Additional $1.2 million for Friendship Centre justice programming

9. Strengthen Indigenous-Led Prevention and Family Supports to Address Gender-Based Violence and address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ (MMIWG2S+) Calls for Justice

Friendship Centres deliver prevention and early intervention programming that strengthens families, reduces violence, and decreases long-term involvement with justice and child welfare systems. Sustained federal funding is required to build on these efforts and address ongoing jurisdictional gaps in urban Indigenous families.

Targeted investments in Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin (I am a Kind Man) programming would support the engagement of Indigenous men and boys in violence prevention and promote healthier relationships. In addition, expanding Children Who Witness Violence programming would enhance early intervention supports for Indigenous children, youth, and families experiencing or at risk of violence. Together, these investments would support Canada's response to MMIWG2S+ Calls for Justice by strengthening culturally grounded, community-based supports that address the root causes of violence, promote family stability and improve safety.

Cost Estimates: $9.7 million

10. Invest in Indigenous Digital Heritage, Knowledge Preservation, Data and AI

For more than 70 years, Friendship Centres have been important cultural and community institutions for urban Indigenous peoples, generating and preserving histories, knowledge and community records. Much of this history remains dispersed, undocumented or at risk of being lost, while Friendship Centres increasingly manage significant community, program and administrative data without the infrastructure and capacity needed to govern and protect it.

Federal investments in Indigenous-led digital heritage, data and AI initiatives would support digitization, secure data infrastructure, governance, cybersecurity and responsible AI adoption across the Friendship Centre network, while upholding Indigenous ownership, control, access and authority. This investment would advance reconciliation, strengthen cultural continuity and self-determination, support intergenerational knowledge transfer, and ensure urban Indigenous histories, data and contributions are protected, represented and accessible for future generations

Cost Estimate: $2.5 million over five years through the OFIFC
Policy Recommendation: Establish federal support for Indigenous-led digital heritage preservation that upholds Indigenous data sovereignty, ownership and control