



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: FROM CRISIS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL CHANGE

**Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and
Northern Affairs**

Bob Bratina, Chair

**MARCH 2021
43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION**

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Standing Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website
at the following address: www.ourcommons.ca

COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: FROM CRISIS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL CHANGE

Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

**Bob Bratina
Chair**

MARCH 2021

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

CHAIR

Bob Bratina

VICE-CHAIRS

Sylvie Bérubé

Jamie Schmale

MEMBERS

Gary Anandasangaree

Jamie Battiste

Rachel Blaney

Eric Melillo

Marcus Powlowski

Adam van Koeverden

Gary Vidal

Arnold Viersen

Lenore Zann

OTHER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO PARTICIPATED

Cathy McLeod

Pam Damoff

CLERK OF THE COMMITTEE

Naaman Sugrue

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Information and Research Service

Olivier Leblanc-Laurendeau, Analyst

Marlisa Tiedemann, Analyst

Sara Fryer, Analyst

THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

has the honour to present its

SIXTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19 and has agreed to report the following:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	1
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: MOVING FROM CRISIS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL CHANGE.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Determinants of Health and Health Inequities	15
General Issues Raised During the Study.....	16
Lack of Adequate Infrastructure.....	17
Lack of Adequate Housing.....	17
Lack of Access to the Internet and Broadband	20
Lack of Adequate Water and Wastewater Infrastructure	23
Lack of Health Care and Long-Term Care Facilities.....	24
Personal Protective Equipment.....	26
Testing and Contact Tracing.....	27
Epidemiological Data.....	29
Human Resources and Capacity	32
Vaccination Hesitancy among Indigenous Peoples	34
Racism and Discrimination.....	36
Mental Health and Wellness.....	37
Governance and Self-Determination.....	43
Consultation, Coordination and Communication.....	45
Food Security	47
Education.....	49
Indigenous Economy	51
Employment and Workforce.....	56
Population-Specific Observations	57

First Nations Communities	57
Inuit and Northern Communities	59
Northern Air Carriers.....	60
Métis Communities.....	63
Urban Indigenous Peoples	64
Women, Children and LGBTQ2S+ People	66
Federal Emergency Programs and Funding	68
Post-Pandemic Recovery.....	73
Conclusion	76
APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES.....	79
APPENDIX B LIST OF WITNESSES.....	83
APPENDIX C LIST OF BRIEFS.....	89
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	91
SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY.....	93
SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS.....	95

SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage across Canada. Although the virus causing COVID-19 affects everyone, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (the Committee) heard repeatedly during the spring and fall of 2020 that First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples and their communities are more vulnerable to it than other Canadians. Many of the vulnerabilities experienced by Indigenous Peoples are rooted in long-standing health and socioeconomic inequities.

In this report, the Committee summarizes what witnesses said about some of the inequities that make Indigenous Peoples more vulnerable to COVID-19. The Committee also looked at how the government's response to the pandemic could be improved. The government needs to make sure that Indigenous communities, businesses and individuals are not left behind during and after the pandemic. Based on what it heard, the Committee makes 42 recommendations. The Committee calls on the government to:

- Address the lack of adequate housing and telecommunications, water and wastewater, and health care infrastructure in Indigenous communities during and after the pandemic (recommendations 1 to 7);
- Identify and address needs for personal protective equipment, rapid testing, COVID-19 data and surge capacity in Indigenous and northern communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (recommendations 8 to 11);
- Continue evaluating and funding permanent emergency management officer positions at the community level (recommendation 12);
- Acknowledge and address the causes of vaccine hesitancy among Indigenous Peoples, and ensure the safe and equitable access to culturally appropriate health and social services by all Indigenous Peoples (recommendations 13 and 14);
- Take immediate actions to address the mental health and wellness crisis in Indigenous communities (recommendations 15, 16 and 17);
- Establish a program to support land-based mental health initiatives (recommendation 18);

- Identify and address gaps in the enforcement of First Nations bylaws (recommendation 19);
- Establish a mechanism to improve coordination and action by all governments during national public health emergencies such as the current pandemic (recommendation 20);
- Take immediate action to support access to traditional food and ensure food security during the pandemic (recommendation 21);
- Ensure that Indigenous students have the resources they need to continue their education during the pandemic (recommendation 22);
- Support Indigenous businesses and provide financial supports to First Nations operating under the Indian Act regime (recommendations 23 to 28);
- Support northern air carriers during the pandemic (recommendations 29, 30 and 31);
- Ensure that Métis, urban Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous women and girls are supported through the pandemic (recommendations 32 to 35);
- Ensure that emergency COVID-19 programming is flexible, needs-based and easy to access by Indigenous communities and businesses (recommendations 36 to 39); and
- Consider measures to leverage infrastructure projects to stimulate the post-pandemic recovery in Indigenous communities (recommendations 40, 41 and 42).

Many of the issues discussed in this report are not new. Historical underfunding and systemic barriers have made Indigenous communities vulnerable to infectious diseases and pandemics. The Committee believes that the government must take immediate actions to remedy to this situation. The government must also commit to implementing long-term solutions. Canada can – and must – ensure that no one is left behind during the pandemic. We cannot return to the status quo once it is over.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that Canada's National Housing Strategy identified Indigenous and northern housing as priority areas for action, take immediate measures to accelerate the release of distinctions-based funding to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis housing, as announced in Budget 2017, Budget 2018 and Budget 2019; and that the government ensure that funding mechanisms are stable, flexible, predictable and based on actual needs, and that funding levels be consistent with those needs..... 19

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada establish minimum housing standards for Indigenous and northern communities, and work to rapidly implement a national Indigenous Housing strategy. 19

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, undertake within six months a review of existing federal programs aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness to identify ways to address Indigenous homelessness in urban centres as well as in remote and isolated Indigenous communities; and that the government assess how homelessness may contribute to the spread of COVID-19 among Indigenous populations. 20

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that the current housing crisis in Indigenous and northern communities places Indigenous Peoples and Northerners at significant risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure that immediate funding and technical support be made available to all Indigenous and northern communities wishing to repurpose community spaces or deploy temporary mobile structures to allow for screening, triaging and isolating individuals..... 20

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada, capitalizing on existing programs and initiatives (such as the Universal Broadband Fund, Connect to Innovate, the Investing in Canada Plan and the First Nations Infrastructure Fund) take immediate action to accelerate the deployment of broadband infrastructure in all Indigenous and northern communities to ensure their access to affordable and stable high-speed Internet (at least 50 Megabits per second download and 10 Megabits per second upload speeds); and that the government provide clear timelines and targets for how it plans to achieve universal access to broadband in Indigenous and northern communities..... 23

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada share publicly its plan with clear timelines, targets and funding in order to work with Indigenous community leadership to improve water infrastructure and maintenance in First Nations communities. 24

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada accelerate the construction of certain publicly funded health infrastructure projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, including by providing rapid funding for health care and long-term care facilities and seniors' homes in Indigenous and northern communities. 25

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations communities, ensure that these communities have access to the quantities and types of personal protective equipment they urgently need; and that the government ensure the process for accessing the stockpile is clear and does not create an administrative burden for First Nations communities..... 27

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada engage with isolated and remote communities to assess the need for rapid testing and point-of-care testing technologies; that the government increase access to such technologies wherever a need is identified; and that it make these technologies available in regional hubs to be identified in continued collaboration with Indigenous and northern partners, should their deployment to some remote and isolated communities be exceptionally challenging due to technical and/or logistical constraints. 28

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada continue to engage with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to track timely, accurate and complete data about the spread of COVID-19 and its outcomes among Indigenous populations; and that the government ensure that First Nations, Inuit and Métis retain control and ownership over any data pertaining to Indigenous Peoples. 32

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada continue to engage with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to identify local need for surge capacity; that the government deploy additional supports – in person or virtually – in communities where an immediate need for health human resources (e.g., nurses, paramedics and physicians) is identified; and that the government work with communities to develop contingency plans to prepare for the deployment of surge capacity personnel in future emergency situations..... 33

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada continue engaging with First Nations communities and organizations to evaluate and fund permanent emergency management coordinator positions at the community level; that the government identify gaps in the current model through which such positions are funded; and that it consider the accessibility of that funding. 34

Recommendation 13

That the Government of Canada acknowledge the root causes of Indigenous Peoples’ vaccine hesitancy and mistrust of the government; and that it engage with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners and community leaders to find ways to address these issues during the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. 36

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada take immediate actions to expand access to culturally appropriate health and social services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis during the COVID-19 pandemic; and that government work with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to identify ways to ensure that all Indigenous Peoples have access to safe and equitable health and social services, without discrimination..... 37

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada provide immediate relief funding to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to ensure the continuity of mental health supports for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic; that the government, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, evaluate ways to adapt existing mental health supports and programs to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples during the COVID-19 pandemic; and that it ensure that sufficient funding is available to communities for social interventions aimed at limiting the damages directly and indirectly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic..... 41

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada review, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, its funding mechanisms for community-based mental health supports to ensure that the funding provided to Indigenous communities is equitable, needs-based, flexible, stable and predictable. This review should take place before the end of 2021..... 41

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Canada establish an emergency program to provide funding to community-based mental health supports for First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth specifically to address pandemic-related needs; that the program's resources reflect the actual mental health needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth; and that the program be designed with the possibility of being extended and/or expanded beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. 41

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, establish a permanent program to provide stable, flexible and predictable funding for land-based mental health, wellness and addictions programs. 43

Recommendation 19

That the Government of Canada work with Indigenous Peoples to identify the gaps in enforcement of First Nations bylaws; and that it implement a plan to address those gaps..... 45

Recommendation 20

That the Government of Canada engage with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to establish a permanent, national strategic unit to allow representatives from Indigenous, provincial, territorial and federal governments to meet regularly during public health emergencies of national concern in order to facilitate complementary and coherent action by all partners. 47

Recommendation 21

That the Government of Canada take immediate action to ensure food security and support access to traditional food by First Nations, Inuit and Métis; that, for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government expand access to the new Harvesters Support Grant program to Indigenous and northern communities otherwise not eligible for the Nutrition North Canada program; and that Nutrition North Canada food subsidies be increased in communities where food prices are not within a reasonable parity with provincial or territorial averages..... 49

Recommendation 22

That the Government of Canada engage with Indigenous community leaders and experts to ensure that Indigenous students are provided with the resources needed to continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic; and that the government have a strategy with timelines for reliable access to the internet..... 51

Recommendation 23

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the Indigenous Business COVID-19 Response Taskforce, establish and maintain a list of Indigenous businesses able to meet federal procurement needs related to the pandemic; and that the list be shared with federal departments and agencies involved in the pandemic response to encourage them to consider Indigenous businesses in the procurement of personal protective equipment and other essential goods. 54

Recommendation 24

That the Government of Canada continue to work with Indigenous partners on a strategic plan with clear timelines and concrete measures to ensure that five

per cent of federal contracts are awarded to businesses managed and led by Indigenous Peoples; that this strategic plan identify barriers to Indigenous businesses securing public contracts and solutions to overcome these barriers; and that the strategic plan be developed within six months. 54

Recommendation 25

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the First Nations Finance Authority, immediately establish an emergency fund to provide ongoing liquidity to First Nations to ensure that they can meet their fiscal obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic. 59

Recommendation 26

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the First Nations Tax Commission, continue to evaluate the establishment of a First Nations tax deferral loan program, to assist communities in making debenture payments for the fiscal year 2020-2021. 59

Recommendation 27

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the First Nations Finance Authority, establish a commercial paper program through the Authority; and that the government and First Nations Finance Authority establish an alternative financing program to leverage dollars over the long-term to accelerate the construction of infrastructure and support economic development and post-pandemic recovery in First Nations communities. 59

Recommendation 28

That the Government of Canada acknowledge that the two decades of reduced funding for Aboriginal Financial Institutions must be reversed in order to attain economic justice for Indigenous businesses; and that the government establish stable long term funding for Aboriginal Financial Institutions in order to bolster capital funds for loans..... 59

Recommendation 29

That the Government of Canada engage with Indigenous and northern partners, as well as with the provinces and territories, to identify concrete measures to ensure the long-term viability and stability of northern air travel routes. 62

Recommendation 30

That the Government of Canada ensure that any new safety rules and regulations are implemented in consultation with air carriers operating in the territories and northern regions of the provinces; and that the government work with them to address any barriers to services that may result. 62

Recommendation 31

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that some communities south of the 60th parallel have been included in programs such as Nutrition North Canada, provide a clear definition of “northern” and “northern air carriers” that includes remote and isolated communities; that these definitions be developed in consultation with Arctic and Northern Policy Framework partners and communities south of 60 which are considered northern by other programming; and that these definitions be immediately applied to any programs, measures, rules and regulations implemented as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. 62

Recommendation 32

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that the Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC) is in a precarious financial situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, provide immediate bridge funding to the MSGC in order to ensure the settlements’ financial sustainability. 64

Recommendation 33

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, immediately establish a mechanism to formally engage the National Association of Friendship Centres and other organizations serving Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve and in urban centres on matters related to the federal pandemic response; and that the government evaluate ways to make such a mechanism permanent once the COVID-19 pandemic is over in order to ensure that urban Indigenous Peoples are proactively involved in the development and delivery of federal programming going forward. 66

Recommendation 34

That the Government of Canada take immediate measures to respond to the calls for justice of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which notably called on the

government to ensure that the rights to health and wellness of Indigenous Peoples, and specifically Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people, are recognized and protected; and that the government release a national action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls before the end of the year..... 67

Recommendation 35

That the Government of Canada, in consultation with organizations such as the Native Women’s Association of Canada and Pauktuutit, assess the needs for childcare services in Indigenous communities and among Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve and in urban centres; and that the government implement measures to address these needs before the end of 2021..... 68

Recommendation 36

That the Government of Canada, recognizing the need for COVID-19 programs to be flexible to meet the needs of each community, refrain from applying a one-size-fits-all approach to its emergency supports; and that the government ensure that the terms and conditions of emergency funding programs remain flexible for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic..... 72

Recommendation 37

That the Government of Canada utilize an Indigenous lens for all programming or policy initiatives in order to ensure that the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are considered. 72

Recommendation 38

That the Government of Canada develop materials to help Indigenous businesses navigate the various federal programs related to COVID-19; that these materials clearly explain the eligibility criteria for each of the programs; and that the government ensure that the information is made available in an alternate format for business owners who lack connectivity to the Internet..... 73

Recommendation 39

That the Government of Canada temporarily appoint a Funding Liaison Officer who would support Indigenous businesses in navigating the application processes in order to release and make funding available to those businesses in a timely fashion. 73

Recommendation 40

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, accelerate essential infrastructure projects in Indigenous communities during the post-pandemic recovery period. 76

Recommendation 41

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations partners, establish an opt-in First Nations Infrastructure Institute to support communities in the design, development, financing and maintenance of infrastructure, and to advance and establish further opportunities for care and control transfer of infrastructure management and operations. 76

Recommendation 42

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, establish an Indigenous Infrastructure Fund with a federal backstop to reduce the cost of capital and make it easier for Indigenous communities to raise capital to invest in infrastructure projects. 76



COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: MOVING FROM CRISIS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic¹ has had devastating effects across the world. In Canada, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities² navigated the first wave of the pandemic with relatively few cases. However, since summer 2020, these communities have been experiencing “an alarming rise in the number of active COVID-19 cases.”³ As of 22 February 2021, there were 1,481 active cases in First Nations communities,⁴ compared to less than 50 in late August 2020.⁵ The total number of confirmed cases in First Nations communities increased rapidly during the fall and winter, from less than 500 in early September 2020 to over 20,000 in late February 2021.⁶

Similarly, Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have experienced an increase in the number of cases during the second wave of the pandemic. For instance, until November 2020, Nunavut was the only jurisdiction in Canada with no reported cases of COVID-19. By the end of that month, however, the rate of active cases per 100,000 population in Nunavut had become one of the highest in Canada. Following the imposition of Nunavut-wide containment measures, the number of active cases was halved by early December 2020. In Yukon and the Northwest Territories, the number of active cases remained relatively low throughout the pandemic, despite increases in

-
- 1 The [World Health Organization](#) declared a pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on 11 March 2020. COVID-19 is a novel infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). For up-to-date information on the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, see: Government of Canada, [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#).
 - 2 Throughout this report, the terms “Indigenous Peoples” and “Indigenous communities” are used to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis and their communities.
 - 3 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs [INAN], [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services).
 - 4 Indigenous Services Canada [ISC], [Confirmed cases of COVID-19](#) (consulted on 23 February 2021).
 - 5 ISC does not collect or share data about the spread of COVID-19 in Métis and Inuit communities, or among the urban and off-reserve Indigenous population; the Department’s website only provides data about the situation in First Nations communities south of the 60th parallel. Issues surrounding the collection and dissemination of epidemiological data are discussed further in this report.
 - 6 ISC, [Epidemiological summary of COVID-19 cases in First Nations communities](#) (consulted on 23 February 2021).



November and December 2020. In the early months of 2021, most cases in the territories have recovered.⁷ Nevertheless, these recent outbreaks show that the North is not immune to the pandemic.

The increase in cases in Indigenous and northern communities is particularly alarming since long-standing socioeconomic inequities make them more vulnerable to infectious diseases such as COVID-19 than other communities in Canada.⁸ These inequities include limited access to health care, higher rates of underlying medical conditions, economic barriers, social and geographic isolation, and lack of adequate infrastructure (such as poor housing conditions and limited or no access to clean water).

Concerned with the increase in COVID-19 cases in Indigenous and northern communities since summer 2020, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (the Committee) agreed on 27 October 2020 to “undertake a study of the opportunities to: support Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through a second wave of COVID-19; facilitate Indigenous communities reopening in a safe and responsible manner; build resiliency with an equitable and sustainable economic recovery plan.”⁹ The Committee, which had already held meetings on this topic in the spring, also agreed to consider the evidence received during the 1st session of the 43rd Parliament (December 2019 – August 2020).

During the fall of 2020, the Committee held six meetings and heard from 49 witnesses, including Indigenous community members, leaders and experts from across the country. It also received seven written briefs.¹⁰ In the spring of 2020, the Committee had held 12 meetings, heard from 66 witnesses and received five written briefs.¹¹ The Committee sincerely thanks all individuals and organizations who took part in this study during these unprecedented times.

The Committee would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous efforts and sacrifices of health care workers and essential workers who have been working hard to keep First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples and their communities safe during this pandemic.

7 As of 22 February 2021, there were two active cases in Yukon, five in the Northwest Territories and 33 in Nunavut. See: Government of Canada, [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#).

8 INAN [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations).

9 INAN, [Minutes of Proceedings](#), 27 October 2020.

10 INAN, [Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses and Individuals through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#).

11 INAN, [Government’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND HEALTH INEQUITIES

The health of individuals is influenced by social determinants and the environment in which they live.¹² Witnesses noted that, prior to the pandemic, Indigenous Peoples were living with several vulnerabilities, such as inadequate and overcrowded housing, high rates of underlying health conditions, lack of access to clean water, food insecurity, lack of access to health care services, lack of services for women and girls fleeing violence, unemployment, poverty, systemic racism and the legacy of colonialism.¹³ Due to these long-standing health and socioeconomic inequities, Indigenous Peoples are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases and pandemics.

As Regional Chief Marlene Poitras of the Assembly of First Nations Alberta Association explained, “[t]his pandemic has highlighted the inequities in this country and exacerbated existing challenges.”¹⁴ Other witnesses shared similar conclusions.¹⁵ Regional Chief Poitras added that, “[h]ad more meaningful investments been made earlier to address systemic issues and build capacity, our [F]irst [N]ations would not be as vulnerable as they are now.”¹⁶ Dr. Debbie Martin agreed that more work needs to be done to address the root causes of these vulnerabilities.¹⁷ Similarly, Mr. Jean-Claude Therrien Pinette, assistant to the Chief of Innu Takuaikan Uashat Mak Mani-utenam, stated that, “in the short and medium term, we will certainly have to invest in all determinants of health, in economic and social sectors, as well as education and housing.”¹⁸

12 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director, Health and Social Services Commission, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador).

13 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras, Assembly of First Nations Alberta Association); INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Carol Hopkins, Executive Director, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay, Senior Director, Health and Social Services, Confederacy of Mainland Mi’kmaq); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin, As an individual); James Smith Cree Nation, [Brief submitted to the Committee](#), 27 November 2020.

14 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

15 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman, President, Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada); First Nations Health Authority, [Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#), 26 November 2020.

16 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

17 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin, As an individual).

18 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Mr. Jean-Claude Therrien Pinette, Assistant to the Chief, Innu Nation COVID-19 Strategic Unit).



The Committee also heard that many communities are facing a double emergency. In addition to COVID-19, communities are dealing with a mental health and addictions crisis, particularly to opioids. For instance, Chief Ronald Mitsuing of the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation was concerned about the suicide crisis in his community, which had resulted in a state of emergency in November 2019.¹⁹ Mr. Erik Blaney, Executive Council Member of the Tla'amin Nation, said that,

In the midst of the outbreak [of COVID-19], we noticed the deep-rooted social issues our nation was facing. We needed some serious help to battle the drug and alcohol and domestic housing issues that were causing our cases to rise dramatically. It was then that we realized we were in a dual pandemic, with the many opioid overdoses happening within the community.²⁰

Moreover, Chief Jennifer Bone of the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation pointed out to the Committee that “[t]he Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called on the federal government to close the gap in health outcomes between [I]ndigenous and non-[I]ndigenous communities and to recognize [I]ndigenous healing practices.”^{21, 22}

Mr. Herbert Lehr, President of the Metis Settlements General Council, noted that governments need to keep in mind that Indigenous Peoples experienced trauma in the past in relation to public health emergencies.²³ This observation is particularly important as governments start distributing vaccines.

GENERAL ISSUES RAISED DURING THE STUDY

All First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are unique, and have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. At the same time, several issues are common to many communities across the country. The Committee heard that many communities face challenges relating to infrastructure; testing and tracking; epidemiological data; human resources and administrative capacity; vaccinations; systemic racism and discrimination; mental health and wellness; Indigenous governance and self-

19 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing, Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation).

20 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney, Executive Council Member, Tla'amin Nation).

21 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone, Dakota Oyate Lodge).

22 In its 2015 final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada had called upon the federal government “to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.” See: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#), 2015, Call to Action no. 19.

23 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. Herbert Lehr, President, Metis Settlements General Council).

determination; consultation, coordination and communication; food security; education; and businesses. The testimony relating to these issues is discussed in the sections below.

Lack of Adequate Infrastructure

As noted above, several factors placed Indigenous communities in a difficult position at the start of the pandemic. In these communities, the infrastructure gaps are aggravating the pandemic. The lack of adequate infrastructure in Indigenous communities – and issues associated with its maintenance – hinders responses to the pandemic and can prevent people from being able to comply with public health guidelines (such as physical distancing, self-isolation and hand washing).

In its brief, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation wrote that the pandemic “has highlighted the insecurity and instability created by remoteness and poor-quality infrastructure.”²⁴ According to Mr. Robert Watt, President of Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, there is a “need to see infrastructure investments that will support and ensure sustainable maintenance of our water and sewer services beyond this pandemic.”²⁵

The following sections explore what the Committee heard with respect to housing, telecommunications, water and wastewater, and health care and long-term care facilities.

Lack of Adequate Housing

Having access to adequate housing or shelter is at the heart of the social determinants of health.²⁶ Yet, the Committee repeatedly heard that inadequate housing and overcrowding are long-standing issues in Indigenous and northern communities, and that there is an urgent need for investments in this area.²⁷

24 Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, *Submission of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on support for Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through a second wave of Covid-19*, 27 November 2020.

25 INAN, *Evidence*, 9 June 2020 (Mr. Robert Watt, President, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq).

26 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 May 2020 (Chief Ghislain Picard, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador).

27 INAN, *Evidence*, 24 November 2020 (Mr. Dillon Johnson, Executive Council Member, Tla’amin Nation); INAN, *Evidence*, 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone); INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson, Executive Director, Economic Development Commission, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador); Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, *Submission of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on support for Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through a second wave of Covid-19*, 27 November 2020.



Witnesses illustrated how this situation is affecting Indigenous Peoples during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Cornelia Wieman, President of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada, explained that “COVID-19 thrives in inequity. During the pandemic the overcrowding and poor conditions of some homes mean that self-isolation is impossible, and the spread of the virus within a family group is inevitable.”²⁸ Regional Chief Poitras agreed that it not always possible to safely self-isolate in First Nations communities due to overcrowding and lack of housing.²⁹ For her part, Chief Bone pointed out that the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation had to pay for hotel rooms to allow individuals to isolate.³⁰

Mr. Mickel Robertson, Executive Director of the Economic Development Commission at the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, agreed that “[t]he housing crisis places First Nations in a situation of vulnerability exacerbated by the pandemic.”³¹ Mr. Dillon Johnson, Executive Council Member of the Tla’amin Nation, explained that “the overcrowding in housing in our community worsened the outbreak. We had multiple families living under one roof who were unable to quarantine and self-isolate in a safe way, and this put other loved ones at risk. It also exacerbated the outbreak.”³²

According to Mr. Robertson, investing in Indigenous housing “would have a lasting effect on communities. It would create a tremendous amount of spinoffs in our communities and the surrounding communities... There really is a problem of overcrowding and over density in our homes, but we see this as an opportunity to change things.”³³ He also told the Committee that there is “a need for more than 10,000 new housing units in Quebec communities, nearly 9,500 lots to be serviced and nearly 7,500 units to be renovated” and estimated that the housing catch-up could be as high as \$4 billion in Quebec alone.³⁴ However, he noted that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation had recently informed the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador that its On-Reserve Non-Profit Housing Program (Section 95) would see a 8% funding decrease in 2021.³⁵ Coupled with

28 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman).

29 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

30 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone).

31 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

32 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Dillon Johnson).

33 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

an increase in construction costs, Mr. Robertson was anticipating that fewer units would be built than what is needed.³⁶

The Committee recognizes that the housing crisis in Indigenous and northern communities is putting people's lives at risk and that it will outlast the current pandemic. This crisis is not a new problem; it has been well documented for decades, including by parliamentary committees.³⁷ However, the pandemic has made it clear that the urgent need for adequate housing must be addressed immediately. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that Canada's National Housing Strategy identified Indigenous and northern housing as priority areas for action, take immediate measures to accelerate the release of distinctions-based funding to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis housing, as announced in Budget 2017, Budget 2018 and Budget 2019; and that the government ensure that funding mechanisms are stable, flexible, predictable and based on actual needs, and that funding levels be consistent with those needs.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada establish minimum housing standards for Indigenous and northern communities, and work to rapidly implement a national Indigenous Housing strategy.

Mr. Robertson also noted that homelessness is a serious problem and that it exists outside urban centres: "it's a phenomenon that has also been revealed in our communities by the pandemic."³⁸ Dr. Martin explained that the pandemic is creating additional problems for people experiencing homelessness as "there are fewer alternative public spaces for homeless people to occupy through the day."³⁹ The Committee believes that no one

36 Ibid.

37 INAN, *A Path to Growth: Investing in the North*, April 2019; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *We Can Do Better: Housing in Inuit Nunangat*, March 2017; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *On-Reserve Housing and Infrastructure: Recommendations for Change*, June 2015; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Housing on First Nation Reserves: Challenges and Successes*, February 2015; Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, *Aboriginal Housing*, March 2007.

38 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

39 INAN, *Evidence*, 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin).



should be left behind and that supports for those who are experiencing homelessness are needed, both in urban centres and in Indigenous communities. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, undertake within six months a review of existing federal programs aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness to identify ways to address Indigenous homelessness in urban centres as well as in remote and isolated Indigenous communities; and that the government assess how homelessness may contribute to the spread of COVID-19 among Indigenous populations.

According to Ms. Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister at Indigenous Services Canada, the government has been funding projects to repurpose community spaces and to provide temporary mobile structures to accommodate the lack of adequate spaces for isolation in communities.⁴⁰ The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services, described such temporary structures as “highly specialized movable structures” that “are adaptable for the winter up to -40°C.”⁴¹ Although not a long-term solution to the housing crisis affecting Indigenous and northern communities, these initiatives are urgently needed to protect people in the short-term. As such, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that the current housing crisis in Indigenous and northern communities places Indigenous Peoples and Northerners at significant risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure that immediate funding and technical support be made available to all Indigenous and northern communities wishing to repurpose community spaces or deploy temporary mobile structures to allow for screening, triaging and isolating individuals.

Lack of Access to the Internet and Broadband

Access to the Internet and to broadband remains limited in Indigenous communities across the country, particularly in rural, isolated and remote areas. This situation was described as particularly problematic during this pandemic, as many people, businesses

40 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (Ms. Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indigenous Services).

41 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

and services shifted their activities and operations online to comply with physical distancing requirements.

The lack of access to the Internet affected Indigenous Peoples, businesses and communities' ability to adapt to changes resulting from the pandemic. For instance, Mr. Natan Obed, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, explained that education and health care services have been impeded by the lack of connectivity in Inuit Nunangat.⁴² Similarly, Ms. Tabatha Bull, President and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, and Mr. Robertson noted that it had also been a challenge for Indigenous businesses.⁴³ Mr. Jean Paul Gladu agreed: "Many of these communities are absolutely hamstrung because they can't get connectivity."⁴⁴ This situation also hinders the government's pandemic response, as noted by Minister Miller: "[l]ack of connectivity is a barrier to the effective deployment of our resources."⁴⁵

Lack of access to the Internet and broadband, however, is not limited to isolated, remote or northern areas. Mr. Elijah Williams, Director of Indigenous Engagement at Sheridan College's Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support, told the Committee that "[a]bout 98% of the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve don't have access to proper Internet."⁴⁶ Mr. Williams explained that this issue also made it harder for Indigenous students to transition to virtual education.⁴⁸

Limited or no access to Internet is also affecting people's access to health and mental health services. Dr. Brenda Restoule, CEO of First Peoples Wellness Circle, stated that the transition to online mental wellness services is impeded by poor connectivity and limited accessibility to technology.⁴⁹ Mr. Robertson indicated that "[n]ot having access to telemedicine, for example, increases the vulnerability of the population. Information is

42 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami).

43 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull, President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

44 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Jean Paul Gladu, As an individual).

45 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

46 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2020 (Mr. Elijah Williams, Director, Indigenous Engagement, Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support, Sheridan College).

47 Six Nations of the Grand River is a First Nation community in southern Ontario, near some of Canada's largest urban areas.

48 Ibid.

49 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule, Chief Executive Officer, First Peoples Wellness Circle).



more difficult to obtain. It also increases isolation... Our communities that don't have access to such services are excluded.”⁵⁰

Chief Mitsuing remarked that even when telecommunications infrastructure exists, financial barriers may prevent a community's access to it: “On the west side of our First Nation, in the town of Loon Lake, we don't have any Internet service. Even though we have a fibre optic cable running by the road, going through the reserve, we can't tap into it because it's so expensive.”⁵¹ Mr. Lehr observed that the Metis settlements in Alberta also have poor cellphone and Internet connectivity.⁵²

Witnesses agreed that increasing access to telecommunications infrastructure is necessary. Mr. Obed stressed that Inuit need an Inuit-specific solution and that reliance on satellite technology only is not acceptable.⁵³ Ms. Bull encouraged “the government to do what they can to move the innovation forward for broadband in rural and remote communities.”⁵⁴ Ms. Kirsten Agrell, legal counsellor for the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793, said there is a need for “an immediate commitment to telecommunications construction projects with time frames set. It should be a real priority.”⁵⁵ She noted that it would also improve access to remote professional training opportunities in communities.⁵⁶ Mr. Robertson agreed and noted that “[t]he health of our people depends on [the deployment of high-speed Internet access], and future economic development will be facilities.”⁵⁷

The Committee recognizes the critical importance of access to high-speed Internet. This need has been highlighted by the current pandemic. However, just like the need for adequate, sustainable and safe housing, the need for stable high-speed Internet will last beyond the pandemic. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

50 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

51 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing).

52 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. Herbert Lehr).

53 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

54 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

55 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Kirsten Agrell, Legal Counsellor, International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793).

56 Ibid.

57 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada, capitalizing on existing programs and initiatives (such as the Universal Broadband Fund, Connect to Innovate, the Investing in Canada Plan and the First Nations Infrastructure Fund) take immediate action to accelerate the deployment of broadband infrastructure in all Indigenous and northern communities to ensure their access to affordable and stable high-speed Internet (at least 50 Megabits per second download and 10 Megabits per second upload speeds); and that the government provide clear timelines and targets for how it plans to achieve universal access to broadband in Indigenous and northern communities.

Lack of Adequate Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Several Indigenous communities lack adequate water and wastewater infrastructure. Witnesses observed that it is difficult to comply with hand-washing directives when you have limited or no access to clean water.⁵⁸ Mr. Shannin Metatawabin, CEO of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, stated that “[d]rinking water is integral to human life. The government has responded to this emergency, this pandemic, with billions and billions [of dollars] of support for Canadians all across the country, but that same support is not afforded to [I]ndigenous people when we can't even get drinking water. This has been a problem for decades.”⁵⁹

Illustrating the extent of this crisis, a few days before the Committee began to hold its meetings in the fall, the water distribution system of the Neskantaga First Nation was shut down.⁶⁰ In the spring, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation noted that the Neskantaga First Nation had been on a boil water advisory for over 25 years.⁶¹

The Committee recognizes that inadequate and inexistent water and wastewater infrastructure, like other infrastructure gaps, will continue to put the health of Indigenous Peoples at risk after the current pandemic. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

58 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba); INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2020 (Mr. Robert Watt); James Smith Cree Nation, [Brief submitted to the Committee](#), 27 November 2020.

59 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin, Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association).

60 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

61 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation).



Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada share publicly its plan with clear timelines, targets and funding in order to work with Indigenous community leadership to improve water infrastructure and maintenance in First Nations communities.

Lack of Health Care and Long-Term Care Facilities

The Committee heard that there is a lack of health care facilities in Indigenous and northern communities. In the spring, Ms. Amanda Meawasige, Director of Intergovernmental Relations at the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba, explained that First Nations communities lack primary care services and are “dependent on a patchwork of nursing station responses.”⁶² Mr. Duane Smith, Chair and CEO of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, added: “We don’t have large hospitals or large medical teams that are easily available or ready. We have small nursing centres.”⁶³

According to Mr. Nick Vodden, President and CEO of Perimeter Aviation LP, health care facilities in the North are small-scale operations with limited resources which are “not set up with adequate supplies to handle anything of this magnitude.”⁶⁴ For instance, Ms. Lorraine Whitman, President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada, indicated that Nunavut’s only hospital has 35 beds for a population of 38,000 and “is not equipped to deal with [the pandemic].”⁶⁵ Likewise, in a brief to the Committee, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq wrote that “[a]ccess to health care does not compare to the rest of Canada in Inuit communities; our clinics and health centres are mainly staffed by nurses and act as referral structures to southern health facilities for major illnesses.”⁶⁶

This gap in services means that Indigenous Peoples and Northerners may need to leave their community to receive health care. This is particularly problematic during a pandemic, when people are asked to limit their movements. In its brief, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation wrote that it has been advocating for many years for a hospital to be built:

62 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige).

63 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation).

64 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Nick Vodden, President and Chief Executive Officer, Perimeter Aviation LP).

65 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women’s Association of Canada).

66 Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, [Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee Concerning the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Delivery of Educational Services in Nunavik](#), 9 June 2020, p. 4.

[T]he government should have looked at funding and building this hospital, especially in anticipation of a second wave of COVID-19. Because of this lack of investment, community members will still need to rely on evacuation to larger hospitals in urban areas should additional waves of COVID-19 reach NAN [Nishnawbe Aski Nation] communities. This cannot be a sustainable model for the future.⁶⁷

Mr. Obed also noted that while there are some long-term care facilities in Inuit Nunangat, most elderly individuals have to go to the south to receive services.⁶⁸ National Chief Bellegarde of the Assembly of First Nations said that additional long-term care facilities were needed in First Nations communities as well.⁶⁹

To accelerate the construction of seniors' homes, Mr. Robertson recommended that the federal government follow an approach similar to Quebec's Bill 66, An Act respecting the acceleration of certain infrastructure projects.⁷⁰ Adopted by the National Assembly of Québec in December 2020, Bill 66 introduced measures to allow the acceleration of certain infrastructure projects, including the construction, expansion and refitting of health care and long-term care facilities. The bill accelerates these projects by simplifying and adapting existing procedures and processes, and/or by providing certain exemptions regarding land use planning and development.⁷¹

The Committee recognizes the immediate need for additional health and long-term care facilities and seniors' homes in Indigenous and northern communities, and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada accelerate the construction of certain publicly funded health infrastructure projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, including by providing rapid funding for health care and long-term care facilities and seniors' homes in Indigenous and northern communities.

67 Nishnawbe Aski Nation, *Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic*, 12 June 2020, p. 21.

68 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 May 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

69 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 May 2020 (National Chief Perry Bellegarde).

70 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Mr. Mickel Robertson).

71 Québec, *Bill 66, An Act respecting the acceleration of certain infrastructure projects*, 1st Session, 42nd Legislature.



Personal Protective Equipment

The Committee heard that personal protective equipment (PPE) was critical to responding to the pandemic. In June 2020, the Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Public Service and Procurement, observed that there had been “an unparalleled growth in demand for PPE across the country.”⁷² Not unlike the rest of Canada, Indigenous communities have been trying to acquire PPE and other supplies to ensure the safety of their frontline workers and citizens since the pandemic started. Minister Miller explained that Indigenous Services Canada “continues to maintain stockpiles of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer for use in [F]irst [N]ations communities during public health emergencies.”⁷³ In October 2020, Ms. Gideon stated that provinces and territories are still the primary providers of PPE.⁷⁴

In the spring, the Committee heard from witnesses that access to PPE had been limited and/or delayed in the North,⁷⁵ in remote areas,⁷⁶ in northern Saskatchewan,⁷⁷ in British Columbia,⁷⁸ in Manitoba,⁷⁹ and in Quebec.⁸⁰ According to one witness, there have also been shortages in Manitoba communities.⁸¹ In its brief, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation wrote that it observed through its communications with the government “the disturbing fact that the federal government did not have a plan in place to supply remote northern First Nations with PPE in an organized and automated manner.”⁸²

In the fall, some witnesses told the Committee that they were still facing challenges in accessing PPE.⁸³ In its brief, the James Smith Cree Nation explained that it had an

72 INAN, [Evidence](#), 19 June 2020 (The Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Public Services and Procurement).

73 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 May 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

74 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (Ms. Valerie Gideon).

75 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (National Chief Perry Bellegarde).

76 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, Co-Chair, MMIWG2S+ - Manitoba Coalition).

77 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Ms. Tara Campbell, Executive Director, Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc.).

78 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Charlene Belleau); INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Mr. Richard Jock).

79 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige).

80 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Chief Mike McKenzie); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Dr. Stanley Vollant).

81 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige).

82 Nishnawbe Aski Nation, [*Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), 12 June 2020, p. 15.

83 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Chief Bryan Mark, Conseil des Innus d'Unamen Shipu, Innu Nation); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. Herbert Lehr); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui).

“urgent and emergency need for [PPE].”⁸⁴ It added that it had submitted several requests to the federal government, but experienced “significant delays and denials,” stating that “[o]ur needs are community-wide and beyond the mandate of available PPE through the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile for healthcare and frontline workers.”⁸⁵

The Committee recognizes how essential PPE are to protect frontline and health care workers, as well as the general public. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations communities, ensure that these communities have access to the quantities and types of personal protective equipment they urgently need; and that the government ensure the process for accessing the stockpile is clear and does not create an administrative burden for First Nations communities.

Testing and Contact Tracing

The Committee also heard about the importance of conducting tests and contact tracing in Indigenous communities as well as among the Indigenous population in urban areas and off-reserve. Testing and tracing allow cases to be identified and individuals to be isolated in order to limit the spread of the virus.⁸⁶ In the spring, the Committee had heard that testing supplies were not always available and that there were delays in obtaining test results.⁸⁷

With respect to testing, Mr. Obed stated that, “[m]oving forward, and especially going into this winter, we need to do more on testing.”⁸⁸ He added: “We are behind when it comes to every aspect of testing and identification.”⁸⁹ Mr. Smith stated that it takes approximately 10 days for results to get back in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, due to the remoteness of its communities.⁹⁰ Mr. Obed, as well as Mr. Vodden, Ms. Agrell and

84 James Smith Cree Nation, *Brief submitted to the Committee*, 27 November 2020.

85 Ibid.

86 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 May 2020 (Ms. Tara Campbell); INAN, *Evidence*, 26 May 2020 (Dr. Stanley Vollant).

87 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 May 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, *Evidence*, 22 May 2020 (Ms. Tara Campbell); INAN, *Evidence*, 26 May 2020 (Chief Mike McKenzie).

88 INAN, *Evidence*, 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

89 Ibid.

90 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith).



Mr. Smith, advocated for communities to have access to rapid testing.⁹¹ Since it might not be possible to deploy rapid testing in all remote communities, Mr. Smith and Dr. Wieman suggested having regional hubs for testing to reduce delays.⁹²

Dr. Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer of the First Nations Health Authority, said that her agency had started to deploy GeneXpert devices in British Columbia and that Abbott ID machines were also on the way.⁹³ According to Minister Miller, as of 19 October 2020, a total of 77 GeneXpert devices had been deployed in or near Indigenous communities across Canada.⁹⁴ Indigenous Services Canada is working with the National Microbiology Laboratory of the Public Health Agency of Canada on the deployment of these devices in or near Indigenous and northern communities.⁹⁵

According to Dr. Wieman, however, “[r]apid testing isn’t necessarily the gold standard for testing for COVID.”⁹⁶ She added that “[i]t’s important to remember that COVID testing in and of itself is really a snapshot of a period in time and it doesn’t necessarily guarantee that you won’t be exposed or pick up the virus and become contagious somewhere quite soon after the actual test in and of itself.”⁹⁷

The Committee recognizes that rapid testing will not end the pandemic by itself. However, given the lack of alternatives, rapid testing may offer isolated and remote communities a much-needed tool in the fight against COVID-19. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada engage with isolated and remote communities to assess the need for rapid testing and point-of-care testing technologies; that the government increase access to such technologies wherever a need is identified; and that it make these technologies available in regional hubs to be identified in continued collaboration

91 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Nick Vodden); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Kirsten Agrell).

92 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman).

93 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

94 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

95 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (Ms. Valerie Gideon).

96 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman).

97 Ibid.

with Indigenous and northern partners, should their deployment to some remote and isolated communities be exceptionally challenging due to technical and/or logistical constraints.

Epidemiological Data

The federal government has been collecting COVID-19 data in First Nations communities south of the 60th parallel.⁹⁸ However, Dr. Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer and Director General at Indigenous Services Canada, said that “off reserve, the lead is the province.”⁹⁹ As such, the collection of data about off-reserve First Nations people, as well as in Métis and Inuit communities, would appear to fall within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. However, not all provinces and territories collect disaggregated data based on Indigenous identity and race. As a result, there is currently no single authority responsible for gathering and sharing COVID-19 data related to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and the data being reported is fragmented.¹⁰⁰

According to the First Nations Health Authority, “[t]imely and accurate data is essential to a nimble and effective response.”¹⁰¹ The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council wrote in its brief that “[d]ata equity is necessary to achieve health equity.”¹⁰² Despite the importance of data, the Committee heard that it has been difficult to get a complete picture of the epidemiological situation among Indigenous populations during the pandemic. For instance, Ms. Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director of the Health and Social Services Commission at the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, also noted that:

Providing quality care and services also requires investment in the development, support and implementation of digital and information strategies for First Nations. The current situation demonstrates with certainty that laws and policies do not allow for adequate monitoring of information or surveillance of the health status of these determinants for our populations.¹⁰³

98 ISC, *Confirmed cases of COVID-19*.

99 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 May 2020 (Dr. Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer and Director General, Office of Population and Public Health, Department of Indigenous Services).

100 Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, *Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs*, 27 November 2020.

101 First Nations Health Authority, *Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19*, 26 November 2020.

102 Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, *Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs*, 27 November 2020.

103 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui).



In the spring, National Chief Perry Bellegarde of the Assembly of First Nations told the Committee that there could be more cases than have been reported within the First Nations population, but gaps in coordination and information sharing between the various levels of government mean that First Nations often lack reliable data.¹⁰⁴ Mr. Obed expressed similar concerns about challenges around data sharing between jurisdictions and the need to “have timely access to Inuit-specific data.”¹⁰⁵ Ms. Jocelyn Formsma, Executive Director of the National Association of Friendship Centres, also stressed the importance for provincial, regional and local authorities to collect disaggregated data: “If we don’t know who the people are who are being affected by this [pandemic], I don’t know how we even have a hope of addressing this at the community level.”¹⁰⁶

Witnesses expressed similar concerns in the fall. Dr. Martin said that there is a “huge gap in our knowledge about the epidemiology of COVID-19 in [I]ndigenous communities. Without that information, we can’t act accordingly.”¹⁰⁷ She also stated that,

[M]inister Marc Miller noted [in November 2020] that we do not have solid epidemiological data for [F]irst [N]ations, Inuit and Métis communities; thus, we may be vastly underestimating the scope of the problem. Combined with the fact that many [I]ndigenous communities also have limited access to testing, not only might we not have a good understanding of the numbers of people who are reporting infections, but we are unable to accurately identify who is infected and then undertake appropriate contact tracing. Without access to data, [I]ndigenous communities are unable to project what their needs will be in order to effectively respond to the crisis.¹⁰⁸

Mr. Lehr and Mr. Obed agreed that their organizations did not have sufficient data about their respective populations.¹⁰⁹ According to Mr. Obed, “[p]rovinces and territories should collect and then report on Inuit-specific data so as to allow Inuit to understand how to serve our populations better and allow all public governments to serve Inuit populations better.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Mr. Christopher Sheppard, President of the National Association of Friendship Centres, said that his organization has been repeatedly

104 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (National Chief Perry Bellegarde).

105 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

106 INAN, [Evidence](#), 13 May 2020 (Ms. Jocelyn Formsma, Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres).

107 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin).

108 Ibid.

109 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. Herbert Lehr).

110 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

warning about “the lack of urban [I]ndigenous health data and other sources of disaggregated urban [I]ndigenous data in Canada.”¹¹¹

In the spring, Ms. Amanda Meawasige, Director of Intergovernmental Relations at the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba, recommended that the government “collaborate with [F]irst [N]ations in developing a nationwide [F]irst [N]ations COVID-19 data collection and surveillance system that is governed by [F]irst [N]ations and has respect for [F]irst [N]ations data sovereignty.”¹¹²

Ms. Meawasige told the Committee about promising practices in Manitoba, where the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba has a data-sharing agreement with the province. This increases the efficiency of contact tracing and tracking cases off reserve. Pursuant to that agreement, individuals testing positive for COVID-19 are asked to identify as First Nations members, which “gives us real-time data on where these people are from. It allows us to communicate to communities that there is possible infection and that contact tracing needs to be made. More importantly, we’re getting that off-reserve data information.”¹¹³ Ms. Meawasige added that having this data-sharing agreement and real-time data allowed Manitoba First Nations to better inform their pandemic response and identify potential trends.¹¹⁴

In British Columbia, the First Nations Health Authority has been able to monitor off-reserve cases through a First Nations client file created in 2010 which “combine[s] the Indian registry plus the provincial registration and premium billing system so that we have a dataset that identifies all resident [F]irst [N]ations people in B.C. and links them to their provincial health number.”¹¹⁵

The Committee recognizes that having access to timely, accurate and complete data is essential for an evidence-informed response to the pandemic. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

111 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard, President, National Association of Friendship Centres).

112 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige).

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer, First Nations Health Authority).



Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada continue to engage with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to track timely, accurate and complete data about the spread of COVID-19 and its outcomes among Indigenous populations; and that the government ensure that First Nations, Inuit and Métis retain control and ownership over any data pertaining to Indigenous Peoples.

Human Resources and Capacity

The Committee heard that communities are also struggling in terms of human resources and administrative capacity. Mr. Jason Alsop, President of the Council of the Haida Nation, and Ms. Janna MacKay, Senior Director of Health and Social Services at the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, both explained that in small communities, people wear many hats.¹¹⁶ As such, those responding to the pandemic have other responsibilities and community-based resources are stretched thin.¹¹⁷ Several witnesses warned that frontline workers and other essential workers are either burnt out or on the verge of burn-out.¹¹⁸ Others added that these workers are dealing with high stress and post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from the first wave.¹¹⁹

Ms. MacKay observed that “[i]n terms of human resources, the pandemic highlighted the need for improved emergency management support at the local community level.”¹²⁰ She added: “We [the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq] recommend targeted funding for permanent emergency management coordinator positions at the local community level.”¹²¹ For his part, Mr. Blaney indicated that workers currently responding

116 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Jason Alsop); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

117 Ibid.

118 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Jason Alsop, President, Council of the Haida Nation); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman); Dene Nation, [Written Submission on Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#), 26 November 2020.

119 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

120 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

121 Ibid.

to the pandemic sometimes lack training to be able to deal with such an unprecedented situation.¹²²

In its brief, the First Nations Health Authority wrote that 80% of its staff time has been dedicated to the pandemic response since 30 March 2020.¹²³ Dr. McDonald also noted that the agency is struggling to access physician resources and surge capacity.^{124, 125} The lack of medical personnel in Indigenous and northern communities is not a new issue, but it brings new challenges during a pandemic. For instance, Minister Miller noted that “one of the lessons we learned from H1N1 is that we didn't want nursing staff or people going in and out on an emergency basis from communities. They themselves become vectors, particularly in situations where they're obviously in there to care and to help.”¹²⁶

The Committee recognizes that Indigenous and northern communities need adequate resources to be able to protect and care for their people. Frontline and essential workers have been doing an incredible job since March 2020, but the pandemic is taking its toll. Some of these workers are also being pulled away from their regular tasks, which are no less essential to the wellbeing of their communities. The Committee is aware that the current situation is unsustainable. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada continue to engage with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to identify local need for surge capacity; that the government deploy additional supports – in person or virtually – in communities where an immediate need for health human resources (e.g., nurses, paramedics and physicians) is identified; and that the government work with communities to develop contingency plans to prepare for the deployment of surge capacity personnel in future emergency situations.

122 INAN, *Evidence*, 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney).

123 First Nations Health Authority, *Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19*, 26 November 2020.

124 INAN, *Evidence*, 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

125 Surge capacity is defined as “[t]he ability to quickly draw upon additional resources in order to meet the increased needs related to an incident involving mass casualties.” See: Government of Canada, *Glossary on the COVID-19 pandemic*.

126 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).



Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada continue engaging with First Nations communities and organizations to evaluate and fund permanent emergency management coordinator positions at the community level; that the government identify gaps in the current model through which such positions are funded; and that it consider the accessibility of that funding.

Vaccination Hesitancy among Indigenous Peoples

Witnesses commented on the country's immunization program, noting that Indigenous Peoples may be hesitant to get vaccinated. Dr. Wieman explained that this is in part a result "of [I]ndigenous peoples' past experiences with medical experimentation and poor treatment."¹²⁷ Dr. Michelle Driedger told the Committee that during the 2009 influenza (H1N1) pandemic, "[t]here was a great deal of distrust in how things were prioritized, and it was felt that the vaccine was being tested on [I]ndigenous bodies to make sure it was safe to give to the white guys."¹²⁸ She explained that some people felt that it was also "another way of getting rid of the Indian problem."¹²⁹

The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council agreed that "there exists substantial mistrust in Indigenous communities towards government vaccination programs, in response to generations of unethical medical practices carried out by the government against our people (such as the Indian Hospitals Program and Forced and Coerced Sterilization)."¹³⁰ In its brief, the James Smith Cree Nation echoed this, noting that "Canada has a long history of medical harm in a variety of settings against minority populations."¹³¹

Dr. Driedger said it remains unclear "if that same level of distrust, in that way, is going to carry forward with COVID-19. It's something that we're going to be learning in the next couple of months as we engage in some of the work. However, that colonial legacy and colonial distrust is very strong."¹³² Dr. McDonald related that in a recent meeting,

127 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman).

128 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Michelle Driedger, As an individual).

129 Ibid.

130 Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, [Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs](#), 27 November 2020.

131 James Smith Cree Nation, [Brief submitted to the Committee](#), 27 November 2020.

132 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Michelle Driedger).

an [E]lder said to me, “I don’t want to take the prioritized immunization.” I was saying we’re going to prioritize [F]irst [N]ations among the immunization programs, and he said, “No, they’re just going to make us guinea pigs. We’re not priorities. They’re going to use this new vaccine on [F]irst [N]ations people to see what happens and then use it on everybody else.”¹³³

Despite the possible prevalence of vaccine hesitancy among Indigenous Peoples, witnesses recommended that Indigenous Peoples and Northerners, including urban Indigenous Peoples, be prioritized during immunization “given their health and exposure vulnerabilities.”¹³⁴ Regional Chief Poitras pointed out that the National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommended that Indigenous Peoples be prioritized.¹³⁵ Chief Bryan Mark of the Conseil des Innus d’Unamen Shipu added that “First [N]ations governance must have a hand in developing and implementing the [immunization] plan.”¹³⁶

Ms. Formsma noted that friendship centres and other urban Indigenous organizations have spaces (e.g., gyms, halls, parking lots) which could be used during vaccine distribution, “that community members may feel a bit safer coming to than mainstream health clinic.”¹³⁷ According to Ms. Sioui, adapted communications strategies could also help sensitize Indigenous Peoples to the new COVID-19 vaccines as they are being rolled out.¹³⁸ Dr. Wieman observed that, “[g]iven the past harms and devastating experiences of [I]ndigenous people during pandemics, historically and in more contemporary times, it is important to clearly articulate messaging around COVID-19 and the public health response.”¹³⁹

The Committee recognizes that vaccine hesitancy among Indigenous Peoples is rooted in traumatic experiences at the hands of people representing the government. The Committee agrees that trauma experienced by Indigenous Peoples, which in some cases is recent, needs to be acknowledged during the distribution of vaccines. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

133 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

134 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Jocelyn Formsma); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Nick Vodden).

135 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

136 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Chief Bryan Mark).

137 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Jocelyn Formsma).

138 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui).

139 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman).



Recommendation 13

That the Government of Canada acknowledge the root causes of Indigenous Peoples' vaccine hesitancy and mistrust of the government; and that it engage with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners and community leaders to find ways to address these issues during the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Racism and Discrimination

Related to the issues described in the previous section are the continuing experiences of racism faced by Indigenous Peoples in the health care system.¹⁴⁰ “In terms of culturally safe care, I think we have seen in the media and know very well the impact of racism and systemic racism in our health care system,” Dr. Martin commented.¹⁴¹ In its brief, the First Nations Health Authority wrote that “First Nations experience systemic and institutionalized racism at all levels.”¹⁴² According to Regional Chief Poitras, experiences of racism in the health system exacerbate First Nations vulnerabilities to the pandemic.¹⁴³

Dr. McDonald and Dr. Wieman both mentioned that in November 2020, a report on Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in British Columbia’s health care system had been released.¹⁴⁴ Dr. Wieman said that this report “reminds us that we have a long way to go to create a health system for [I]ndigenous people that is safe to access during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.”¹⁴⁵ Mr. Raymond Wanuch, Executive Director of the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers, and Mr. Tom Jackson also made comments about racism against Indigenous Peoples more broadly.¹⁴⁶

140 Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, *Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs*, 27 November 2020.

141 INAN, *Evidence*, 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin).

142 First Nations Health Authority, *Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19*, 26 November 2020.

143 INAN, *Evidence*, 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

144 INAN, *Evidence*, 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald); INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman). See: Addressing Racism Review, *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care*, November 2020.

145 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Dr. Cornelia Wieman).

146 INAN, *Evidence*, 12 June 2020 (Mr. Tom Jackson, Performer, Creative Industries Coalition); INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Mr. Raymond Wanuch, Executive Director, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers).

The Committee recognizes the harm experienced by Indigenous Peoples due to systemic racism in the health care system. Following the tragic death of Ms. Joyce Echaquan in a Quebec hospital in September 2020, the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw presented a brief to the governments of Quebec and Canada. Entitled “Joyce’s Principle,” the document “aims to ensure that all Indigenous Peoples have a right of equitable access, without discrimination, to all health and social services, as well as the right to the highest attainable standard of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.”¹⁴⁷ The Committee agrees that it is unacceptable that Indigenous Peoples experience racism and discrimination when accessing health and social services. The Committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada take immediate actions to expand access to culturally appropriate health and social services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis during the COVID-19 pandemic; and that government work with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to identify ways to ensure that all Indigenous Peoples have access to safe and equitable health and social services, without discrimination.

Mental Health and Wellness

Chief Charlene Belleau, Chair of the First Nations Health Council, observed that the pandemic has had “devastating impacts” on mental health.¹⁴⁸ Prior to the pandemic, many Indigenous communities were already dealing with a mental health, wellness and addictions crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has been exacerbating that crisis. Individuals and communities are more isolated now than ever and their access to mental wellness services has been hindered. Regional Chief Poitras explained that “[t]he pandemic has brought with it many challenges for mental health, as strict public health protocols have led to isolation. Economic impacts have brought many people deeper financial trouble and greater stress.”¹⁴⁹ She continued: “The anxiety of the pandemic weighs on all of us, and for [F]irst [N]ations these stresses have been compounded for many people due to pre-existing mental health concerns, often a result of intergenerational trauma.”¹⁵⁰

147 Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw, *Principe de Joyce*, 2020 [TRANSLATION].

148 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 May 2020 (Chief Charlene Belleau, Chair, First Nations Health Council).

149 INAN, *Evidence*, 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

150 Ibid.



Minister Miller acknowledged the situation as dire: “The hidden face of this pandemic is the mental health crisis, the worst iterations of which are the opioid use and abuse, suicide and ideation.”¹⁵¹ According to Dr. Restoule, “[i]t’s expected that the mental wellness pandemic will last far beyond this pandemic.”¹⁵² She added: “The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequities in mental wellness services, as noted by higher levels of crisis, violence and overdose deaths.”¹⁵³ For her part, Chief Bone noted that a state of emergency was declared in the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation in October 2020 due to suicide contagion.¹⁵⁴ Chief Mitsuing said that the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation was also concerned about youth suicide and he was worried that people might not be reaching out for help when they need it.¹⁵⁵

Witnesses also highlighted how the pandemic has impeded access to mental health supports and services. In its brief, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq wrote that school closures mean that “many at-risk students have been cut-off from a local support service hub” and that the continuity of psycho-social supports has been impacted.¹⁵⁶ Ms. Whitman indicated that the pandemic meant that “[s]upport systems like community counselling and other programs have been withdrawn, and the mechanisms established to help other people cope with their special needs have disappeared.”¹⁵⁷

In the spring, the Committee heard that community lockdown and road checkpoints had been efficient at keeping the disease out of communities.¹⁵⁸ In the fall, the Committee heard from Dr. McDonald, however, that lockdowns come at a cost:

Lockdowns are dangerous for individuals with opioid substance use disorders, who are being told to stay home and stay alone. Programs and services that could support them in other times are shut down or less accessible during the COVID emergency. It has been extremely challenging to support people who are using alone in their homes.¹⁵⁹

151 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

152 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule).

153 Ibid.

154 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone).

155 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing).

156 Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, [Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Delivery of Educational Services in Nunavik](#), 9 June 2020.

157 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Lorraine Whitman).

158 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Ghislain Picard); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige); INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler).

159 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

Dr. Restoule also pointed out that in some cases, historical trauma contributed to the negative effects of lockdowns:

One of the things we heard very clearly was that communities have worked to keep COVID out by looking at lockdowns and border controls, but what that has meant is that the community members themselves don't have the freedom of movement. They talked about how that was a triggering of a past system, where they needed permission to be able to leave the community to go out to do their shopping and things like that.¹⁶⁰

National Chief Norman Yakeleya of the Dene Nation said that Dene Chiefs are concerned about the “increased alcohol and drug abuse in our small communities and the fatalities we have suffered resulting from the pandemic’s related public health restrictions.”¹⁶¹ According to Chief Mitsuing, addictions issues have “skyrocketed”, in part due to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit: “We had a lot of people having a lot of money that they had never had before.”¹⁶²

In Inuit Nunangat, Mr. Obed explained that insufficient resources for harm reduction and safe drug supply facilities is challenging.¹⁶³ When he appeared in the spring, he said that access to mental health and addiction services must be expanded as outlined in the *National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy*.¹⁶⁴ He also stressed the need to invest in community-based mental health and well-being programs.¹⁶⁵

Others noted that the pandemic has limited access to group therapy and treatment centres, and led to cases of substance withdrawal syndrome in communities under lockdown.¹⁶⁶ Mr. Therrien-Pinette noted that “[v]iolent incidents also became more frequent and severe.”¹⁶⁷ Ms. MacKay indicated that “[a]ccess to treatment is incredibly impaired right now. We’re seeing increased drug use and relapse here, and there’s no place to go... What’s the impact? The impact is that communities are struggling. It’s really hard to see an end in sight when treatment isn’t available.”¹⁶⁸ The Nishnawbe Aski Nation also pointed to an increase in substance abuse as well as domestic abuse in its

160 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule).

161 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (National Chief Norman Yakeleya, Dene Nation).

162 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing).

163 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

164 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

165 Ibid.

166 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Charlene Belleau); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Mr. Jean-Claude Therrien Pinette).

167 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Mr. Jean-Claude Therrien Pinette).

168 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).



brief, stating that “more funding for mental health is urgently needed, with continuity of care and clinical oversight for at least five (5) years and a way for the client to evaluate the services that they received.”¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Dr. Restoule recommended that the federal government:

- 1) improve access to culturally relevant mental wellness supports and services across the lifespan;
- 2) ensure equitable access to virtual care for mental wellness;
- 3) support the overburdened mental wellness workforce; and
- 4) invest in Indigenous knowledge on mental wellness.¹⁷⁰

Ms. Sioui and Ms. Carol Hopkins, Executive Director of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation also stressed the urgent need for telemedicine options to break the isolation and distress experienced by many individuals.¹⁷¹ Telemedicine tools could help address some of the issues resulting from the lack of access to services, provided that people have access to stable high-speed Internet.

Minister Miller noted that the federal government had recently committed \$82.5 million in new funding to maintain sustainable access to mental health services, in addition to the existing \$425 million in annual funding.¹⁷² According to Ms. Hopkins, \$82.5 million is not enough.¹⁷³ She noted that this funding is time-limited and temporary whereas communities need sustained and stable resources.¹⁷⁴ Ms. MacKay agreed: “In terms of mental health impact, mental health supports were already under-resourced, and the pandemic made it worse.”¹⁷⁵ Dr. Restoule told the Committee that “[m]ental wellness supports and services in [I]ndigenous communities have been consistently underfunded

169 Nishnawbe Aski Nation, *Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic*, 12 June 2020, p. 21.

170 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule).

171 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Ms. Carol Hopkins); INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui).

172 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

173 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Ms. Carol Hopkins).

174 Ibid.

175 INAN, *Evidence*, 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

compared to Canadians, resulting in a patchwork of supports and services that vary across the country.”¹⁷⁶

The Committee recognizes the significant mental health, wellness and addictions issues people are facing in many Indigenous communities. This mental health crisis is not new; this Committee studied the suicide crisis in Indigenous communities in 2016 and 2017. These issues have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and public health measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus (such as isolation and lockdowns). Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada provide immediate relief funding to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to ensure the continuity of mental health supports for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic; that the government, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, evaluate ways to adapt existing mental health supports and programs to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples during the COVID-19 pandemic; and that it ensure that sufficient funding is available to communities for social interventions aimed at limiting the damages directly and indirectly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada review, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, its funding mechanisms for community-based mental health supports to ensure that the funding provided to Indigenous communities is equitable, needs-based, flexible, stable and predictable. This review should take place before the end of 2021.

The Committee also recognizes that Indigenous youth are being impacted by the current pandemic in unique ways. First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth ought to be afforded the same opportunities and supports as any other youth in Canada. Indigenous children and youth need to know that their lives are valued. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Canada establish an emergency program to provide funding to community-based mental health supports for First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth specifically to address pandemic-related needs; that the program’s resources reflect the actual mental health needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth; and that the program

¹⁷⁶ INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule).



be designed with the possibility of being extended and/or expanded beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee also heard of promising practices implemented by Indigenous Peoples. Culture and land-based initiatives were put forward by witnesses as ways to help people cope during these unprecedented times. In Inuit Nunangat, Mr. Obed explained that going on the land during the warmer months provided an alternative for people living in overcrowded housing units.¹⁷⁷ He noted that, by going on the land, people “have been providing to the communities more of their country foods than generally in the most recent history.”^{178, 179} In the Western Arctic, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation also adopted a “cultural approach” and on-the-land programs.¹⁸⁰

In the spring, Chief Belleau said that on-the-land initiatives had been a success in British Columbia insofar as they helped “strengthen communities.”¹⁸¹ Dr. McDonald explained that the First Nations Health Authority “encourage[s] communities ... to use their time on the land and their traditional practices to support individuals, families and the community in moving forward in a time of crisis.”¹⁸²

Dene National Chief Yakeleya also said that the Dene Nation had made a case in favour of an on-the-land approach, which was funded by the federal government.¹⁸³ He explained that in the early days of the pandemic, he had sought guidance from an Elder who told him:

We heard this in the past from our [E]lders. We were told to go on the land, and that's the only place we are going to be safe. When you go back to the land, you will learn your medicines, you will learn your way of life, you will learn to live in a healthy relationship with your families and your children, and you'll learn how to be a person again.¹⁸⁴

177 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

178 Ibid.

179 This observation seemingly contradicts other testimony by witnesses from the southern parts of the country. However, it is important to note that different parts of the country have been impacted by the pandemic differently.

180 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith).

181 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Charlene Belleau).

182 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

183 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (National Chief Norman Yakeleya).

184 Ibid.

Based on the Dene Nation's experience, National Chief Yakeleya recommended funding land-based addictions and wellness programs.¹⁸⁵ Ms. Hopkins agreed that "culture continues to make the difference in supporting [F]irst [N]ations people with their wellness."¹⁸⁶ Chief Mitsuing also related that one Elder talked about bringing back culture to help people.¹⁸⁷

According to Ms. Hopkins, ensuring that people have access to culture is currently a great concern to communities.¹⁸⁸ Others, such as Mr. Blaney and Chief Bone reported that the pandemic is preventing communities from taking part in cultural activities and ceremonies.¹⁸⁹ This situation is "causing some major mental wellness issues within the community," Mr. Blaney explained.¹⁹⁰ Chief Bone said her community is trying to come up with solutions to address people's spiritual needs.¹⁹¹

The Committee recognizes the importance of culture and land to Indigenous Peoples' health and wellbeing. The Committee was encouraged to hear about the success of on-the-land initiatives. The Committee believes the government must support the need for culturally relevant supports based on Indigenous Peoples' worldviews, during and after the pandemic. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, establish a permanent program to provide stable, flexible and predictable funding for land-based mental health, wellness and addictions programs.

Governance and Self-Determination

Several witnesses discussed the role of Indigenous governments in responding to the pandemic. Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination and the right to self-

185 Ibid.

186 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Carol Hopkins).

187 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing).

188 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Carol Hopkins).

189 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone).

190 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney).

191 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone).



government. Yet, in the spring, National Chief Bellegarde noted that First Nations are still struggling to have their jurisdictions recognized. He added that

The fundamental principles of an effective government response to this crisis are the following: First [N]ations must be included in all discussions relating to COVID-19; jurisdictional conflict, confusion and resistance to [First [N]ations' exercising our inherent jurisdictions must not stand in the way of ensuring that [F]irst [N]ations citizens are protected; and [F]irst [N]ations must be supported in exercising their authority and jurisdiction in meeting the health needs of their communities and in planning for recovery.¹⁹²

Similarly, Regional Chief Poitras stated that

First [N]ations need to be at the table when decisions are being made. Historically, they haven't been at the table. It's critical that they be part of the decision-making that impacts them. First [N]ations are sovereign nations. They're working towards building their nationhood, so they have to be respected and included.¹⁹³

For instance, Ms. MacKay told the Committee that Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia had been "left out of decisions that would affect the financial livelihood of communities... This left communities in debt and uncertain about their financial futures."¹⁹⁴

Ms. Sioui believed that the role played by the community leaders "has helped minimize the spread of the virus."¹⁹⁵ Chief Mark agreed: "Like our ancestors, we were forward-thinking, anticipating future events and taking initiative to mobilize and better support our communities."¹⁹⁶ Ms. MacKay also "acknowledge[d] and commend[ed] the swift action taken by Nova Scotia community leadership to proactively lock down their communities at the start of the pandemic."¹⁹⁷

Minister Miller stated that "[w]e know that when local [I]ndigenous leadership is given the necessary resources, they are best placed to successfully respond to a crisis with immediate, innovative and proactive measures to ensure the safety of their members."¹⁹⁸ Mr. Eric Cardinal agreed that giving First Nations leadership "more

192 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (National Chief Perry Bellegarde).

193 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

194 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

195 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui).

196 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Chief Bryan Mark).

197 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

198 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).

autonomy and trust[ing] them in the implementation of certain policies and programs” was needed.¹⁹⁹

Some witnesses highlighted issues related to the enforcement of First Nations bylaws and measures related to the pandemic. For instance, Ms. MacKay said that “[t]he pandemic response has amplified the disconnect between [F]irst [N]ations community bylaws and their enforcement.”²⁰⁰ Chief Mitsuing said his community’s security does not have the capacity to enforce its laws²⁰¹ and Ms. Sioui noted that “[m]any communities still have to rely on provincial police services.”²⁰² Ms. Angeline Gillis, Associate Executive Director at the Confederacy of Mainland Mi’kmaq, observed similar situations in Nova Scotia: “The gap we are seeing is with enforcement, getting enforcement to act, and that gap was, in fact, exacerbated through COVID when our communities tried to protect themselves by implementing the lockdowns, implementing curfews and such.”²⁰³ In the spring, National Chief Bellegarde stated that the pandemic had emphasized the need to recognize Indigenous policing as an essential service.²⁰⁴

The Committee recognizes the importance for First Nations communities to be able to enforce their bylaws, especially during a pandemic. The Committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation 19

That the Government of Canada work with Indigenous Peoples to identify the gaps in enforcement of First Nations bylaws; and that it implement a plan to address those gaps.

Consultation, Coordination and Communication

Witnesses highlighted issues relating to consultation, coordination and communication between governments. Minister Miller acknowledged that there have been jurisdictional issues.²⁰⁵ In Canada, the constitutional division of provincial and federal powers

199 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal, As an individual).

200 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

201 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Ronald Mitsuing).

202 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Marjolaine Sioui).

203 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Angeline Gillis, Associate Executive Director, Confederacy of Mainland Mi’kmaq).

204 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (National Chief Perry Bellegarde).

205 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller).



sometimes leads to gaps and issues for Indigenous Peoples. Minister Miller noted, however, that “COVID doesn't check the Constitution before it infects someone, and where we've seen it, it goes after those who are most vulnerable.”²⁰⁶

Both Mr. Alsop and National Chief Yakeleya called for more intergovernmental coordination.²⁰⁷ In its brief, the Dene Nation wrote that “Indigenous governments are often reduced to being recipients of funding that may or may not meet their needs, as they do not have input into program design and implementation.”²⁰⁸ National Chief Yakeleya said that “no one government can do it alone. Unilateral decision-making is counterproductive.”²⁰⁹ He continued: “The pandemic has helped create the conditions that make it clear that the only way ahead is through a collaborative co-governance approach among the indigenous governments, Canada and the GNWT [Government of the Northwest Territories], whereby issues of common concern can be discussed and next steps agreed upon.”²¹⁰

Regional Chief Poitras was also of the view that “[t]oo often [F]irst [N]ations were the last to receive information and were left out of the decision-making process at the federal, provincial and territorial tables.”²¹¹ She added that “[w]e need that nation-to-nation engagement.”²¹² Ms. MacKay similarly reported that there had been “[s]ome challenges... [including] very long delays in receiving responses to questions, clear communication lines that took too long to be established and information overload.”²¹³ She recommended establishing “fully transparent communication lines between communities, all levels of government and supporting organizations at the start of the decision-making process.”²¹⁴

In the spring, the Committee heard that Indigenous governments created taskforces, strategic units and working groups to coordinate their pandemic response. Chief Mathias

206 Ibid.

207 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Jason Asop); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (National Chief Norman Yakeleya).

208 Dene Nation, [Written Submission on Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#), 26 November 2020.

209 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (National Chief Norman Yakeleya).

210 Ibid.

211 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

212 Ibid.

213 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

214 Ibid.

said the Long Point First Nation created a local pandemic committee, investing energy into “developing measures, educating, creating awareness and setting up temporary community infrastructure.”²¹⁵ Chief McKenzie explained that the Innu Nation established a COVID-19 Strategic Unit to coordinate the local pandemic response.²¹⁶ According to Chief Mark, “thanks to the [Innu Nation] strategic unit, we were better able to align our local efforts with regional measures.”²¹⁷ The Nishnawbe Aski Nation also created a COVID Task Team, which quickly developed and put in place measures such as checkpoints and barricades.²¹⁸

The Committee recognizes the need for proper consultation, coordination and communication between Indigenous, federal, provincial and territorial governments during crises such as the current pandemic. The *Emergency Management Framework for Canada*, states that “[e]mergency management requires collaboration, coordination and integration to facilitate complementary and coherent action by all partners to ensure the most effective use of emergency management resources and execution of activities.”²¹⁹ The Committee agrees and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 20

That the Government of Canada engage with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to establish a permanent, national strategic unit to allow representatives from Indigenous, provincial, territorial and federal governments to meet regularly during public health emergencies of national concern in order to facilitate complementary and coherent action by all partners.

Food Security

Witnesses highlighted the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous food security. Dr. Martin defined food security as “the idea that people have the ability to access safe, culturally appropriate food and the right amounts that provide for their nutritional needs. In many cases, food justice also involves the idea that indigenous Peoples specifically be able to access lands and their territories in ways that allow them

215 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Chief Steeve Mathias).

216 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Chief Mike Mckenzie).

217 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Chief Bryan Mark).

218 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler).

219 Public Safety Canada, [An Emergency Management Framework for Canada](#), Third Edition, May 2017, p. 10.



to enact culturally appropriate activities.”²²⁰ She explained that “there are multiple layers and multiple ways in which food security is affected.”²²¹

In the spring, several witnesses mentioned that food insecurity was an issue in their communities and that it was being exacerbated by the pandemic.²²² Ms. Tara Campbell, Executive Director of the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc., indicated that travel restrictions, road closures and remoteness had all contributed to food insecurity.²²³

According to Mr. Obed, there is no evidence that food security had been impacted by northern air carriers operating differently due to the pandemic, but he observed that there had been delays in perishable items arriving to communities.²²⁴ He added that the supply system must be supported to prevent it from collapsing.²²⁵ In the Western Arctic, Mr. Smith said that the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation has been providing food baskets and supporting harvesting activities to maintain food security in the region.²²⁶

Mr. Blaney told the Committee that the hunting and fishing season, and the Tla’amin Nation’s access to traditional food, had been “significantly impacted” by the pandemic.²²⁷ Mr. Alsop explained that people coming on Haida territory to hunt are also causing competition for food.²²⁸ In the fall, Chief Mike McKenzie of Innu Takuaikan Uashat Mak Mani-utenam, on the opposite side of the country, had also noted that the pandemic had impacted his people’s hunting season.²²⁹ Chief Mark, also from the Innu Nation, said that “[c]ome winter, food security becomes a real concern... We are

220 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin).

221 Ibid.

222 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Melanie Omeniho, President, Women of the Métis Nation - Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak); INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Ms. Tara Campbell); INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Charlene Belleau); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige).

223 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Ms. Tara Campbell).

224 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

225 Ibid.

226 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith).

227 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney).

228 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Jason Alsop).

229 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Chief Mike McKenzie, Innu Nation COVID-19 Strategic Unit).

requesting substantial support for our traditional food security.”²³⁰ He recommended supporting initiatives such as controlled community hunting.²³¹

The pandemic is not only affecting food security by impeding hunting and fishing and access to traditional food. In its brief, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq wrote that school closures also affected breakfast and lunch programs, which provided minimal food security to at-risk students.²³²

The Committee recognizes the link between food security and health. The Committee is concerned about the impacts of the pandemic on food security, particularly given that Indigenous Peoples and Northerners already experienced high rates of food insecurity. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 21

That the Government of Canada take immediate action to ensure food security and support access to traditional food by First Nations, Inuit and Métis; that, for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government expand access to the new Harvesters Support Grant program to Indigenous and northern communities otherwise not eligible for the Nutrition North Canada program; and that Nutrition North Canada food subsidies be increased in communities where food prices are not within a reasonable parity with provincial or territorial averages.

Education

Education is another important social determinant of health. With temporary school closures and classes primarily shifting online, education has been impacted by the pandemic. Mr. Johnson stated: “What we’ve seen from our lockdown is that these kids – our kids – are quite a bit behind.” Grand Chief Fiddler stressed the need to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic to avoid First Nations children falling further behind.²³³

230 INAN, *Evidence*, 26 November 2020 (Chief Bryan Mark).

231 Ibid.

232 Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, *Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the delivery of Educational Services in Nunavik*, p. 7.

233 INAN, *Evidence*, 24 November 2020 (Mr. Dillon Johnson).



Ms. Hopkins noted that parents are concerned about their children's education.²³⁴ She added: "I've heard from many families that their children have said, 'If I have to continue education virtually next year, then I want to take the year off.' Parents are asking about home-schooling, because there's too much stress. We've heard this across the country in populations outside of first nations communities. It's about managing the wellness of children."²³⁵ In its brief, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq wrote that it anticipates a higher dropout rate during the 2020–2021 school year.²³⁶ According to Mr. Smith, school closures also mean that children have fewer opportunities to be physically and mentally active.²³⁷

In the spring, Mr. Watt explained that "without access to broadband/high-speed Internet, there is no real prospect for distance education and online education platforms to develop as a serious service offering in the youth, adult and post-secondary sectors in Nunavik."²³⁸ Others in different parts of the country echoed his comments.²³⁹

Mr. Watt promoted on-the-land initiatives to support education during the pandemic.²⁴⁰ Mr. Alsop noted that

There's great opportunity to look at developing more resources and supports, not only online learning but options to bring community teachers into the classroom to teach remotely. An additional option is to explore outdoor education opportunities, and support safe transportation, so that we can get the kids out to learn on the land, and not feel cooped up in that environment.²⁴¹

Ms. Ellen Gabriel also highlighted that other forms of knowledge transfer are impacted by the pandemic. For instance, in Kanehsatà:ke, the Kanien'kéha:ka language immersion program had been affected because most of the people teaching the language are Elders who are unfamiliar with the tools and software that would allow the program to

234 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Carol Hopkins).

235 Ibid.

236 Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, [Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Delivery of Educational Services in Nunavik](#), 9 June 2020, p. 7.

237 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Duane Smith).

238 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2020 (Mr. Robert Watt).

239 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2020 (Mr. Elijah Williams); INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

240 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2020 (Mr. Robert Watt).

241 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Jason Alsop).

continue virtually.²⁴² In her testimony, Ms. Gabriel also emphasized the need for “[I]ndigenous control over [I]ndigenous education.”²⁴³

The Committee recognizes the importance of education as a social determinant of health. The Committee believes that measures must be taken to ensure that the pandemic does not jeopardize the education of Indigenous students. The Committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation 22

That the Government of Canada engage with Indigenous community leaders and experts to ensure that Indigenous students are provided with the resources needed to continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic; and that the government have a strategy with timelines for reliable access to the internet.

Indigenous Economy

There are over 40,000 Indigenous businesses in Canada. In the fall, the Committee heard that the value of Indigenous businesses’ activities in Canada is in the billions of dollars²⁴⁴ and that they are “key drivers of employment, wealth creation and better socio-economic outcomes for [I]ndigenous communities and people.”²⁴⁵

Regional Chief Poitras noted that “the businesses, which are the backbone of most communities, have lost significant resources due to the shutdown. A lot of them are struggling to maintain operations.”²⁴⁶ Mr. Jonathan Huntington, Vice-President of Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations at the Cameco Corporation, also highlighted that Indigenous businesses are part of broader supply chains. If they were to go out of businesses, it would have impacts on larger corporations such as Cameco, which procure a lot of goods and services from them.²⁴⁷ He therefore emphasised the need to consider

242 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2020 (Ms. Ellen Gabriel, As an individual).

243 Ibid.

244 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Harold Calla, Executive Chair, First Nations Financial Management Board).

245 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 May 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin, Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association).

246 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

247 INAN, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2020 (Mr. Jonathan Huntington, Vice-President, Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations).



the impacts that large-scale COVID-related bankruptcies of Indigenous businesses would have on the broader Canadian economy.²⁴⁸

Due to the pandemic, bankruptcy is threatening a lot of Indigenous businesses. In March 2020, at the start of the pandemic, the CCAB surveyed 843 Indigenous businesses about the impact of the public health crisis:

- More than 90% reported having experienced a negative impact on their operations;
- About 30% reported having closed their offices and/or facilities;
- About 20% reported having completely shut down;
- 44% reported that they'd have to close within three to six months without supports;
- 12% reported that they'd have to close within a month. 249

In the spring, Ms. Bull said that “[t]he loss of [I]ndigenous businesses on this scale has a direct adverse impact on the [I]ndigenous economy, and in turn [I]ndigenous communities.”²⁵⁰ Ms. Bull also noted that “Indigenous women disproportionately bore the brunt of the negative affects of COVID-19. More [I]ndigenous women-owned businesses reported very negative outcomes to their business.”²⁵¹

Mr. Obed and Chief Mark reported a negative economic fallout in Inuit Nunangat and Nitassinan as well.²⁵² Similarly, Chief Bone said that the pandemic “has brought economic activity to a standstill and has resulted in dramatic declines in community growth and self-reported indices of well-being.”²⁵³ Ms. Angeline Gillis explained that unilateral decisions by the provincial government have had a negative impact on

248 Ibid.

249 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 May 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull); INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal).

250 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 May 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

251 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

252 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Chief Bryan Mark).

253 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone).

Mi'kmaq sources of revenues.²⁵⁴ According to Ms. Bull, “[t]oo often, indigenous business concerns are an afterthought.”²⁵⁵

To alleviate the pandemic’s impacts on the Indigenous economy, witnesses proposed a number of solutions. For instance, Mr. Cardinal stressed the need for the government to ensure that Indigenous businesses benefit from their fair share of public contracts: “We are seeing that the government makes little use of indigenous businesses for its purchase of goods and services, especially when it comes to needs related to COVID-19.”²⁵⁶ Ms. Bull noted that only a small fraction of the federal procurement of PPEs (then valued at over \$6 billion) was awarded to Indigenous businesses.²⁵⁷ Prior to the pandemic, the federal government had committed to awarding 5% of public contracts to Indigenous businesses.²⁵⁸ According to Ms. Bull, Canada is nowhere close to meeting that target.²⁵⁹ To stimulate the Indigenous economy during and after the pandemic, Mr. Metatawabin recommended ensuring that the 5% procurement target is met.²⁶⁰

Mr. Kirt Ejesiak, a representative from the Inuit Business Council, also “encourage[d] governments across the north to purchase goods and services from Inuit-owned businesses,” stating that “[t]he current procurement system is not really conducive to this type of crisis. It favours large, long-established companies from outside the north.”²⁶¹ In its brief, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation asked the government to increase procurement from Inuvialuit businesses:

Canada has several large procurement projects in the Western Arctic coming online in the next few years. Canada has specific obligations under the [Inuvialuit Final Agreement] to ensure that Inuvialuit are involved in the federal procurement process in the Western Arctic, and in the past has fallen short of those obligations. Additionally, some federal projects are being managed by the [Government of the Northwest Territories], such as the [Department of National Defence] work at the Inuvik Airport. There is sufficient capacity in the Western Arctic to complete these projects, and now

254 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Angeline Gillis).

255 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

256 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal).

257 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

258 Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, [Minister of Public Services and Procurement Mandate Letter](#), 13 December 2019.

259 Ibid.

260 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

261 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Kirt Ejesiak, Representative, Inuit Business Council).



more than ever it is essential that we minimize travel into the North from other regions of Canada for public health regions.²⁶²

Witnesses also mentioned the work of the Indigenous Business COVID-19 Response Taskforce. Mr. Cardinal noted that the task force has a database of over 250 businesses ready to supply PPE and other pandemic-related products.²⁶³ Mr. Wanuch indicated that the task force is “going to make [its] database public facing, so that any procurement opportunity that can help our indigenous suppliers across the country is going to be offered up, and not based solely on COVID-19. That's one of the areas we're hoping will make an impact going forward.”²⁶⁴

The Committee recognizes that meeting the 5% Indigenous procurement target is an opportunity to stimulate the Indigenous economy – and consequently the Canadian economy – during and after the pandemic. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 23

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the Indigenous Business COVID-19 Response Taskforce, establish and maintain a list of Indigenous businesses able to meet federal procurement needs related to the pandemic; and that the list be shared with federal departments and agencies involved in the pandemic response to encourage them to consider Indigenous businesses in the procurement of personal protective equipment and other essential goods.

Recommendation 24

That the Government of Canada continue to work with Indigenous partners on a strategic plan with clear timelines and concrete measures to ensure that five per cent of federal contracts are awarded to businesses managed and led by Indigenous Peoples; that this strategic plan identify barriers to Indigenous businesses securing public contracts and solutions to overcome these barriers; and that the strategic plan be developed within six months.

262 Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, *Submission of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on support for Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through a second wave of Covid-19*, 27 November 2020.

263 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal).

264 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 November 2020 (Mr. Raymond Wanuch).

Mr. Metatawabin also recommended improving the federal emergency programming for Indigenous businesses by increasing the non-repayable component.²⁶⁵ Mr. Metatawabin and Ms. Bull noted that Indigenous businesses are currently not in a position to take on any more debt.²⁶⁶ Yet, a large portion of the federal emergency funding for Indigenous businesses is made up of loans. Mr. Wanuch agreed that lending them money is only compounding the high risks already faced by Indigenous businesses.²⁶⁷ Mr. Metatawabin suggested providing funding through 50% repayable and 50% non-repayable components.²⁶⁸

Mr. Metatawabin also recommended proactively assessing the needs of Indigenous businesses and supporting them during the recovery, and increasing funding for Aboriginal Financial Institutions, which he said have seen their funding reduced by 70% over the last 20 years.²⁶⁹ In the spring, he explained to the Committee that 40% of these institutions were already fully loaned out and did not have enough capital to respond to the needs of Indigenous businesses.²⁷⁰ In November 2020, he said that some Aboriginal Financial Institutions had no choice but “to turn away their own clients and refer them instead to the non-[I]ndigenous RDA [Regional Development Agencies] or CFDC [Community Futures Development Corporations]. This situation is demoralizing.”²⁷¹

For his part, Mr. Wanuch noted that Economic Development Officer positions are funded on a per capita basis, which means some communities get limited funds while others get “close to a million.”²⁷² His organization is looking at ways to ensure that funding is shared strategically and in a “fair and equitable” way.²⁷³ The Committee, which conducted a study on community capacity building in 2019, recognizes the importance of Economic Development Officers and is encouraged by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers’ efforts.

265 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

266 Ibid; INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

267 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Raymond Wanuch).

268 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

269 Ibid.

270 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 May 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

271 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

272 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Raymond Wanuch).

273 Ibid.



Employment and Workforce

The pandemic's impact on the Indigenous workforce was also addressed by witnesses. Mr. Obed noted that many Inuit have not been working in the mines since the beginning of the pandemic and "[t]here is only so long that large-scale mining operations can pay for Inuit employees who want to work and are ready to work, but just are not able to work because of the risk associated with these remote camps in relation to the general population."²⁷⁴

Similarly, Mr. William Goodon, Minister of Housing and Property Management at the Manitoba Métis Federation, and Mr. David Chartrand, Vice-President and National Spokesperson of the Métis National Council, noted that many Métis citizens work in industries which cannot shift to working remotely.²⁷⁵ Mr. Chartrand added that "Métis constitute the largest [I]ndigenous labour force in Canada, and the data coming out of Canada's labour market survey shows we have lost jobs at a faster rate than other groups."²⁷⁶

In Sioux Valley, Chief Bone indicated that "the impacts evolving from COVID-19 are causing extensive social, psychological and economic damage... Those of our members holding insecure and casual jobs have been the first to be laid off and face unemployment with its attendant mental and physical health effects."²⁷⁷ The First Nations Health Authority wrote that "Statistics Canada has reported that Indigenous persons (excluding on-reserve First Nations) experienced similar rates of job losses in the first three months of the pandemic, but had not recovered those losses in the following three months."²⁷⁸

Ms. Agrell recommended that the government take measures to remove barriers to training, notably by bringing more opportunities closer to remote communities.²⁷⁹ This would avoid people having to travel to COVID-19 hot spots for training and prevent disruptions within communities. The First Nations Health Authority agreed and

274 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

275 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand, Vice-President and National Spokesperson, Métis National Council); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. William Goodon, Minister, Manitoba Metis Federation).

276 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand).

277 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Chief Jennifer Bone).

278 First Nations Health Authority, [Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#), 26 November 2020.

279 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Kirsten Agrell).

recommended “[supporting] organizations [that are] already developing infrastructure, support and training for First Nations to join the growing remote workforce.”²⁸⁰

In the spring, Mr. Jackson stressed the impact on workers from the live-performance sector: “About 50,000 Canadians are out of work. There is virtually 100% unemployment in our industries, and our members are experiencing wage losses of about \$130 million per month.”²⁸¹ At the time, Mr. Jackson had called for an extension of the maximum eligibility period and end date of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.^{282, 283}

POPULATION-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

In addition to the general observations and recommendations from the previous sections, the Committee also heard about how the pandemic is affecting distinct populations differently. The following sections provide an overview of what the Committee heard with respect to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, urban Indigenous Peoples, and women, children and LGBTQ2S+ people.

First Nations Communities

The Committee heard that First Nations People living on-reserve face unique circumstances related to the *Indian Act*. According to Mr. Harold Calla, Executive Chair of the First Nations Financial Management Board, “[First Nations] got sidelined with the *Indian Act*. We weren’t allowed to evolve or emerge as a government or as people.”²⁸⁴ Ms. Bull explained that businesses face barriers to accessing capital on reserve (on-reserve businesses cannot use land as a collateral because of the *Indian Act*) and that is why Aboriginal Financial Institutions are so important.²⁸⁵ Mr. Gladu agreed that the *Indian Act*,

280 First Nations Health Authority, [*Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19*](#), 26 November 2020.

281 INAN, [*Evidence*](#), 12 June 2020 (Mr. Tom Jackson).

282 Ibid.

283 A few days after Mr. Tom Jackson’s appearance, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was extended to 24 weeks (and then again to 28 weeks in August 2020). In September 2020, the CERB was then replaced by the Employment Insurance program and new benefits such as the Canada Recovery Benefit. Indigenous Peoples can apply for these programs and benefits.

284 INAN, [*Evidence*](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Harold Calla).

285 INAN, [*Evidence*](#), 29 May 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).



by not allowing First Nations to own their land, “hampers [their] ability to develop credit” and “is an impingement on investment into [their] communities.”²⁸⁶

Regional Chief Poitras noted that First Nations’ resources are “dwindling.”²⁸⁷ In the short-term, Mr. C.T. (Manny) Jules, Chief Commissioner of the First Nations Tax Commission, recommended “that a [F]irst [N]ations tax deferral loan program be established and that [F]irst [N]ation debenture payments for this year be made by the federal government. This would help communities replace lost revenues so that they can better meet public health requirements.”²⁸⁸

For his part, Mr. Ernie Daniels, President and CEO of the First Nations Finance Authority, recommended that the government:

- establish an emergency fund of ongoing liquidity to ensure that borrowing First Nations can continue to meet their obligations during the pandemic;
- implement a commercial paper program²⁸⁹ through the First Nations Finance Authority to provide a source of short-term financing that would support First Nations’ ongoing needs; and
- create an alternative financing program to leverage dollars over the long-term to accelerate the construction of infrastructure and support economic development in First Nations communities.²⁹⁰

In October 2020, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, stated that the government had committed “\$17.1 million to provide interest payment relief for [F]irst [N]ations with loans through the First Nations Finance Authority.”²⁹¹

The Committee recognizes the combined impacts of the *Indian Act* and the current pandemic on First Nations finances. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

286 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Jean Paul Gladu).

287 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

288 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. C.T. (Manny) Jules, Chief Commissioner, First Nations Tax Commission).

289 Commercial papers are a commonly used source of short-term financing.

290 INAN, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2020 (Mr. Ernie Daniels, President and Chief Executive Officer, First Nations Finance Authority).

291 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Carolyn Bennett).

Recommendation 25

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the First Nations Finance Authority, immediately establish an emergency fund to provide ongoing liquidity to First Nations to ensure that they can meet their fiscal obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 26

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the First Nations Tax Commission, continue to evaluate the establishment of a First Nations tax deferral loan program, to assist communities in making debenture payments for the fiscal year 2020-2021.

Recommendation 27

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the First Nations Finance Authority, establish a commercial paper program through the Authority; and that the government and First Nations Finance Authority establish an alternative financing program to leverage dollars over the long-term to accelerate the construction of infrastructure and support economic development and post-pandemic recovery in First Nations communities.

Recommendation 28

That the Government of Canada acknowledge that the two decades of reduced funding for Aboriginal Financial Institutions must be reversed in order to attain economic justice for Indigenous businesses; and that the government establish stable long term funding for Aboriginal Financial Institutions in order to bolster capital funds for loans.

Inuit and Northern Communities

In the spring, Mr. Obed had told the Committee that the government must adopt an Inuit-specific approach in Inuit Nunangat: “All of our interventions must be evidence-based, globally informed and Inuit-specific.”²⁹² He had also called on the federal and territorial governments “to ensure that [Inuit] aren’t left behind or that we just aren’t considered” in the reopening plans.²⁹³ The Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern

292 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 May 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

293 Ibid.



Affairs, acknowledged that “[r]emote, isolated and northern communities have unique needs.”²⁹⁴

According to Mr. Obed,

The federal government has helped with the response to COVID-19, with approximately \$90 million of federal Inuit-specific funding through two rounds of [I]ndigenous community support funds and a top-up to the Inuit post-secondary education funding. Those types of supports have really helped Inuit communities and Inuit land claim organizations respond to COVID-19 in a meaningful way.²⁹⁵

The funding was used to support food programs and on-the-land initiatives, purchase cleaning supplies, provide heat and water, and support education and childcare.²⁹⁶

In its brief, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation recommended extending the Arctic Cruise Ship and Pleasure Craft restrictions until the end of the 2021 open water season: “These are reasonable and pragmatic measures that do not affect essential shipping or the exercise of Indigenous rights.”²⁹⁷

Northern Air Carriers

In the Arctic, one of the concerns related to the pandemic is the impact on air carriers and supply chains. Minister Vandal explained that northern air carriers are “vital to ensuring that people living in remote fly-in communities have continued access to food, medical supplies, and other essential goods and services.”²⁹⁸ Canadian North, a 100% Inuit-owned air carrier, described its operations as a “lifeline” as they “enable the movement of people, food, medicine and other important goods as well as access to crucial medical care and government services.”²⁹⁹

In the spring, Mr. Obed highlighted that Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami had been advocating for northern air carriers to be labelled as “essential services” and “critical infrastructure” because, with exceptions of the annual sealift in the summer, communities are

294 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Dan Vandal).

295 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

296 Ibid.

297 Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, [Submission of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on support for Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through a second wave of Covid-19](#), 27 November 2020.

298 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 May 2020 (The Honourable Dan Vandal).

299 Canadian North, [Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs: Preserving a Vital Lifeline](#), 1 June 2020.

completely reliant on northern air carriers for their supplies. In the fall, he told the Committee that “the federal government has defined Inuit Nunangat air transportation as an essential service.”³⁰⁰

Northern air carriers have been incurring significant losses due to the pandemic. According to Mr. Vodden, some routes are hardly viable anymore.³⁰¹ Nonetheless, he noted that his company is maintaining operations on routes needed for essential medical supplies and medical transportation: “We made the conscious decision as a company at the onset to not stop service to any isolated community that did not have road access or other means. We took that on our shoulders in good faith that we would be able to get somewhere with the government to sustain any losses there.”³⁰²

According to Mr. Sébastien Michel, a member of the Board of Directors of the Northern Air Transport Association, it is not sustainable for private operators to maintain these essential services at a loss.³⁰³ He added that once the pandemic is over, there is no indication that things will go back to normal for northern airlines: “We are already afraid that they will not get back to normal. Passenger transportation will not get back to 100% after the crisis. It will take years for passenger transportation to return to its pre-COVID-19 levels.”³⁰⁴ It is likely that prices will increase while the frequency of flights will decrease, having a significant impact of the life of people living in the Arctic.³⁰⁵

According to Mr. Michel, alleviating the excise fuel tax and other fees (such as NAV CANADA’s fees and airports fees) could lessen the financial burden on northern carriers “in a way that would be fair for all the industry.”³⁰⁶ For its part, the Northern Air Transport Association recommended that the government:

- revisit its air policy supporting sustainable air travel, with safeguards for the northern sector;

300 INAN, *Evidence*, 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

301 INAN, *Evidence*, 1 December 2020 (Mr. Nick Vodden).

302 Ibid.

303 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 May 2020 (Mr. Sébastien Michel, Member, Board of Directors, Northern Air Transport Association).

304 Ibid.

305 Ibid.

306 Ibid.



- engage with Indigenous and northern partners on new federal safety rules;
- increase the federal Airports Capital Assistance Program to ensure upgrades to infrastructure and develop new health security facilities and protocols; and
- develop northern-specific travel incentives.³⁰⁷

In October 2020, Minister Vandal told the Committee that the government had announced a \$75 million program to ensure the continuity of air transport to remote communities over the last six months of 2020.³⁰⁸ The program could then invest up to \$174 million over 18 months, as needed.

The Committee recognizes that air carriers are a lifeline to northern communities. It is imperative that the government do everything it can to support them during these trying times. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 29

That the Government of Canada engage with Indigenous and northern partners, as well as with the provinces and territories, to identify concrete measures to ensure the long-term viability and stability of northern air travel routes.

Recommendation 30

That the Government of Canada ensure that any new safety rules and regulations are implemented in consultation with air carriers operating in the territories and northern regions of the provinces; and that the government work with them to address any barriers to services that may result.

Recommendation 31

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that some communities south of the 60th parallel have been included in programs such as Nutrition North Canada, provide a clear definition of “northern” and “northern air carriers” that includes remote and isolated communities; that these definitions be developed in consultation with Arctic and

307 Northern Air Transport Association, *NATA Briefing Note – Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19*, 1 December 2020.

308 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Dan Vandal).

Northern Policy Framework partners and communities south of 60 which are considered northern by other programming; and that these definitions be immediately applied to any programs, measures, rules and regulations implemented as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Métis Communities

In the spring, Mr. Chartrand stated that the 400,000 citizens of the Métis Nation are disadvantaged and put at risk by “the distressing fact that neither level of government [provincial and federal] has taken responsibility to address the deep-seated health conditions of the Métis [P]eople in Canada.”³⁰⁹ According to him, “Métis have been shut out of the provincial and federal health care systems.”³¹⁰ In the fall, he reiterated that “[t]he COVID crisis has also exposed the particular vulnerability of [Métis] citizens and communities, owing to [their] long-standing exclusion from the federal health supports available to other [I]ndigenous peoples,” referring to the programs and services of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, for which Métis are not eligible.³¹¹

Mr. Chartrand, Mr. Goodon and Mr. Lehr all stated that these jurisdictional issues mean Métis are being “tossed back and forth” by the federal and provincial governments.³¹² “The Métis have really been discriminated against and the negative effect has been causing us to have worse health care than anybody else in western Canada,” Mr. Chartrand added.³¹³

Dr. Driedger explained that, in Manitoba, Métis citizens often have to travel to larger centres to access health services, which “has to be covered out of pocket. Métis do not receive benefits from first nations and Inuit health grants, such as access to medical van transportation.”³¹⁴ She added that, although they face issues such as overcrowding and inadequate housing, “Métis citizens don't have access to any kinds of housing programs that exist for [F]irst [N]ations and Inuit communities.”³¹⁵

309 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 May 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand).

310 Ibid.

311 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand).

312 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. William Goodon); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. Herbert Lehr).

313 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand).

314 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Michelle Driedger).

315 Ibid.



Additionally, Mr. Lehr stressed that the Metis settlements, which are not affiliated with the Métis National Council, “face the prospect of insolvency in under 12 months.”³¹⁶ He described the situation as an emergency threatening the Metis settlements’ way of life and stated that,

Given these facts, it is time for the Government of Canada to ensure a proper relationship with the Metis settlements, including long-term financial sustainability... MSGC [the Metis Settlements General Council] is seeking federal funding of \$50 million per year for three years as a stopgap measure until the tripartite negotiations are complete—a process which could take years to conclude.³¹⁷

The Committee recognizes that the Metis settlements are in a dire financial situation. The government must ensure that the pandemic does not threaten the Metis settlements’ way of life. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 32

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that the Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC) is in a precarious financial situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, provide immediate bridge funding to the MSGC in order to ensure the settlements’ financial sustainability.

Urban Indigenous Peoples

In Canada, more than half of the Indigenous population now lives in cities. However, witnesses told the Committee that urban and off-reserve Indigenous Peoples are underserved and under resourced.³¹⁸ The First Nations Health Authority wrote that “[c]urrent funding is fragmented and not sufficient to provide critical services” to Indigenous Peoples in urban areas.³¹⁹ According to Ms. Edith Cloutier, Executive Director of the Val-d’Or Native Friendship Centre, this population has been a “blind spot” in Canada’s response to the pandemic.³²⁰ “Indigenous [P]eople are a priority population in

316 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. Herbert Lehr).

317 Ibid.

318 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Melanie Omeniho); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige); INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

319 First Nations Health Authority, [Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#), 26 November 2020.

320 INAN, [Evidence](#), 13 May 2020 (Ms. Edith Cloutier, Executive Director, Val-d’Or Native Friendship Centre).

this pandemic, and we need to ensure that urban indigenous [P]eople are not left behind,” noted Mr. Sheppard.³²¹

Urban Indigenous Peoples have also faced jurisdictional issues. According to Ms. Formsma, “[e]ach level of government was looking to the other: ‘This is your jurisdiction’ or ‘No, this is your jurisdiction.’”³²² Mr. Sheppard added that organizations serving this population, such as friendship centres, “experienced what continues to be an ongoing jurisdictional wrangling that has been noticed since the beginning. Neither the federal nor the provincial governments stepped up early to provide supports specific to urban indigenous organizations, with each inquiring of us what contributions the other level of government was making.”³²³

Witnesses were also critical of the way emergency funding for urban Indigenous Peoples was deployed. Unlike First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, organizations serving urban Indigenous Peoples had to submit a proposal for funding. In the spring, Mr. Sheppard said that this “forced the largest portion of [I]ndigenous people in this country to compete for the smallest amount.”³²⁴ In November 2020, he noted that the same thing has been happening in subsequent rounds of funding.³²⁵ When he appeared in May 2020, Mr. Robert Bertrand, then National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, was critical of disbursing funding for urban and off-reserve organizations through a call for proposals, describing it as “a competitive bureaucratic process that pitted off-reserve organizations against each other.”³²⁶

According to Mr. Sheppard, the federal government and friendship centres “have such a long history of working together, but oftentimes, we aren't there in the on-boarding, the development, the creation or the design [of programs], which can be extremely problematic when you're trying to measure impact or even to have impact.”³²⁷ In the spring, Ms. Lindsay Kretschmer, Executive Director of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, recommended exploring new opportunities for federal funding and establishing a “mechanism that formally connects urban [I]ndigenous coalitions directly to

321 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard).

322 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Ms. Jocelyn Formsma).

323 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard).

324 INAN, [Evidence](#), 13 May 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard-Buote).

325 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard).

326 INAN, [Evidence](#), 13 May 2020 (National Chief Robert Bertrand, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples).

327 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard).



the federal government that would meet regularly to develop and implement responses.”³²⁸

The Committee recognizes that the work of friendship centres and other organizations serving urban Indigenous Peoples has been crucial during this pandemic. These organizations have been providing PPE, temporary handwashing stations, meal and food delivery, and cultural supports, among other measures. Given that most Indigenous Peoples live in urban centres, these organizations need be engaged with as partners. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 33

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, immediately establish a mechanism to formally engage the National Association of Friendship Centres and other organizations serving Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve and in urban centres on matters related to the federal pandemic response; and that the government evaluate ways to make such a mechanism permanent once the COVID-19 pandemic is over in order to ensure that urban Indigenous Peoples are proactively involved in the development and delivery of federal programming going forward.

Women, Children and LGBTQ2S+ People

The Committee also learned that Indigenous women, children and LGBTQ2S+ people are particularly vulnerable during this pandemic. In the spring, witnesses reported a rise in domestic violence and human rights violations.³²⁹ According to Ms. Sandra DeLaronde, Co-Chair of the MMIWG2S+ - Manitoba Coalition, who referred to violence against Indigenous women and girls as its own pandemic, the “[COVID-19] pandemic is highlighting the desperate, impossible situation our women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA find themselves in.”³³⁰ Furthermore, according to Dr. Restoule, June 2020 data from Statistics Canada showed that stress and anxiety related to the pandemic were “particularly noticeable for [I]ndigenous women.”³³¹

328 INAN, [Evidence](#), 13 May 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Kretschmer, Executive Director, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council).

329 INAN, [Evidence](#), 13 May 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard-Buote); INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Lorraine Whitman); INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Melanie Omeniho); INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Hilda Anderson-Pyrz); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Dr. Stanley Vollant, Health Expert, Innu Nation COVID-19 Strategic Unit).

330 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Sandra DeLaronde).

331 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule).

Furthermore, in the spring, witnesses expressed concerns about the impact of the pandemic on the release of the national action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.³³² Ms. Whitman urged the Committee to pressure the government to uphold its commitment to release the plan, which was initially expected by June 2020.³³³ Minister Bennett told the Committee that the pandemic created new challenges for all partners involved, but that she hoped the national action plan would be tabled “as soon as possible.”³³⁴

Ms. Melanie Omeniho, President of the Women of the Métis Nations – Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, called on the government to fund grassroots organizations to ensure the safety of Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2S+ people.³³⁵ In the spring, Chief Belleau had also said that the government must ensure that First Nations children continue to access services under Jordan’s Principle.³³⁶ With respect to children and youth, Dr. Restoule explained that:

Children and youth are experiencing higher rates of loneliness, stress and anxiety as a result of public health measures, and although there's a lack of [I]ndigenous-specific data, past evidence suggests that negative impacts are exacerbated by family and community challenges, such as intergenerational trauma; difficulty meeting basic needs related to housing, clean water and food security; financial insecurity and poverty; violence, substance misuse and mental illness; and inequitable access to health, community and social supports. Informal reports have also indicated that the public health measures have also retriggered memories of colonial trauma and are negatively affecting the well-being of families and communities.³³⁷

The Committee recognizes that a gendered lens must be applied to the pandemic response. Indigenous women and girls, children and youth, and LGBTQ2S+ people are particularly at risk during this pandemic. The government must do all it can to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 34

That the Government of Canada take immediate measures to respond to the calls for justice of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous

332 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. C.T. (Manny) Jules); INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Lorraine Whitman); INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Sandra DeLaronde).

333 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Lorraine Whitman).

334 INAN, [Evidence](#), 19 June 2020 (The Honourable Carolyn Bennett).

335 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 May 2020 (Ms. Melanie Omeniho).

336 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Charlene Belleau).

337 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Dr. Brenda Restoule).



Women and Girls, which notably called on the government to ensure that the rights to health and wellness of Indigenous Peoples, and specifically Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people, are recognized and protected; and that the government release a national action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls before the end of the year.

Additionally, Ms. Bull and Regional Chief Poitras mentioned that access to childcare is a particular concern for working mothers.³³⁸ The Committee recognizes that these concerns must be addressed to allow Indigenous women to financially support their families and participate in the economy. The Committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation 35

That the Government of Canada, in consultation with organizations such as the Native Women's Association of Canada and Pauktuutit, assess the needs for childcare services in Indigenous communities and among Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve and in urban centres; and that the government implement measures to address these needs before the end of 2021.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY PROGRAMS AND FUNDING

In order to support Indigenous Peoples and Northerners' response to the pandemic, the federal government announced several emergency measures and programs since March 2020.³³⁹ The government's main emergency program has been the Indigenous Community Support Fund. However, Ministers Miller, Bennett and Vandal mentioned other initiatives as well, such as:

- \$117 million to support community-owned businesses (in addition to the \$306.8-million fund for small-to-medium Indigenous businesses);
- \$16 million to support the Indigenous tourism industry;
- \$130 million to support the territories, including air transportation services and the Nutrition North Canada program;

338 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras); INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

339 When he first appeared on [1 May 2020](#), the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services, said that the government had then allocated \$740 million to specifically support First Nations, Inuit and Métis and Northerners. According to [ISC's website](#), as of 30 November 2020, that amount was now \$4.2 billion.

- \$30 million to support modern treaty and self-governing nations; and
- \$34 million for the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund and \$15 million for the Northern Business Relief Fund, two initiatives of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.³⁴⁰

In the spring, the Committee heard that the amounts initially announced were insufficient. Dr. Stanley Vollant, health expert of the Innu Nation COVID-19 Strategic Unit, and Mr. Calla noted that on a per capita basis, Indigenous Peoples were receiving less than other Canadians.³⁴¹ Since then, the government has adjusted existing emergency programs and announced new ones. Nevertheless, the Committee heard from Dr. McDonald in the fall that, “[c]onsidering the existing health inequities that are inevitable, it seems that the funding we have received is often stated as not being proportionate to the needs.”³⁴² Ms. MacKay also said that “the funding opportunities made available during the pandemic did not adequately meet Mi'kmaq communities' needs,” and forced them to use their own revenues.³⁴³

Witnesses had other concerns about the federal emergency programs and funding. Mr. Cardinal stated that “[p]rograms must be adapted to better meet all the community needs.”³⁴⁴ Mr. Metatawabin agreed that support mechanisms need to be more flexible.³⁴⁵ For example, Mr. Blaney noted that backup generators are not covered by Indigenous Services Canada’s Emergency Management Assistance Program: “backup generators are something that needs to be looked at, for not only emergency operation centres, but also for emergency food storage and management.”³⁴⁶

Mr. Metatawabin described the terms and conditions of the emergency funding for Indigenous businesses as “inequitable... compared with other federal measures,” pointing for instance at lower stacking limits and “more onerous lending terms.”³⁴⁷ He also explained that delays during the negotiation of contribution agreements in the

340 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Marc Miller); INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Carolyn Bennett); INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 October 2020 (The Honourable Dan Vandal).

341 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Dr. Stanley Vollant); INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Harold Calla).

342 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

343 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

344 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal).

345 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

346 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney).

347 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).



spring meant that Aboriginal Financial Institutions “could not offer relief until mid-June. These funds simply came too late for some [F]irst [N]ations, Métis and Inuit businesses,” adding that “[t]he timing issues persist with the second wave,” and that the Indigenous economy lost businesses during these delays.³⁴⁸

Similarly, when she appeared again in the fall, Ms. Bull reminded the Committee that the initial eligibility criteria for the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy left many Indigenous businesses ineligible: “We appreciate that these gaps were remedied. However, we must not forget the additional burden the close to a month-long gap had on many indigenous businesses.”³⁴⁹ She added that many Indigenous businesses are very young: “we had a number of members who had not yet filed a tax return and couldn’t apply for a number of the wage subsidies. They were so young that they didn’t have revenue to be able to compare to as a gauge for the wage subsidy as well, and also for CEBA.”³⁵⁰ Likewise, Mr. Ejesiak told the Committee in the spring that many Inuit businesses were not eligible to receive benefits from programs that exist for other Canadians.³⁵¹ He recommended establishing a “northern CEBA program” to respond to the needs of these businesses.³⁵²

With respect to First Nations specifically, the Committee heard, both in the spring and in the fall, that Indigenous Services Canada had been using funding formulas based on the population living on reserves.³⁵³ According to Regional Chief Poitras, “[t]his is proof that Canada is only willing to recognize our nationhood within the confines of a reserve.”³⁵⁴ Mr. Johnson, whose nation is self-governing, added that the government’s approach to funding is rooted in systemic problems in the relationship between Canada and its treaty partners.³⁵⁵ Dr. Martin added that the funding formulas are based on data from the 2016 census, “which does not paint an accurate portrait of the number of people per community.”³⁵⁶

348 Ibid.

349 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

350 Ibid.

351 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Kirt Ejesiak).

352 Ibid.

353 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Dillon Johnson).

354 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

355 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Dillon Johnson).

356 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin).

Moreover, Mr. Metatawabin and Mr. Sheppard noted that the emergency funding is currently set to end on 31 March 2021.³⁵⁷ Mr. Metatawabin asked: “What are we going to do after that? We really have to come up with another strategy to ensure that, in this uncertain time, we're going to last longer.”³⁵⁸ Mr. Sheppard agreed: “we are gravely concerned that the community supports that people are now relying on will not be able to continue into the new fiscal year.”³⁵⁹ Dr. Martin also told the Committee that “[l]ooking ahead to the hopefully not-so-distant future, our communities are already expressing concern about whether there will be access to any form of transition assistance once people are no longer able to receive COVID supports.”³⁶⁰ The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation agreed that funding needs to extend beyond the end of the current fiscal year.³⁶¹

Witnesses also criticized the administrative burdens created by the funding process. In the spring, Ms. Meawasige said that communities had to develop and submit more than one proposal in order to get funding. In her view, the government should instead implement a “seamless, single-window kind of approach” to reduce the administrative burden.³⁶² In its brief, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation also called on the government to “[d]ecrease administrative and reporting burdens with respect to funding received at the community level.”³⁶³ Regional Chief Poitras expressed concerns about the application process for some of the funding, and the fact that some First Nations do not have the capacity to prepare proposals.³⁶⁴

Despite these concerns, witnesses were generally appreciative of the funding provided by the federal government. “There is no doubt that Canada's [I]ndigenous support programs, in addition to its broader COVID-19 economic response plans, have helped with preventive measures to slow down the devastating impact on our communities,”

357 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard).

358 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Shannin Metatawabin).

359 INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Christopher Sheppard).

360 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Dr. Debbie Martin).

361 Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, [*Submission of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on support for Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through a second wave of Covid-19*](#), 27 November 2020.

362 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 May 2020 (Ms. Amanda Meawasige).

363 Nishnawbe Aski Nation, [*Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), 12 June 2020, p. 18.

364 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).



said Mr. Goodon.³⁶⁵ Mr. Blaney was also thankful that the funding provided by the Indigenous Community Support Fund was non-prescriptive and could be used as needed.³⁶⁶

Ms. Bull also noted that there are now several emergency programs to support Indigenous businesses, which can be confusing:

[The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business] has repeatedly highlighted the need for a navigator function specific to [I]ndigenous business to assist with the understanding and uptake of the various programs. Indigenous businesses have found navigating the bureaucracy, which often does not consider their unique legal and place-based circumstances, a significant barrier to accessing the supports necessary to keep their businesses alive and maintain the well-being of their communities.³⁶⁷

The Committee recognizes the need for emergency programs to be flexible to respond to the unique needs of each community. The Committee also recognizes that smaller businesses may be overwhelmed and agrees that the government could take steps to assist them navigate the programs available to them. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 36

That the Government of Canada, recognizing the need for COVID-19 programs to be flexible to meet the needs of each community, refrain from applying a one-size-fits-all approach to its emergency supports; and that the government ensure that the terms and conditions of emergency funding programs remain flexible for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 37

That the Government of Canada utilize an Indigenous lens for all programming or policy initiatives in order to ensure that the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are considered.

Recommendation 38

That the Government of Canada develop materials to help Indigenous businesses navigate the various federal programs related to COVID-19; that these materials clearly

365 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. William Goodon).

366 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Erik Blaney).

367 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

explain the eligibility criteria for each of the programs; and that the government ensure that the information is made available in an alternate format for business owners who lack connectivity to the Internet.

Recommendation 39

That the Government of Canada temporarily appoint a Funding Liaison Officer who would support Indigenous businesses in navigating the application processes in order to release and make funding available to those businesses in a timely fashion.

POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

During this study, witnesses discussed the post-pandemic recovery period. Chief Ghislain Picard of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador indicated that the recovery “will be difficult for many [First Nations], and it will be at a different pace than for the Canadian population.”³⁶⁸ Mr. Metatawabin compared the post-pandemic recovery to a post-war effort.³⁶⁹

Many witnesses stated that they do not want things to go back to “normal” after the pandemic. The Nishnawbe Aski Nation wrote that “[w]e simply cannot afford to go back to the status quo.”³⁷⁰ Chief Steeve Mathias of the Long Point First Nation and National Chief Yakeleya agreed.³⁷¹ National Chief Yakeleya added: “The status quo is not enough. We would not want to go back to the normal way.”³⁷² According to Regional Chief Poitras, “normal didn’t do us justice. Normal meant injustices for our people; it meant underinvestment in our communities; it meant the exploitation of our lands without our consent.”³⁷³ She later added:

We have an opportunity to learn from our experiences with the pandemic to date, to be stronger in our response together as we move forward. First [N]ations need to be afforded equitable opportunities to make it through the next waves of the pandemic with minimal illness and loss of life. As Dr. Tam stated in her recently released report, no one is protected until everyone is protected. Into the future, [F]irst [N]ations need to be

368 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 May 2020 (Chief Ghislain Picard).

369 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 May 2020 (Ms. Shannin Metatawabin).

370 Nishnawbe Aski Nation, [Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Concerning the Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic](#), 12 June 2020, p. 6.

371 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Chief Steeve Mathias); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (National Chief Norman Yakeleya).

372 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (National Chief Norman Yakeleya).

373 INAN, [Evidence](#), 12 June 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).



provided opportunities to be part of the economic recovery and response. Let us not return to normal. Let us work together to provide a better way forward for [F]irst [N]ations and all Canadians.³⁷⁴

Other witnesses saw the post-pandemic recovery as an opportunity. They noted that there will be a continued need to invest in infrastructure, particularly housing, water and telecommunications.³⁷⁵ Mr. Cardinal explained that “[t]he Canadian economic recovery will generally rely a great deal on infrastructure. This is a golden opportunity to support [I]ndigenous communities.”³⁷⁶ Ms. Bull agreed: “A reasonable starting point to support [I]ndigenous economic recovery would include procurement and infrastructure set-asides for [I]ndigenous businesses and communities.”³⁷⁷ Mr. Cardinal stressed that there was now an opportunity for economic reconciliation which would empower Indigenous communities to reduce and eliminate socioeconomic gaps.³⁷⁸

In the spring, Mr. Calla made similar comments about infrastructure investments serving to restart the economy: “Over the last 20 years, I have observed that governments like to invest in infrastructure as a vehicle to support economic recovery. Indigenous communities could benefit from being included in these initiatives.”³⁷⁹ Alongside Mr. Jules, Mr. Calla had recommended the creation of an opt-in First Nations Infrastructure Institute to “support [First Nations] communities in the design, development, financing and maintenance of infrastructure.”³⁸⁰ For his part, Mr. Gladu had recommended establishing an Indigenous Infrastructure Fund with a “federal backstop similar to Alberta’s [I]ndigenous opportunities fund.”^{381, 382}

Witnesses also emphasized that recovery needs to be a concerted and coordinated effort. Ms. Bull said that Indigenous economic recovery must be Indigenous-led.³⁸³ Ms.

374 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Regional Chief Marlene Poitras).

375 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull); INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal); INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Mr. Jason Alsop); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Mr. Nick Vodden); INAN, [Evidence](#), 1 December 2020 (Kirsten Agrell).

376 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal).

377 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

378 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Mr. Eric Cardinal).

379 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Harold Calla).

380 Ibid.

381 INAN, [Evidence](#), 5 June 2020 (Mr. Jean Paul Gladu).

382 The [Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation](#) (AIOC) is an arms-length provincial Crown corporation established in 2019. The AIOC is a \$1-billion fund mandated with helping “to reduce the cost of capital for Indigenous groups and make it easier to raise capital to invest in natural resource projects.”

383 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 November 2020 (Ms. Tabatha Bull).

MacKay stated that “[e]conomic recovery plans need to include Mi’kmaq community governments, businesses and entrepreneurs.”³⁸⁴ According to Dr. McDonald, moving beyond COVID-19, actions must remain rooted in tripartite decision-making (Indigenous, federal, provincial) and in recognizing Indigenous governance.³⁸⁵

For his part, Mr. Chartrand stressed that the commitments made by the government during the last federal election could help ensure an equitable and sustainable recovery.³⁸⁶ Mr. Goodon agreed that accelerating the fulfilment of these promises “may also help to address long-standing needs and provide economic stimulus in our communities.”³⁸⁷ Mr. Metatawabin also recommended ensuring that momentum is not lost with respect to the Indigenous Growth Fund announced in Budget 2019.³⁸⁸ According to Mr. Chartrand:

Acting on these commitments will serve to stimulate economic activity and resolve long-standing inequities. These include commitments by Canada to close the infrastructure gap in Métis communities by 2030 through investments in critical health infrastructure such as the Métis nation health hubs; co-develop distinctions-based [I]ndigenous health legislation—with which we’re in dialogue with Canada right now—to ensure [I]ndigenous control over the development and delivery of services; attain a 5% [I]ndigenous procurement target in federal spending and establish a major projects benefit framework to ensure Métis communities benefit from major projects. I should add that passing federal legislation to implement [the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*] will greatly assist in helping shape this major project framework.³⁸⁹

With respect to Indigenous health legislation, the First Nations Health Authority wrote that creating a legislative base “could remove barriers of access to data and provide equal regulatory footing for our professionals working in communities.”³⁹⁰

The Committee recognizes that the post-pandemic recovery will offer an opportunity to address long-standing inequities in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities mentioned throughout this report. The Committee agrees with witnesses that investing

384 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Ms. Janna MacKay).

385 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 November 2020 (Dr. Shannon McDonald).

386 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand).

387 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 November 2020 (Mr. William Goodon).

388 Ibid.

389 INAN, [Evidence](#), 3 November 2020 (Mr. David Chartrand).

390 First Nations Health Authority, [Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#), 26 November 2020.



in infrastructure can help address these inequities while stimulating economic recovery. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 40

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, accelerate essential infrastructure projects in Indigenous communities during the post-pandemic recovery period.

Recommendation 41

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations partners, establish an opt-in First Nations Infrastructure Institute to support communities in the design, development, financing and maintenance of infrastructure, and to advance and establish further opportunities for care and control transfer of infrastructure management and operations.

Recommendation 42

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, establish an Indigenous Infrastructure Fund with a federal backstop to reduce the cost of capital and make it easier for Indigenous communities to raise capital to invest in infrastructure projects.

CONCLUSION

Having dedicated most of its time to this study over the last months, the Committee is humbled by the testimony shared by witnesses. People have been making enormous sacrifices since the start of this pandemic. The Committee strongly believes that the recommendations included in this report, which have been informed by witness testimony, must be implemented to help Indigenous Peoples and Northerners get the support they need in the coming months as well as after the pandemic. Much of the testimony received during this study highlighted long-standing issues that need to be addressed immediately.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a tragedy. However, it also gives Canada an opportunity to do better and to ensure that no one is left behind once this crisis is over. First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples have waited too long for health and socioeconomic inequities to be addressed. This situation has left them vulnerable to COVID-19. It is more urgent now than ever for the federal government and Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners to close health and socioeconomic gaps.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Serge Beaudoin, Assistant Deputy Minister Northern Affairs Organization Annie Boudreau, Acting Senior Assistant Deputy Minister Policy and Strategic Direction Sector Daniel Quan-Watson, Deputy Minister Martin Reiher, Assistant Deputy Minister Resolution and Partnerships Joe Wild, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister Treaties and Aboriginal Government	2020/10/27	3
Department of Indigenous Services Kelley Blanchette, Assistant Deputy Minister Lands and Economic Development Christiane Fox, Deputy Minister Dianne Galus, Director General Sector Operations Branch, Regional Operations Sector Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister Mary-Luisa Kapelus, Assistant Deputy Minister Education, Social Development Programs and Partnerships Sector Philippe Thompson, Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer of Public Health First Nations and Inuit Health Branch	2020/10/27	3

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
House of Commons Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Hon. Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services Hon. Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs	2020/10/27	3
Assembly of First Nations Alberta Association Marlene Poitras, Regional Chief	2020/11/03	4
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Natan Obed, President	2020/11/03	4
Métis National Council David Chartrand, Vice-President and National Spokeperson	2020/11/03	4
As an individual Éric Cardinal	2020/11/17	5
Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Tabatha Bull, President and Chief Executive Officer	2020/11/17	5
Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers Raymond Wanuch, Executive Director	2020/11/17	5
First Peoples Wellness Circle Brenda M. Restoule, Chief Executive Officer	2020/11/17	5
National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association Shannin Metatawabin, Chief Executive Officer	2020/11/17	5
Thunderbird Partnership Foundation Carol Hopkins, Executive Director	2020/11/17	5
As an individual Michelle Driedger	2020/11/24	7
Council of the Haida Nation Jason Alsop, President	2020/11/24	7
Dakota Oyate Lodge Jennifer Bone, Chief Christopher Hersak, Director	2020/11/24	7

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
First Nations Health Authority Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer	2020/11/24	7
Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation Ronald Mitsuing	2020/11/24	7
Tla'amin Nation Erik Blaney, Executive Council Member Dillon Johnson, Executive Council Member	2020/11/24	7
As an individual Debbie Martin	2020/11/26	8
Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq Angeline Gillis, Associate Executive Director Janna MacKay, Senior Director Health and Social Services Amber MacLean-Hawes, Emergency Management Manager	2020/11/26	8
Dene Nation Norman Yakeleya, National Chief	2020/11/26	8
Innu Nation Bryan Mark, Conseil des Innus d'Unamen Shipu Jean-Claude Therrien Pinette, Chief of Staff Innu Takuaikan Uashat Mak Mani-utenam	2020/11/26	8
Manitoba Métis Federation William Goodon, Minister	2020/11/26	8
Metis Settlements General Council Herbert Wayne Lehr, President	2020/11/26	8
Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador Mickel Robertson, Executive Director Economic Development Commission Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director Health and Social Services Commission	2020/12/01	9
Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada Cornelia Wieman, President	2020/12/01	9

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793 Kirsten Agrell, Legal Counsellor	2020/12/01	9
Inuvialuit Regional Corporation Duane Ningaqsiq Smith, Chair and Chief Executive Officer	2020/12/01	9
National Association of Friendship Centres Jocelyn Formsma, Executive Director Christopher Sheppard, President	2020/12/01	9
Perimeter Aviation LP Nick Vodden, President and Chief Executive Officer	2020/12/01	9

APPENDIX B

LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

43rd Parliament – 1st Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Serge Beaudoin, Assistant Deputy Minister Northern Affairs Organization Jeff Moore, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister Policy and Strategic Direction Sector Ross Pattee, Assistant Deputy Minister Implementation Sector Daniel Quan-Watson, Deputy Minister	2020/05/01	6
Department of Indigenous Services Christopher Duschenes, Director General Economic Policy Development, Lands and Economic Development Valerie Gideon, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister First Nations and Inuit Health Branch Mary-Luisa Kapelus, Assistant Deputy Minister Education, Social Development Programs and Partnerships Sector Jean-François Tremblay, Deputy Minister Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer and Director General Office of Population and Public Health	2020/05/01	6
House of Commons Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Hon. Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services Hon. Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs	2020/05/01	6

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Assembly of First Nations Perry Bellegarde, National Chief	2020/05/08	7
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Natan Obed, President	2020/05/08	7
Métis National Council David Chartrand, Vice-President and National Spokesperson	2020/05/08	7
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples Robert Bertrand, National Chief	2020/05/13	8
National Association of Friendship Centres Jocelyn Formsma, Executive Director Christopher Sheppard-Buote, President	2020/05/13	8
Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council Larry Frost, President Lindsay Swooping Hawk Kretschmer, Executive Director	2020/05/13	8
Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre Edith Cloutier, Executive Director	2020/05/13	8
MMIWG2S+ - Manitoba Coalition Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, Co-Chair Sandra DeLaronde, Co-Chair	2020/05/15	9
Native Women's Association of Canada Lorraine Whitman, President	2020/05/15	9
Women of the Métis Nation - Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak Melanie Omeniho, President	2020/05/15	9
Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador Ghislain Picard, Regional Chief	2020/05/22	10
First Nations Health Authority Richard Jock, Interim Chief Executive Officer Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer	2020/05/22	10
First Nations Health Council Charlene Belleau, Chair	2020/05/22	10

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission Marjolaine Sioui, Director General	2020/05/22	10
Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc. Tara Campbell, Executive Director	2020/05/22	10
First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba Amanda Meawasige, Director of Intergovernmental Relations	2020/05/26	11
Innu Nation COVID-19 Strategic Unit Mike McKenzie, Chief Jean-Claude Therrien Pinette, Assistant to the Chief Stanley Vollant, Health Expert	2020/05/26	11
Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Tabatha Bull, President and Chief Executive Officer	2020/05/29	12
National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association Shannin Metatawabin, Chief Executive Officer	2020/05/29	12
Northern Air Transport Association Sébastien Michel, Member Board of Directors	2020/05/29	12
Cameco Corporation Dale Austin, Manager Federal and Provincial Government Relations	2020/06/02	13
Cameco Corporation Jonathan Huntington, Vice-President Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations	2020/06/02	13
First Nations Finance Authority Steve Berna, Chief Operating Officer Ernie Daniels, President and Chief Executive Officer	2020/06/02	13
Metis Settlements General Council Herbert Wayne Lehr, President	2020/06/02	13
As an individual Jean Paul Gladu	2020/06/05	14

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
First Nations Financial Management Board Harold Calla, Executive Chair	2020/06/05	14
First Nations Tax Commission C.T. (Manny) Jules, Chief Commissioner	2020/06/05	14
Inuit Business Council Kirt Ejesiak, Representative	2020/06/05	14
As an individual Éric Cardinal Ellen Gabriel	2020/06/09	15
Kativik Ilisarniliriniq Robert Watt, President	2020/06/09	15
Sheridan College Elijah M. Williams, Director, Indigenous Engagement Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support	2020/06/09	15
Assembly of First Nations Alberta Association Marlene Poitras, Regional Chief	2020/06/12	16
Creative Industries Coalition Tom Jackson, Performer	2020/06/12	16
Long Point First Nation Steeve Mathias, Chief	2020/06/12	16
Nishnawbe Aski Nation Alvin Fiddler, Grand Chief	2020/06/12	16
Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Daniel Quan-Watson, Deputy Minister François Weldon, Director General	2020/06/19	18

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Indigenous Services Valerie Gideon, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister First Nations and Inuit Health Branch Sony Perron, Associate Deputy Minister Philippe Thompson, Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer and Director General Office of Population and Public Health	2020/06/19	18
Department of Public Works and Government Services Arianne Reza, Assistant Deputy Minister Procurement Michael Vandergrift, Associate Deputy Minister	2020/06/19	18
House of Commons Hon. Anita Anand, Minister of Public Services and Procurement Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Hon. Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services	2020/06/19	18

APPENDIX C

LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

43rd Parliament – First Session

Canadian North

Kativik Ilisarniliriniq

National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association

Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Yukon Chamber of Mines

43rd Parliament – Second Session

Dene Nation

First Nations Health Authority

Indigenous Primary Health Care Council

International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793

Inuvialuit Regional Corporation

James Smith Cree Nation

Northern Air Transport Association

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Bratina
Chair

Supplementary Report of the New Democratic Party (NDP)

The global coronavirus pandemic has had an enormous effect on all persons, all regions, all countries, and all nations. In Canada, it has stripped bare all our social safety nets and exposed the weaknesses in every system.

We are being told to wash our hands frequently, practice social distancing, and stay at home as much as possible. Yet, how can a person be expected to wash their hands frequently if there is no clean water available? How can a person be expected to practice social distancing if their home is overcrowded because of a lack of affordable housing? How can a person be expected to stay at home if they are homeless?

COVID-19 has highlighted these critical issues in Indigenous communities across Canada. While the title of this report expresses the hope of the Committee to see meaningful change happen for Indigenous peoples across our country, it is the view of the New Democratic Party that the current Liberal Government will likely not undertake all 42 recommendations contained in this report.

Prime Minister Trudeau has repeatedly said that the most important relationship of his government is with First Nations, but he continually misses the point. The most important aspect of Canada's relationship with First Nations must be in demonstrating the will to change and ensuring the government takes the hard and difficult decisions that reconciliation requires.

Decades of federal underfunding for Indigenous communities has led to appalling conditions in housing, lack of access to clean water, and deteriorating infrastructure and social programs. As these recommendations indicate, it will require a huge investment of resources and funding to correct these complex issues. Most of all, it will take political will.

While the New Democratic Party fully agrees with all recommendations in this report, we strongly urge the Government to forego the usual 120 days to respond and instead get to work on solving these issues now.

If the Liberals truly agree that Canada's relationship with First Nations is the most important, they will heed our call.

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: MOVING FROM CRISIS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

In February 2020, Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois, stated that Indigenous Peoples “are nations, much like Quebecers make up a nation and Canadians make up a nation.”¹ For decades, our party has consistently reiterated its willingness to be an ally to Indigenous Peoples. We fully supported the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* from the beginning, long before the Canadian government chose to do so, and we continue to support it. These are the broad principles guiding the Bloc Québécois’s actions on Indigenous affairs.

For this report, we decided to concentrate on the issue of housing, which the Viens Commission described as “the epicentre of many of the issues faced by the First Nations and Inuit.”² We believe that the recent pandemic has shown the need to focus our efforts on this issue, because the poor housing conditions Indigenous Peoples must endure only heighten their vulnerability to infectious diseases and contribute to outbreaks, as we are currently seeing. The pandemic has demonstrated how hard it is to correctly implement public health measures and self-isolation and physical distancing guidelines. What is more, since the pandemic seems to be coming to an end, we believe that it is all the more important to focus on this issue, given the long-term benefits that significant investments and robust government intervention could have for these communities.

CONSULTATIONS AND ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Many of the witnesses who testified during the Committee’s study stressed the need to do more about housing. As the Committee report notes, Mickel Robertson, Executive Director of the Economic Development Commission at the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL), outlined the housing needs of Quebec’s Indigenous Peoples.³ Mr. Robertson also said that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation would be reducing the budget for its social housing program by 8% starting this year. He added, “This reduction is difficult to justify in the context of a pandemic. The housing crisis places First Nations in a situation of vulnerability exacerbated by the pandemic.” The Bloc Québécois believes in exploring all avenues to expand First Nations housing capacity.

A document entitled *Assessment and Outlook: First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic in First Nations in Quebec – March 13 to July 31, 2020*, prepared by the Assembly of First

¹ House of Commons, *House of Commons Debates*, 43rd Parliament, 1st Session, Vol. 149, No. 018, Tuesday, February 18, 2020, p. 1156.

² QUEBEC, Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress, 2019, p. 230.

³ House of Commons, Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, *Evidence*, 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session, INAN, Meeting No. 09, Tuesday, December 1st, 2020, p. 9.

Nations Quebec-Labrador, provides many relevant observations and recommendations that would help the government improve its response to the challenges the current pandemic presents for Indigenous Peoples. In this supplementary report, we are reprising a few of the recommendations that do not already appear in the above report. In our view, the fact that the housing problems in First Nations communities are mentioned so many times in this document underscores the urgency of this issue. The more the government cuts corners in this area, the more harm will be done to the public interest and First Nations' living conditions. Change is imperative. The AFNQL document also highlights frustrations with the delivery of support programs. The lengthy delays between the announcement of a program and its implementation have created considerable uncertainty for Indigenous businesses and for organizations that provide social services to these communities. Despite the good intentions of Indigenous Services Canada, the document notes that clear answers are hard to come by and various aspects of the new programs remain ill-defined. Lastly, the document rightly points out that "jurisdictional issues should not be factors that limit the response to needs."

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that the government should consider the following recommendations, in addition to those included in the report, because we believe that implementing them will substantially improve the socio-economic living conditions of First Nations and Inuit people in Quebec and Labrador and help resolve many of the systemic issues that these nations face.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada invest \$4.3 billion over five years in renovating, decontaminating and building the approximately 11,000 housing units that First Nations and Inuit people in Quebec need in order to permanently address the widening housing gap.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada draw on the strategy used by the Government of Quebec in Bill 66 to expedite the construction of the infrastructure and housing needed to improve health outcomes in Indigenous communities, such as elders' homes.

Recommendation

That the Government of Canada reconsider its decision to reduce funding to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's On-Reserve Non-Profit Housing Program by 8% for 2021.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada shorten the time between the announcement and implementation of pandemic response programs in order to improve predictability for Indigenous businesses, individuals and decision-makers.

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada give greater consideration to the unique characteristics of First Nations when implementing economic support programs for individuals and businesses. This may include considering appointing liaison officers chosen for their knowledge of Indigenous Peoples' realities to liaise between Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), Indigenous communities and other federal government central agencies, such as the Canada Revenue Agency and Employment and Social Development Canada, and any other agency that delivers programs with a significant impact on Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 5

That the federal government, while respecting First Nations' right to self-determination, local, regional and national First Nations and Inuit organizations, and the provinces' autonomy and jurisdiction, take action to develop a common statement on the roles and responsibilities of each agency that delivers services to Indigenous communities and individuals in the areas of crisis management, implementation of measures, and communication of information to ensure that the organizations' roles and responsibilities are complementary. This statement should be developed collaboratively and without jurisdictional disputes.

Recommendation 6

That ISC and other federal departments and agencies be required to collaborate with First Nations to determine which federal teams will be assigned to crisis management based on the nature of the crisis. This would avoid situations where the services offered to First Nations fail to meet their needs or interfere with the achievement of their objectives.

