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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

John Williamson, Chair

**NOVEMBER 2023
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees 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.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

has the honour to present its

THIRTY-FOURTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee has studied the Report 8, Emergency Management in First Nations Communities – Indigenous Services Canada, of the 2022 Reports 5 to 8 of the Auditor General of Canada and has agreed to report the following:



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

KEY FINDINGS OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

- Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) did not meet First Nations' needs in preparing for and mitigating emergencies. The department had not addressed problems with preparedness and mitigation identified in an audit by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) in 2013.
- ISC did not ensure response services meet the needs of First Nations communities.
- ISC did not use information about the risks faced by First Nations and the capacity of First Nations to respond to emergencies.
- ISC did not have an updated emergency management plan as required under the *Emergency Management Act*.¹

1 Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG), Emergency management in First Nations communities, Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, [At a Glance](#), Our findings.



SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE’S RECOMMENDATIONS AND TIMELINES

Table 1—Summary of the Committee’s Recommendations and Timelines

Recommendation	Recommended Measure	Timeline
Recommendation 1	Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) must provide the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made by the department, in collaboration with the First Nations, in identifying the risks related to emergencies and the costs of preventing and potentially responding to them. A final report should also be presented, explaining the new approach for allocating project funding based on this identification of needs and risks. The final report should also confirm that the new approach and funding measures have been implemented.	15 January 2024 30 April 2024
Recommendation 2	ISC must provide the Committee with reports showing the number of structural mitigation projects funded during the preceding fiscal year in First Nations communities, and for which amount, as well as the structural mitigation projects that are still not funded.	30 April 2024 30 April 2025 30 April 2026 30 April 2027 30 April 2028
Recommendation 3	ISC must provide the Committee with a report indicating whether the departmental and regional emergency management plans have all been updated.	31 January 2024
Recommendation 4	ISC must provide the Committee with a report on the changes to the number of emergency management coordinators and the reasons for these changes.	30 April 2024

Recommendation	Recommended Measure	Timeline
Recommendation 5	ISC must provide the Committee with reports on multilateral emergency management service agreements with First Nations and the provinces and territories, on wildfire agreements, and on the development of evacuation service standards. Furthermore, the Committee strongly encourages ISC to develop service standards by April 2025, rather than the timeline set out in its action plan (April 2027).	30 April 2024 30 April 2025 30 April 2026 30 April 2027
Recommendation 6	ISC must provide the Committee with a report presenting the new indicators used by the Emergency Management Assistance Program to measure the progress made against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.	31 March 2024
Recommendation 7	ISC must provide the Committee with a report explaining how the department: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) defines what is meant by comparable services for First Nations; 2) monitors the services provided to First Nations to ensure that they are comparable to services provided to non-Indigenous communities, are culturally appropriate, and address the needs of marginalized groups; and 3) identifies and addresses shortcomings by monitoring emergency management service agreements and conducts lessons-learned exercises. 	15 January 2024



INTRODUCTION

Background

On 15 November 2022, the reports of the Auditor General of Canada were tabled in the House of Commons and referred to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts (the Committee) for study, one of which was entitled “Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada.”² This report summarizes the OAG report and presents the Committee’s recommendations addressed to ISC.

Audit Parameters

The key parameters of the OAG performance audit are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2—Audit Parameters

Organization audited	Indigenous Services Canada (ISC or the department).
Audit objective	To determine whether ISC provided the support First Nations communities needed to manage emergencies. The OAG examined the department’s activities related to floods, wildfires, landslides and severe weather events because these are the most prevalent types of emergencies affecting First Nations communities. The audit looked at First Nations communities in the provinces and not in the territories because almost all on-reserve First Nations communities are located in the provinces.
Audit period	The audit conclusion covers the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 August 2021.

Source: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, [Emergency management in First Nations communities—Indigenous Services Canada](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, About the Audit and para. 8.9.

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities regarding emergency management are presented in Table 3.

² House of Commons, [Journals](#), 15 November 2022.

Table 3—Roles and Responsibilities

First Nations communities	First Nations communities are responsible for using local resources to prepare for and respond to emergencies. If the situation is beyond the community’s capacity to respond, it can ask for help from the federal government, provincial governments, and non-governmental organizations, such as the Canadian Red Cross.
Indigenous Services Canada	<p>The department is responsible for ensuring that First Nations communities receive emergency management services, including emergency planning, flooding prevention (such as sandbagging), and wildfire suppression. During an emergency, the department is also responsible for providing advice and support as requested by the affected First Nation and province.</p> <p>It does not provide direct emergency response services to First Nations communities; instead, it negotiates emergency management service agreements with provinces or other service providers, such as the Canadian Red Cross, to provide emergency services in First Nations communities.</p> <p>From 2018–2019 to 2021–2022, ISC spent about \$828 million on emergency management supports for First Nations communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About \$754 million was provided through the Emergency Management Assistance Program, which reimburses First Nations, provinces, and other service providers for the costs of responding to emergencies in First Nations communities. • About \$74 million was provided through the First Nation Infrastructure Fund, which funds infrastructure projects in First Nations communities, including mitigation projects, such as building culverts and dikes, to reduce the impact of emergencies.

Source: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, [Emergency management in First Nations communities—Indigenous Services Canada](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, paras. 8.4–8.7.

Meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

On 25 November 2022, the Committee held a meeting on the OAG report with the following in attendance:

- OAG—Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada; Glenn Wheeler, Principal; and Doreen Deveen, Director
- ISC—Gina Wilson, Deputy Minister; Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister; Joanne Wilkinson, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional



Operations Sector; and Kenza El Bied, Director General, Sector Operations Branch, Regional Operations Sector³

While the Committee does not typically invite Cabinet ministers to appear, given the Committee’s concerns about the gravity of the issue and of the OAG’s findings, exceptionally, on 20 March 2023, the Committee held a second meeting on this audit that included an appearance by the Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., Minister of Indigenous Services, and the following departmental officials:

- ISC—Gina Wilson, Deputy Minister; Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister; Joanne Wilkinson, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Operations Sector; Kenza El Bied, Director General, Sector Operations Branch, Regional Operations Sector; and Rory O’Connor, Director General, Regional Infrastructure Delivery Branch, Regional Operations Sector.⁴

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Preparing For and Mitigating Emergencies

According to the OAG, ISC “did not meet First Nations’ needs in preparing for and mitigating emergencies.”⁵

1. Resource Allocation

The OAG found that “its total spending on response and recovery activities in that period (\$646 million) was 3.5 times its spending on preparedness and mitigation activities (\$182 million),”⁶ although the latter figure did increase between 2018–2019 and 2021–2022.

According to Public Safety Canada’s 2019 Emergency Management Strategy for Canada, for every \$1 invested in preparedness and mitigation, \$6 can be saved in emergency

3 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#).

4 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 20 March 2023, [Meeting No. 53](#).

5 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.16.

6 *Ibid.*, para. 8.27.

response and recovery costs. ISC “recognizes that greater investments in preparedness and mitigation initiatives reduce the impact of emergencies for First Nations communities.”⁷

On this point, Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister, ISC, provided the following explanation:

The current program has always been structured to respond to emergencies. So we have resources for that. We also have the capacity to apply for funding, on an annual basis, to respond to claims for expenses that have been incurred to deal with emergencies and put strategies in place.

The responsibility for emergency management lies primarily with the provinces and territories. So we absolutely have to work with them and involve First Nations partners. Our response depends on the willingness and ability of the provinces and territories to make the transition to preventive measures.⁸

The department also “had not addressed problems with preparedness and mitigation ... identified almost a decade ago, when [this matter was audited] in 2013. For example, the department did not conduct a risk assessment to identify the First Nations communities most vulnerable to emergencies.”⁹

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada should work with First Nations to implement a risk-based approach to inform program planning and decisions on where to invest in preparedness and mitigation activities to maximize support to communities at highest risk of being affected by emergencies.¹⁰

Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada, explained this recommendation:

We talk about identifying the communities most at risk—some that historically may have experienced natural disasters more often. You also need to understand the magnitude, so every community needs to be included and considered. Until you have

7 Ibid., para. 8.26.

8 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#), 1325.

9 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.16.

10 Ibid., para. 8.32.



the lay of the land to know how much funding might be needed and how much capacity might be needed, you won't know how much you need to invest in that preparedness.¹¹

Gina Wilson, Deputy Minister, ISC, explained how the recommendation in the 2013 report was implemented:

To my understanding, we felt that we in fact had incorporated a risk-based approach through our priority-ranking framework on infrastructure, which is based on risk, and also through our risk-based formula through the EMAP funding.

In talking to the Auditor General when we received the draft report, we came to understand that her understanding of a risk-based approach was not satisfactory. What we plan to do is to improve that risk-based approach. You have that in the recommendation and the timelines.¹²

According to its action plan, the department is planning to take the following action:

- analyze the current risk-based approach and determine gaps in the existing approach—by June 2023;
- develop a new risk-based approach that better informs the allocation of mitigation and preparedness funding in order to maximize support for communities at the highest risk of being impacted by emergency events (i.e. consider public risk management approach)—by February 2024;
- implement a new risk-based approach—beginning in April 2024; and
- gather post-implementation feedback on an ongoing basis from regional offices and First Nation communities to ensure effectiveness of updated approach and adjust as required—ongoing from April 2024.¹³

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1—On the risk-based allocation of resources

That, by 15 January 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made by the

11 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#), 1340.

12 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 20 March 2023, [Meeting No. 53](#), 1125.

13 Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 1.

department, in collaboration with the First Nations, in identifying the risks related to emergencies and the costs of preventing and potentially responding to them. A final report should also be presented by 30 April 2024 explaining the new approach for allocating project funding based on this identification of needs and risks. The final report should also confirm that the new approach and funding measures have been implemented.

2. The Needs of First Nations in Structural Mitigation

The OAG found that “funding for structural mitigation projects identified by First Nations did not meet First Nations’ needs. The department determined that there were 112 projects eligible for funding, but they were still unfunded. The department told us that it had insufficient funding to cover all eligible structural mitigation projects.”¹⁴

For example, as of “April 2022, 39% of structural mitigation projects were eligible but waiting for funding.”¹⁵ According to the OAG, “First Nations communities are likely to continue to experience emergencies that could be prevented or mitigated by building the infrastructure.”¹⁶

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada should work with First Nations communities to address the backlogs of eligible but unfunded structural mitigation projects and of unreviewed structural mitigation projects to effectively allocate resources to reduce the impact of emergencies on First Nations communities.¹⁷

Regarding the funding available for prevention, Joanne Wilkinson, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, ISC, added:

The funding that we have available specifically for structural mitigation is \$12 million a year. We spend 100% of that funding. As Associate Deputy Minister Gideon mentioned, the cost that we have estimated currently for the 94 unfunded structural mitigation project proposals is \$358 million.¹⁸

14 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.17.

15 Ibid., Exhibit 8.3.

16 Ibid., para. 8.17.

17 Ibid., para. 8.36.

18 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#), 1420.



During her appearance, Minister Hajdu told the Committee that “[we’re] actively finding solutions to address unfunded structural mitigation reports. Since our last appearance, we’ve reduced these reports from 122 to 58.”¹⁹ She added:

[W]e don’t have one source of money for infrastructure investments in first nations. It doesn’t all come through Indigenous Services Canada. There is, obviously, money in Indigenous Services Canada, but there are a number of other departments, including Infrastructure, that Indigenous Services works collaboratively with to close that gap.²⁰

Additionally, Rory O’Connor, Director General, ISC, stated the following:

The major projects in particular are complex. They are often multi-year projects. Sometimes there are delays in projects, for example, related to COVID, which puts back timelines due to labour and materials. As such, sometimes we need to reprofile funds into future years in order to be able to complete those projects as originally planned.²¹

In its detailed action plan, ISC outlines the short- and long-term measures it plans to take to address the backlogs:

- Identify implementation timelines based on an understanding of the communities at highest risk and availability of funding for the remaining eligible unfunded priority projects:
 - In the short term for fiscal year 2023–2024 identify what projects could be implemented using available resources—by May 2023;
 - In the medium and long term, use Other Community Infrastructure (OCI) funding as available until 2027–2028, and pursue new infrastructure funds, to address structural mitigation projects remaining eligible and unfunded—ongoing to March 2028.
- ISC will work with partners to review unreviewed structural mitigation projects—by April 2024.²²

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

19 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 20 March 2023, [Meeting No. 53](#), 1100.

20 *Ibid.*, 1125.

21 *Ibid.*

22 ISC, [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 1–2.

Recommendation 2—On the backlog of structural mitigation projects

That, by 30 April of each year from 2024 to 2028, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report showing the number of structural mitigation projects funded during the preceding fiscal year in First Nations communities, and for which amount, as well as the structural mitigation projects that are still not funded.

3. Departmental Emergency Management Plans

The OAG found that ISC “did not have an updated emergency management plan as required under the *Emergency Management Act*. Public Safety Canada’s guidance recommends that departments update their emergency management plans every 2 years or following important changes to mandates or roles and responsibilities. The department’s current emergency management plan, finalized in June 2017, had not been updated to reflect the department’s current mandate and approach to working with First Nations.”²³

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada should, on the basis of an assessment of risks, regularly update outdated departmental and regional emergency management plans and take immediate action to develop regional emergency management plans for the 3 regions that do not have them. These plans should be used to make informed decisions and take concrete actions to assist First Nations communities with managing the risks related to emergencies²⁴.

In response to this recommendation, the department plans to update its emergency management plans, including input from First Nations, the provinces and territories and other partners, by December 2023, and review and approve them by January 2024.²⁵

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

23 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.37.

24 Ibid., para. 8.39.

25 ISC, [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 2.



Recommendation 3—On departmental and regional emergency management plans

That, by 31 January 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report indicating whether the departmental and regional emergency management plans have all been updated.

4. Needs of First Nations' Emergency Management Coordinators

Emergency management coordinators are staff “who develop and maintain emergency management plans, manage and coordinate emergency management training, provide support in response and recovery after an incident, and maintain relationships with the community, tribal councils, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations.”²⁶

The OAG found that “capacity needs of First Nations communities were not identified. For example, although the department provided funding to First Nations for about 190 full-time or part-time emergency management coordinators, it did not know how many more were needed for First Nations to have the capacity to manage emergencies.”²⁷

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada, in collaboration with First Nations, should determine how many emergency management coordinator positions are required and allocate funding for these positions on the basis of risk and need to ensure that First Nations have sustained capacity to manage emergencies.²⁸

Valerie Gideon provided the following explanation:

We have a budget allocation to increase the capacity of communities in this regard, but it is relatively modest. However, that funding has allowed us to fund emergency management coordinators in first nations communities and agencies across the country. There are currently 196, but we hope there will be more.²⁹

26 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, Definitions.

27 Ibid., para. 8.18.

28 Ibid., para. 8.42.

29 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#), 1330.

According to its action plan:

- ISC to analyze information received in previous engagements and complete further planned engagements with current EMCs and First Nations to identify program gaps. ISC will also identify areas that lack EMC positions and their relative risk in comparison to other communities. This exercise will prioritize areas for EMC allocation—by April 2024;
- ISC will utilize risk-based data gathered through the development of a new risk based approach to inform the distribution of community-based EMCs—by April 2024.³⁰

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 4—On the number of emergency coordinators required

That, by 30 April 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report on the changes to the number of emergency management coordinators and the reasons for these changes.

B. Emergency Response

According to the OAG, “ISC did not ensure response services met the needs of First Nations communities.”³¹

1. Emergency Management Service Agreements

The OAG found that ISC “did not have service agreements across all jurisdictions with provinces or other service providers to provide emergency services in First Nations communities,” which increased “the risk that some First Nations communities will not receive emergency services when they are most needed.”³²

According to the OAG, the department changed its approach, which “was shifting from bilateral emergency management service agreements between the department and

30 ISC, [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 2.

31 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.43.

32 *Ibid.*, para. 8.52.



provinces to multilateral agreements that included First Nations.”³³ However, while no “multilateral emergency service agreements had been established, the department signed 2 arrangements in British Columbia between First Nations, the province, and the department. While these arrangements outlined shared goals and priorities for collaboration, they did not contain provisions for emergency services, which should be in multilateral emergency management service agreements.”³⁴

Regarding the agreements, Gina Wilson explained the following:

Regardless of an agreement being put in place—bilateral, multilateral or first nation—all first nation communities have been receiving and will continue to receive the help they need to protect their people and infrastructure during an emergency. Provinces and territories continue to protect all citizens in their areas.

I wanted to make sure that was very clear. Not having an agreement in place does not mean that the services are not there, particularly for response.³⁵

Regarding negotiations, Minister Hajdu stated the following:

As you know, when you’re working on a multilateral agreement, you don’t actually control the timeline completely. Of course, we would need the provinces and territories to work collaboratively with us. Those trilateral conversations with first nations people, provinces, territories and the federal government happen in a collaborative way.

We have a memorandum of understanding on a trilateral approach with British Columbia, and we’re thrilled. In fact, it worked very well with the Province of B.C. There was some great work happening with Alberta, as well. Manitoba is in progress. There are other provinces and territories that are not at the same stage.³⁶

The minister also committed to providing further details on the status of negotiating these agreements. This response is available in Appendix A.

33 Ibid., para. 8.54.

34 Ibid., para. 8.56.

35 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#), 1425.

36 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 20 March 2023, [Meeting No. 53](#), 1140.

2. Evacuation Needs

The OAG found that:

- ISC “established mutually agreed-upon evacuation service standards with service providers in only 1 province;”³⁷
- “the department did not address issues identified after evacuations, including access during evacuations to essential services, such as mental health, health care, education, and child and family services;”³⁸and
- “only 2 of the department’s 7 regions had determined the number of evacuees that host communities could accommodate.”³⁹

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada should, in collaboration with First Nations, provincial governments, and other service providers, ensure that First Nations communities receive the emergency management services they need by:

- establishing emergency management service agreements and wildfire agreements in all jurisdictions that include all First Nations;
- establishing mutually agreed-upon evacuation service standards in the jurisdictions that lack such standards;
- increasing support for First Nations–led approaches to emergency management.⁴⁰

According to its action plan, ISC plans to take the following measures:

- set the stage for multilateral discussions that bring all partners together to develop new multilateral service agreements—by April 2025;
- as part of establishing new multilateral service agreements, ISC will continue to assess internal capacity and work with partners to develop

37 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.57.

38 Ibid., para. 8.58.

39 Ibid., para. 8.59.

40 Ibid., para. 8.62.



mutually agreed-upon service standards, costing models, governance structures, and implementation plans—by April 2027;

- in jurisdictions where wildfire agreements already exist (BC, AB, SK, MB, ON, and QC), ISC will engage with the provincial government and First Nations to review the wildfire agreement and propose changes to be implemented the following fiscal year or at the nearest agreement renewal cycle (e.g., prior to any expiry dates)—by April 2025; and
- in jurisdictions where wildfire agreements do not exist, ISC will engage with provincial governments and First Nations to establish wildfire agreements. Should a Province and/or First Nation not agree to establish a new wildfire agreement, ISC will ensure activation procedures will continue. ISC will develop regional specific plans for new agreements by April 2024 and establish new agreements—by April 2025.⁴¹

The Committee is concerned about how long it will take (April 2027) to develop service standards. It urges the department to act as quickly as possible, and thus recommends:

Recommendation 5—On multilateral emergency management service agreements and wildfire agreements

That, by 30 April of each year from 2024 to 2027, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report on multilateral emergency management service agreements with First Nations and the provinces and territories, on wildfire agreements, and on the development of evacuation service standards. Furthermore, the Committee strongly encourages Indigenous Services Canada to develop service standards by April 2025, rather than the timeline set out in its action plan (April 2027).

3. Respect for Emergency Management Commitments

According to the OAG, one of ISC’s objectives “is to ensure that First Nations have access to emergency services comparable to those available in municipalities of similar size and circumstance in their respective province. The department also aims to provide services that are culturally appropriate. ... The department did not define what comparable meant or include provisions for culturally appropriate services in service agreements. As a result, the department did not know whether it was meeting its commitment to

41 ISC, [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 2–3.

ensure that First Nations communities had access to comparable emergency services and culturally appropriate services.”⁴²

Furthermore, the OAG “found that most of the department’s performance indicators tracked spending to measure its progress against the goals. (An indicator is a measure that provides information to monitor, track, and report on performance and progress toward targets. An indicator relies on consistent data collection and is used to measure progress over time against benchmarks or baselines.) Spending is not a good measure because it does not mean that results are being achieved. Without better performance indicators, the department could not assess progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.”⁴³

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada should develop performance indicators to allow the department to measure progress against the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and use these indicators to track and report publicly on progress.⁴⁴

According to the departmental action plan, new indicators to measure progress against the UN Sustainable Development Goals will be approved by March 2024, measured for the first time and included in the 2024–2025 Departmental Results Report.⁴⁵

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 6—On the implementation of result indicators

That, by 31 March 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report presenting the new indicators used by the Emergency Management Assistance Program to measure the progress made against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

42 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.63.

43 Ibid., Exhibit 8.9.

44 Ibid., para. 8.66.

45 ISC, [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 4.



4. Integration of the Impact on Marginalized Groups

The OAG found “that the department did not address gender-based analysis plus considerations in how emergency services were planned for and delivered in First Nations communities.”⁴⁶

Karen Hogan added:

Indigenous Services Canada did not ensure that emergency services were culturally appropriate and comparable to services provided in municipalities of similar size and circumstances. The department did not define comparable services. It also did not consistently monitor the services provided to first nations communities by provinces and other service providers.⁴⁷

Consequently, the OAG made the following recommendation:

Indigenous Services Canada should, in collaboration with First Nations, provincial governments, and other service providers, ensure that First Nations communities receive the emergency management services they need by:

- defining what is meant by comparable services for First Nations in relation to those available to municipalities of similar size and circumstance in each jurisdiction;
- monitoring the services provided to First Nations to ensure that they are comparable to services provided to non-Indigenous communities, are culturally appropriate, and address the needs of marginalized groups;
- identifying and addressing shortcomings by monitoring emergency management service agreements and conducting lessons-learned exercises.⁴⁸

According to its action plan, the department plans to take two approaches. First, under bilateral service agreements:

46 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.67.

47 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, 25 November 2022, [Meeting No. 40](#), 1305.

48 OAG, [Emergency management in First Nations communities](#), Report 8 of the 2022 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, para. 8.68.

- Review and further the existing analysis of bilateral agreements to determine if existing reporting requirements are effectively monitoring services provided—July 2023;
- Work with regional offices to assess if, and how, they define and assess municipal comparability, culturally appropriate services, and meeting the needs of marginalized populations; and if and how they conduct lessons-learned exercises—August 2023;
- Engage with First Nation partners to understand how ISC can measure and understand the provision of culturally appropriate services—by December 2023;
- Develop an interim report template whereby ISC, the provinces, territories and third parties can conduct lessons learned on how services can be improved to be more culturally appropriate, and better address the needs of marginalized people—December 2023; and
- Support First Nations to develop their own [emergency management]service standards (in lieu of monitoring based on municipal comparability) that are culturally appropriate and address the needs of marginalized people—Beginning in March 2023.⁴⁹

Under multilateral service agreements, the department plans to:

- Develop a calendar with timelines and milestones for reaching multilateral agreements, in partnership with First Nations and emergency management stakeholders—March 2023;
- In negotiation with First Nations and the provinces and territories, integrate First Nation-led emergency management service standards and lessons learned reporting into multilateral agreements.⁵⁰

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

49 ISC, [Detailed Action Plan](#), p. 4.

50 Ibid.



Recommendation 7—On the quality of emergency management services

That, by 15 January 2024, Indigenous Services Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report explaining how the department:

- 1) defines what is meant by comparable services for First Nations;**
- 2) monitors the services provided to First Nations to ensure that they are comparable to services provided to non-Indigenous communities, are culturally appropriate, and address the needs of marginalized groups; and**
- 3) identifies and addresses shortcomings by monitoring emergency management service agreements and conducts lessons-learned exercises.**

CONCLUSION

The OAG concluded that Indigenous Services Canada did not provide the support First Nations communities needed to manage emergencies such as floods and wildfires. The department did not identify the First Nations communities at the highest risk of not being able to manage emergencies so it could better target funding to build local capacity.

Furthermore, the department did not have service agreements across all jurisdictions with provinces or other service providers to provide emergency services in First Nations communities.

Consequently, the Committee has made seven recommendations to ensure that the OAG recommendations are properly followed, and that the department provides the Committee with evidence of this through progress reports. These recommendations concern the risk-based allocation of resources, the backlog of structural mitigation projects, departmental and regional emergency management plans, the number of emergency coordinators required, multilateral emergency management service agreements and wildfire agreements, the implementation of new result indicators, and the quality of emergency management services.

APPENDIX A—STATUS OF MULTILATERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SERVICE AGREEMENTS

In response to a question during a hearing, Indigenous Services Canada provided the following information.

RESPONSE FROM INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA

Indigenous Services Canada is committed to continue engaging and working in partnership with First Nations and emergency management partners to establish comprehensive emergency management service agreements, inclusive of mutually agreed-upon service standards, as well as increase supports for First Nations-led approaches to emergency management. In doing so, by April 2025, ISC is committed to providing continued funding and, as available, new funding to support First Nation-led engagement with regards to their vision for emergency management, as well as the development of regional specific strategies, and new emergency management models.

Through April 2025, we will continue to work with and support First Nations to engage with their members on their vision for emergency management, and will provide additional funding to initiate and enable First Nation partners to develop their own First Nation-led emergency management models. This will help set the stage for multilateral discussions that bring all partners together to develop new multilateral service agreements. During this time, we will continue advancing multilateral conversations and initiate new conversations with First Nations, Indigenous leadership, and with all provincial and territorial governments across Canada regarding the future of emergency management service agreements. Work with partners will continue, in order to develop region-specific strategies and plans to advance new agreements which will include negotiation models and plans for engagement.

Recent examples of advancements in emergency management service agreements include in British Columbia, where discussions are underway to action a Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2019 with First Nations Leadership Council, and the Governments of Canada and British Columbia. To advance the Memorandum of Understanding over the next months, all parties have agreed to develop a discussion paper outlining Emergency Management in British Columbia and the vision to advance a new Trilateral Emergency Management service agreement, which will help support

future engagement with First Nations. Additionally, a Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement exists between the T̓silhqot'in National Government, and the Governments of Canada and British Columbia and we are working with the parties on priorities of this agreement, including the advancement of the development of an Emergency Centre. Recently in Alberta, an Emergency Management Chief's Forum was held in partnership with the province of Alberta (Alberta Emergency Management Agency) which was well received by the participating Chiefs and representatives. The Region continues to consider how to broaden engagement with all Alberta First Nations. Saskatchewan has recently distributed funding to five Tribal Councils (Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Yorkton, and File Hills Qu'Appelle) to fund a temporary resource in each Tribal Council who would engage with their member communities to conceptualize their vision for emergency management and develop models. Furthermore, in Manitoba, funding has been distributed to the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, Southern Chiefs' Organization, Island Lake Tribal Council to facilitate engagement sessions and conduct a needs analysis on emergency management for their member communities.

Further, wildfire agreements exist in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. By April 2025, ISC will engage with the provincial governments and First Nations to review existing wildfire agreements and propose changes to be implemented the following fiscal year, or the nearest agreement renewal cycle (prior to the expiry date). In jurisdictions where wildfire agreements do not exist, we will engage with provincial governments and First Nations to establish wildfire agreements. Should a Province and/or First Nation opt not to establish a new wildfire agreement, ISC will ensure activation procedures continue. Regional specific plans for new agreements will be developed by April 2024, and by April 2025, new agreements will be established.

By April 2027, in establishing new multilateral service agreements, we will continue assessing internal capacity. Work will continue to be done with partners to develop mutually agreed-upon service standards, costing models, governance structures, and implementation plans.

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](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Indigenous Services</p> <p>Kenza El Bied, Director General, Sector Operations Branch, Regional Operations Sector</p> <p>Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister</p> <p>Joanne Wilkinson, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Operations Sector</p> <p>Gina Wilson, Deputy Minister</p>	2022/11/25	40
<p>Office of the Auditor General</p> <p>Doreen Deveen, Director</p> <p>Karen Hogan, Auditor General</p> <p>Glenn Wheeler, Principal</p>	2022/11/25	40
<p>Department of Indigenous Services</p> <p>Kenza El Bied, Director General, Sector Operations Branch, Regional Operations Sector</p> <p>Valerie Gideon, Associate Deputy Minister</p> <p>Hon. Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services</p> <p>Rory O'Connor, Director General, Regional Infrastructure Delivery Branch, Regional Operations Sector</p> <p>Joanne Wilkinson, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Operations Sector</p> <p>Gina Wilson, Deputy Minister</p>	2023/03/20	53

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. 40, 53 and 80](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

John Williamson
Chair

The Conservative Party of Canada’s Dissenting Report: Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada

Conservative members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (PACP) demand action be taken by the Government of Canada to address the total lack of emergency management in First Nations communities and the unacceptable lack of progress in implementing proactive and preventative measures.

The utter incompetence of the department and complete absence of short and long term action has jeopardized the lives of Indigenous people; therefore, the Conservative members of the Committee recommend the following:

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

The Government of Canada immediately eliminate performance and at-risk bonuses for every manager and executive who has failed to address the concerns with emergency management in First Nations communities as noted in this report.

Recommendation #2

Terminate the Deputy Ministers who failed to provide support for First Nations communities to manage emergencies.

Recommendation #3

The Government take immediate action to complete the necessary infrastructure projects for emergency management by June 30, 2024.

Recommendation #4

Establish mutually agreed-upon evacuation service standards in the jurisdictions that lack such standards.

Recommendation #5

Indigenous Services Canada should work with First Nations to implement a risk-based approach to inform program planning and decisions on where to invest in preparedness and mitigation activities to maximize support to communities at highest risk of being affected by emergencies.

Recommendation #6

Acknowledge that it is in Canada's best interest to implement effective Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada and that it is a priority of this government.

Recommendation #7

The Government identifies and holds a singular government department accountable for the achieving the recommendations outlined in the Auditor General's report entitled "*Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada.*"

Background

On November 15, 2022, the Auditor General's report entitled *Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada* was tabled in Parliament. It issued a scathing review of government incompetence, fiscal mismanagement, and a failed approach to emergency preparedness and disaster mitigation.

In 2013, the Auditor General had outlined many serious concerns about emergency management in First Nations communities and because of systemic failures within the Government, very little has changed. The Auditor General stated that "many of our findings were identified almost a decade ago, when we audited this topic in 2013."¹

The Auditor General found that the department "spent 3.5 times more on responding to and recovering from emergencies than on supporting First Nations communities to prevent and prepare for them."² This clearly displays Indigenous Services' choice to be overwhelmingly reactive instead of taking a proactive approach to emergency management.

The challenges faced by First Nations communities regarding emergency management, mainly the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, calls for real action to save lives and communities from the threats posed to them. Infrastructure "culverts and dikes to prevent seasonal floods" are imperative to the safety and well-being of any community, yet the department has showed complete ineptitude in this respect.³

¹ https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/docs/parl_oag_202211_08_e.pdf

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Emergency management must focus on averting danger as soon as possible, and not when it is too late.

