

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



NATIONAL CHIEF PERRY BELLEGARDE BULLETIN

March 18, 2020

COVID-19 AND CANADA'S ECONOMIC RESPONSE PLAN

*The Assembly of First Nations issues regular updates on work underway at the national office.
More information is available at www.afn.ca.*

SUMMARY:

- The Prime Minister announced on March 18 the “Government of Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan” which includes a number of areas that directly or indirectly impact First Nations.
- The announcement includes \$305 million for an Indigenous Communities Support Fund. AFN is working to get more information on how the fund can be accessed and used by First Nations.

On March 18, 2020, the Prime Minister announced the “Government of Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan,” a new set of economic measures aimed at stabilizing the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These measures will provide up to \$27 billion in direct support to Canadian workers and businesses and \$55 billion in tax credits. Overall, this package seems geared to immediately remedy families unable to pay rent or purchase commodities and to lessen the broader economic impact on small to medium employers. I am providing a link at the end of this Bulletin to the Government of Canada’s information for the full details and I am attaching a short summary of the main investments and initiatives that are relevant to First Nations.

A major aspect of this announcement is \$305 million for an Indigenous Communities Support Fund. The fund is to address immediate needs in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The Prime Minister stated this Fund will be “distinctions-based,” recognizing the distinct nature of needs and priorities amongst First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. We are working to get more details as soon as possible on this fund, including how it will be allocated or accessed. At a press conference following the announcement, the federal Finance Minister stated that the government is trying to make sure those directly impacted are protected and that it will include allocating resources necessary for those far from medical care. The Finance Minister stated that the government still needs to work out the details but this will be done on an urgent basis. The AFN is pushing to ensure First Nations are engaged in this work. Our leaders, our people, know best what is needed in their communities and Nations. The AFN is working to ensure that this benefit is scalable.

The Plan included a new directive that, in cooperation with the United States, the Canada-U.S. border will now be closed to all “non-essential” traffic. “Non-essential” is a reference to non-commercial or trade-related traffic. We take notice because there are First Nations that are on the border and others that are very near the border. We hold rights under the Jay Treaty and other agreements that are specific to border-crossing. The AFN has been assured that border mobility by First Nations citizens will not be impacted.

The AFN is contacting the government now to get more details on how the programs, funds and initiatives announced will be rolled out and how they can be accessed. We know some First Nations face unique circumstances in terms of location, accessibility, connectivity and other factors. All of these must be addressed in the federal government’s plans and processes. The AFN wants an urgent response to our questions and we will keep you informed of all information as it is confirmed.

I want to be clear that the Economic Response Plan announced today focuses on economic measures. The federal government already announced measures related to health, safety and emergency preparedness, which included First Nations. That announcement included \$100 million for First Nations, Métis and Inuit, an amount that the Prime Minister assured is scalable and expandable as required. I am providing a link to my Bulletin of March 13 for more information.

I know this is a time of concern and I assure you that the Assembly of First Nations will ensure the needs of First Nations are addressed and that every effort is made to keep our people safe. I will keep you informed throughout this time. My priority is to advocate for the safety, security, health and well-being of First Nations.

More information:

Government of Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, March 18,2020

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2020/03/canadas-covid-19-economic-response-plan-support-for-canadians-and-businesses.html>

National Chief Bulletin March 13, 2020: COVID-19 and First Nations

<https://www.afn.ca/national-chief-perry-bellegarde-bulletin-march-13-2020-covid-19-and-first-nations/>

Overview of Investments and Initiatives Impacting First Nations

- \$305 million for the Indigenous Communities Support Fund
- \$50 million for women’s shelters and sexual assault centres, including those on-reserve
- An extra \$300/month for the Canada Child Benefit
- Introducing the Emergency Care Benefit providing up to \$900 bi-weekly, for up to 15 weeks. This flat-payment Benefit would be administered through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and provide income support to:
 - Workers, including the self-employed, who are quarantined or sick with COVID-19 but do not qualify for Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits.
 - Workers, including the self-employed, who are taking care of a family member who is sick with COVID-19, such as an elderly parent, but do not qualify for EI sickness benefits.
 - Parents with children who require care or supervision due to school closures, and are unable to earn employment income, irrespective of whether they qualify for EI or not.
- Introducing an Emergency Support Benefit delivered through the CRA to provide up to \$5 billion in support to workers who are not eligible for EI and who are facing unemployment.
- Implementing the EI Work Sharing Program, which provides EI benefits to workers who agree to reduce their normal working hour as a result of developments beyond the control of their employers, by extending the eligibility of such agreements to 76 weeks, easing eligibility requirements, and streamlining the application process. This was announced by the Prime Minister on March 11, 2020.
- The tax-filing deadline for individuals has been moved to June 1, 2020