

Legislative Update

Federal Budget 2013: Notes on Aspects Impacting Aboriginal Communities

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The 2013 Federal Budget includes references to First Nations in almost every section of the budget with programs and spending linked to infrastructure, health, justice, policing and education. However, many of these references are continuations or renewals of existing programs, often at the same or at a decreased funding rate. The exceptions were a program focused on policing in First Nations communities set to receive an increase in funding for 2013 and the changes to the on-reserve Income Assistance Program with the creation of the First Nations Job Fund.

Aboriginal Fisheries

Building on past program funding, the 2013 Budget proposes to provide \$33.1 million in 2013 and 2014 to extend the Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative and the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative. The funding does not extend to 2014 and 2015 in the published budget.

These Initiatives are designed to integrate First Nations fishing enterprises into existing commercial fisheries and to reduce the possibilities of conflicts with non-aboriginal fisheries following the recognition of the aboriginal constitutional right to fish.

Infrastructure

The Federal Government set aside \$155 million over 10 years for the First Nations infrastructure Fund. The funding does not start until 2014.

The primary focus of the money will be to fund on-reserve projects such as roads, bridges, energy systems, broadband connectivity, garbage disposal, as well as improving community capacity for infrastructure planning. The funding will flow through the new Building Canada Fund with additional investment expected from the Gas Tax Fund.

No new funding was provided for on-reserve housing, water and wastewater treatment, or primary and secondary education facilities.

Independently from this program, the Federal Government will be spending \$100 million over the next two years for the construction of 250 housing units in Nunavut. The funding will flow through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Health Services

Ottawa announced \$48 million over two years to allow for the extension of programs announced in 2008 funding the development of tele-health and videoconferencing sites to help patients in remote and isolated communities connect with medical professionals. The funds will also go towards increasing the number of accredited health care facilities in First Nations communities. This accreditation system was created to ensure services are provided in line with national standards.

The Budget also announced the continuation of funding for the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program. This Program provides eligible First Nations and Inuit people with medically necessary supplementary health benefits when not provided through other public or private health insurance plans.

Mental Health

Mental health and suicide prevention measures will receive \$4 million in funding over two years. The funds will go towards increasing the number of mental health wellness teams serving First Nations communities. Specifics of these measures are expected to be revealed as the budget plans are implemented.

The Public Health Agency of Canada will also reallocate \$2 million to improve data collection and reporting of mental illness and mental health.

Family Violence Prevention

The Family Violence Prevention Program will receive \$24 million over two years in renewed funding, keeping the level of funding the same as in the last six years.

This program provides women, children and families ordinarily resident on-reserve access to family violence shelter services and funds proposal-based prevention projects.

Aboriginal Justice

The Aboriginal Justice Strategy will receive extended funding with \$11 million for 2013-2014. The level of funding for 2014-2015 was not stated in the budget document. These programs provide community-based, culturally sensitive justice measures for lesser offences.

Land Claims Resolutions

The Budget projected \$54 million over two years to assist with the timely resolution of specific claims relating to Canada's obligations under historic treaties or the way it managed First Nations funds or assets. This represents a decrease in annual spending of about \$7 million compared to the past five years.

These payments will allow for the continuation of the *Justice at Last* initiative created in 2007 and will mostly serve to provide resources to ensure claims are addressed promptly.

First Nations Land Management Regime

Funding for the expansion of the First Nations Land Management Regime was set at \$9 million over two years. This represents a decrease in annual spending of about \$5.5 million compared to 2011 and 2012.

This Land Management Regime allows First Nations to opt out of the land-related sections of the Indian Act and to enact their own land management laws. Under this Regime, First Nations can establish a land code for the development, conservation, use and possession of reserve land, resources and environment. Currently, 61 First Nations across the country have opted into this Regime. The Federal Government expects an additional 33 First Nations to join the Regime by 2015, including the 8 announced earlier in 2013.

Policing Programs

The First Nations Policing Program's funding will increase over 2013-2015 with \$33 million to extend policing in First Nations and Inuit communities. The program will also receive an additional \$3 million over two years for ten additional police officers to focus on contraband tobacco. For the previous two years, \$15 million per year were allocated to the Program.

Education

For post-secondary education, the Budget includes a total of \$15 million for Indspire's bursaries and scholarships to First Nations and Inuit students and for the expansion of Cape Breton University's activities to encourage business studies by Aboriginal students.

No additional spending for early childhood, elementary and secondary education was announced. The Budget, however, reiterates the government's commitment to consult with Aboriginal communities and develop a *First Nations Education Act* by September 2014, with the objective of improving graduation rates.

Job Training

The government committed \$109 million over five years to a training program called the *First Nations Job Fund*. This program will only provide income assistance to Aboriginal youth participating in the specific job training program. In addition, \$132 million over five years will go to the cost of setting up and administrating the program as well as monitoring its implementation.

Communities that do not implement mandatory training will not be able to access the funding.

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