



**ATLANTIC POLICY CONGRESS**  
**OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS SECRETARIAT**

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**Submission to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper**  
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**Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat**



## ATLANTIC POLICY CONGRESS OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS SECRETARIAT

We speak to you today from a position of great potential.

Our First Nations communities are ready to make their full contribution to the economic future of our country.

We are energized to form strong and stable partnerships that promote change and growth.

We have seen success and we are not afraid to face challenges. We are here today to speak about the exciting opportunities we see for the future when we work together.

We believe that the future of the entire Canadian economy and the economy of Atlantic Canada are tied directly to the essential role of our First Nation people.

We must unlock this potential. We all have to contribute to the development of long term opportunities for economic renewal. We need to make our communities a strong base for a better future.

Today, we'll give you an update about our progress in a number of areas including,

- Issues and opportunities for First Nations children and youth;
- Treaty Implementation
- First Nations Fisheries;
- Health and Addictions;
- Funding Sustainability; and,
- Housing and Infrastructure;

One of the main priority areas for us is working to fulfill the potential of First Nations children and youth. Our focus is on three main concerns:

1. We need to ensure that our youth receive high-quality education and access to post-secondary education and training.
2. We need to ensure that we are partnering with government and the private sector to create opportunities for our youth as they enter the workforce.
3. We need to address difficult challenges like suicide and addiction. We need to provide our children with hope.

We now have in front of us a great opportunity. Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing population in Canada. In Atlantic Canada, the First Nations population is expected to continue to grow by at least 25% over the next 12 years in the age group 25-44. As the private sector and governments of each province search for human resources, our communities must be ready to provide a highly skilled and educated supply of people to join the workforce in every sector.

We need to start early to provide our children with a solid foundation, at home, and at school. Learning must be grounded in our values, traditions and languages to ensure the children who grow into youth and adults become contributors to our societies and lead tangible improvements for our people.

We need to provide our youth with the support they need to choose training programs and post-secondary education that will help them take their place in Atlantic Canada's growing economy.

We have already made improvements in education. More First Nations youth are staying in school, longer. They are doing better in class. They are going on to higher education, in universities and community colleges. In Atlantic Canada over 1400 First Nations students are attending Universities and Community Colleges.

Education is a critical lifeline for our young people as they seek to take their place in the world as proud Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Innu peoples.

We need to continue this good work, and we can do that by working together.

Beyond education, we need to ensure that our young, educated people have tools, skills and the access to opportunities.

Mega projects like the Lower Churchill Falls in Newfoundland & Labrador, and the Federal shipbuilding contract awarded in Halifax will require hundreds, if not thousands of skilled workers over the next 30 to 40 years. These are ideal opportunities for First Nations people.

A partnership focus must ensure that First Nations youth connect and stay with training and have access to these employment opportunities. Our First Nations youth require support making the transition to urban centres, which is often where the good jobs and opportunities are. We need the partnership of all levels of government, employers, First Nations and all aboriginal employment and support agencies to provide this support.

We've seen how successful this approach can be.

The Sydney Tar Ponds project provided innovative approaches to create real jobs and business opportunities for First Nations and Unama'ki Benefits offices - a collaborative effort of five First Nations in Cape Breton and now one community in the mainland of Nova Scotia. Over 24 months, this project has produced 71 million dollars in contracts for Aboriginal companies. The project trained 213 people, and has led to 60 permanent jobs.

The Federal government provided a multiyear investment in First Nations capacity to support economic/business opportunities and supported targeted training for specific jobs and skills required for the project. The support of First Nations and research to identify and provide long term supports to people before, during and after training and as they move through the career process to ensure those who participate become long term highly skilled exceptional permanent employees.

To access these opportunities, however; our children and youth need support at the most basic level. Our youth need positive programming to ensure that they grow into healthy well-adjusted adults and do not face serious challenges of addiction or suicide. We need them to have hope. Programming, services and supports must empower our young people. There are serious gaps in youth programming at the community level. And we need to fix this.

We have a great deal of work ahead of us, but by working together, we know that our First Nations youth are poised to succeed.

Housing is another key concern, and a very basic need that must be addressed for our communities to succeed.

In the Atlantic region, at least 3000 new units are needed to address the backlog and growing families in all the communities. The current fixed budgets at CMHC and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development will take decades to address the needs which exist today. An investment of new funds is needed to provide much needed housing to the First Nations in the region as well as the rest of Canada.

In the area of First Nation Infrastructure, the recently completed National Engineering Assessment provides evidence on the poor and urgent situation which exists on First Nations communities. The report provides a solid starting point to develop a long term plan and solution for this issue. With existing resource levels, it will take an estimated 300 years to address all the needs identified.

Massive investments are needed to address this infrastructure crisis in First Nations.

One potential solution to this challenge is the P3 approach. We need to investigate this approach further, and determine whether this approach could provide a long term solution to address water and infrastructure deficits in our communities.

We need to ensure that First Nations communities have access to the level of quality and services and standards which exist in all non-native communities in the country.

Funding sustainability is a foundational issue for First Nations communities in Atlantic Canada.

Another key concern for us, that has already been shown to be an economic success story, is the Atlantic Fishery.

Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat has done a great deal of work with all First Nations and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans over the past number of years.

We have been working to develop governance and business capacity in First Nation community communal fisheries.

APC, in partnership with Ulnuoweg, Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has undertaken an innovative approach to build and strengthen First Nations-level capacity and expertise.

In particular, through the collaborative efforts of the Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative real improvements have been made in each community.

The Marshall 1999 SCC Decision which recognized our Treaty Rights was an important starting point for the full participation and inclusion of all our First Nations in the full spectrum of the Atlantic fishery. Today, many of the First Nations produce considerable employment and revenues which support economic and social development in each of our communities. To sustain such important efforts, it is paramount to develop a business approach to this work and have clearly demonstrated business performance indicators which show progress and results in each and every community.

Through collaboration between APC and DFO as well as the operation of a Business Development Team, we have been able to focus efforts, including;

- Total First Nations control of all aspects of the fishery;
- Defined mentoring & training;
- Business plan development;
- Strong governance, and;
- Tracking of performance for first nations through a fisheries management system

This combined with the announcement of the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Strategic Partnership Initiative last year has helped First Nations to gradually move beyond just harvesting and to become more diversified in their activities in the Atlantic fishery.

The new efforts create new lines of activity and additional jobs as well as increased revenues for the First Nations.

As a community, however, we are facing a number of challenges that need to be addressed if we are to fulfill our potential.

Mental health and addictions are key issues for First Nations communities. – One of the challenges we face is based on the small size of our region and four provinces – the Health Canada Atlantic FNIHB, and the four provincial governments that must work together consistently.

Mental health programming today is almost non-existent in First Nations communities. This requires funding based on the detailed strategy developed in collaboration with the First Nations in the region.

In recent years, the prevalence of prescription drug abuse in Atlantic First Nations communities has been on the rise and has required focused action and collaboration. Traditional addictions such as alcohol are still serious issues; however, more attention needs to be paid to the misuse and abuse of prescribed drugs such as opioids and benzodiazepines.

Atlantic Canada is unique because 75% of our First Nations communities are ‘Health Transfer’ communities. This means that they have a significant degree of influence over health funding and how it is used in the community.

However, the current funding limits on transfer payments to communities, particularly smaller communities, presents significant problems. This approach to funding and the formula basis used for First Nations communities needs to be revised based on a common standard that addresses needs, and creates comparable programming and services for each First Nations community – regardless of population.

These are real challenges we have in front of us. But with these challenges comes opportunity. We have in place the framework to succeed and move forward. But to do this we need partnership, collaboration, and stable long-term planning.

The First Nations communities of Atlantic Canada are committed to taking their place as part of the economic success of our region.

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