

OFF-RESERVE
Aboriginal
ACTION PLAN



Business Case to Close the Socioeconomic Gaps
for Off-Reserve Aboriginal People in British Columbia

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BCAAFC
BC ASSOCIATION OF ABORIGINAL
FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

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Executive Summary

British Columbia has the second largest off-reserve Aboriginal population in Canada. Over 70 per cent of the province's Aboriginal population live off of reserves, including almost two-thirds of B.C.'s Status First Nations population. B.C.'s Aboriginal population is the youngest and fastest growing group in the province. Within a ten-year period, the Aboriginal youth population doubled and the overall urban population grew by 33 per cent.

Aboriginal Friendship Centres are B.C.'s largest service delivery infrastructure for the off-reserve Aboriginal population. Established in the 1950s in response to the lifting of a federal travel ban that prohibited First Nations people from leaving their reserves, Friendship Centres have been a cultural and community hub for Aboriginal people moving into cities or rural areas for more than 60 years. Friendship Centres provide cultural resources, employment resources, health promotion and prevention services, counseling supports, and early childhood education and development services.

However, Friendship Centres are at the breaking point. Demands for service have more than doubled in the last decade. Core operating funds for Friendship Centres have not seen an increase in over 20 years, and in 2010, funding through the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation's First Citizen's Fund was cut by a further 17 per cent.

Off-reserve Aboriginal people have some of the lowest social and economic outcomes in the province. For example, Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the jails, within the child welfare system, and are disproportionately living in poverty.

Despite all of this, there is no coordinated strategy in B.C. designed to improve socioeconomic conditions for this population group.

However, for the first time in the history of British Columbia, a commitment was made in this year's Official Speech from the Throne signaling a promise to establish a coordinated strategy for off-reserve Aboriginal peoples:

“The government will work with Aboriginal partners, the federal government and local governments to develop an off-reserve Aboriginal action plan to achieve better education and job training, healthier family life, and strengthened cultures and traditions”

This document presents the business case for the development of an off-reserve Aboriginal Action Plan (ORAAP) that will close the socioeconomic gap for off-reserve Aboriginal people by five per cent in four years. Social and Economic conditions for off-reserve Aboriginal people can improve through a comprehensive ORAAP, based on a set of five key actions to occur over a period of four years:

- **Establish a Provincial Managing Partnership (PMP)** through a formal agreement between the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Children and Family Development, First Nations Leadership Council, and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres.
- **Establish a Community Development Process** that will enable Aboriginal communities to build their own change agenda in collaboration with the Managing Partnership, based on B.C.’s social innovation “Change Lab” process.
- **Invest in a Long-term Capacity Fund for B.C. Friendship Centres** consisting of quarterly increases in a capacity investment over four years, totaling \$3.1M annually by year four.
- **Align Ministry Service Plans** within the B.C. Government’s social ministries to actions identified in the ORAAP that will improve relations with off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples, as well as contribute to closing the socioeconomic gap by five per cent.
- **Define and Implement Social and Economic Success Measures** in partnership with all parties involved, to track progress and impact of the ORAAP and maximize effectiveness of investments into off-reserve Aboriginal communities.

Introduction

British Columbia has the second largest off-reserve Aboriginal population in Canada¹. Over 70 per cent of the province's Aboriginal population live off of reserves², including almost two-thirds of B.C.'s Status First Nations population³.

Compared to the rest of British Columbians, social and economic outcomes for off-reserve Aboriginal people are some of the lowest in the province, and country. Yet there is no coordinated strategy in B.C. designed to improve socioeconomic conditions for off-reserve Aboriginal people.

However, for the first time in the history of British Columbia, a commitment was made in this year's Official Speech from the Throne signaling a promise to establish a coordinated strategy for off-reserve Aboriginal peoples:

*"The government will work with Aboriginal partners, the federal government and local governments to develop an off-reserve Aboriginal action plan to achieve better education and job training, healthier family life, and strengthened cultures and traditions"*⁴

This document presents the business case for the development of an off-reserve Aboriginal Action Plan (ORAAP) that will close the socioeconomic gap for off-reserve Aboriginal people by five per cent in four years. Background data and context is provided, in addition to five proposed key actions forming the comprehensive ORAAP for more than 70 per cent of British Columbia's Aboriginal population.

Background

On-Reserve versus Off-Reserve Investment

Throughout the last decade in British Columbia, commitments have been made towards addressing social and economic conditions exclusively for First Nations people living on-reserve, including:

- The 2006 Transformative Change Accord, established in part to “close the social and economic gap between First Nations and other British Columbians”⁵, and to “improve the quality of life of Aboriginal peoples in Canada”⁶
- The 2006 New Relationship Trust, a \$100M fund for projects within the areas of governance, education, culture and language, youth and elders, and economic development⁷.

Despite these investments, First Nations and Aboriginal people living off-reserve in B.C. are unable to access any of the funds aimed at improving social and economic conditions. Furthermore, Aboriginal people continue to migrate into urban areas, and the urban Aboriginal youth population has doubled over the past 10 years⁸.

The Role of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

Aboriginal Friendship Centres are the largest service delivery infrastructure for the more than 145,000 Aboriginal people living off-reserve, and are the natural go-to place for social support, cultural resources, employment resources, health promotion and prevention services, counseling supports, and early childhood education and development services. Established in the 1950s in response to the lifting of a federal travel ban that prohibited First Nations people from leaving their reserves, Friendship Centres have been a cultural and community hub for Aboriginal people moving into cities or rural areas for more than 60 years. The importance of Friendship Centres has been recognized by:

- The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples (2010)⁹
- The Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (1996)¹⁰.

Capacity funding for Friendship Centres in B.C. has not increased in 20 years. In 2010, an annual core funding allotment for B.C. Friendship Centres through the Province's First Citizens Fund (FCF) was cut by a further 17 per cent. Meanwhile, B.C.'s urban Aboriginal population has increased by 33 per cent over the last 10 years, and demand for service has more than doubled.

Unacceptable Social and Economic Outcomes for Off-Reserve Aboriginal People

Aboriginal people face disproportionate risks and barriers to living long and healthy lives, including the lowest life expectancy and graduation rates, and some of the highest rates of suicide, addictions, unemployment, poverty, victimization and incarceration.

Poverty: The poverty rate for off-reserve Aboriginal people is almost double than the poverty rate for non-Aboriginal people in B.C.¹¹. In 2008, almost two-thirds of off-reserve Aboriginal children in urban areas were living in low-income families¹². Poverty has been directly correlated with compromised outcomes for Aboriginal children, such as significant risks to health, well-being, and increased vulnerability¹³.

Unemployment: Although Aboriginal people are the province's youngest and fastest growing population group¹⁴ and thus are a significant resource for the future job market, unemployment rates have been more than double for Aboriginal people living off-reserve in B.C., compared to the rest of the population¹⁵.

Children Growing Up Without Their Parents: Aboriginal children are six times more likely to be taken into foster care than non-Aboriginal children¹⁶. In 2010, Aboriginal children in B.C. represented 54 per cent of the children in care, despite the fact they made up only 5 per cent of the population¹⁷. Furthermore, federal data shows that while approximately

5 per cent of First Nations children living on-reserve are in foster care, the rate of children in foster care residing off-reserve is estimated to be almost eight times higher¹⁸.

Low High-school Graduation Rates: In 2006, 33 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 had not completed high school, compared to 59 per cent of non-Aboriginal British Columbians¹⁹.

Poor Health Outcomes: Data available for First Nations people in British Columbia shows that the diabetes rate is 40 per cent higher than the general population. Life expectancy rates are 7 years shorter than those of other British Columbians²⁰.

Crime and Victimization: By 2010, in a one-year period, 297 Aboriginal women were counted as missing or murdered in British Columbia. Most of these women were living off-reserve at the time of their death or disappearance. In Canada, Aboriginal women make up 3.9 per cent of the female population yet account for 29 per cent of female admissions to sentenced custody²¹.

Lack of Housing: There are significant housing shortages for Aboriginal people living off of the reserves in B.C.. Off-reserve housing shortages are connected in part to barriers such as income, inconsistent information about waitlists, and racially based discrimination²². 28 per cent of the total Aboriginal population is in core housing need compared to 16 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.

Recommended Actions to Be Included In the ORAAP

Social and Economic conditions for off-reserve Aboriginal people can improve through a comprehensive ORAAP, based on a set of five key actions to occur over a period of four years. Key actions are designed to significantly increase social stability and improve economic activity. Each key action would be accompanied by a set of outcome measures to track improvement in order to maximize effectiveness of investments into off-reserve Aboriginal communities.

1. Provincial Managing Partnership (PMP)

- Consists of an overarching formal agreement between Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Children and Family Development, First Nations Leadership Council, and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC)
- Managing partnership will enable funding to flow directly into communities through building on existing initiatives and opportunities, and eliminating redundancies
- Relationships are built on cooperation and collaboration with shared values, vision, and goals

2. Community Development Process

- Enables Aboriginal communities to build their own change agenda in collaboration with the Managing Partnership
- Pilots within 3-4 communities
- Community Development Process is rooted in “Change Lab” Process - leveraging off of good work of Social Innovation Council, Government Non-profit Initiative, and Vancouver Foundation

3. Long-term Capacity Fund Investment in Friendship Centres

- 25 per cent increase in capacity investment over four years, totaling \$3.1M annually by year four
- \$775,000 in year one, \$1.55M in year two, \$2.33M in year three, and \$3.1M in year four

4. Ministry Service Plans

- Social ministries across government would align their service plans with actions identified in the ORAAP
- Strategic actions and outcome measures could be developed to improve relations with off-reserve Aboriginal people that will contribute to closing the socioeconomic gap by five per cent.

5. Social and Economic Success Measures

- Clear set of outcomes, indicators and measures as defined by all parties involved that will track progress and close the socioeconomic gap by five per cent
- Outcomes aligned and fed into annual Transformative Change Accord report

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