

COVID-19 MESSAGE FROM ISC BC REGION

UPDATE #77 / March 24, 2021

This update and earlier editions are also available on the **First Nations Public Service Secretariat website.**



Good afternoon,

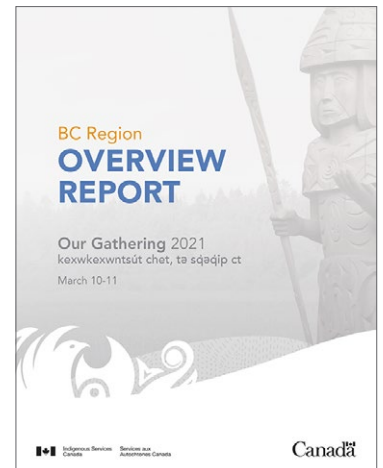
Thanks to all who attended this year's Our Gathering *kexwkexwntsút chet, tə sǫǫǫp ct* on March 10-11. Your participation helped make our 9th event a tremendous success. It certainly was two very full days of virtual presentations, discussions, and idea sharing. Special thanks to Elder Bob Baker for his honour song in recognition of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls and those we lost during the pandemic.

We will be following up with individuals and First Nations to address any questions raised that we did not get to in the sessions. In case you missed it, BC Region adapted its annual presentation of BC Region's budget and program successes into a **BC Overview Report** to release at Our Gathering *kexwkexwntsút chet, tə sǫǫǫp ct*.

The report highlights BC Region's total budget for the year including \$236 million in COVID-19 supports over and above the base budget of \$1.1 billion. In addition, this year's report includes contact information for all our directors and a behind-the-scenes section summarizing some of our shared successes.

In the coming weeks, we will be sending you details on a virtual follow-up session to Our Gathering *kexwkexwntsút chet, tə sǫǫǫp ct*, which will be held June 23-24, 2021. As always we welcome your feedback and any questions you may have.

There is some good news on the horizon. Our partners at the First Nations Health Authority expect to have all First Nation communities offered their first dose of **vaccine by the end of March**. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Teresa Tam, shared some words on the one-year anniversary that we think are reflective of where we are at now. "We have all experienced loss and I know we are all tired, but let's also recognize some of our achievements, and the good things that we want to carry forward. We can have renewed faith in ourselves coming together during a crisis, sticking it out longer than any of us might have guessed we could do, and doing it with enduring kindness. Though there have been stumbles, we have adapted and we have endured and I know we have what it takes to see things through."



How can you
help protect your community?



UPDATES

Indigenous Community Support Fund

Our conversations with communities suggest there are still some questions about the Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF) to address:

● What are eligible expenses under the ICSF allocations?

Direct allocation provided to communities must be used for activities to prevent, prepare and respond to COVID-19. These funds can be used for measures including, but not limited to:

- support for Elders and vulnerable community members
- measures to address food insecurity
- educational and other support for children
- mental health assistance and emergency response services
- preparedness measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19

If you have specific questions about your funding please contact your Funding Services Offices (FSO).

● Are there spending requirements for directly allocated funds? What are the reporting requirements for application-based funds?

ICSF funds for both direct allocations and application-based funding should be spent by March 31, 2021; however carrying forward unexpended funds into 2021-2022 may be possible if the recipients have a fixed or flex funding agreement, if they meet the requirements to do so and if the terms and conditions through which the funding is being provided permits it. Please contact your FSO to discuss your community's specific situation.

For application-based funds all recipients will be required to submit the Activities and Expenditures Report that describes how the funding was used. The due date for the report is **July 29, 2021**. BC Region will collect completed reporting forms.

● Do I need to spend my ICSF funds by a certain deadline?

Yes, given that ICSF funding is limited and its objective is to respond to immediate needs for COVID-19, ICSF funds for both direct allocations and application-based funding should be spent by March 31, 2021. However, carrying forward of unexpended funds into 2021-22 may be possible if the recipients have a fixed or flex funding agreement, if they meet the requirements to do so and if the terms and conditions through which the funding is being provided permits it. Please contact your Funding Services Officer (FSO) to discuss your own specific situation.

Summary of COVID-19 Related Funding to First Nations

The total BC Region COVID funding envelope (all programs) is \$249 million:

- \$119.9 million in ICSF, including \$16 million for off-reserve members and activities;
- \$61.3 million has been provided to First Nations as Income Assistance top-ups (mirroring provincial rates);
- \$9.9 million for COVID-related infrastructure safety measures;
- \$24.6 million in education funding; and,
- \$34 million in various other ISC program areas.

We will continue to respond to emerging needs and remain committed to supporting Indigenous communities and families through this pandemic and beyond. We will share any information on additional funding as it becomes available.

Increased Support to Workers and Families

Legislation to increase the maximum number of weeks available to workers through EI regular benefits **has now passed**. Workers claiming EI regular benefits can now access up to a maximum of 50 weeks for claims established between September 27, 2020 to September 25, 2021.

In addition, self-employed workers who have opted in to the EI program to access special benefits are now able to use a 2020 earnings threshold of \$5,000, compared to the previous threshold of \$7,555. This change is retroactive for claims established as of January 3, 2021 and applies until September 25, 2021.

In addition, new regulations to increase the number of weeks available under the Canada Recovery Benefits have come into effect. This includes:

- an increase in the number of weeks available under the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB) by 12 weeks,
- extending the maximum duration of the benefits from 26 weeks to 38 weeks.
- an increase in the number of weeks available under the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) from 2 weeks to 4 weeks.

Individuals can access these additional weeks through the Canada Revenue Agency beginning on March 18, 2021.

PARTNER INFORMATION

Provincial Benefits

The Province of BC **announced this week** that more than 300,000 British Columbians will benefit from the largest-ever permanent increase to income assistance and disability assistance rates and the first-ever increase to the senior's supplement. Starting with payments issued in April 2021, individuals on income assistance and disability assistance will automatically receive a permanent \$175 per month increase.

We are aware there is some concern about the pressure the end of COVID-19 Supplements may place on individuals who have been receiving up to \$450 monthly from January to March 2021 (with the combined federal and provincial top ups) and are now looking at an ongoing benefit payment of \$175 (provincial only). Please stay tuned for more information from ISC about changes to our policy and future funding adjustments. Remember also to encourage your members to sign up for the **BC Recovery Benefit and its one-time payment of \$1,000** if they haven't already done so. They have until June 30, 2021 to apply.



HELP FOR MEMBERS SEEKING BENEFITS!

Getting the benefits like the **Canada child benefit**, the **Canada workers benefit** and the GST/HST credit is now easier.

The new Credit and benefit short return and the Canada Child Benefit for First Nations forms are easy to complete, and there is support to help you.

For more information or help filling out the forms, call 1-855-214-7070.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS – CRA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES BENEFITS AND CREDITS PRESENTATION

Saturday, April 17, 2021

10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. (Pacific Standard Time)

Thursday, April 29, 2021

1:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. (Pacific Standard Time)

You can **register for the webinars here**. When registering, click on the link associated with the date and topic of your choice.

GET HELP DOING YOUR TAX RETURN

There are options to make it easier to file a tax return and get your benefits and credits. Visit the **Canada Revenue Agency updated webpage**.

Small and Medium-sized Business Recovery Grant Program

The Province of BC has extended the application deadline of its **Small and Medium-sized Business Recovery Grant** Program to **August 31, 2021** or until funds are fully committed, whichever comes first. Eligible Businesses only need to show a 30% revenue loss from March 2020 to now when compared to the same one-month period in 2019. Grants of \$10,000 to \$30,000 are available to eligible small and medium sized B.C. businesses impacted by COVID-19. An additional \$5,000 to \$15,000 grant is available to eligible tourism-related businesses.

For more information, about your eligibility and how to apply, visit the website or watch the **Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant program information session**.

Government of Canada launches Vaccine Community Innovation Challenge to support increased vaccine confidence

Community engagement plays a critical role in building vaccine confidence so everyone has the accurate information they need to make an informed decision on vaccination.

To this end, the Government of Canada announced on March 8 the launch of the **Vaccine Community Innovation Challenge**.

Under the Challenge, individuals and/or groups are invited to propose creative ideas for communications campaigns that will reach groups within their communities who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twenty finalists will be chosen by an expert panel and given \$25,000 to develop their ideas and launch their campaigns. A grand prize of \$100,000 will be awarded to one winner at the end of the Challenge period to reinvest in the protection and promotion of public health in their community.

The deadline to submit a proposal is April 9, 2021, at 3 pm EST.

ECONOMIC SUPPORTS – DEADLINE APPROACHING

The April 2020 **COVID Economic Stimulus Package for Indigenous Businesses**, through the Aboriginal Financial Institutions network, closes on March 31, 2021.

VAXCHAMP CHALLENGE

Did you know the First Nations Health Authority has a **VaxChamp challenge** underway?

It's inspiring to see the photos and read the reasons people are getting vaccinated!



Chief James Harris, Seabird Island,
on why he is being vaccinated against COVID-19:

"To protect our elders, our oral history, and our children, our future generations. Getting back to being with family and practicing our traditional way."

The Vaccine Community Innovation Challenge is one of several efforts by the Government of Canada to work with partners and stakeholders to increase vaccine confidence and address barriers to vaccine acceptance and uptake, including the **Immunization Partnership Fund**.

The Best Vaccine for You Is the One Available to You Right Now

On March 16, 2021, the First Nations Health Authority has posted a **message from Dr. Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer**. She says that “while there’s been a lot of media speculation about which vaccine is the most effective, experts are clear: the best vaccine for you or your members is the one available right now.” She also adds “getting your vaccine as soon as you can will not only prevent you from getting ill, it will also prevent further variants of concern from developing, and will help us all to achieve ‘community immunity’ sooner. This means we will be able to get back to being with the people we love and doing the things we love to do, which is something we can all look forward to! We are almost there; keep up the good work!”

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Lockdowns and limited travel options create mental health concerns. It can be challenging to keep people in their homes and manage the frustration in community with people wanting to leave.

The Hope for Wellness Helpline provides immediate, culturally safe, telephone crisis intervention support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis, 24 hours a day, seven days a week (1-855-242-3310 or the online chat at **hopeforwellness.ca**).

Additionally community members can call the First Nations Health Authority’s 24/7 culturally safe KUU-US Crisis Response Services at 1-800-588-8717 (or 250-723-2040 for child and youth / 250-723-4050 for adult and Elder).

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

As the province enters a new chapter in the COVID-19 response and recovery we wanted to highlight some of the artwork by Indigenous children and youth recently shared by Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children & Family Services Society (Xyólheméylh) located in Stó:lō Territory. The Agency decided it was the right time to ask Indigenous children and youth in British Columbia what they are grateful for. Nature and family ranked high in their responses.

These are the first place entries for the 3-12 and 13-19 year old categories. To view all the winners please visit the **FVACFSS website**.



- ▲ Summer-Quill, 12
- ◀ Miranda, 16





STATUS CARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

As of December 10, 2020, status cards can list a gender other than Male and Female.

And in case you missed it, the Registration and Status Card Service Counter in Vancouver is open by appointment. Please call **236-330-9961** to make an appointment before arriving. For application requirements, please visit canada.ca/indian-status or call 1-800-567-9604.

- **Protect your health and your community** – Preventing infection, handwashing and drinking water advisories, how to prepare, what to do if you are sick or caring for someone sick
- First Nations Health Authority – **Information for community leaders**
- **COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool**
The app will let you receive the latest updates, trusted resources, and alerts. The Self-Assessment Tool is built in.
- **New financial support** – developed by ISC, this page provides financial support information for Indigenous individuals, students, businesses, organizations and communities.
- Latest Service Canada programs and services posters
 - » **General**
 - » **For seniors**
 - » **For youth**
 - » **For businesses**

USEFUL LINKS

- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Indigenous communities**
- **COVID-19 vaccines and Indigenous peoples**
 - » **Moderna COVID-19 vaccine: what you should know**
 - » **Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine: what you should know**
 - » **Canada's COVID-19 Immunization Plan**
- **COVID-19 Awareness Resources and Videos**
 - » **COVID-19: How vaccines are developed (video)**
 - » **Vaccine development and approval in Canada (infographic)**
 - » **What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine for Canada (poster)**
 - » **Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Statement Series on COVID-19: mRNA Vaccines**
- **Taking care of your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic**

REGIONAL CONTACTS

We've set up a dedicated email for any non-health COVID-19-related questions and requests: aadnc.iscbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca.

- **Regional Director General**
Catherine Lappe / 604-340-7703
- **Associate Regional Director General**
Bill Guerin / 604-803-9476
- **Director, Community Infrastructure**
Paula Santos / 604-790-8451
- **Director, Programs and Partnerships**
Wendy Rogers / 604-363-8117
- **Director, Lands and Economic Development**
David Russell / 604-817-2644
- **Director, Funding Services**
Jody Kaden / 236-334-4742
- **Director, Child and Family Services**
Chiara Taylor / 778-668-9067
- **Director, Community Development**
James Moxon / 604-367-8241
- **Director, Corporate Services**
Harold Powell / 604-219-1737

Should you have any COVID-19 health-related questions, the First Nations Health Authority would like you to use the following:

- For general inquiries: COVID19@fnha.ca
- For FNHA and community health care providers (CHNs, HD, etc.) or CDE planning questions: CDMgmt@fnha.ca
- For individual health care and COVID-19 questions: 811 or primary care provider or contact the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day 1-855-344-3800 or email virtualdoctor@rccbc.ca.

Should you have any questions regarding the Emergency Management Assistance Program, please contact our Duty Officer at 604-209-9709 or bcaandc.do@canada.ca.

