

# COVID-19 MESSAGE FROM ISC BC REGION

## UPDATE #61 / September 24, 2020

Good Afternoon,

As we hear of COVID-19 cases in more communities and rising numbers provincially, you are all very much on our minds. This disturbing trend is happening when many of us are yearning for a return to normalcy – at work, school, and in our social interactions. Many talk about pandemic fatigue.

We know many of you are missing your extended family gatherings, and religious and cultural ceremonies. We acknowledge the significance of cultural gatherings and the lingering trauma caused by the banning of cultural activities in the past. The past six months have shown us that attending even small gatherings increases the risk of exposure to COVID-19. This increases the chance of participants becoming infected and carrying the virus into their communities and passing it on to vulnerable friends and family, particularly Elders.

We are committed to supporting your efforts to keep your communities safe.

In **her most recent update**, Dr. Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer of the First Nations Health Authority, summed up Phase 1 as being about flattening the curve and Phase 2 about how much we could open things up again safely. Phase 3 she says has to be about ‘fewer faces, bigger spaces’, as recommended by Dr. Bonnie Henry. Dr. McDonald says “we are all in this for the long haul,” noting that “you may be tired of it, but COVID isn’t.”

This week marked the beginning of BC Region’s phased return to the office at 1138 Melville in Vancouver. Our goal in this first phase is to move towards resuming 100 per cent of our services to First Nations while limiting our occupancy to 10-20 per cent of normal. On Monday, September 28, the Indian Status Registration service kiosk will reopen to First Nations clients on an appointment basis. When the line opens, the phone number for appointments will be 236-330-9961. We’ll provide information about a toll-free number when it is available.

Employees and clients will be expected to follow measures that have been put in place for the safety of everyone in the building, including wearing a mask while moving through the lobby, elevators and all common areas, and practicing safe physical distancing.

Finally, on a lighter note **this poster from the Cowessess Education Centre** in Saskatchewan reminds us that even in adversity there is comfort in shared humour.



**Don't bring the COVID virus home**



Help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Indigenous communities. **Learn how to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly.**



## UPDATES

### Speech from the Throne

Yesterday, Canada's **Speech from the Throne** included a number of commitments to Indigenous communities which include moving forward to introduce legislation to implement the **United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** before the end of this year.

The Government of Canada also pledged to: accelerate the ten year commitment to close the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities; make additional resiliency investments to meet the clean drinking water commitment in First Nations communities; address food insecurity; and, support additional capacity-building for First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.

The Government will continue to support Canadians through the COVID-19 crisis by extending the **Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy** right through to next summer and scaling up the **Youth Employment and Skills Strategy**, and revamping the **Employment Insurance system** including the introduction of the transitional **Canada Recovery Benefit** for workers who are self-employed or are not eligible for EI.

We will provide more details as they become available.

### Additional Support for a Safe Return to First Nations Schools

Many First Nations schools are now preparing to welcome back students or have reopened in one form or another. We're pleased to advise that in addition to the school supports outlined in **Update 60**, that included the **Safe Return to Class Fund** that provides \$112 million nationally to support a safe return to elementary and secondary First Nations schools on reserve, and \$482 thousand to support First Nations schools in BC to be allocated through the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Indigenous Services Canada is providing \$1.6 million nationally in minor capital funding to First Nations with schools on reserve to support school adaptation. The funding is intended to address immediate public health and safety measures, including those related to minor capital investments that support physical distancing and enhanced health and safety practices. First Nations community leadership has flexibility to determine what health and safety measures are necessary in their facilities such as:

- Additional hand washing stations
- Signage to reinforce social distancing and consistent with local public health guidance
- Plexiglas/safe space barriers for distancing/partitioning
- Cleaning supplies and sanitizers
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff and/or students
- Flushing of water lines
- Safety checks and updates of existing HVAC systems

Please note the funding cannot be used to address major capital improvements or capital improvements not related to adapting to the COVID pandemic, funding for additional teachers, or requests for technology supports for schools or individual students.

BC Region is in the process of sending out amendments as well as additional guidance related to reporting requirements.

### Hope for Wellness Help Line



Immediate, culturally safe telephone crisis intervention support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis 24 hours a day, seven days a week and the number is 1-855-242-3310. Online chat: [hopeforwellness.ca](https://www.hopeforwellness.ca).

First Nations Health Authority also offer 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).

## New Federal Funding Supports a Safe Back to School in Provincial Schools

Building on the Province's \$45.6-million investment to support a safe restart for BC's schools, **additional funding from the Government of Canada will allow schools to expand health and safety measures, purchase more PPE and increase capacity for remote learning.**

To support BC's COVID-19 response for K-12 education, Canada is providing \$242.4 million to the Province of BC in one-time funding for the 2020-21 school year, with the first half of the payment expected to be received in September.

Funding will be allocated to public school districts based primarily on student enrolment. BC's Ministry of Education is initially allocating \$101.1 million to school districts, \$8.0 million to independent schools and reserving \$12.1 million for emerging COVID-19 related issues between September and December 2020. This funding will support all students attending provincially-run facilities, including 8,000 First Nations students who live on reserve but are attending a public or off-reserve independent school.

## Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB)

In case any of your post-secondary students missed it, the **Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB)** provides financial support to post-secondary students, and recent post-secondary and high school graduates who are unable to find work due to COVID-19.

This benefit is for students who do not qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Employment Insurance (EI).

From May to August 2020, the CESB provides a payment to eligible students of:

- \$1,250 for each 4-week period
- \$2,000 for each 4-week period, if you have dependents or a disability

All applications for the CESB must be submitted before September 30, 2020.

## Additional funding for the Indigenous Community Support Fund

As first announced in August, the Government of Canada has announced additional funding for the **Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF)**. These investments are an additional allocation of the original ICSF. Further details about the funding envelopes are available now to First Nations and the allocation process.

Funding will be provided in two ways:

1. An allocation-based amount that will flow on a distinctions-basis directly to First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Funding for this envelope is \$145,125,000. Allocations for First Nations (\$107,625,000) will be directed to First Nation and self-governing communities. Amounts will be allocated to First Nations using a similar methodology to initial ICSF allocations. In BC, this means an additional \$20 million will be sent to First Nations and self-governing communities through amendments that are being processed.
2. A needs-based process in which all Indigenous communities and organizations, whether they be located on or off reserve, will be able to submit applications for needs-based support. Funding for this envelope is \$159,875,000. Details on the criteria and process for accessing funding through the needs-based process will be forthcoming. These funds are available to more Indigenous communities and organizations, including Tribal Councils and service organizations, with resources to implement their own solutions, informed by public health guidance, related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communities have started receiving letters outlining the amounts they will be receiving under the first stream and information on other funding streams.

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### Why is my community's allocation for the second round of the Indigenous Community Support Fund less than what we were allocated in the first round?

As noted above, while the \$305 million total funding announced in August is the same total amount as the original ICSF announced in March, given the inclusion of a needs-based component within the new \$305 million, the allocations to communities will be approximately half of the original round.

It's important to note that there are a number of other targeted funding supports that have come on stream since the first ICSF to address community needs and supplement costs originally eligible in ICSF. For example:

- The First Nations Health Authority may be able to reimburse some security costs incurred up to September 30. Please contact them for details and to find out how to apply.
- Education costs like minor capital as outlined above, and funds allocated to the First Nations Education Steering Committee as part of the Safe Start education measures in First Nations schools in BC, along with allocations to support education programming, provide a dedicated source of funds to support First Nations learners on reserve. (This was first shared in [Update 60](#).)
- Income Assistance – The Government of Canada announced **\$270 million for to supplement the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program on May 29, 2020**. In BC Region, we have since the start matched the Province's \$300/month top up for IA and added a three month federal top up of \$300/household per month.
- Additionally, off-reserve members now have access in many places to groups we have funded through the **Indigenous Community Support Fund's off-reserve and urban stream**, and individual benefits such as the **Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (which ends September 26)**, **enhanced post secondary supports**, and **Old Age Security increases**.

We recognize that in the first weeks of the pandemic response communities had to cover everything and anything (cleaning supplies, food security, etc.) largely through the quick infusion of funds provided by ICSF but as some of those issues are no longer as acute and other responses have now been developed, including direct benefits to individuals on and off reserve and to Indigenous organizations off reserve, this next round of ICSF funding can cover other components.

As was the case for earlier funding under the first ICSF, this new funding can be used for a wide variety of measures such as supporting Elders and vulnerable community members, addressing food insecurity, mental health assistance and emergency response services, preparedness measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and more.



## Pandemic Pay for Assisted Living Workers

The Adult In Home Care (Assisted Living) program is receiving a top up in September. The assistance is part of the **\$285.1 million to support the ongoing public health response to COVID-19 in Indigenous communities** announced by the Prime Minister in May.

ISC acknowledges the valuable care that staff in the Assisted Living Program provide during this challenging time. The funds will support health and social workers wage top-up expenses for Assisted Living homemaker workers that were not already covered by the province.

This funding will align with the Province of British Columbia's temporary pandemic pay that supports eligible employees that deliver in-person, front-line care in social services for a 16-week period (April to July 2020). The one-time top-up will be available to eligible, essential Assisted Living workers in First Nation communities.

On September 18, on behalf of the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services, Patrick Weiler, Member of Parliament for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, attended a virtual event to recognize the **62 Indigenous organizations in BC** which have received \$6.4 million in funding through the ICSF's off-reserve and urban stream to respond to the current COVID-19 pandemic. If you missed it, you can watch it on the **First Nations Public Service Secretariat YouTube page** and hear recipients like the Pacific Association of First Nations Women and the DUDES Club Society talk about their projects.





If all the funds are not used for the wage top-up for essential workers, there is flexibility for recipients to use any unexpended funds towards their pandemic response in the areas of Assisted Living Program. There is no need for First Nations to apply, it's allocated through a formula based on prior year reporting. A letter with more details will be shared with First Nations in the near future.

## Call for community-led projects in response to COVID-19

The Government of Canada has launched an **open call to non-governmental not-for-profit organizations** who will work directly with municipalities, local governments, Indigenous communities and not-for-profit community partners to identify and fund local projects through the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative.

The Initiative, **announced by Minister McKenna on August 13, 2020**, is providing up to \$31 million over the next two years to support community-led projects that respond to immediate and ongoing needs arising from COVID-19. The goal of the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative is to support projects that help communities of all sizes and compositions adapt to COVID-19 under three main themes: creating safe and vibrant public spaces, improving mobility options, and digital solutions.

Potential projects could include: supporting main street business associations to adapt seating arrangements, modifying recreational facilities to accommodate for physical distancing, building pop-up passage ways for bikes, scooters, and personal mobility devices to allow

citizens to move around their communities safely, or developing apps or other digital tools to allow residents to access services remotely.

## Extension of Rent Relief for Small Businesses

The **Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA)** for small businesses has been extended by one month to help eligible small businesses pay rent for September. Current CECRA application deadlines will also be extended to accommodate this extension.

Property owners are encouraged to continue to make use of CECRA for eligible tenants and to work to provide flexibility where possible to their tenants as they recover from the crisis. The federal government also continues to support the provincial banning of commercial evictions during the pandemic.

This will be the final extension of this program as the government explores options to support small businesses as they face the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic — including the challenges of fixed costs at a time when health concerns and precautions prevent many businesses from operating at full capacity.

Details on the September extension are available on the **CMHC website**.

## Greater flexibility and extension of Canada Emergency Business Account announced

In case you missed it, the application deadline for the **Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)** has been extended from August 31 to October 31, 2020.

**Not sure what benefits might be applicable to community members?** In the coming weeks there will be changes coming to existing programs. We'll update you as information comes available. In addition, the Government of Canada has an online navigator to help you find what federal and partner assistance might be available

If community members do not have access to the internet or face other barriers, a Service Canada Outreach Support Centre will ensure they get access to the critical benefits they need.

The outreach support center can be accessed by calling 1-877-631-2657. Outreach workers are available to assist from 8:30am to 4:00pm Monday to Friday.

Find  
financial  
help during  
COVID-19

The Government of Canada is working closely with financial institutions to make the CEBA program available to those with qualifying payroll or non-deferrable expenses that have so far been unable to apply due to not operating from a business banking account. Further details on these changes will be released in coming days, including a new business account opening process through which qualifying businesses will be able to apply.

## Easing eligibility requirements for Canada Student Loans and Canada Student Grants

It's not just elementary and secondary students gearing up for classes in these challenging times. Post-secondary students are starting classes as well. Canada Student Grants have been doubled for full-time students to up to \$6,000 for this school year, and the cap on Canada Student Loans has been increased to \$350 per week of study. These fall measures represent an investment of approximately \$1.9 billion and are expected to expand the reach of the **Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP)** and benefit approximately 765,000 students.

These initiatives **follow Canada's other recently introduced COVID-19 measures** on supports for young Canadians and students affected by the pandemic, including a six-month interest-free moratorium on the repayment of Canada Student Loans, effective until September 30, 2020, that has provided relief to over 1 million CSLP borrowers currently in repayment.

## PARTNER INFORMATION

### New support to those most vulnerable to COVID-19 and their communities



The Province of BC is investing \$1.6 billion in a **fall and winter preparedness plan** that will significantly build upon and strengthen measures that respond to the health-care requirements of COVID-19.

The plan will provide new support to seniors in long-term care homes and assisted-living facilities, by ensuring more British Columbians can get a flu shot and by reducing the chance for transmission of COVID-19 in BC hospitals.

Additionally, the Province of BC is dedicating \$44.1 million to launch the **Health Career Access Program** and recruit an estimated 7,000 health-care workers in long-term care homes and assisted-living facilities throughout the province. The program will provide a path for approximately 3,000 applicants who may not previously have had health-care experience to receive on-the-job training. New hires in the program will start in a health-care support worker position and receive paid training that leads to full qualification as a health-care assistant.

### THE FLU SHOT:

Protect yourself, protect your community



Share traditions not the Flu! Getting the flu shot can help keep you and your community healthy.

## USEFUL LINKS

- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Indigenous communities** – developed by ISC, this page provides health and financial support information for Indigenous communities.
- Find information on how to apply for financial or economic support from the Government of Canada at: [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus).
- With the help of BCFC, the First Nations Public Service Secretariat has developed **a series of one-pagers on COVID-19 support and resources**.
- **Taking care of your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks**
- 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.
- **Transport Canada – COVID-19 measures, updates, and guidance issued by Transport Canada**

## REGIONAL CONTACTS

We've set up a dedicated email for any non-health COVID-19-related questions and requests:  
[aadnc.isbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca](mailto:aadnc.isbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca).

