

COVID-19 MESSAGE FROM ISC BC REGION

UPDATE #79 / April 21, 2021

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



Good afternoon,

We hope this update finds you and your communities well.

On Monday, April 19, 2021, the Government of Canada tabled **Budget 2021**. We will provide information on those budget measures and commitments as soon as we are able.

As mentioned in **Update 78**, Bill Guerin is currently the Acting Regional Director General in BC. He will be supported by members of the Executive Leadership Team who will act as the Associate Regional Director General on a rotating basis over the next few months until a new RDG is named. Please don't hesitate to contact us at the numbers at the end of this Update if you have any questions or concerns.

How can you
help protect your community?



UPDATES

Income Assistance Information

On March 17, 2021, **the Province of BC announced** a 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 the increase.

Indigenous Services Canada is updating the regional policy rates to remain comparable to the Province of BC.

Effective April 2021, the ISC rates are as follows:

- Members who are already in receipt of regular Income Assistance, the Persons with Disabilities benefit (PWD) and the Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers benefit (PPMB) assistance will be entitled to an increase of \$175/month per adult (\$350 for couples) to their basic needs allowance starting in the month of April 2021.
- Comforts Allowance (for people in special care facilities) will increase by \$20 to \$115. (At this time, there is no increase to the Comforts Allowance for PWD clients.)
- Seniors Supplement increase is \$50 per recipient.



Information has been sent to Band Social Development Workers. Should your First Nation have questions or concerns please contact us at the number/email below:

- BSDW Policy Support Line: 1-888-440-4080
- aadnc.tsdbsooutien-bsdwsupport-bc.aandc@canada.ca

VACCINE INFO UPDATE

COVID-19 vaccines: get the facts

The Government of Canada has developed a **fact sheet** to help answer questions and dispel myths on the COVID-19 vaccinations. Common questions are answered, including questions related to side effects, vaccination safety and public health measures.

FROM OUR PARTNERS

In case you missed it, the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC), Métis Nation BC (MNBC), the First Nations Health Council (FNHC), the First Nations Health Directors Association (FNHDA), and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), **issued a news release** responding to questions posed by some members of the public asking why Indigenous people are a higher priority for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine in British Columbia (BC). The response may help support conversations with your members and any inquiring neighbouring populations.

“From the outset, the vaccine rollout to Indigenous people in BC was based on recommendations from Canada’s National Advisory Committee on Immunization, said Richard Jock, FNHA’s Chief Executive Officer. “In considering potential at-risk groups, the advisory committee identified Indigenous people as high risk and therefore considered a high priority to receive an initial dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.”

FNHA Acting Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Shannon McDonald said, “Access to acute care within 2.5 hours was a key element and informed the decision to provide vaccines to remote communities first and work our way inward. As COVID-19 clusters were identified, the FNHA directed vaccine supply to those affected communities.”

The following factors formed some of the basis of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommendations:

- Racialized and marginalized populations in Canada have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
- Systemic barriers to supportive care for COVID-19 also exist in urban settings due to factors such as poverty, systemic racism and homelessness.
- The risk of transmission is especially high in remote or isolated First Nations communities where physical distancing and other infection prevention and control measures are challenging.
- Adults living in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, where access to health care may be limited and infection can have disproportionate consequences, should be prioritized to receive initial doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The existence of anti-Indigenous racism within the provincial health care system has been well documented and cannot be ignored. Indigenous-specific racism can lead to hesitancy in seeking care, negative experiences at the point of care, inequitable medical treatment, physical harm and even death for BC’s First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

Existing data shows the extent to which Indigenous people are disproportionately affected with a much higher risk of hospitalization and death due to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus than the non-Indigenous population in BC. More information is available on the **First Nations Health Authority website**.

PARTNER INFORMATION

Infrastructure Canada Call for Applications for the new Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Program

With many communities ready to turn the page on COVID-19 and look to recovery, a new infrastructure initiative may be of interest.

Infrastructure Canada is currently accepting applications for retrofits and new building projects for community buildings. Applications are being accepted



on an ongoing basis for projects under \$3 million and until July 6, 2021 at 23:59 PDT for projects from \$3 million to \$25 million.

The Green and Inclusive Community Buildings (GICB) program aims to build more community buildings and improve existing ones – in particular in areas with populations experiencing higher needs – while also making the buildings more energy efficient, lower carbon, more resilient, and higher performing. This five-year \$1.5 billion program will support green and accessible retrofits, repairs or upgrades of existing public community buildings and the construction of new publicly-accessible community buildings that serve high-needs, underserved communities across Canada.

The GICB program supports the first pillar of the **Strengthened Climate Plan** by making it easier for Canadians to improve the places in which they live and gather, including by cutting pollution (e.g. reducing GHG emissions, increasing energy efficiency, building resiliency to climate change and encouraging new builds to net zero standards), making life more affordable and supporting thousands of good jobs.

Infrastructure Canada invites municipal or regional governments, public sector bodies, not-for-profit organizations, provincial or territorial governments and Indigenous recipients to apply for funding for eligible projects.

\$150 million has been set aside for Indigenous applicants undertaking projects that will serve Indigenous populations and communities.

For more details please see the [Infrastructure Canada website](#).

Emergency Funding Boost Supports Student Success In The North

Students attending post-secondary institutions in northern British Columbia have access to emergency assistance funding to help them cope with financial pressures caused by COVID-19.

Since March 2020, post-secondary institutions in northern BC have received a combined total of \$1,283,500 to assist students, including Indigenous students, who are experiencing an unexpected financial emergency that may affect their ability to complete

FIRST NATIONS WELL-BEING FUND

First Nations throughout BC can now **apply for funding to promote well-being, improve quality of life for community members on and off reserve**, and find solutions to poverty in their communities.

Funding is offered through two streams: community projects and planning. The community projects stream provides up to \$35,000 for a single First Nation, \$70,000 for two First Nations and \$105,000 for regional applications of three or more partnering First Nations.

Applications will be accepted through the **First Nations Public Service Secretariat** until 11:00 p.m. (Pacific time) on Sunday, May 30, 2021.

their studies and handle expenses, especially those related to COVID-19.

The **non-repayable emergency assistance** can be used to help with a broad range of costs, including living expenses, food, travel, portable computers and other supports for students who are returning to campuses for 2021-22. This emergency funding is part of \$9 million invested since March 2020 to help BC post-secondary students.

Students who attend one of BC's 25 public post-secondary institutions, as well as the Native Education College and students enrolled in post-secondary programs at Indigenous institutes, may apply to access these funds by contacting their school's financial aid office or Indigenous student service centre.

Still Time to apply for the BC Recovery Benefit

The **BC Recovery Benefit** (the benefit) is a one-time direct deposit payment for eligible families, single parents or individuals. Benefit eligibility is based on net income from your 2019 tax return. Members must apply before June 30, 2021 to receive the benefit.

BENEFIT RATES

The amount you're eligible for will be automatically calculated based on your net income.

Applicants must provide 2019 income tax data to receive the benefit.

FAMILIES AND SINGLE PARENTS

- \$1,000 for eligible families and single parents with a net income of up to \$125,000
- Reduced benefit amount for eligible families and single parents with a net income of up to \$175,000

The benefit defines a family as an individual and their spouse or common-law partner, unless they are **separated**. Both people must be residents of BC on December 18, 2020.

The benefit defines a single parent as an individual who is the principal caregiver to at least one child. A child is someone under the age of 19 on December 18, 2020 who would not be eligible for the benefit on their own.

INDIVIDUALS

- \$500 for eligible individuals with a net income of up to \$62,500
- Reduced benefit amount for eligible individuals with a net income of up to \$87,500

DID YOU KNOW? THE NEXT CENSUS OF POPULATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN MAY 2021

Census information is used to make informed decisions.

Please encourage your members to participate.

Additionally, Statistics Canada is currently hiring approximately 32,000 people for census enumerator and crew leader positions across Canada. For more information on the jobs available for the 2021 Census and the hiring process, please visit the [2021 Census jobs FAQ](#).

LINKS TO LEARNING

The annual Links to Learning workshop (virtual this year) is coming up in BC **May 3-4, 2021**.

The technical training forum provides a range of learning opportunities for First Nations Economic Development Officers and Lands Management Officers.

Links to Learning 2021 is a partnership between Cando, the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association, First Nations Land Management Resource Centre and Indigenous Services Canada.

For more information, contact:
skonoval@edo.ca or call
1-800-463-9300 x 231.



[See the agenda](#)

BC Unveils New Programs to Help Corporations Recover from the Financial Impacts of COVID-19

As part of BC's Economic Recovery Plan, the Ministry of Finance has opened applications for two new programs to help corporations recover from the financial impacts of COVID-19.

The BC Increased Employment Incentive is a one-time refundable tax credit for employers which encouraged the creation of new jobs for BC workers or increases in payroll for existing low- or middle-income employees in the last quarter ending December 31, 2020. The tax credit is calculated at 15% of the amount that the employer's eligible remuneration for the last quarter ending December 31, 2020 exceeds the employer's eligible remuneration for the quarter ending September 30, 2020.

For more information, including eligibility requirements and access to the application, visit gov.bc.ca/employertaxcredit.

The BC PST Rebate on Select Machinery and Equipment is a temporary provincial sales tax (PST) program that acts like a refund but is separate from the existing PST Refund process. Under this temporary program, corporations can apply to receive an amount equal to the PST they paid between September 17, 2020 and September 30, 2021 on qualifying machinery and equipment.

For more information, including eligibility requirements and access to the application, visit gov.bc.ca/corporatePSTrebate.



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

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.

Spring FireSmart BC

With another fire season on the horizon, fire safety is more important than ever.

FireSmart BC has launched its annual awareness campaign. After years of devastating wildfires, they asked firefighters and experts from around the world one question: “What have we learned?”

As it turns out, people who have fought these fires also saw a silver lining: the homes that survived did something different, but simple. In short, the message is that the homes that are prepared are the homes left standing.

To help prepare your community’s homes, visit firesmartbc.ca/homes and download a new interactive homeowners guide which recommends steps as easy as clearing gutters and moving firewood.

There is also an informative video which you can [view here](#).

Spring Flooding

With warmer weather and melting snow packs, there is a risk of localized flooding in some areas. For First Nations communities and members preparing for spring flooding, our provincial partners have put together [guidelines for responding to floods during COVID-19](#). It includes best practices for sandbag production while practicing safe physical distancing.

USEFUL LINKS

- **COVID-19 vaccines and Indigenous peoples**
 - » **COVID-19 vaccines: get the facts**
 - » **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)**
- **Taking care of your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **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.

REGIONAL CONTACTS

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

- **Acting 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:** covid19needs@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.

