



## **Premiers committed to a strong, resilient Canadian North**

WHITEHORSE, YUKON (May 9, 2022) – As Chair of the Northern Premiers’ Forum, Premier Silver welcomed Premier Cochrane and Premier Akeegok to the Yukon for their first in-person meeting of Northern Premiers in over two years. While enthusiastic about meeting face to face, Premiers continue to urge appropriate caution with COVID-19, asking Northerners to assess the risk before gatherings so they help protect themselves and others.

Premiers discussed a number of important priorities, including Arctic security, climate change, housing, healthcare and public safety. Premiers are committed to a safe, secure and prosperous North for current and future generations.

### **A strong and resilient North**

Premiers discussed ongoing international events and their impact on diplomacy in the Arctic. Premiers continue to condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the atrocities unfolding in Ukraine and call for a swift and peaceful resolution to the conflict.

For many years, foreign countries have pursued objectives in the Arctic region that run counter to Canadian interests. Northern Premiers are committed to working with the federal government and Indigenous partners to strengthen Canada’s position in the region. Premiers agreed that Arctic sovereignty and security are enhanced by strengthening the resiliency of our people and our communities, and discussed the need for coordinated federal investments, informed by the interests and needs of Northerners. Premiers noted the contributions made by the Canadian Rangers and the Junior Rangers program in supporting the security and sovereignty of the Arctic and fostering opportunities for youth and community development. Premiers call for increased federal investment in capacity and development for the Rangers program.

The path to stronger security must reflect the needs of Northerners and be supported by new investments in critical infrastructure such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications that supports social and economic growth in our communities. This includes resource

development that allows Canada to be less reliant on other regions. Premiers noted their interest in a Northern exploration tax credit to support this transition. Closing the gap of inequities experienced by Northerners is key to building a strong and resilient Arctic. Investment in healthcare, housing, food security and education are critical to vibrant and thriving Northern communities.

### **Addressing the impacts of climate change**

Climate change affects every Northern resident. While territorial governments continue to do their part to mitigate and adapt to climate change, Premiers recognized the disproportionate impacts felt in the North despite the limited emissions. Premiers agreed that flexible and accessible investments are needed to support climate-resilient infrastructure, reliable renewable and alternative secure energy systems, emergency preparedness and northern research.

Premiers call on the federal government to establish, extend, and expand federal funding programs and opportunities that support climate change mitigation and adaptation, clean energy, and monitoring across the territories. Addressing climate change in the territories requires understanding of the realities faced by our communities. It is only through a collaborative approach where our unique circumstances are understood can all levels of government work together to advance our mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Premiers also discussed the importance of diversifying the economy towards new possibilities in sustainable industries, renewable resources, critical minerals, and the blue economy. With strategic investment in transformative infrastructure, the territories can be a strong partner in Canada's transition to a low carbon economy. Securing regionally appropriate resources that support territorial and Indigenous governments to collectively address the needs of the North and Northern climate-related risks remain critical in our efforts to adapt, mitigate and build resilience to our climate change realities.

Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework provides a shared vision with the federal government for addressing northern needs, and a foundation to build upon to inform the unique northern approach to climate change.

Premiers and Indigenous leaders are united in the need for action. Today, Northern Premiers released a pan-northern leaders' statement on climate change, calling for increased federal attention, support and investment in climate resilient infrastructure; reliable renewable and alternative secure energy systems; emergency preparedness; northern research, knowledge and capacity building; supporting health and wellness; preservation of cultural identity; and economic and leadership opportunities.

## **Acute housing needs in the North**

Housing challenges represent an ongoing and heavy burden to Northerners. It impacts every element of people's lives. The already high costs for construction relative to the rest of Canada is increasing dramatically, adding to the challenges of building in a region with shorter construction seasons, infrastructure gaps, and climate change. Premiers acknowledged that a lack of adequate housing in the North not only impacts individuals but also the resilience of communities. The global pandemic has only emphasized and increased the need for adequate housing throughout the territories.

Premiers understand that access to adequate, affordable and suitable housing is linked with all aspects of wellbeing, including health, education and employment. Premiers agreed to continued dialogue and collaboration with the federal government and Indigenous partners to enhance support, assistance and innovation for the provision and sustainability of social housing in the North over the long-term.

Premiers noted the significant federal investments in housing proposed in Budget 2022, including \$150 million over two years for the territorial governments to support affordable housing and related infrastructure. While this is appreciated, long-term sustainable and flexible funds are needed to fully address the acute housing needs in the North. This includes building, operation and maintenance costs.

Premiers agreed the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework continues to be an opportunity and a means to channel the flexible investments needed for Northern priorities. This includes building capacity throughout the territories to support and grow our presence in the Arctic. Premiers encourage the federal government to attach meaningful and robust investments to the policy that support climate change, housing, infrastructure, reconciliation, and security in the North.

## **Pandemic highlights healthcare challenges**

Premiers acknowledged that Northerners have come together to support one another during the pandemic. That support is made possible because of the hard work of territorial healthcare staff. They remain a foundational part of the pandemic response and Premiers wish to thank them all for their continued commitment to their communities.

The health and wellbeing of Northerners supports a strong and resilient Arctic. Premiers discussed how the pandemic continues to strain all facets of the healthcare system, including health human resources, mental health and substance use, and access to primary care. The

pandemic also highlighted the need for improvements to Elder care. Premiers acknowledged the important contributions Elders provide to communities and the need to support them to age with dignity at home.

Premiers acknowledged the wide range of mental health and substance use challenges experienced in the North, especially among the youth who shoulder the experiences of intergenerational trauma from colonial policies. Premiers recognized the significant community impacts felt by the loss of life from mental health and substance use challenges. Premiers emphasized the need for a full spectrum of mental health supports across all ages and levels of need. Premiers agreed to continue working together to address these issues and to reduce the stigma associated with getting help.

Premiers agreed that a pan-territorial approach to health human resources was needed to ensure all communities have the support they need, now and in the future. They agreed that a particular focus on the needs of Northern, rural and remote areas should inform any pan-Canadian strategy.

Premiers renewed their commitment to working with the federal government to secure a significant, long-term increase in federal healthcare funding to support the health and wellbeing of Canadians. They look forward to negotiating a First Ministers' agreement on sustainable healthcare funding in the near future.

### **Public safety**

Premiers discussed the current work underway related to the stabilization and expansion of the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program in the North. Premiers discussed the call from communities for the need for increased investments in police officers, community safety officers, and community policing infrastructure across the three territories. Premiers encourage Public Safety Canada to remain flexible in the distribution of First Nations and Inuit Policing Program resources.

Sustained, strategic solutions and investments in Canada's Arctic, driven by and including its people and communities, are essential to honouring Canada's commitment as an Arctic Nation. Premiers look forward to continued and focused partnerships in strengthening the Arctic, together.

Northwest Territories was confirmed as the chair of the Northern Premiers' Forum for the 2023 calendar year.

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