



Premiers commit to working together for a prosperous, healthy, and strong North

INUUVIK, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (May 17, 2023) – Premier Cochrane welcomed Premier Pillai and Premier Akeegok to Inuvik, Northwest Territories for the annual meeting of Northern Premiers. Premiers appreciated the opportunity to experience Inuvik. This is the first time the NWT has hosted this meeting outside of Yellowknife since 2011. Premiers discussed shared priorities, including climate change, Arctic security and sovereignty, infrastructure opportunities, affordability, economic development, and the health and well being of people and communities.

Arctic Sovereignty and Security

Protecting the North and supporting the people that live there is essential to the security of all Canadians. A significant portion of Canada’s international border is in the territories. In 2023 aerial and marine objects were identified in Canadian airspace and waters, including that of the territories. Growing global attention in the region, along with recent incidents have underscored its the vulnerability and the need for increased investment from Canada. Territorial Premiers will continue to seek support for dual use infrastructure and clean energy initiatives, including investment from federal and private sector partners.

Premiers received a briefing on NORAD modernization from Department of National Defence officials. Premiers expect substantive engagement and collaboration with territorial leaders and Indigenous governments on the update of Canada’s Defence Policy. Premiers further urged that NORAD modernization could be used as a valuable tool for economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Infrastructure and Corridors

As international politics shift and climate change creates new challenges and opportunities for the North, Canada needs to show the world its commitment to this region. Investment in dual-use infrastructure and clean energy will keep Canada safe and secure while also supporting communities and promoting economic prosperity. Robust transportation, energy,

and telecommunications infrastructure that connects us to the rest of Canada is required to unlock opportunities for economic diversification and promote social development across the North.

As the federal government considers the next major national infrastructure fund to succeed the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, Premiers called for secure territorial allocations with terms that recognize the fiscal capacity and priorities of Northern governments, and flexibility to address the distinct realities in each jurisdiction.

Critical Minerals

The North holds many of the critical minerals necessary to support the low-carbon future of Canada and the world. Strategic investments in infrastructure will also support the territories to get these vital resources to market. They encourage the federal government to work in collaboration with territorial and Indigenous governments to improve regulatory and assessment efficiency in the North to ensure that the territories can be full participants in critical minerals opportunities. Premiers call on the federal government to create a Northern-specific mineral exploration tax credit to complement existing tax incentives for mining, given the high operating costs in the region. Premiers also acknowledge the importance of protecting Indigenous ways of life and ensuring cultural activities are not impeded.

Affordability and Housing

All territories are grappling with inflation driven by the cost of housing and fuel, in a region where a significant portion of the population was already struggling with the cost of living. Premiers discussed actions they have taken to address the affordability challenges experienced across the territories, including lowering childcare costs, increasing access to housing and improving income security benefits. Support from the Government of Canada has been crucial in these areas. Premiers noted that the escalating costs in some regions around air transportation are having immediate impacts, particularly in remote communities.

Housing affordability and accessibility is a pressing focus for the territories. Premiers called for meaningful engagement by the federal government on the delivery and design of the National Housing Strategy and other targeted programs to ensure Northerners have access to an adequate and affordable supply of quality housing. Premiers expressed the need for territorial specific funding under the Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Strategy.

Healthy people and communities

Premiers look forward to working with the federal government to improve health care in the territories. They call on the federal government to recognize the distinct needs of the territories and provide the flexibility and adequate funding needed to advance health care across the North.

Premiers recognized the devastating effects of substance use across Northern communities, and discussed efforts underway in each jurisdiction to improve supports for mental health, expand treatment and harm reduction options, and address the public safety impacts of the illicit drug trade. They agreed that culturally appropriate programs and services, including on-the-land treatment play an important role in healing and recovery.

Labour Market

The territories, much like the rest of the country, are experiencing labour shortages. Challenges are particularly acute in some sectors, including health care, particularly nurses. Recognizing that economic growth relies on a strong labour market, Premiers discussed ways to address these challenges particularly through collaboration with other jurisdictions.

Education and Skills Development

To build labour capacity at home, Premiers discussed training and skills development tailored to the needs of territorial residents. Education opportunities close to home that reflect the diverse learning needs in the North can support a productive workforce. Premiers spoke to the importance of well-resourced post-secondary institutions and explored opportunities for collaboration that meet the needs of each territory.

Climate Change

Premiers expressed deep concern regarding the ongoing wildfires in Hay River and Kátt'odeeche First Nation and flooding in Fort McPherson. They commended the efforts of emergency personnel and volunteers who have been battling these disasters and providing services to evacuees.

The North is seeing the impacts of climate change with increasing severity and occurrence of natural disasters. These include unprecedented flooding which causes life-altering hardship for many residents, businesses, and communities.

Premiers discussed the need for Nation building levels of investment towards proven reliable clean energy sources. This allows us to take a leadership role in meeting Canada's emission targets, and fully unlocks the potential of resources required for the low carbon transition.

Climate change significantly affects communities, the land and waters across the territories. Premiers discussed the continued importance of the interests laid out in the Pan-Northern Leaders' Statement on Climate Change, the need for federal investment tailored to the circumstances of the North, and collaboration among all levels of governments to adapt to the changing climate.

Premiers committed to working together to create a prosperous and sustainable future for all territorial residents and the rest of Canada.

Nunavut was confirmed as the chair of the Northern Premiers' Forum for the 2024 calendar year.

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