



National Aboriginal Health Organization

BRIEFING NOTE

TITLE: Speech from the Throne to Open the First Session of the 38th Parliament of Canada – *The Canada We Want*.

ISSUE: To analyze the Speech from the Throne and the Government of Canada’s response for potential impact on future policy and spending, directed at the health and well-being of Aboriginal people in Canada.

BACKGROUND: **Attachments:** Yes No

Speech from the Throne - Key Elements related to Aboriginal people

Governor General Adrienne Clarkson opened the first session of the 38th Parliament of Canada on September 30, 2002, with the Speech from the Throne. In summary, the Governor General directed Government to consider the following under five broad themes:

- Under the theme Putting in Place the Health Care System for the 21st Century, the “government will take further action to close the gap in health status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians by putting in place a First Nations Health Promotion and Disease Prevention strategy with a targeted immunization program, and by working with its partners to improve health care delivery on-reserve.”
- Concerning Helping Children and Families out of Poverty, “government will take additional measures to address the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. It will put in place early childhood development programs for First Nations, expanding Aboriginal Headstart, improving parental supports and providing Aboriginal communities with the tools to address fetal alcohol syndrome and its effects.” It was further noted how the “most enduring contribution Canada can make to First Nations is to raise the standard of education on-reserve. The government will work with the recently created National Working Group on Education to improve educational outcomes for First Nations children, and take immediate steps to help First Nations children with special learning needs.”
- Related to the Challenge of Climate Change and the Environment, government was directed to “accelerate its work with the provinces on improved national water quality guidelines, and ensure their implementation in areas of federal jurisdiction.”
- Under the general theme of A Magnet for Talent and Investment, 2 sub-themes under which Aboriginal issues are addressed:

- Related to Skills, Learning and Research, government was directed to “promote entrepreneurial skills and job creation among Aboriginal people by increasing support for Aboriginal Business Canada. It will also tailor and target its training programs to help Aboriginal and Inuit people participate in economic opportunities such as the development of Voisey Bay, northern gas pipelines and similar projects throughout Canada.”
- Concerning Competitive Cities and Healthy Communities, the development of an urban strategy targeting infrastructure development is proposed, with a focus on extending investments in affordable housing, such as through the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative. In particular, given that in “a number of cities, poverty is disproportionately concentrated among Aboriginal people”... “government will work with interested provinces to expand on existing pilot programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal people living in cities.”
- Finally, in support of A new Partnership between Government and Citizens, the “government will reintroduce legislation to strengthen First Nations governance institutions - to support democratic principles, transparency and public accountability, and provide the tools to improve the quality of public administration in First Nations communities. It will work with these communities to build their capacity for economic and social development, and it will expand community-based justice approaches, particularly for youth living on reserves and Aboriginals in the North. The government will also work with Aboriginal people to preserve and enhance Aboriginal languages and cultures.”

IMPLICATIONS/OPTIONS:

In the January 2001 Speech from the Throne, government was directed to:

- increase Aboriginal business development and access to broadband technology;
- implement inter-departmental approaches to address determinants of health impacting the health of Aboriginal people;
- increase funding in early childhood development (Aboriginal Head Start);
- develop a national focus on FAS/FAE interventions;
- reduce the incidence of preventable diabetes and tuberculosis; and
- reduce the rate of Aboriginal people incarcerated or in conflict with the law.

Eighteen months later, strategic recommendations are again presented to government to build upon this momentum in specific areas. For example:

- a First Nations Health Promotion and Disease Prevention strategy with a targeted immunization program, to address, for example, the disproportionate rates of tuberculosis; and
- expanding Aboriginal Headstart, with a focus on FAS/FAE supports, as well as a National Working Group on Education to improve education outcomes.

Other recommendations focusing on legislation and standards remind government of obligations to First Nations, namely:

- improved national water quality guidelines/ implementation in areas of federal jurisdiction are long overdue for many First Nations communities; and
- revisions to the Indian Act to strengthen First Nations governance institutions is noted in the Speech to support Band accountability, in addition to recommendations to government to expand community-based justice approaches, and enhance Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Additional observations include:

- The Speech from the Throne has a focus on on-reserve First Nations, which has continuing implications for Métis and off-reserve populations.
- Entrepreneurial skill development and housing, also reiterated in this year's Speech, will only be focusing on specific or existing 'pilot' initiatives, with little mention of new targeted funding.
- Furthermore, there is an absence of investment to support increased access to broadband technology, a highlight of last year's Speech, which is vital to ongoing activities to include Aboriginal communities in the development of Canada's Information Highway.

ATTACHMENT:

1) Speech from the Throne to Open the First Session of the 38th Parliament of Canada – *The Canada We Want*.

Approved

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Date Signed

October 2, 2002

Updated