

Declaration Act Annual Report 2022-23

Redesigned <https://declaration.gov.bc.ca>

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Disclaimer: This PDF report is a compilation of the Declaration.gov.bc.ca website as it stood when the redesigned site was launched June 28, 2023. The 2022/23 Declaration Act Annual Report was delivered through a digital first approach, meaning a typical PDF annual report was not created. The digital approach to the 2022/23 Declaration Act Annual Report reflected partnership with Indigenous leaders, experts and artists, and is responsive to feedback from Indigenous leaders for reporting that is more accessible, accountable, transparent, co-operative and impactful.

Introduction

It's about a better future for everyone.

Together, in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples, we will advance reconciliation in tangible and measurable ways in B.C. – today and into the future.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) passed unanimously in the B.C. legislature on November 26, 2019, and came into force on November 29, 2019. B.C. is the first jurisdiction in Canada to have passed legislation to formally adopt the internationally recognized standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).

The Declaration Act mandates government to bring provincial laws into alignment with the UN Declaration and to develop and implement an action plan to achieve the objectives of the UN Declaration in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples.

Through this work, B.C. is building a province where Indigenous Peoples' excellence, leadership, governance, and self-determination is recognized and respected.

Declaration Act Secretariat

The Declaration Act Secretariat, led by Deputy Minister Jessica Wood/Si Sityaawks, is a central agency within government that was created to guide and assist the Province to ensure provincial laws align with the UN Declaration and are developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples, as set out in section 3 of the Declaration Act.

Annual Reports

The Province reports on progress made to implement the Declaration Act through annual reports – a requirement of the Act. The annual reports are developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples in B.C. and publicly released by June 30 each year.

Joint message from the Premier of B.C. and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and Declaration Act Secretariat

We are pleased to present the fourth Declaration Act Annual Report, which details our shared work between April 1, 2022 and March 31, 2023 to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) in the province – done in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples.

The 2022/23 Declaration Act Annual Report is an important milestone: it is the first report back since the launch of the Declaration Act Action Plan and the Declaration Act Secretariat.

The report includes a summary of work by the Declaration Act Secretariat – established in 2022 – and provides an update on progress to align provincial laws with the UN Declaration.

We're launching this year's Declaration Act Annual Report as part of a redesigned Declaration Act website. Our goal is to provide indicators and detailed reporting for 32 Action Plan items – showing the highlights, the challenges we face, and the transformational work ahead as we implement the plan. As we continue working on all 89 actions, a new dashboard will provide a snapshot of our status.

At the heart of the redesigned website are the words and voices of Indigenous Peoples, based on their lived experiences. Read about First Nations members who are restoring clam gardens throughout the Nuu-chah-nulth territory. Or hear how the Okanagan Indian Band is reconnecting its members to their culture, language, and community with a new housing project.

On the website, you'll be able to listen to the voices of two Dakelh language revitalization experts. Or watch a video to understand how a historic agreement will transform the way the Province and First Nations work together to steward land, water and resources in the Northeast.

We hope you will take the time to explore the redesigned Declaration Act website and see how we are reporting on progress in a more accessible, transparent, cooperative and impactful way.

Review progress in the four themes of the Declaration Act Action Plan

Section 5 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act requires an annual report on progress made towards the alignment of provincial laws with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the implementation of the Declaration Act, all to be done in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples.

The 2022-23 Declaration Act Annual Report is a significant step forward in the Province's work to implement the Declaration Act, as it's the first report to include progress on implementation of the Action Plan. This year's report includes progress made in 32 actions from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023, supported by detailed reporting and highlights diverse Indigenous voices through storytelling.

Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government

Indigenous Peoples exercise and have full enjoyment of their rights to self-determination and self-government, including developing, maintaining and implementing their own institutions, laws, governing bodies, and political, economic and social structures related to Indigenous communities.

Shared Priorities Framework

Progress to achieve the outcomes of the Shared Priorities Framework will be included in future annual Declaration Act annual reports.

Title and Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples exercise and have full enjoyment of their inherent rights, including the rights of First Nations to own, use, develop and control lands and resources within their territories in B.C.

Ending Indigenous-Specific Racism and Discrimination

Indigenous Peoples fully express and exercise their distinct rights, and enjoy living in B.C. without interpersonal, systemic and institutional interference, oppression or other inequities associated with Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination, wherever they reside.

Social, Cultural and Economic Well-Being

Indigenous Peoples in B.C. fully enjoy and exercise their distinct rights to maintain, control, develop, protect and transmit their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, languages, food systems, sciences and technologies.

Alignment of Laws (Section 3)

Section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) requires the Province of B.C., in consultation and co-operation with the Indigenous Peoples in B.C., to take all measures necessary to ensure the laws of B.C. are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).

Including this obligation, the Declaration Act recognizes that transforming legislation is essential for the recognition and implementation of title and rights, including treaty rights, and for upholding the minimum standards in the UN Declaration for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

This work of transforming laws must be done in partnership between the Province and Indigenous Peoples, and requires new learning, knowledge and patterns. This includes new learnings within the B.C. public service, including a deeper understanding and respect for Indigenous legal orders. This work also requires that we co-develop clear and practical shared understandings of consent, co-drafting, co-development, consultation and co-operation. As this is new work, we will continually be able to learn and do it better through time. For example, we have learned over the past year that co-development of legislation takes substantial work, and places significant burdens on the time and capacity of Indigenous Peoples – and as such, resources have been identified for the co-development of laws, policies and practices.

Progress in 2022/23

Over the past year, progress has been achieved both in the structural changes necessary to transform laws – the processes and capacity to carry out this work – and in the transformation of individual pieces of legislation to be consistent with the UN Declaration.

Creation of the Declaration Act Secretariat

Recognizing that embedding the UN Declaration into provincial laws, policies and practices requires significant shifts in legislative and policy development across the public service, the Province established the Declaration Act Secretariat as a centralized and dedicated body to drive this whole-of-government work.

In March 2022, Jessica Wood/Si Sityaawks was appointed to establish the Declaration Act Secretariat, and was promoted to Deputy Minister in March 2023. Over the 2022/23 year, the Declaration Act Secretariat recruited staff to critical positions, with a focus on Indigenous-exclusive hiring. In January 2023 Priscilla Sabbas-Watts/ća?aa joined the Secretariat as Assistant Deputy Minister of Legislative

Engagement and Transformation, and a number of executive director roles have been filled and will begin in spring 2023.

In the coming year, the Secretariat will continue to expand its capacity to guide and direct the Province in meeting its obligation to ensure legislation is consistent with the UN Declaration, and is developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples. The intention is for the Secretariat to be fully staffed in 2024 exclusively by Indigenous people.

“Meaningful implementation of the Declaration Act requires whole-of-government changes in systems, beliefs and patterns of behaviour. Creation of the Declaration Act Secretariat as a central agency within the Province and ensuring that this team is led by Indigenous people is starting to positively effect this required change. The Interim Approach is a key example of the impact of the Secretariat’s work, and a promising signal that constructive transformation is within reach.”

Cheryl Casimer, Political Executive, First Nations Summit

Shifting mindsets and increasing capacity within the public service

The capacity of the public service must evolve in order to effectively carry out the work of transforming laws and policy in partnership with Indigenous Peoples. The Secretariat plays a key role in this process by undertaking cross-government education and participating in key decision-making processes that enhance understanding of the Province’s obligations under the Declaration Act and Interim Approach, the rights of Indigenous Peoples as described in the UN Declaration, and the history of relations between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples. More broadly, given that many public servants are now working with Indigenous people in ways that haven’t been considered comprehensively until now, the Secretariat also works to shift mindsets, disrupt past assumptions and create new space for Indigenous Peoples to participate constructively on matters that affect their rights.

There is significant interest in this work across the public service. Over the past year, the Secretariat delivered close to twenty internal presentations to approximately 1,500 senior officials that represent all ministries and sectors. A significant number of presentations were also made to key external audiences and organizations, including to Indigenous leaders and organizations who provided clear feedback on the Secretariat’s priorities and ways to further embed the transformative change potential of section 3 of the Declaration Act.

Additionally, the Secretariat participates in several cross-government decision-making committees which provides the opportunity for involvement and feedback on key legislation and policy decisions as they move through the provincial process.

Making B.C.’s laws consistent with the UN Declaration

There are currently dozens of projects underway to ensure provincial laws and policy are consistent with the UN Declaration. This past year, two significant pieces of legislation were passed by the Legislature and reflected consultation and co-operation efforts with Indigenous Peoples as described in the Interim Approach

Bill 36 Health Professions & Occupations Act

The Health Professions and Occupations Act (HPOA) received royal assent in the BC Legislative Assembly on November 24, 2022. With this legislation, the Province formally hardwires anti-discrimination measures, restorative processes and trauma-informed practices directly into health profession legislation.

This was achieved by ensuring consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples throughout the process. In total, twenty-six co-development sessions were held between the Ministry of Health staff, First Nations and Métis organizations and First Nations governments. Additionally, the Ministry engaged with Indigenous health teams and front-line staff in the Health Authorities, and with Indigenous advisory bodies established by the Ministry of Health.

With 645 clauses in the new legislation, there was a significant amount of policy analysis, legal analysis, and expertise required to ensure coherence and consistency. With an urgent need for modernized legislation, those involved in drafting and reviewing the legislation had significant pressures to meet tight timelines. This task was a massive undertaking, and particularly challenging as policy evolved in response to the extensive feedback received, including from Indigenous Peoples. This feedback ultimately strengthened the Act significantly, which now upholds consistency with the UN Declaration in many ways, including:

- Making it clear that Indigenous people have a right to be free of discrimination based on their Indigenous identity when receiving health services in B.C., and that discrimination is a form of professional misconduct.

- Guiding principles that must be reflected in how decision-makers carry out their duties and powers under the act include supporting and promoting UNDRIP, and the need to address Indigenous-specific racism.
- Including anti-discrimination as an objective for how regulators conduct regulatory processes, and how health practitioners provide health services.
- Enabling the use of Indigenous practices, including restorative processes and Indigenous support workers, in health service delivery, dispute resolution, and investigation and complaints processes.
- Establishing requirements for consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Governing Bodies on a range of decisions, oversight processes and development of standards.

“For too long, colonialism has been the basis for government’s approach to law and policymaking, disregarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The interim approach establishes a better path forward to recognize that our laws must not only respect Indigenous laws and customs, but also be implemented respectfully and collaboratively. This approach is a critical part of our ongoing work to advance meaningful reconciliation in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and reflects our commitments under the Declaration Act.”

Niki Sharma, Attorney General

The Ministry of Health introduced this new legislation on October 19, 2022, as Bill 36. The Health Professions and Occupations Act passed into law on November 24, 2022. It enhances patient safety, strengthens oversight of health regulatory colleges and improves governance of health professionals.

With this legislation, the Province formally hardwires anti-discrimination measures, restorative processes, and trauma-informed practices directly into health profession legislation.

Read the Bill 36 news release

Bill 38, Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act

Bill 38 amended the Adoption Act and the Child, Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA) especially to enable new ways to put the UN Declaration and the Declaration Act into action and to align with the federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families. These amendments move the child welfare system in B.C. toward a multi-jurisdictional model that promotes prevention supports and respecting and facilitating connections to communities and culture, resulting in healthier lifelong outcomes.

Co-development of this legislation took place through 63 meetings with First Nations and Métis organizations, the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations, four Indigenous governing bodies preparing to assert jurisdiction over child and family services (Splatsin, Sts’ailes, Cowichan, and Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw), and fifteen First Nations governments. These meetings took place throughout the process, from policy development to introduction of the bill.

This process resulted in legislation that:

- Recognizes that the CFCSA must be administered and interpreted in accordance with the inherent right of self-government with respect to child and family services.
- Enables Indigenous governing bodies to assume jurisdiction over child-welfare services provided to an Indigenous child in accordance with Indigenous laws, and enables information sharing between the Province and Indigenous governing bodies.
- Establishes a new Indigenous child-welfare director position in the Ministry of Children and Family Development to provide guidance and advice to CFCSA directors and their delegates in navigating a multi-jurisdictional child and family services model.
- Enables joint and consent-based agreements to be made in accordance with the Declaration Act for relevant powers under the Adoption Act and the CFCSA.

This was the first time MCFD took steps towards a co-development model with Indigenous partners for legislative development. Partners faced challenges in this process, particularly due to the accelerated timeline which made it more difficult to ensure that engagement was effective and meaningful and that all decisions were transparent to everyone involved. Overall, this process required greater flexibility than any past legislation projects and this key takeaway will be built into legislation and regulation projects in the future.

On October 26, 2022, the Ministry of Children and Family Development amended the Adoption Act and the Child, Family and Community Service Act, recognizing the inherent right of self-government of Indigenous communities including jurisdiction over child and family services. The amendments removed barriers in provincial legislation so Indigenous Peoples can deliver child and family services pursuant to their Indigenous laws, keeping Indigenous children and youth safely connected to family, community,

and culture. One of the goals is to address and reduce the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous children and youth in provincial care. The amendment act passed into law on November 25, 2022. Read the Bill 38 news release

Stories

Read, watch, and listen to stories that capture the work being done to build a future where First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in B.C. have full enjoyment of their inherent rights and opportunity to pursue their dreams and raise their families.

Declaration Act Action Plan

The Declaration Act Action Plan, released in March 2022, is the first of its kind. Built in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples, the plan articulates the specific actions every ministry in government will take over five years to create a better B.C. for everyone.

The first of its kind, the Declaration Act Action Plan includes 89 tangible, achievable actions in the areas of self-determination and self-government, rights and title, ending anti-Indigenous racism, and enhancing social, cultural and economic well-being.

Every ministry in government is working in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples to deliver on their specific actions in tangible and measurable ways.

The Action Plan was developed through two years of intensive engagement to ensure it aligned with the priorities of Indigenous Peoples in B.C. It includes goals, outcomes, and tangible actions needed for meaningful progress in reconciliation.

Interim approach

The Declaration Act Secretariat released the 'Interim Approach to Implement the Requirements of Section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act' in October 2022.

Interim Approach to Implement the Requirements of Section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

In October 2022, the Declaration Act Secretariat released the 'Interim Approach to Implement the Requirements of Section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act'. The world-leading interim guidance approach provides every ministry and sector of government with clear, transparent processes for how they are to work together with Indigenous Peoples in developing provincial laws, policies and practices, as required under the Declaration Act.

The Interim Approach brings together what government has learnt on co-developing laws since 2019 and is helping government transition towards an approach of law-making that is thoughtful, consistent, and supports legal commitments to affirm Indigenous rights.

Read the report written on Section 3 by Dr. Roshan Danesh, KC that informed the Interim Approach. While the Interim Approach was created by the Declaration Act Secretariat, it was developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous leadership, ensuring Indigenous rights are affirmed through this work.

About the Secretariat

Announced in Budget 2022, the Secretariat's core functions are to provide guidance on consultation and co-operation and consistency of laws; develop processes and measures to support alignment of laws; inform government's legislative agenda and serve in an interlocutor role.

The work to align laws with the UN Declaration is resulting in an increasing number of provincial legislative reforms. The Province passed several bills since the Declaration Act came into law.

For example:

Health Professions & Occupations Act (Bill 36)

The Ministry of Health introduced this new legislation on October 19, 2022, as Bill 36. The Health Professions and Occupations Act passed into law on November 24, 2022. It enhances patient safety, strengthens oversight of health regulatory colleges and improves governance of health professionals.

With this legislation, the Province formally hardwires anti-discrimination measures, restorative processes, and trauma-informed practices directly into health profession legislation.

Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Bill 38)

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Accessible British Columbia Act (Bill 6)

The Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction introduced the new legislation on April 28, 2021, as Bill 6. The Accessible British Columbia Act, passed into law June 3, 2021, establishes the legal framework to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessibility including for Indigenous people.

Human Rights Code Amendment Act (Bill 18)

The Attorney General introduced this statute on November 17, 2021, as Bill 18. The bill, which was passed into law November 23, 2021, amended the provincial Human Rights Code to further uphold Indigenous human rights and advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples by adding Indigenous identity as a protected ground against discrimination.

Amendments to the Adoption Act (Bill 21)

The Ministry of Children and Family Development developed these amendments, which were introduced under a miscellaneous statute on October 7, 2021, as Bill 21. Passed into law October 21, 2021, the amendments authorized information-sharing under the Adoption Act. The changes established this authority to support First Nation adoptees in obtaining their status so they can gain access to federal health, dental and other benefits.

Amendments to the Child, Family and Community Service Act (Bill 21)

The Ministry of Children and Family Development developed these amendments, which were introduced under a miscellaneous statute on October 7, 2021, as Bill 21. The bill was passed into law October 21, 2021, aligning the Child, Family and Community Service Act with the information-sharing requirements of the federal statute, an act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

Forests Statutes Amendment Act (Bill 23)

The Minister of Forests introduced this statute on October 20, 2021, as Bill 23. Passed into law on November 23, 2021, the bill amended the Forests Act, the Forest and Range Practices Act, and the Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act. These amendments establish the framework for an approach that is more focused on ecological and cultural values. A key part of this will be replacing forest stewardship plans, which are currently developed by industry, with forest landscape plans developed by the Province with First Nations, local communities and other partners, which will create new opportunities for shared decision-making between the Province and First Nations.

Education Statutes Amendment Act (Bill 25)

The Minister of Education and Child Care introduced the amendments on October 25, 2021, as Bill 25. Passed into law on November 2, 2021, the bill amended the First Nations Education Act, the Teachers Act, and the Criminal Records Review Act, all in support of First Nations' jurisdiction over education on First Nation land. In addition, the legislation changed the composition of the British Columbia Teachers' Council, ensuring representation and a voice for First Nations Education Authority.

Interpretation Amendment Act (Bill 29)

The Attorney General introduced this statute on November 17, 2021, as Bill 29, which was passed into law on November 23, 2021. This bill added a universal non-derogation clause to the Interpretation Act, making it explicit that provincial laws uphold, and do not abrogate or derogate from, the rights of Indigenous Peoples under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Bill 29 also amended the Interpretation Act to provide that all provincial acts and regulations must be read to be consistent with the UN Declaration.

The progress of bills can be viewed on the Parliamentary Business website. Recent announcements on new or amended legislation can be found on the Working for you website.

Declaration Act Secretariat Leadership

Meet the Declaration Act Secretariat

Jessica Wood/Si Sityaawks
Deputy Minister

Si Sityaawks – (Woman who creates change) is from the Gitksan and Tsimshian First Nations with extended roots among the Tahltan and Nisga’a Nations.

Currently serving as Deputy Minister of the Declaration Act Secretariat, Jessica is leading British Columbia’s cross-ministry work to align provincial laws with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. Jessica recently became the first Indigenous Person to serve as Deputy Minister in the Province of British Columbia.

Jessica previously served as Assistant Deputy Minister for the Reconciliation Transformation and Strategies Division with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation where she was responsible for the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (The Declaration), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action, and learnings from relevant case law. As part of this transformation, she led, in collaboration with the First Nations Leadership Council, the development of legislation to implement the Declaration in provincial law. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act received Royal Assent in November 2019. Her division also led the development of the first Declaration Act Action Plan released in March 2022. The Plan was developed with Indigenous Peoples to ensure it reflects the priorities of Indigenous Peoples and outlines 89 specific actions every ministry will take over a five-year period.

Jessica was recently the second Policy Practitioner Fellow at UBC’s School of Public Policy and Global Affairs. She is an experienced community developer whose portfolios have focused on issues related to race relations, residential school, sexual health, sex work, Indigenous women and gendered violence. She was the first Indigenous woman in Canada whose work as a municipal social planner focused solely on the health and safety of sex workers and impacted communities, gendered and racialized violence, and the prevention of youth sexual exploitation.

Jessica has previously held positions working on the Residential School Settlement Agreement and the National Film Board Documentary Finding Dawn, a film about missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. Jessica is a long-time organizer with the Vancouver DTES Women’s Memorial March Committee.

Priscilla Sabbas-Watts/ čaʔaa

Assistant Deputy Minister of Legislative Transformation and Engagement

Priscilla’s traditional name is čaʔaa [sah-ah], which comes from the word čaʔaas, meaning to strip cedar from the cedar tree. She is from the Hiškʷiiʔaṭṭ (Hesquiaht) on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Hiškʷiiʔaṭṭ is one of fourteen nations of the Nuučaanuł (Nuuchahnulth).

Priscilla is the Assistant Deputy Minister, Legislative Transformation and Engagement with the Declaration Act Secretariat. Within this role she plays a fundamental role supporting cross-government efforts to work in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples to align laws with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as per section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. Priscilla has served as a public servant for the past 20 years holding positions both within her Nation and within the provincial public service. She has previously served both as an elected councillor for Hesquiaht, and Vice President of the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council. Within the BC Public Service Priscilla has held roles in the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the BC Public Service Agency. Most recently she was the Executive Director of the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Branch at the BC Public Service Agency.

Priscilla lives in čišaaʔaṭṭ (Tseshaht) and Hupačasath territory in the Alberni Valley with her husband and three children.

Aaron Brown

Executive Director, Economics and Finance

Aaron Brown is the Executive Director supporting the Finance and Economics sector at the Declaration Act Secretariat.

Aaron’s ancestry is North-Western European and Indigenous: he is a member of the Misipawistik Cree Nation (Grand Rapids) in Northern Manitoba.

Aaron has worked for fifteen years in the B.C. Public Service, holding a variety of senior management roles across four ministries. Most recently, Aaron worked at the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure where he designed and developed the Passenger Transportation Accessibility Program which improves transportation services and experiences for the accessibility community. Prior to this, Aaron worked at the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

In addition to helping to implement the Declaration Act across the B.C. Public Service, Aaron is interested in creating strategy and vision, assessing complex policy, and managing projects.

Aaron holds a Bachelor of Commerce Degree from the University of Victoria. He lives with his wife and two children (aged two and four so life is busy!) on the unceded traditional territory of the Lekwungen people (known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations) in Victoria, B.C. and is grateful to live, work and play there.

Jackie Demerse-Abbasi

Executive Director, Social Justice and Policing

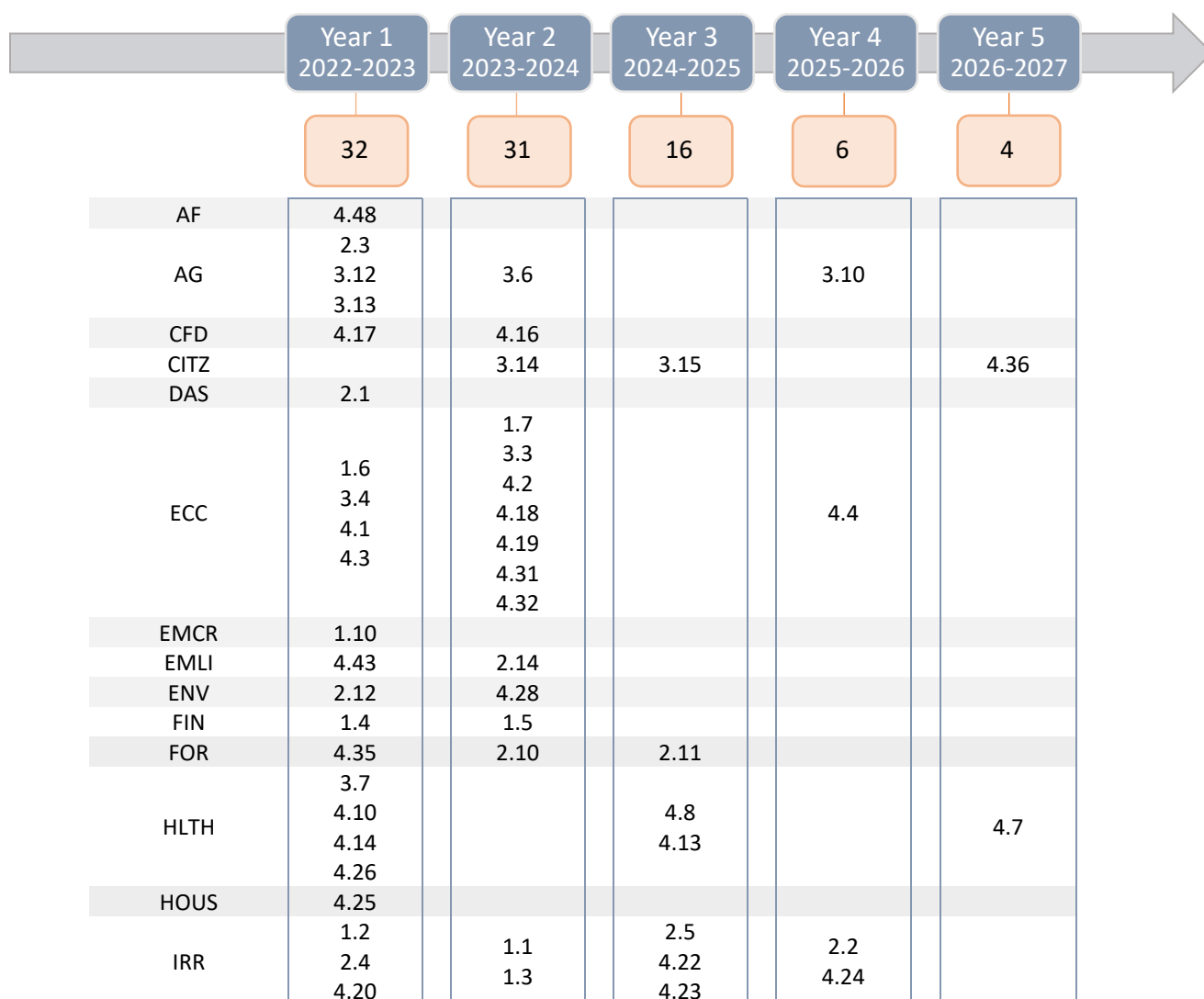
Jackie was born and raised on Treaty 4 territory in Saskatchewan, home of the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, Lakota, Dakota, and homeland of the Métis. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Masters in Public Administration from the University of Regina, and PhD (abd) from the University of Western Ontario specializing in multi-level governance, public policy, and Canadian politics. Jackie has a diverse background in both the public and academic sectors. Over the years, she has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in local government, public administration, and strategic planning. Most recently, Jackie held the role of Director of Indigenous Economic Development at the Ministry of Trade and Export Development with the Government of Saskatchewan. Prior to this, she was the Director, then Acting Executive Director of the Status of Women Office and Senior Legislative Analyst with the Ministry of Government Relations.

Jackie has worked collaboratively with Indigenous communities, organizations and people on files spanning economic reconciliation, gender equity and gender-based violence including MMIWG2S+. And, as the daughter of a Sixties Scoop survivor, understands the cumulative impact of colonial policies and importance of connection/re-connection to community and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. She is married with two boys under the age of six and is grateful for the opportunity to live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, in Victoria B.C.

Section 4 (Action Plan)

Forecasted Implementation Sequencing

Actions anticipated to begin substantial implementation in year identified and will begin reporting in corresponding year. Actions will continue reporting in subsequent Annual Reports.



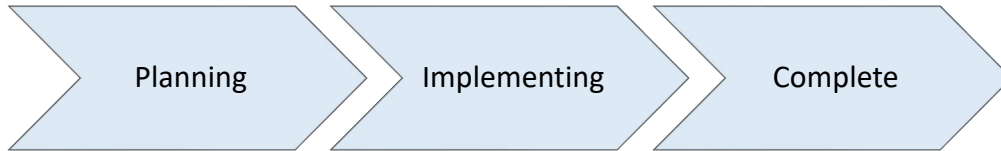
	4.21		4.29		
	4.30		4.49		
JEDI	4.45	4.39 4.40	4.42		
LAB				4.46	
MMHA	4.12				
MOTI		2.13	3.9		
MUNI			4.27		1.11
PSA	3.1	3.2 4.44			
PSFS	1.8	1.9 4.5 4.41			
PSSG		3.11 4.11 4.47	3.8		
SDPR		4.15	4.9		
TACS	4.6 4.37	4.38	3.5	4.33	4.34
WLRS	2.6	2.7 2.9	2.8		

Actions per year by Sector:

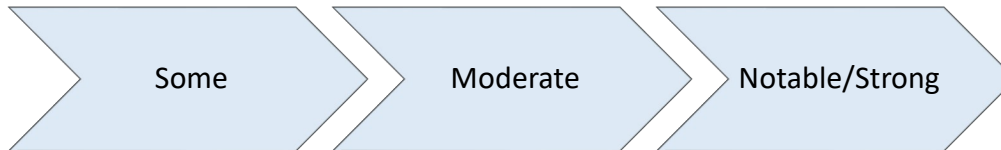
	Year 1 (32)	Year 2 (31)	Year 3 (16)	Year 4 (6)	Year 5 (4)
Social	11	12	3	1	1
Natural Resources	10	7	7	2	
Economy	4	5	4	2	3
Justice and Public Safety	5	5	2	1	
Central Services (PSA)	1	2			
Declaration Act Secretariat	1				

Reporting on Year 1 Actions

“How far along is this work?” icons develop along this pathway:



The remaining icons develop along this pathway:



Theme 1: Self-determination and inherent right of self-government

DASHBOARD

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	1.2	• Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation	Shift from short-term transactional arrangements to the co-development of long-term agreements that recognize and support reconciliation, self-determination, decision-making and economic independence.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Moderate Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	1.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation 	Co-develop with Indigenous Peoples a new distinctions-based fiscal relationship and framework that supports the operation of Indigenous governments, whether through modern treaties, self-government agreements or advancing the right to self-government through other mechanisms. This work will include collaboration with the Government of Canada.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Moderate Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	1.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education and Child Care 	Co-develop an approach to deliver on the BC Tripartite Education Agreement commitment, in which the Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee will co-develop legislation that requires local education agreements (LEAs) with First Nations where a First Nation wants one, and that requires the application of the provincial LEA at the request of a First Nation.	Implementing Stage	Some Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	1.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills 	Recognize the integral role of Indigenous-led post-secondary institutes as a key pillar of B.C.'s post-secondary system through the provision of core funding, capacity funding and the development of legislation. This includes institutes mandated by First Nations, as well as a Métis post-secondary institute being developed by Métis Nation BC.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	1.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Management and Climate Readiness 	Co-develop modernized emergency management legislation (replacing the Emergency Program Act) with First Nations.	Implementing Stage	Some Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement

DETAILED REPORTING

Shared Priorities Framework: Progress to achieve the outcomes of the Shared Priorities Framework will be included in future annual Declaration Act annual reports.

Highlights

In the first year of implementing the [Shared Priorities Framework](#) which was signed in 2022, the Province and the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations (Alliance) have:

- Made significant progress on a lands and resources management model at the Collaborative Fiscal Process table, and is expected to go forward for government decision this fiscal year.
- Established the Shared Priorities Working Group allowing for coordination of implementation efforts, and established a collaborative approach for project management and tracking progress in implementing the Shared Priorities Framework.
- Hosted the second annual leadership meeting between the Alliance and the Province to support relationship building and communication between the parties to identify and advance shared interests, and organized the third.
- Collaboratively identified key priority projects, including:
 - Exploring, through the collaborative fiscal process, approaches to block funding;
 - Developing engagement guidance to support provincial staff to meaningfully work with modern treaty nations and the Alliance on strategic initiatives, policy and legislation; and,
 - Initiating a project to develop education for public servants to support timely and respectful treaty implementation.

Also, as part of the Ministry of Finance's work to collaboratively develop a new approach to treaty property taxation, Budget 2023 introduced amendments to the Treaty First Nation Taxation Act and the Nisga'a Nation Final Agreement Act to enable modern treaty nations to self-determine exemptions from property tax for their members/citizens on Treaty Lands.

Indicators

The indicators of success for advancing treaty implementation and upholding treaty partnerships are those articulated in the Shared Priorities Framework:

1. Established fiscal arrangements to fulfil treaty rights and obligations that ensure:

- Modern treaty nations are appropriately resourced to fully implement their treaties;
 - The Province’s fiscal mechanisms reflect the jurisdiction and autonomy of modern treaty nation governments and the tripartite nature of treaties; and,
 - Modern treaty nations can meaningfully participate in the development of new fiscal policies and programs.
2. Established meaningful participation of modern treaty nations in the Province’s legislative and policy initiatives to ensure:
- Early consideration of modern treaty rights in the development of policy and legislation so that modern treaty rights are recognized, observed and enforced;
 - The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act is implemented in a manner consistent with distinct modern treaty rights; and,
 - Effective communication and engagement mechanisms that facilitate co-development and implementation of policy and legislation.
3. Established organizational and policy changes in the provincial public service to advance a whole of government approach to treaty implementation which will ensure:
- Provincial accountability and oversight to uphold modern treaty rights to ensure timely, effective and appropriately resourced treaty implementation;
 - Provincial staff and elected officials understand and enforce treaty rights and obligations and uphold the government-to-government relationship between the Province and modern treaty nations; and,
 - Formalization of communication channels between the Alliance and the Province to identify and advance shared interests.

How are we working together?

The Province works in consultation and co-operation with modern treaty nations, through the Alliance, to advance the shared vision set out in the Shared Priorities Framework to ensure that:

- Modern treaties are recognized, observed, and enforced;
- Modern treaty nations and the Province are resourced for a whole of government approach to timely and effective treaty implementation;
- The Province’s relationships with modern treaty nations are distinct and reflect their established rights; and

- The Province’s relationships with modern treaty nations are dynamic and evolve and improve over time.

Consultation and co-operation occurs across ministries through working groups, forums and tables focused on specific initiatives and priority projects that advance the outcomes set out in the Shared Priorities Framework.

The collaborative fiscal process table is a leading example of where consultation and co-operation with the Alliance is occurring to collaboratively determine expenditure need for treaty lands and resource management.

For overall co-ordination, there is also a Shared Priorities Framework Working Group between Alliance and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) that tracks overall progress and identifies new implementation priorities.

Are there challenges?

While the signing of the Shared Priorities Framework was a major milestone between the Province and the Alliance, challenges remain in ensuring successful implementation of the Framework.

One challenge is that modern treaty nations find they must frequently use their staff resources and policy capacity to educate provincial leaders and staff on modern treaty rights and jurisdiction. When provincial staff do not take early steps to consider the impacts of their program, policy, and legislation changes on treaty rights and jurisdiction, there are risks of interruptions and delays to provincial initiatives as work is done to meaningfully engage modern treaty nations. For modern treaty nations, the risks can include potential infringement of rights, and delays to the important work of nation building.

1.2 Shift from short-term transactional arrangements to the co-development of long-term agreements that recognize and support reconciliation, self-determination, decision-making and economic independence. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)*

Highlights

Stz’uminus First Nation and B.C. entered a reconciliation agreement in March 2022 that sets out commitments to work together on community priorities, future land transfers, and economic development, while also establishing funding for future environmental remediation activities in Ladysmith Harbour.

The Wei Wai Kum First Nation and the Province signed an Incremental Treaty Agreement in August 2022 that will transfer 2,276 hectares of territorial lands back to Wei Wai Kum and help boost the Nation’s economic activities.

B.C. and the 3Nations Society (Tahltan, Kaska, and Taku River Tlingit) renewed and strengthened the regional partnership under an agreement in September 2022. This agreement provides stable funding for ongoing, community-driven initiatives, and builds on previous successes.

The Province purchased ranch lands for Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation to be returned to as part of treaty negotiations with the Northern Secwepemc te Qelmuw (NStQ) and entered an umbrella agreement in December 2022 that will help resolve ranching issues in the NStQ treaty negotiations.

Lake Babine Nation and the Province took the next step in the journey to recognize and implement the Nation's rights and title through the signing of a new land transfer agreement in January 2023.

Several treaty tables are in Stage 5 negotiations with conclusion of some expected in 1-2 years.

Several tables are in reconciliation negotiations outside of the treaty process and are expected to conclude negotiations between 1-3 years.

Long-term agreements demonstrate a structured and intentional approach towards reconciliation. Increasing the number of signed long-term agreements demonstrates emphasis on being intentional about progress toward reconciliation, focused on achieving self-determination, decision-making and economic independence.

Indicators

- ❖ **The number of agreements signed:** Five co-developed long-term agreements that recognize and support reconciliation, self-determination, decision-making and economic independence.

How are we working together?

The negotiation of long-term agreements is a collaborative process with First Nations that requires on-going engagement. These negotiations involve close working relationships and the co-development of collaborative solutions.

Together, the Province is working with First Nations and the federal government to create innovative agreements that are flexible and better suited to addressing the needs of individual Nations. This past year, the Province signed several unique and diverse agreements to exemplify this action including with the Lake Babine Nation, Wei Wai Kum Nation, Stz'uminus First Nation and others. Engagement is ongoing with First Nations across B.C. through regular meetings to negotiate additional agreements to support reconciliation, self-determination, decision-making and economic independence.

Are there challenges?

New and innovative approaches to achieve long-term reconciliation may require new policy and legislation. This work takes time and requires co-ordination within government, as well as co-operation with negotiation partners. As new agreements demonstrate change and positive steps

towards reconciliation, there will be increased demand on provincial capacity. Recruiting and retaining knowledgeable and experienced teams is a challenge in the current labour market.

1.4 Co-develop with Indigenous Peoples a new distinctions-based fiscal relationship and framework that supports the operation of Indigenous governments, whether through modern treaties, self-government agreements or advancing the right to self-government through other mechanisms. This work will include collaboration with the Government of Canada. *(Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)*

Highlights

In 2022, the Province began an intensive co-development process with First Nations, focused on the vision, principles, and objectives of a new fiscal framework, and co-development of options for a new forestry revenue sharing model with First Nations. Through this process, the Province heard a clear message of change: a new fiscal framework must support a fundamental shift in the way we work together as governments, and support an integrated, rights-based approach to decision-making, stewardship, and benefits sharing. This is important work that will support a transition away from the short-term transactional approach of the past towards a new fiscal framework that recognizes, respects, and supports Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and self-government.

Indicators

- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** New Fiscal Framework Discussion Paper sent to every First Nation in B.C.
- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** 94 First Nations provided feedback on the Discussion Paper (in writing or at meetings).

How are we working together?

- The New Fiscal Framework Discussion Paper released in November 2022, followed by virtual engagement session in January 2023.
- First Nations Leaders' Gathering in November 2022.
- Provincial forestry forum in November 2022.
- Province-wide engagement Fall 2022/Winter 2023.

A key focus of the engagement process has been on government-to-government engagement at tables where the Province has made commitments around co-developing a new fiscal framework or new revenue sharing arrangements.

The Ministry of Finance consulted with modern treaty nations on the Budget 2023 measures for treaty property taxation.

Are there challenges?

Given the scale of the work, the commitment to co-develop a new fiscal framework with Indigenous Peoples poses risks from a project management and capacity perspective, for both the Province and First Nations governments and organizations. The Province will need to offer a range of consultation and cooperation opportunities during the full five-year span of the Action Plan to ensure it can engage comprehensively with Indigenous Peoples in a way that reflects their diverse interests, needs, and priorities.

1.6 Co-develop an approach to deliver on the BC Tripartite Education Agreement commitment, in which the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the First Nations Education Steering Committee will co-develop legislation that requires local education agreements (LEAs) with First Nations where a First Nation wants one, and that requires the application of the provincial LEA at the request of a First Nation. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

Highlights

The Ministry of Education and Child Care (ECC) has engaged collaboratively with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to work through problems and come to consensus on solutions to implement BC Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA) commitments. Consultation with Indigenous rights holders on the policy approach is currently ongoing.

Next steps are continuing work on co-development of policy and planning for potential legislative changes.

Indicators

- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** Legislation and Policy Working Group formed with FNESC and initial policy development discussions underway.

How are we working together?

ECC and FNESC have had regular meetings since April 2021 to co-develop the Local Education Agreement (LEA) approach. FNESC consulted with First Nation governments prior to the signing of BCTEA in 2018 and over the last four years to ensure First Nation direction was incorporated into a Provincial LEA template. In addition to co-development with FNESC, ECC has been engaging with First Nations and Treaty First Nations on the proposed LEA policy since February 2023.

Are there challenges?

Timelines for implementation, legislative changes, and ensuring that First Nations and boards of education are appropriately informed of any new policies.

1.8 Recognize the integral role of Indigenous-led post-secondary institutes as a key pillar of B.C.'s post-secondary system through the provision of core funding, capacity funding and the development of legislation. This includes institutes mandated by First Nations, as well as a Métis post-secondary institute being developed by Métis Nation BC. (*Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills*)

Highlights

Key components of this action are to ensure that legislation is enacted that recognizes the integral role of First Nations-mandated institutes in the BC post-secondary system and commits to provide ongoing core and capacity funding. This is part of the alignment of laws of British Columbia with Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. First Nations-mandated institutes play a significant role in First Nation communities, helping to fill gaps where the mainstream education and post-secondary education systems have not been able to adequately support First Nation learners. Their role in supporting First Nation learners to continue their education journey has been and continues to be a key component of BC's education system and for this reason, the institutes need to be recognized through legislation.

Planning funding has been secured to support Métis Nation BC (MNBC) with institute development and discussions are ongoing regarding possible governing structures through ongoing meetings.

Indicators

- ❖ **Amount of funding provided:** One-time core funding of \$4 million for First Nations mandated institutes provided in 2022/23 with an ongoing commitment of \$6.7 million in annual core and capacity funding for First Nations-mandated institutes in the StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan.

How are we working together?

Consultation and collaborative development with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) regarding the funding of First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes predates the Declaration Act Action Plan and continues through regular meetings and collaborative policy development for the legislation and future requests for increased funding. Consultation on the legislation will be conducted with First Nations and engagement with the First Nations Leadership Council is planned.

The Ministry is taking a distinctions-based approach to implementing this action. As such, we are having separate discussions with FNEESC and IAHLA and with the Métis Nation BC (MNBC).

Are there challenges?

Ongoing core and capacity funding for First Nations-mandated institutes has been secured as part of the StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan. Collaboratively developing all aspects of this policy and legislative initiative is complex and is taking some time to work through.

1.10 Co-develop modernized emergency management legislation (replacing the Emergency Program Act) with First Nations. *(Emergency Management and Climate Readiness)*

Highlights

EMCR has engaged in legislation and regulation co-development with First Nations title and rights holders, the First Nations Leadership Council, the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations, and a range of other service organizations. Modernized legislation is expected to be introduced in Fall 2023. Co-development and engagement opportunities will continue to shift to focus on regulations to be made under the new Act over the coming months and beyond. Some draft implementation plans and tools are also in development.

Significant policy shifts that align with the Declaration Act include: recognizing First Nations rights and the role of Indigenous governing bodies in relation to emergencies; enabling agreements with Indigenous governing bodies to support collaboration and decision making; requiring consultation and cooperation with Indigenous governing bodies across the phases of emergency management and prior to taking land-based response actions; embedding cultural safety in all phases of emergency management; and including Indigenous knowledges in risk assessments and plans.

Indicators

- ❖ **Legislation drafted:** Draft Emergency Disaster Management Act is complete and is planned to be introduced in Fall 2023.

How are we working together?

Engagement initiated in 2019 laid the groundwork for the new legislation. The COVID-19 pandemic suspended the process, then in 2022, EMCR reset the engagement process and began the co-development process with First Nations. Throughout 2022, EMCR hosted regional sessions with First Nations governments and organizations to inform updated policy intentions and legislative development. Legislation was shared with First Nations in late fall 2022 and revised based on feedback. Engagement with First Nations governments will inform development of regulations.

Are there challenges?

The project involves time constraints and engagement timelines are compressed. Timelines have been reset at several points.

Capacity for all 203 First Nations to participate in the co-development process is limited by resources. Some communities are still in recovery from emergency events in their communities. The team is considering ways to minimize engagement fatigue and to enable more partners to participate.

Theme 2: Title and rights of Indigenous People

DASHBOARD

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declaration Act Secretariat 	Establish a Secretariat to guide and assist government to meet its obligation to ensure legislation is consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and is developed in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples.	Complete	Some Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Notable Engagement
Year 1	2.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attorney General 	Issue guidelines from the Attorney General of B.C. to the Ministry of Attorney General legal counsel regarding the conduct of civil litigation involving the rights of Indigenous Peoples.	Complete	Some Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Some Engagement
Year 1	2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Water, Land and Resource Stewardship 	Negotiate new joint decision-making and consent agreements under section 7 of the Declaration Act that include clear accountabilities, transparency and administrative fairness between the Province and Indigenous governing bodies. Seek all	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Moderate Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
			necessary legislative amendments to enable the implementation of any section 7 agreements.				
Year 1	2.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water, Land and Resource Stewardship • Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation • Environment and Climate Change Strategy • Forests • Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation • BC Energy Regulator 	Co-develop strategic-level policies, programs and initiatives to advance collaborative stewardship of the environment, land and resources, that address cumulative effects and respects Indigenous Knowledge. This will be achieved through collaborative stewardship forums, guardian programs, land use planning initiatives, and other innovative and evolving partnerships that support integrated land and resource management.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	2.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment and Climate Change Strategy 	Collaboratively develop and implement CleanBC and the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy to support resilient communities and clean economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples that benefit our shared climate and advance reconciliation.	Implementing Stage	Some Complexity	Moderate Challenges	Some Engagement

DETAILED REPORTING

2.1 Establish a Secretariat to guide and assist government to meet its obligation to ensure legislation is consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and is developed in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. (*Declaration Act Secretariat*)

Highlights

The Declaration Act Secretariat released [The Interim Approach to Implementing the Requirements of Section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (Interim Approach) in October 2022. The first-of-its-kind Interim Approach provides clarity and transparency around co-development, consultation, and cooperation with Indigenous peoples throughout the provincial legislative process. Examples of legislation that have benefited from the consultation and co-operation guidance from the Secretariat are the Interpretation Act, Forest and Range Practices Act, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Emergency Program Act, and the Anti-Racism Data Act. For more details about the work of the Declaration Act Secretariat, please visit [\[link to DAS portion of website\]](#).

Indicators

- ❖ **Establishment of the Declaration Act Secretariat:** Established April 1, 2022.
- ❖ **Policies/Reports developed:** Interim Approach released to all of Province October 24, 2022.

How are we working together?

Expert dialogue sessions on section 3 informed the development of the Interim Approach. This guidance is iterative and consultation and co-operation with Indigenous partners will continue.

The Declaration Act Secretariat continues to provide advice and guidance to ministries on alignment with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, consultation and co-operation requirements and engagement with Rights and Title holders, Indigenous Peoples and organizations.

Are there challenges?

Adequate staffing of the Secretariat to meet the demand for its participation and guidance is a risk, but recruitment is in progress.

The volume of consultation and cooperation engagement requests being sent to Indigenous partners continues to rise, and is contributing to consultation fatigue. There is a lack of consistent approaches taken across sectors and ministries to streamline these requests and in some instances not taking into account previous engagements where Ministries would have received feedback on specific priorities.

Ministries are at various points of understanding the requirements they are responsible for under section 3 of the Declaration Act. This can cause some obstacles as it relates to appropriate co-development, consultation and cooperation. For example, when legislative timelines are compressed, it can affect how ministries interpret their responsibilities to consult and cooperate with Indigenous peoples.

2.3 Issue guidelines from the Attorney General of B.C. to the Ministry of Attorney General legal counsel regarding the conduct of civil litigation involving the rights of Indigenous Peoples. *(Ministry of Attorney General)*

Highlights

The Directives on Civil Litigation involving Indigenous Peoples were published on April 21, 2022. The core objectives of the Directives are to prioritize and promote resolution, innovation and negotiated settlement, and to reduce the potential for litigation involving Indigenous Peoples. When matters do result in litigation, these Directives instruct counsel to engage honourably and to assist the court constructively, expeditiously and effectively.

Legal Services Branch of the Ministry of Attorney General, with the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), hosted a professional development session on the Directives in February 2023. The session provided an opportunity to gain context and insight from Indigenous and government leaders, as well as legal practitioners, into the ongoing implementation of the Directives, how they fit within British Columbia's reconciliation goals, and operationalizing the Directives in the practice of litigation.

Indicators

- ❖ **Policies/Reports developed:** Directives issued from the Attorney General of B.C. to the Ministry of Attorney General legal counsel regarding the conduct of civil litigation involving the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

How are we working together?

Meetings with FNLC were held regularly in the development of the Directives.

Are there challenges?

Action complete.

2.4 Negotiate new joint decision-making and consent agreements under section 7 of the Declaration Act that include clear accountabilities, transparency and administrative fairness between the Province and Indigenous governing bodies. Seek all necessary legislative amendments to enable the implementation of any section 7 agreements. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship)*

Highlights

Tahltan Central Government and the Province entered into the first consent-based decision-making agreement under the Declaration Act in June 2022.

This agreement honours Tahltan's jurisdiction in land-management decisions in Tahltan Territory, in recognition of Tahltan's title and rights within its territory. The agreement advances reconciliation as well as provides clarity and predictability for the Eskay Creek Revitalization Project.

The shíshálh Nation and the Province started negotiations on the first joint decision-making agreement to be negotiated under section 7 of the Declaration Act in August 2022.

The agreement, when negotiated, will apply to decisions on dock tenures in the shíshálh swiya (territory/birthplace/world) and builds upon the current model for making shared decisions on dock tenures created in 2018.

The negotiation of section 7 agreements under the Declaration Act demonstrates a structured and intentional approach towards reconciliation. Whether joint or consent based, these agreements help address the legacy of colonialism by allowing the Province to work together with Indigenous Peoples on decisions that affect them to further reconciliation. Legislative amendments are often required for these agreements to be operationalized.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of active negotiations:** Two Indigenous governing bodies actively negotiating joint decision-making and consent agreements under section 7 of the Declaration Act.
- ❖ **Number of legislative amendments:** Two legislative amendments made to enable implementation of joint decision-making and consent agreements under section 7 of the Declaration Act during the fiscal year. Legislative amendments were made to the Child, Family and Community Service Act and the Adoption Act.

How are we working together?

Negotiation of section 7 agreements is a collaborative process with Indigenous governing bodies that involves on-going engagement. In addition, the Province has been working with the First Nations Leadership Council and Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations on the approach to the

negotiation and implementation of section 7 agreements. Exploratory discussions are underway with other Indigenous governing bodies interested in developing section 7 agreements and are expected to result in additional mandated negotiations.

Are there challenges?

Considerable progress is being made in negotiations and the Province is advancing agreements that share statutory decision-making with Indigenous governing bodies. Although the Declaration Act establishes the space for negotiating section 7 agreements, statutory amendments may be required for these agreements to be implemented. This work takes time, cross-government alignment, and consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples.

2.6 Co-develop strategic-level policies, programs and initiatives to advance collaborative stewardship of the environment, land and resources, that address cumulative effects and respects Indigenous Knowledge. This will be achieved through collaborative stewardship forums, guardian programs, land use planning initiatives, and other innovative and evolving partnerships that support integrated land and resource management. *(Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, BC Energy Regulator)*

Highlights

There are a wide variety of innovative and meaningful partnerships, programs, and initiatives underway that contribute to the advancement of this action:

- Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework (CISF)
 - On October 24, 2022, the Province endorsed a long-term commitment to fund regional Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums, including an expanded Cumulative Effects Framework and support for Guardians. This will provide stability and certainty to the work of existing and future Forums in delivering resource stewardship through shared decision-making and co-management that brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous data, knowledge systems, and methodologies.
- Collaborative marine planning (i.e., Marine Protected Areas Network and Marine Plan Partnership for the Northern Shelf Bioregion)
 - In February 2023, 15 First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Government of B.C. jointly endorsed the Marine Protected Area Network Action Plan (the Action Plan) for the Northern Shelf Bioregion. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and

robust science, the Action Plan is a model of collaborative governance/stewardship and provides a planned approach to the protection of our oceans and their marine wildlife and environments.

- Blueberry River First Nations Implementation Agreement
 - Signed on January 18, 2023, between B.C. and Blueberry River First Nations (BRFN), this Agreement manages for the past, present and future cumulative impacts of industrial development on treaty rights, better protects those rights, and allows for responsible resource development. This agreement includes (but is not limited to) significant and new measures such as establishing a \$200 million restoration fund for BRFN to direct projects to heal the land and heal the people, a reduction in commercial timber harvesting activities in important cultural areas to BRFN members, and material changes to the regulatory environment for the oil and gas sector.
- Forest Landscape Planning (FLP)
 - The Ministry of Forests is undertaking four FLP pilot projects and initiating eight new FLPs across the province in collaboration with First Nations and Indigenous organizations. FLPs enable holistic consideration of the way we manage forests in B.C. including how we manage for cultural values, old growth forest, wildfire and climate change resiliency. These processes represent a true collaboration on establishing how natural resources are managed in B.C. and will be the cornerstone of a new sustainable approach to forestry.
- As well as:
 - modernized land use planning,
 - Great Bear Rainforest Agreement,
 - Aboriginal Liaison Program,
 - Guardian Shared Compliance and Enforcement Pilot Project with Kitasoo Xai'xais and Nuxalk First Nations, and
 - the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** 120 First Nations participating in collaborative stewardship tables, programs, and initiatives.
- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** Nine key initiatives that include 20 collaborative stewardship tables, programs, and initiatives contributing to implementation.

How are we working together?

For the 2022-2023 reporting year, the focus for consultation and collaboration was for B.C. and First Nations partners to agree on what policies, programs, or initiatives currently demonstrate that progress on Action 2.6 is underway. The identified programs and initiatives jointly set priorities for stewardship activities through regionally established forums or partnerships and integrate data and decision-making through a variety of collaborative and cooperative processes. Key in all of these processes is the respect and recognition of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Each of the initiatives identified under 2.6 will contribute to the advancement of this action and represent joint stewardship in action.

Are there challenges?

Risks to fully implementing this action include:

- The ability to develop meaningful performance measures in consultation and cooperation with First Nations partners for the whole of 2.6 while respecting the diversity of initiatives, partnerships, and governance structures within it.
- Engagement/reporting fatigue and capacity constraints and the impact on sustained effort on 2.6 reporting over time.
- Possible barriers within policy and legislation to advance innovative approaches required to achieve collaborative stewardship in alignment with UNDRIP/Declaration Act.

2.12 Collaboratively develop and implement CleanBC and the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy to support resilient communities and clean economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples that benefit our shared climate and advance reconciliation. *(Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy)*

Highlights

In collaboration with Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative and First Nations Emergency Services Society, the Province is launching an Indigenous Climate Resilience Capacity-building Pilot. The Pilot will identify models for enhancing Indigenous capacity in climate adaptation and resilience and to demonstrate the value of this increased capacity of Indigenous communities and organizations to inform potential future investment. It will support First Nations to pursue their climate adaptation planning and implementation priorities and protect First Nations' title and rights and their wholistic health and well-being from the impacts of climate change.

The First Nations Leadership Council, with financial assistance from the Province, will support a Climate Capacity and Needs Assessment for First Nations. This initiative will identify climate capacity best practices, needs, gaps, and challenges within First Nations communities to support and strengthen the capacity within and available to First Nations to prepare for and respond to climate change. This Assessment will also identify

barriers to the implementation of self-determined climate change actions and First Nations participation in provincial climate change making decisions and help to develop solutions to those barriers.

CAS worked with the First Nations Leadership Council – BC Technical Working Group on Climate Change and the Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group to collaboratively develop draft indicators for Action 2.12. Measures to evaluate success include:

- Appropriate mechanisms or governance structures in place to support collaborative implementation of CleanBC and the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy. The expected outcome is a formal structure for Indigenous advisory/working groups to engage in dialogue, provide strategic advice and ensure Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and experience of First Nation rights and title holders are included in development and implementation of climate initiatives.
- Collaborative prioritization and work planning with Indigenous advisory/working groups, with the outcome of meaningful engagement and collaboration with advisory/working groups on areas of shared priorities pertaining to CleanBC, the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy, and the First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan.
- Number of Indigenous partners, First Nations title and rights holders and treaty rights holders meaningfully engaged, with the outcome of broad engagement with Indigenous Peoples on climate initiatives in addition to collaboration with advisory/working groups.

Indicators

- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** Monthly meetings between the Climate Action Secretariat (CAS) and two Indigenous advisory groups including the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) – BC Technical Working Group on Climate Change and the Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group (ICAWG), provide a venue to share information on emerging climate policy and legislative initiatives and advice to CAS staff on consultation and engagement.
- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** The Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group and CAS worked collaboratively to design and seek project delivery partners for the Indigenous Climate Resilience Capacity-building Pilot Project, which is a project that will continue in 2023/24 to explore ways to support Indigenous climate resilience capacity and skill-building needs.
- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** 95 participants attended the Fall 2022 CleanBC Roadmap to 2030 Indigenous engagement sessions (virtual and in-person); 235 people (representing 113 First Nations and Indigenous organizations) attended the 3-day virtual Indigenous Climate Resilience Forum.

How are we working together?

Monthly meetings are held between the Climate Action Secretariat and two Indigenous advisory groups: 1) First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) – BC Technical Working Group on Climate Change and 2) Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group. These working groups were established to provide a technical venue to engage in dialogue, provide strategic advice related to climate change initiatives and ensure that First

Nations and Indigenous perspectives and interests are included in development and implementation of CleanBC and the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy.

Broad Indigenous engagement forums were held on CleanBC Roadmap implementation and attended by 95 First Nations and Indigenous organizations. A virtual Indigenous Climate Resilience Forum was held over three days and attended by 235 people representing 113 First Nations and Indigenous organizations. In addition, individual engagements/consultations were carried out on specific initiatives such as clean energy opportunities, Remote Community Energy Strategy, Forest Carbon Offset Protocol, energy efficiency standards, clean transportation, and carbon pricing.

Are there challenges?

There is a clear expectation that new initiatives and legislation be aligned with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act), regardless of when work may have started on them. Recent guidance is helping to ensure this analysis is completed in a consistent and thorough way.

Concerns have been raised regarding the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to meaningfully engage in co-development of policies and legislation associated with B.C.'s Climate Plans. These issues and approaches to address free, prior, and informed consent, will continue to be discussed with the FNLC-BC Technical Working Group in the coming year.

Theme 3. Ending Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination

DASHBOARD

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Service Agency Finance – Crown Agencies and Board Resourcing Office 	Develop essential training in partnership with Indigenous organizations, and deliver to the B.C. public service, public institutions and corporations that aims to build foundational understanding and competence about the history and rights of Indigenous Peoples, treaty process, rights and title, the UN Declaration, the B.C. Declaration Act, the dynamics of proper respectful relations, Indigenous-specific racism, and meaningful reconciliation.	Implementing Stage	Moderate Complexity	Some Challenges	Some Engagement
Year 1	3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education and Child Care 	Implement a mandatory course or bundle of credits related to First Peoples as part of graduation requirements in B.C. and co-create culturally relevant provincial resources with Indigenous people for use by all educators across the K-12 education system.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Notable Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	3.7	• Health	Implement recommendations made in the In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in B.C. health care report, striving to establish a health care system in B.C. that is culturally safe and free of Indigenous-specific racism.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	3.12	• Attorney General • Public Safety and Solicitor General	Prioritize implementation of the First Nations Justice Strategy to reduce the substantial overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples involved in and impacted by the justice system. This includes affirming First Nations self-determination and enabling the restoration of traditional justice systems and culturally relevant institutions.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Moderate Challenges	Moderate Engagement
Year 1	3.13	• Attorney General • Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General	Prioritize endorsement and implementation of the Métis Justice Strategy to reduce the substantial overrepresentation of Métis Peoples in and impacted by the justice system. This includes affirming Métis self-determination, and enabling the restoration of traditional justice systems and culturally relevant institutions.	Planning Stage	Notable Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Some Engagement

DETAILED REPORTING

3.1 Develop essential training in partnership with Indigenous organizations, and deliver to the B.C. public service, public institutions and corporations that aims to build foundational understanding and competence about the history and rights of Indigenous Peoples, treaty process, rights and title, the UN Declaration, the B.C. Declaration Act, the dynamics of proper respectful relations, Indigenous-specific racism, and meaningful reconciliation. *(Public Service Agency, Ministry of Finance – Crown Agencies and Board Resourcing Office)*

Highlights

Work on this action began late in the 2022/23 fiscal year with partner identification and contact occurring in November 2022. In February 2023, a working group comprised of Indigenous partners, the BC Public Service Agency (PSA), and Crown Agencies and Board Resourcing Office met and reviewed existing training for BC Public Service (BCPS) employees and known gaps. Three levels of training will be co-developed to achieve this action item and work has begun on an instructional design proposal for the first level of training.

An Indigenous consultant interviewed Indigenous members of public sector boards and the training recommendations were presented to the working group for initial feedback. Next steps will include co-development of training that is tailored to meet the learning needs of specific roles on public sector boards, with an emphasis on governing in the public interest in a manner that is inclusive of Indigenous rights.

Indicators

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** A draft instructional design plan was created and is under revision for Level 1 training, the instructional design proposal was circulated with a working group and engagement will continue in the 2023/24 fiscal year.
- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** A learning needs assessment was completed for the Crown Agencies and Board Resourcing Office to identify training for public sector boards.

How are we working together?

The BC Public Service Agency is collaborating with First Nations organizations on an instructional design proposal for essentials training for approximately 36,000+ BCPS employees. The Ministry of Finance's Crown Agencies and Board Resourcing Office (CABRO) is working to extend the PSA essentials training to approximately 3000 board members of public sector organizations and will collaborate with the same group of First Nations organizations, as part of the PSA process, as well as MNBC, Urban Indigenous organizations and existing board members on this part of the work.

Are there challenges?

Competing priorities and finite capacity remain ongoing challenges for timely implementation.

3.4 Implement a mandatory course or bundle of credits related to First Peoples as part of graduation requirements in B.C. and co-create culturally relevant provincial resources with Indigenous people for use by all educators across the K-12 education system. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

Highlights

Put into effect on July 1, 2023, the new graduation requirement will ensure B.C. students have a deep understanding of Indigenous peoples, their histories and cultures. The Ministry of Education and Child Care co-developed all Indigenous-focused graduation requirement materials with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). Métis Nation BC (MNBC) was provided with the opportunity to review and provide input on materials. Local B.C. First Nations involvement and sign-off is required for development of local courses that can meet the new graduation requirement. Co-construction with FNESC has been a priority for all resource development and curriculum implementation activities.

Indicators

- ❖ **Training sessions held:** Ongoing professional development workshops supporting the implementation of the Indigenous-focused graduation requirement.
- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** Ministerial Order drafted to implement mandatory bundle of credits in July 2023.

How are we working together?

Invitations were sent to each First Nation in B.C., and to MNBC, to invite input into the new graduation requirement. Regular meetings continue to be held with FNESC and other as-required meetings with partners. Resources related to the graduation requirement have been developed collaboratively with FNESC.

Are there challenges?

This action item was identified as having no challenges at time of reporting. Further Annual Report updates may change this action's challenge icon status indicator.

3.7 Implement recommendations made in the *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care* report, striving to establish a health care system in B.C. that is culturally safe and free of Indigenous-specific racism. (Ministry of Health)

Highlights

On June 14, 2022, a new Cultural Safety and Humility standard was released. This is the first standard of this type within Canada and was the culmination of years of effort and partnership between the First Nations Health Authority, the Health Standards Organization and multiple Indigenous organizations and thought leaders. The standard is currently being used to help guide health system organizations as they work towards improved cultural safety and humility with the intent that this standard will subsequently become part of the suite of accreditation standards that Accreditation Canada uses to assess and accredit health care organizations.

On November 24, 2022, the B.C. Government received royal assent for the new Health Professions and Occupations Act to reduce the number of regulatory colleges through amalgamation, reform complaints processes to improve accountability and transparency, commit to cultural safety and humility and improve governance systems. This represents a proactive approach and significant step forward to eliminate discrimination in B.C.'s health-care system. Regulated health professionals and regulated occupations under the Act will be required to embed anti-discrimination measures in the delivery of health-care services. Discrimination will be a form of professional misconduct or actionable conduct, which will require regulatory colleges to take action against professionals and occupations when they discriminate against others.

Indicators

- ❖ **Policies/Reports developed:** First annual progress report on the In Plain Sight recommendations was released December 1, 2022.

How are we working together?

The various elements of the recommendations require different approaches for consultation and cooperation depending on who is leading the implementation and who the key partners are. Partnership with Indigenous organizations, leaders and communities across the province primarily include FNHA, MNBC, FNHC, regional nation executive tables and FNLC. Some recommendations are being pursued primarily through partnerships and actions from health authorities. The approach that each health authority is taking on implementation can be driven by their relationships with FNHA, MNBC and regional Indigenous leaders and governing bodies and while there are significant alignments across the province, each region can have a unique structure and processes that work in that regional context. There are also regular meetings with the Vice Presidents of Indigenous Health from across the Health Authorities as well as regular meetings with the Indigenous Health Authority Board members. The Ministry of Health continues to observe and learn from the collaboration and cooperation pathways that other projects and ministries are following in addition to the guidance provided by the Declaration Act Secretariat.

Are there challenges?

The greatest risks to full implementation in a timely manner are competing priorities and finite capacity across the health system and Indigenous organizations and communities for meaningful engagement and partnerships. The Ministry of Health recognizes that Indigenous peoples and many other health system partners have not been adequately resourced to meet the competing and increasingly heavy and complex demands on their capacity for full cooperation and collaboration on all issues and opportunities.

3.12 Prioritize implementation of the First Nations Justice Strategy to reduce the substantial overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples involved in and impacted by the justice system. This includes affirming First Nations self-determination and enabling the restoration of traditional justice systems and culturally relevant institutions. (*Ministry of Attorney General, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General*)

Highlights

The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) hosted its annual First Nations Justice Forum in Vancouver from March 6-8, 2023. The Forum served as an opportunity to provide an update on the implementation of the First Nations Justice Strategy; hear directly from Indigenous leadership, rights holders, and Indigenous organizations; and seek feedback on priorities for the upcoming year. This was the first annual forum since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the first since the provincial endorsement of the First Nations Justice Strategy in February 2020.

Budget 2023/24 included the announcement of funding over the next two years to open an additional 10 Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) in the Province. Operated by the BC First Nations Justice Council, IJCs provide culturally appropriate information, advice, support and legal representation on criminal and child protection matters, directly to Indigenous people at the community level. They take a holistic approach to client and community wellness by facilitating client connections to supports such as housing, mental health and addictions treatment, and employment services. IJCs currently operate in-person in Merritt, Prince George, and Prince Rupert, as well as a Virtual IJC that clients across the Province can access regardless of location. Collectively the IJCs have helped more than 400 individuals since 2020. The locations for the next five IJCs scheduled to open have been identified as Kelowna, Nanaimo, Surrey, Vancouver and Victoria.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of implementation projects underway:** Initiated work on 11 of 25 Strategies within the BC First Nations Justice Strategy.

How are we working together?

In developing the strategy, BCFNJC consulted with First Nations leadership over numerous meetings and summits. Consultation with First Nations communities continues when needed to implement strategies that operate at the community level. The Province of B.C., BCFNJC and Canada host tripartite leadership circle, and an Annual Tripartite Ministers Meeting.

Are there challenges?

The implementation workplan was endorsed in 2021, and is at risk of not proceeding as planned as both BCFNJC and the Province are advancing work in an ad hoc manner without dedicated provincial funding for implementation.

3.13 Prioritize endorsement and implementation of the Métis Justice Strategy to reduce the substantial overrepresentation of Métis Peoples in and impacted by the justice system. This includes affirming Métis self-determination, and enabling the restoration of traditional justice systems and culturally relevant institutions. *(Ministry of Attorney General, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General)*

Highlights

Over the past year, Métis Nation BC and the Province worked collaboratively to advance the development of the Métis Justice Strategy with the goal of having this strategy endorsed by both parties. The Strategy is on a pathway to approval in 2023-24.

Indicators

- ❖ **Policies/Reports developed:** The final draft of the Métis Justice Strategy (MJS) has been developed, and is pending endorsement.
- ❖ **Implementation plan developed:** The implementation workplan for the MJS has been developed, and is pending endorsement.

How are we working together?

Métis Nation BC completed consultation with Chartered Communities. The Province is nearing completion of internal consultation with impacted areas to develop an implementation workplan. The Province and Métis Nation BC meet regularly to work towards seeking endorsement.

Are there challenges?

This action item was identified as having no challenges at time of reporting. Further Annual Report updates may change this action's challenge icon status indicator.

Theme 4: Social, cultural and economic well-being

DASHBOARD

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	4.1	• Education and Child Care	Identify and undertake concrete measures to increase the literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous students at all levels of the K-12 education system, including the early years.	Planning Stage	Some Complexity	Some Challenges	Some Engagement
Year 1	4.3	• Education and Child Care	Co-develop and implement a framework for the involvement of Indigenous Education Councils in school district financial planning and reporting.	Implementing Stage	Some Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	4.6	• Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport	Promote culturally relevant sport, physical activity and recreation initiatives and opportunities that increase Indigenous engagement, participation and excellence in both traditional and mainstream sports for individuals in both urban and rural or remote areas.	Complete	Some Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Some Engagement
Year 1	4.10	• Health	Prioritize the implementation of Primary Care Networks, the First Nations-led Primary Health Care Initiative, and other primary care priorities, embedding Indigenous perspectives and priorities into models of care to increase Indigenous Peoples' access to	Implementing Stage	Moderate Complexity	Moderate Challenges	Some Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
			primary care and other health services, and to improve cultural safety and quality of care.				
Year 1	4.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health and Addictions • Public Safety and Solicitor General • Attorney General 	<p>Address the disproportionate impacts of the overdose public health emergency on Indigenous Peoples by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - applying to the Government of Canada to decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use, and continuing campaigns and other measures to help end the stigma and shame associated with addiction; - expanding prescribed safer supply and other harm reduction measures; and - ensuring accessibility of recovery beds, and evidence-based, culturally relevant and safe services to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples, including youth. 	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Moderate Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	4.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Mental Health and Addictions 	Increase the availability and accessibility of resources to Indigenous partners in COVID-19 pandemic health and wellness planning and response, including the implementation of the Rural, Remote, First Nations and Indigenous COVID-19 Framework to ensure access for all Indigenous Peoples to immediate and culturally safe and relevant care closer to home.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Notable Challenges	Some Engagement
Year 1	4.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Family Development 	In collaboration with B.C. First Nations and Métis Peoples, and Inuit, continue implementing changes to substantially reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care through increased prevention and family support services at all stages of contact with the child welfare system.	Planning Stage	Some Complexity	Notable Challenges	Some Engagement
Year 1	4.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation 	Advance a collaborative, whole-of-government approach in the partnership between the Métis Nation of British Columbia and the Province of B.C., respecting Métis self-determination and working to establish more flexibility and sustainability in funding.	Planning Stage	Some Complexity	Some Challenges	Notable Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	4.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation 	Bring together key Indigenous urban leaders to create a provincial urban Indigenous advisory table to develop and implement a five-year plan to address the priorities of urban Indigenous Peoples, including a focus on Elders, youth, children, women, men, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and persons with disabilities.	Planning Stage	Some Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Some Engagement
Year 1	4.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation 	Work with Indigenous Peoples to build more on- and off-reserve housing and pursue new federal contributions.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Moderate Engagement
Year 1	4.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health Mental Health and Addictions 	Strengthen the health and wellness partnership between Métis Nation British Columbia, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and support opportunities to identify and work to address shared Métis health and wellness priorities.	Planning Stage	Some Complexity	Notable Challenges	Moderate Engagement
Year 1	4.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills 	Support Indigenous language revitalization through sustainable funding.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Moderate Challenges	Notable Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
Year 1	4.35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forests Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport 	Work with First Nations to reform the Heritage Conservation Act to align with the UN Declaration, including shared decision-making and the protection of First Nations cultural, spiritual, and heritage sites and objects.	Implementing Stage	Some Complexity	Notable Challenges	Notable Engagement
Year 1	4.37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport 	Provide funding to assist Indigenous tourism businesses that have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to further support recovery of the Indigenous tourism sector in B.C.	Complete	Some Complexity	Challenges Resolved	Some Engagement
Year 1	4.43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation 	Co-develop recommendations on strategic policies and initiatives for clean and sustainable energy. This includes identifying and supporting First Nations-led clean energy opportunities related to CleanBC, the Comprehensive Review of BC Hydro, and the BC Utilities Commission Inquiry on the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities.	Implementing Stage	Some Complexity	Moderate Challenges	Moderate Engagement
Year 1	4.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation 	Prioritize and increase the number of technology sector training opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and other groups currently under-	Implementing Stage	Moderate Complexity	Some Challenges	Some Engagement

Year	Action	Ministry	Description	How far along is this work?	How complicated is this work?	Are there challenges?	How are we working together?
			represented in B.C.'s technology sector.				
Year 1	4.48	• Agriculture and Food	Work with the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food and other Indigenous partners to identify opportunities to strengthen Indigenous food systems and increase Indigenous participation in the agriculture and food sector.	Implementing Stage	Notable Complexity	Some Challenges	Some Engagement

DETAILED REPORTING

4.1 Identify and undertake concrete measures to increase the literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous students at all levels of the K-12 education system, including the early years. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

Highlights

The Ministry of Education and Child Care (ECC) releases the [Aboriginal Report: How Are We Doing?](#) annually. This year, Superintendents received letters with district-level reports that also highlighted the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) as a key indicator for literacy and numeracy. School districts are required to report FSA results through the [Framework for Enhancing Student Learning](#), and ECC acknowledges the importance of mechanisms such as the FSA to maintain accountability in school districts for improving outcomes for Indigenous students throughout the province.

ECC will continue to collaborate and support school districts to include reconciliation and restorative practices in their strategic planning and collaborate with Indigenous peoples through the process.

Indicators

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** Letters sent to all School Districts regarding student outcomes, including FSA participation.

How are we working together?

Engagement with the First Nations Education Steering Committee and Métis Nation BC is required to address the broader scope of this action.

Are there challenges?

The student outcomes published in the annual [Aboriginal Report: How Are We Doing?](#) demonstrate that there are persistent gaps and challenges in the results for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

4.3 Co-develop and implement a framework for the involvement of Indigenous Education Councils in school district financial planning and reporting. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

Highlights

The Ministry of Education and Child Care (ECC) has engaged collaboratively with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) over the Fall and Winter of 22/23 to develop policy for setting standards of Indigenous Education Councils. ECC and FNESC have a broad policy direction, and consultation with First Nations, Treaty First Nations, and Métis Nation British Columbia has begun.

Indicators

- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** Legislation and Policy Working Group formed with FNESC and initial policy development discussions underway.

How are we working together?

ECC and FNESC have had meetings approximately monthly, or more often, since May 2022 to develop the Indigenous Education Council policy. ECC has been meeting with First Nation rights holders on the proposed policy since February 2023. Initial consultation has begun with Métis Nation BC.

Next steps are continuing work on co-development of policy and planning for potential legislative changes.

Are there challenges?

Timelines for implementation, legislative changes, and ensuring that First Nations and boards of education are appropriately informed of any new policies.

4.6 Promote culturally relevant sport, physical activity and recreation initiatives and opportunities that increase Indigenous engagement, participation and excellence in both traditional and mainstream sports for individuals in both urban and rural or remote areas. *(Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport)*

Highlights

Provided \$1.4 million to Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (ISPARC) to support delivery of the Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Strategy, Premier's Awards for Indigenous Youth Excellence in Sport program, and to develop collaborative partnerships with provincial and disability sport organizations to enhance reconciliation in the sport sector.

ISPARC also completed curriculum development and the training modules for the Cultural Safety Workshop to increase awareness and education in the sport sector to further support the delivery and improved access to programs and initiatives for Indigenous people.

The BC Games Society, ISPARC and the BC Lacrosse Association partnered to support Indigenous athletes to compete in Box Lacrosse at the 2022 Canada Summer Games. This was a pilot initiative to include more Indigenous athletes in the Canada Games. The B.C. Men's team won the Gold medal and the B.C. Women's team won the Silver medal.

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc has been selected by ISPARC as the B.C. candidate host community for the 2027 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG). In partnership with ISPARC, a final bid was submitted to NAIG Council in March 2023, which included a letter of support from the provincial government signed by Minister Lana Popham.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (ISPARC) delivered 206 programs and events to 7,643 participants, including: 81 youth camps with 4,772 participants, 14 Provincial Championships and Camps with 830 participants, 24 coaching courses with 247 coaches trained, and 275 community healthy living leaders trained.

How are we working together?

The Sport Branch is in regular contact (bi-weekly) with ISPARC and the BC Games Society, and provides assistance as required or requested.

Are there challenges?

Action complete.

4.10 Prioritize the implementation of Primary Care Networks, the First Nations-led Primary Health Care Initiative, and other primary care priorities, embedding Indigenous perspectives and priorities into models of care to increase Indigenous Peoples' access to primary care and other health services, and to improve cultural safety and quality of care. (*Ministry of Health*)

Highlights

On October 11, 2022, the Dakeelh Dene, T̓silhqot'in and Secwépemc Nations, in collaboration with the First Nations Health Authority, opened the Williams Lake First Nations Wellness Centre and 1,300 new Indigenous patients will be able to access longitudinal primary care in a culturally-safe team-based care setting. On March 17, 2023, a ground-breaking and traditional ceremony was held for the new Sts'ailes Community Care Campus (SCCC), in Harrison Mills, B.C. The SCCC will be the third First Nations-Led Primary Health Care Centre to launch in the province and, once fully operational, will provide 1,400 new Indigenous patients with longitudinal primary care. Progress continues to be made on moving the remaining 13 First Nations-Led Primary Health Care Centres (FNPCCs) into implementation across the province, with nine centres planned to open in 2024.

Local community Primary Care Networks are engaging with First Nations and Indigenous health serving organizations in service plan development and implementation. Representatives from each are members of Primary Care Network Planning and Steering Committees, and are active in Primary Care Network governance, and in some cases, are serving as committee co-chairs. In Primary Care Network Service Plans to-date, 149.2 full-time equivalents (FTEs) have been approved to directly support Indigenous peoples. Of these, 49.2 FTEs are Elders, Traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers, and Aboriginal Patient Navigators; to be included on local primary care teams.

Indicators

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** Planning and implementation status of Primary Care Networks (PCN) and First Nations-Led Primary Health Care Centers (FNPCCs) across the province involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partnerships as appropriate to the local community context is underway; at the time of this reporting, 63 of 99 PCNs are launched (64%) and 6 of 15 FNPCCs are approved or in approval (40%).

How are we working together?

First Nations-Led Primary Health Care Centres are created in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and local First Nations to provide culturally-safe care to Indigenous Peoples living in B.C. For the Guidelines and Protocols Advisory Committee, a permanent committee representative from the Chief Medical Office at the FNHA was added in 2020. In response to In Plain Sight, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the FNHA collectively established a provincial working group on Indigenous Cultural Safety and Humility in Primary and Community Care, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous members representing clinical committees, professional practice organizations, regional health authorities, and Indigenous health and wellness organizations.

Are there challenges?

Primary Care Networks and First Nations-Led Primary Health Care Centres have experienced service planning delays due to community capacity constraints and COVID-19 challenges. Health human resource shortages across the province are also significantly impacting progress in some regions. Additionally, growing patient attachment gaps are commonly outpacing physician and nurse practitioner recruitment in Indigenous, rural and remote communities.

Obstacles to Primary Care Networks and First Nations-Led Primary Health Care Centres implementation progress relate to physician compensation issues and Primary Care Network governance structures. Actions are being taken to address these issues through the new Physician Master Agreement, refreshed Primary Care Strategy compensation models, and the Ministry of Health's restructuring of Primary Care Network governance requirements.

4.12 Address the disproportionate impacts of the overdose public health emergency on Indigenous Peoples by:

- applying to the Government of Canada to decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use, and continuing campaigns and other measures to help end the stigma and shame associated with addiction;
- expanding prescribed safer supply and other harm reduction measures; and
- ensuring accessibility of recovery beds, and evidence-based, culturally relevant and safe services to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples, including youth. (*Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Ministry of Attorney General*)

Highlights

On May 31, 2022, Health Canada approved B.C.'s request for an exemption under s.56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to remove criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of certain illicit substances for personal use (people will no longer face criminal sanctions if they are found to be in possession of up to 2.5 cumulative grams of drugs listed in the province's threshold schedule). This exemption came into effect on January 31, 2023, and remains in place for three years. The s.56 exemption supports B.C.'s comprehensive response to the ongoing toxic drug crisis, including the disproportionately devastating impact on First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Decriminalization will help address these inequities, promoting pathways to supports, including culturally informed treatments and culturally safe services for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who are at risk of toxic drug poisonings.

The Ministry will continue to engage with First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous communities and partners, including FNHA, First Nations leaders, MNBC, BCFNJC, and BCAAFC to ensure decriminalization is implemented in a culturally-safe and appropriate way. As part of the pre-implementation work on this, MMHA worked with MNBC to hold a Provincial town hall for Métis people. In addition, information packages were sent to all First Nations in B.C., including an invitation to upcoming Town Hall sessions, and an offer to meet individually with any interested First Nation. This was also distributed to FNLC and FNHC. The Ministry partnered with FNHA to deliver five regional town halls for First Nations leadership, and the Ministry now continues to meet individually with First Nations, with the support of partners from FNHA and the regional Health Authorities. Accounting for all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples' and communities' experiences, needs and right to self-determination will continue to be a key part of implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Indicators

- ❖ **Policies/Reports developed:** Developed and released a technical policy framework for the Adult Substance Use System of Care Framework in December 2022.
- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** Successfully applied to Government of Canada to decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use to address the toxic drug crisis, which came into effect on January 31, 2023, for an initial three-year period.
- ❖ **Number of meetings and engagements held:** Hosted five regional Town Halls for First Nations leadership in November and December 2022 in partnership the First Nations Health Authority, and worked with Métis Nation BC to hold a Provincial town hall for Métis people.

How are we working together?

Work is underway to implement the Adult Substance Use System of Care Framework and support health system transformation through continued engagement with First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous partners. Consultation and cooperation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners and peoples being pursued in a variety of ways across the four key subtasks of this action, including Working Groups and Planning Tables. A decriminalization information package was sent to all First Nations communities in B.C. and to the First Nations Leadership Council and First Nations Health Council. Town hall sessions on decriminalization were codeveloped with the First Nations Health Authority for First Nations (Fall 2022) and with Métis Nation BC (June 2022). First Nations Health Authority, Métis Nation BC, BC First Nations Justice Council, and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres have and continue to be members of the decriminalization Core Planning Table that has been meeting since July 2021 and to inform MMHA's approach to engagement with partners.

Are there challenges?

Decriminalization is being rolled out in the midst of concurrent public health emergencies related to the COVID-19 and the toxic drug crisis, which are greatly impacting communities and the capacity of health and social service providers. Partner capacity to engage with multiple streams of work at varying touchpoints may delay development/implementation of project work. Mitigation sought via close communication with key First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous partners supporting the streams of work.

B.C.'s decriminalization efforts will need to take into account the unique experiences, community contexts, and rights of Indigenous peoples throughout implementation. B.C. will need to continue to work closely with the Indigenous partners and engage with First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous partners and communities to evaluate impacts of decriminalization on First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. This feedback will be critical to support ongoing program and policy improvements.

4.14 Increase the availability and accessibility of resources to Indigenous partners in COVID-19 pandemic health and wellness planning and response, including the implementation of the Rural, Remote, First Nations and Indigenous COVID-19 Framework to ensure access for all Indigenous Peoples to immediate and culturally safe and relevant care closer to home, (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)

Highlights

Approved funding for Real-Time Virtual Support services in 2022/23 supported physicians and other healthcare providers to provide culturally-safe virtual primary care services including extended hours and increased access to care for those who have difficulties travelling.

Indicators

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** All Service Plans reviewed and funding letters issued (100%).
- ❖ **Indigenous patient satisfaction rates:** From patient satisfaction surveys, over 90% of users accessing the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day service report satisfaction with their appointment and over 95% of users indicate they would recommend the service to their family and friends.
- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** From implementation in April 2020 to March 31, 2023, there were 30,123 First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day encounters. From implementation in August 2020 to March 31, 2023, there were 4,483 First Nations Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service encounters.

How are we working together?

Regular, ongoing, collaborative partner meetings with the First Nations Health Authority to support program implementation and oversight. Planning for engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis healthcare providers and patients to provide feedback on their experience, outcomes, and opportunities to improve Primary Care funded virtual care services.

Are there challenges?

Funding for Real-Time Virtual Support services ends in March 2024, as it is currently funded out of COVID-19 contingency funds from Treasury Board. Sustainment and expansions of this service will require identification of base funding to ensure it is a fully-funded operation.

4.17 In collaboration with B.C. First Nations and Métis Peoples, and Inuit, continue implementing changes to substantially reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care through increased prevention and family support services at all stages of contact with the child welfare system. *(Ministry of Children and Family Development)*

Highlights

Last year over 90% of Indigenous children who needed protection were able to return to living safely with their families after receiving supports — including culturally specific services such as access to knowledge keepers, cultural ceremonies, and Elder-led healing.

Although the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in care is still unacceptable and there is still much work to be done, the number of Indigenous children and youth in care has decreased to the lowest number in over 20 years.

Bill 38/2022 Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act:

In collaboration with Indigenous partners, B.C. amended the Child, Family and Community Service Act to remove barriers for Indigenous Peoples exercising jurisdiction over child and family services, becoming the first province in Canada to expressly recognize within provincial legislation Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to self-government over child and family services. The Act is a turning point that provides a path to end the overinvolvement of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in the lives of Indigenous families. In addition to setting out a pathway for Indigenous Peoples to exercise legal jurisdiction over child and family services, the amendments create a new Indigenous Child Welfare Director position within MCFD; provide for greater information sharing with Indigenous communities exercising or planning to exercise jurisdiction; and provide for greater involvement of Indigenous communities in child and family services through agreements with the Province. Amendments to the Adoption Act strengthen collaboration with Indigenous communities and consent-based decision making with Indigenous governing bodies on adoption placements and adoption for Indigenous children who are in the care of MCFD.

First Signed Coordination Agreement:

Splatsin, B.C. and Canada signed the first tripartite coordination agreement in B.C. to ensure that Splatsin can effectively exercise their inherent right of self-government including jurisdiction in relation to child and family services for their children and families. This agreement supports the ongoing exercise of Splatsin's jurisdiction of their Child, Family and Community Services under Spallumcheen Indian Band Bylaw #3-1980 and Secwepemc law.

First Signed Co-created Child Welfare Agreement:

Simpcw First Nation and B.C. signed the province's first co-created child welfare agreement. The Simpcw First Nation now has its unique practices, customs, laws, language and traditions integrated into Tcwesétmentem: Walking Together Agreement, the first of its kind in B.C. This

agreement will inform child welfare decision making and ensure the Simpcw First Nation is involved in the protection, planning and placement of Simpcw children and youth who come into contact with the child welfare system.

Youth Transitions:

Since 2022, the following Youth Transitions programs/supports have been implemented:

- Ensuring young adults can stay in their homes until age 21 with Temporary Support and Housing Agreements (TSA/THA) (Spring 2022)
- Additional flexibility for Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) life-skills programming (Spring 2022)
- A no-limit earnings exemption (Summer 2022)
- Launch of the Rent Supplements Program (Fall 2022)
- Second Intake of Rent Supplements Program (Spring 2023)
- New transition workers have begun to be available on Vancouver Island and in the North
- Duration of Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) increased to 84 months (Spring 2023)
- Increased flexibility to move from a THA to a TSA (Spring 2023)
- Increases to, and expansion of, dental and medical benefits (Spring 2023)

Healthy Connections Through Culture Program: This program supports Indigenous youth through cultural and community connections and provides funding to support Indigenous youth involved or at risk of involvement with the youth justice system, including those transitioning into adulthood.

Foster Parent Recruitment campaign: MCFD is building a new recruitment campaign, designed to recruit more foster parents and out-of-care providers as long-time foster parents retire.

Indicators

- ❖ **Percentage of funding increased:** MCFD increased support for “out-of-care caregivers,” often referred to as Kinship caregivers, by more than 70% to harmonize their rates with foster caregiver rates. Service rates, the additional payments that caregivers receive for supporting children or youth with increased needs, have also increased this year by nearly 30%. Respite and relief care has increased up to 36%.

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** In 2022, MCFD began implementing the Enhanced Out-of-Care program. This program enables children and youth living with moderate to significant support needs to reside with extended family or people known to them and support fewer children and youth being brought into care, residing in foster homes, or specialized homes.
- ❖ **Legislation amendment:** Legislative amendments to the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) were drafted and are expected to be introduced in May 2023. These legislative amendments are intended to expand eligibility and services available to young adults with government care experience to better support them as they transition to adulthood.

How are we working together?

Over two thirds of Bill 38 came into force in 2022. The Ministry is working with Indigenous partners to develop regulations and policies needed to bring into force the remaining clauses of Bill 38. This includes engagement on changes to court processes to support the full exercise of jurisdiction, developing the Indigenous Child Welfare Director role, expanded information sharing, and consent for adoption of Indigenous children. The Ministry is also engaging on a fiscal framework to support Indigenous communities providing services to their children and families and expanded the suite of supports and services for young adults under youth transitions.

Are there challenges?

Sufficient capacity is required to ensure rights holders can co-develop Bill 38 regulations, collaborate on the engagement approach for the fiscal framework, schedule and provide regular input on transformational initiatives, and have sufficient time to report to their communities.

4.20 Advance a collaborative, whole-of-government approach in the partnership between the Métis Nation of British Columbia and the Province of B.C., respecting Métis self-determination and working to establish more flexibility and sustainability in funding. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)*

Highlights

The Province has committed to providing \$1 million in funding over the next two fiscal years to Métis Nation BC (MNBC) to support Action Plan engagement and implementation and alignment of provincial laws with the UN Declaration. The Province also committed to providing \$390,000 for delivery of community-led programs in the 39 Métis Chartered Communities engaging with school districts, municipalities, regional districts, and other organizations and agencies to address social, cultural, and economic initiatives and activities.

A Letter of Intent was signed between the Province and Métis Nation BC which initiated the BC-Métis Relations Table in November 2021. The Table advances a new whole of government approach to Métis relations as a partnership between the Province and MNBC, respecting Métis self-determination. A key goal of the table is to co-develop a reconciliation agreement that is aligned with and supports MNBC priorities, including fiscal priorities.

Indicators

- ❖ **Agreement signed:** Letter of Intent signed between the Province and Métis Nation BC which initiated the BC-Métis Relations Table (November 2021).
- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** Five BC-Métis Relations Table sub-tables established and ongoing: Housing; Health and mental health; Environmental protection; Economic development; and Heritage and culture.

How are we working together?

The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) is engaging with MNBC bi-weekly through the technical BC-Métis Relations Table. Each quarter, MIRR staff and executive engages with MNBC political leadership at a senior leadership table. Regular engagement keeps MNBC informed on invitations for consultation on policy and legislation.

Are there challenges?

There are gaps across the public service with regard to understanding the history and provincial relationship with Métis people in British Columbia. While there is agreement that Métis do not hold site-specific section 35 rights in B.C., discussions on social areas of self-determination would help advance Métis communities to thrive and be full participants in the social, cultural and economic landscape of the province.

4.21 Bring together key Indigenous urban leaders to create a provincial urban Indigenous advisory table to develop and implement a five-year plan to address the priorities of urban Indigenous Peoples, including a focus on Elders, youth, children, women, men, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and persons with disabilities. (*Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation*)

Highlights

The Province committed to an Indigenous-led process that brings together urban Indigenous leaders to create better outcomes for Indigenous Peoples in urban areas. On February 22, 2023, the inaugural Provincial Urban Indigenous Leadership Dialogue was attended by more than 50 urban Indigenous leaders from across the province. Participants were asked to explore what a coordinated network of urban Indigenous community leaders could look like, how to ensure no one gets left behind and how to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and values lead the space.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** 60 people in attendance at information session held on December 1, 2022.
- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** 51 people in attendance at the inaugural Provincial Urban Indigenous Leadership Dialogue on February 22, 2023.

How are we working together?

Throughout 2022 and early 2023, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) met bi-weekly to determine schedules, budgets, roles, responsibilities and messaging to support urban Indigenous Peoples. Urban Indigenous leaders will inform the development of the advisory table and subsequent development of a five-year plan to address the priorities of urban Indigenous Peoples along with indicators.

Are there challenges?

This action item was identified as having no challenges at time of reporting. Further Annual Report updates may change this action's challenge icon status indicator.

4.25 Work with Indigenous Peoples to build more on- and off-reserve housing and pursue new federal contributions. *(Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)*

Highlights

Budget 2023 and the new Homes for People action plan announced the Province's commitment to provide \$1.3 billion over ten years (2023-2033) to double the construction of new Indigenous housing units from 1,750 to 3,500. This is on top of the \$550 million over 10 years to invest in Indigenous Housing through Indigenous Housing Fund (IHF). As of March 31, 2023, 87% of the original goal has been achieved.

The IHF program is aimed at Indigenous families, seniors, individuals, and persons living with a disability both on- and off-reserve. B.C. became the first province in Canada to invest provincial housing funds on-reserve which is federal jurisdiction. Since 2018, BC Housing opened all Building BC funding programs to applications from Indigenous people.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of new social housing units:** 1,519 units of new social housing units completed or underway as of March 31, 2023.
- ❖ **Number of other Indigenous affiliated units:** 1,084 units through the Community Housing Fund; 275 units through the Supportive Housing Fund; 55 units through the Women's Transitional Housing Fund and 261 units through the Deep Affordability Program underway or completed as of March 31, 2023.

How are we working together?

BC Housing has been engaging Indigenous partners and sector organizations over many years on strategic initiatives, such as the development of its reconciliation strategy and Indigenous design guidelines. BC Housing will be sustaining such strategic engagements as it finalizes its formal Reconciliation Strategy and moves into more collaboration and co-creation with communities as it implements the various strategy actions.

BC Housing continues to consult with First Nations on active and proposed projects, and meets to discuss housing opportunities both on and off reserve. One example is the shelter and supportive housing located at 1275 7th Avenue in Hope. BC Housing has been engaging with First Nation communities and the First Nations Health Authority to ensure services, design and opportunities for cultural practices are made available for Indigenous tenants and shelter guests.

Are there challenges?

This action item was identified as having no challenges at time of reporting. Further Annual Report updates may change this action's challenge icon status indicator.

4.26 Strengthen the health and wellness partnership between Métis Nation British Columbia, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and support opportunities to identify and work to address shared Métis health and wellness priorities. *(Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)*

Highlights

In late 2022, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR), Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA) came together with Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) to develop a new Health, Mental Health and Wellness, and Harm Reduction Sub-Table, under the Métis Partnership Table. This Sub-Table brings together key system partners to explore ways to advance Métis health and wellness priorities, strengthen MNBC's relationship with the Province, and to explore opportunities to develop and promote Métis-specific health and mental health and wellness programming in the B.C. health system.

MNBC has made significant strides in strengthening their relationship with health system partners over the past year, through utilization of the increased MoH-MNBC funding resources. These resources, which include ongoing annualized funding, have supported the hiring of regional health coordinators and other regional-centred programming that help Métis people to access appropriate care, engagement in joint working groups, and development of Indigenous Children and Youth health and wellness education and training modules.

Indicators

- ❖ **Amount of funding provided:** In 2022/23, MoH and MMHA provided MNBC with a total of \$2.2 million (\$1.2 million in annualized funding; \$1 million grant) to support capacity building for engagements, partnership, and activities to support Métis health, mental health, and wellness.
- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** The Métis Health, Mental Health and Wellness and Harm Reduction Sub-Table was established.

How are we working together?

Partnership and collaboration forums include working groups, the In Plain Sight Task Team, monthly/bi-monthly Executive meetings, a quarterly ADM meeting and the newly established Health, Mental Health and Wellness, and Harm Reduction Sub-Table.

Are there challenges?

Challenges include limited MNBC capacity to engage on multiple streams of work which may delay development and implementation of specific initiatives and partnership opportunities.

MNBC has stated that funding supports are inadequate to address community needs and facilitate MNBC's engagement in provincial initiatives and opportunities; as well, the current funding from multiple partners in numerous agreements is resulting in a heavy administrative and reporting burden.

4.30 Support Indigenous language revitalization through sustainable funding. (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills)

Highlights

In 2022/23, the Province provided nearly \$35 million in new funding to the FPCC and FPCF to support First Nations languages, arts, and cultural heritage revitalization programming and operations.

Of this new funding, the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills provided \$2.6 million to boost the Youth Empowered Speakers Program. The program provides First Nation students in B.C. who are studying education and early childhood education with one-on-one mentor-apprentice language learning and funding to support their post-secondary studies. The program addresses the need to develop new First Nations language speakers to become immersion teachers who will work in First Nation communities to deliver community immersion programming across the province.

PSFS also supports the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree framework that was initiated by First Nations and First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes, and which provides a pathway for First Nations, First Nations-mandated institutes, and public post-secondary institutions to collaboratively establish and deliver degree programs in First Nation languages.

Additional funding is required to support the current First Nation language programs and for the expansion of the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree framework, which is a unique initiative, distinct from other post-secondary language programs, that has fluency in an Indigenous language as its primary learning outcome and purpose.

The information in the [2022 Report on the Status of BC First Nations Languages](#) helps to inform progress/metrics.

Indicators

- ❖ **Amount of funding provided:** In 2022, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation provided \$25 million investment over three years to FPCC towards its language, arts and cultural heritage revitalization programming, as well as \$7.15 million to FPCC in new 2022-2023 operational funding. In 2022, the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills provided funding of \$2.6 million to First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) for language revitalization through the Youth Empowered Speakers Program.
- ❖ **Amount of funding provided:** The Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills also provided \$1.5 million in 2022 to the First Nations Education Steering Committee for development and implementation of the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree framework. The Ministry provided an additional \$1.6 million for a variety of community-based language revitalization and preservation initiatives from the Indigenous Skills Training and Education program fund, the majority of which was administered by the First Nations Education Steering Committee through the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program. The StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan commits to ongoing funding for the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree and for Michif language revitalisation.
- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** Six Indigenous Language Fluency Degree pilots are underway. The first degree approved under the framework was the Bachelor of nsyilxcən Language Fluency Degree, with the first students to receive this degree graduating in June 2023.

How are we working together?

The Ministries of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation are continuing to work with the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, First Peoples Cultural Council and Métis Nation BC. The Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills is providing funding support and working with post-secondary institutions to facilitate their support of the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree framework. The framework was initiated by First Nations and First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes and continues to be First Nations-led.

Are there challenges?

Based on current funding levels, funding is insufficient to meet the needs for language revitalization in B.C.

The Province invested nearly \$35 million in new funding to the FPCC and FPCF in June 2022. Most recently through Budget 2023/24 the Province announced more than \$6 million annual operational boost to FPCC. MIRR continues to work with FPCC and the Federal Government to work towards securing sustainable funding.

Funding secured to date for the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree will not meet current needs or support its expansion to other First Nations whose languages are endangered. The Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills will seek additional funding for the Indigenous Language Fluency Degree.

4.35 Work with First Nations to reform the Heritage Conservation Act to align with the UN Declaration, including shared decision-making and the protection of First Nations cultural, spiritual, and heritage sites and objects. *(Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport)*

Highlights

Phase 1 engagement with First Nations and stakeholders on the Heritage Conservation Act Transformation Project (HCATP) has successfully concluded. Analysis of feedback and the drafting of What We Heard Reports is well underway. The co-development of an HCATP Consultation and Cooperation Plan for First Nations has been completed, while the co-development of a Request for Decision (RFD) to move to Phase 2 is in-progress.

Indicators

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** Co-developed Heritage Conservation Act Transformation Project (HCATP) materials and resources through the Joint Working Group on First Nations Heritage Conservation (JWGFNHC), with input from the Alliance of Modern Treaty Nations, to support Phase 1 engagement with First Nations and stakeholders.
- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** 134 participants representing 98 First Nations, 2 Tribal Councils, 4 Treaty Societies and 15 First Nations Organizations participated in two virtual and five in-person Phase 1 engagement sessions, or by way of Nation-requested Government-to-Government meetings, while upwards of 300 persons representing 173 organizations across 11 sectors/interest groups attended external stakeholder sessions. Participant feedback was received by way of oral commentary during the sessions, written submission, or through an online survey.

How are we working together?

HCATP work is being led through the JWGFNHC, with input from the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations. Phase 1 included in-person and virtual engagement sessions with First Nations, as well as an online survey, written submissions and G2G meetings as requested. An independent Indigenous facilitator was retained under contract with UBCIC to deliver First Nations engagement and prepare a What We Heard Report. Engagement with the Métis Nation of BC has also been undertaken. Phases 2 and 3 will include opportunities for further engagement and consultation and cooperation. The HCATP CCP outlines in detail how the Province will Consult and Cooperate with First Nations on the HCATP.

Are there challenges?

Target timeline to introduce proposed comprehensive legislative amendments within this mandate may not provide adequate time for consultation and cooperation including the collaborative co-development of policy options and proposed legislation with First Nations, as well as necessary engagement with stakeholders.

4.37 Provide funding to assist Indigenous tourism businesses that have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to further support recovery of the Indigenous tourism sector in B.C. (*Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport*)

Highlights

\$5 million in initial relief funding allocated to Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC). 140 grants delivered to Indigenous tourism businesses.

A second intake of the BC Indigenous Tourism Recovery Fund was launched in January 2022 providing an additional \$3 million to continue to support Indigenous tourism businesses. \$3 million in additional relief funding allocated to ITBC. 161 grants delivered to Indigenous tourism businesses.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of grants delivered:** 301 grants delivered to Indigenous tourism businesses.

How are we working together?

Funding responded to a recommendation from the Tourism Task Force - a consultation process developed through COVID-19 to identify needs of the tourism sector.

Are there challenges?

Action complete.

4.43 Co-develop recommendations on strategic policies and initiatives for clean and sustainable energy. This includes identifying and supporting First Nations-led clean energy opportunities related to CleanBC, the Comprehensive Review of BC Hydro, and the BC Utilities Commission Inquiry on the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities. (*Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation*)

Highlights

Based on feedback from workshops hosted in March 2022 by the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation (EMLI) and the First Nations Energy and Mining Council (FNEMC), First Nation leadership provided approval for three Engagement Tables to proceed: Electricity Table, Hydrogen Market Opportunities Table and Legislative Standing Table. Engagement for 2022/23 included: opportunities in hydrogen and renewable natural gas; a learning series on electricity markets, systems and regulation; and development of a joint process for engagement on clean energy regulation and legislation.

Legislative Standing Table: EMLI and FNEMC to develop the Legislative Standing table to bring forward provincially-proposed clean energy legislative and regulatory changes for discussion with First Nations on alignment with UNDRIP as per DRIPA Section 3 obligations.

Electricity Table: In November 2022, FNEMC and EMLI convened an Electricity Table Advisory Group (ETAG) consisting of Indigenous and industry leaders. ETAG, facilitated by a third-party contractor, will discuss opportunities in the electricity sector and provide advice to EMLI and FNEMC on the implementation of activities outlined in the ICEO workplan for the Electricity Table.

The ETAG Terms of Reference, formally approved in December 2022, provides a list of members and scope of activities for the first two years of ETAG and can be found on the ICEO website. An Indigenous graphic facilitator captured the discussions in a visual form to illustrate plans for the Electricity Table and ICEO. With input from ETAG members, FNEMC and EMLI have developed a framework for a series of 'Electricity 101 knowledge sessions', that will be presented (in-person) to rights holders at a clean energy workshop in Summer 2023.

Hydrogen Table: The BC Hydrogen Office (BCHO) and FNEMC have formed a strong partnership since the workplan began. Jointly, the BCHO and FNEMC are developing an Indigenous Hydrogen Opportunities Analysis. On January 31 a Hydrogen 101 Workshop was presented and met with great success. The workshop had over 50 participants and stimulated many questions and much interest. Planning is underway for a second (in-person) workshop to be held in Summer 2023.

The goals for this action include:

- First Nations are fully positioned to participate in current and future opportunities in B.C.'s clean energy sector.
- Recommendations to decision makers for legislation, regulation and policy related to clean energy are jointly developed.

Indicators

- ❖ **Implementation project underway:** A BC/FNEMC Hydrogen Initiative was launched via virtual successful workshop on January 31, 2023.
- ❖ **Strategic engagement underway:** Development of the Electricity Table Advisory Group (ETAG), made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous representatives with technical and subject matter expertise in the electricity sector, to provide advice to FNEMC and EMLI on carrying out activities of the Electricity Table. Three meetings of ETAG have been held.

How are we working together?

The ICEO is a co-developed, co-led process between EMLI and FNEMC and is subject to the individual Parties' authorities, responsibilities and internal structures and processes.

FNEMC and EMLI representatives have developed a strong working relationship through co-developing and co-leading the ICEO engagement process. Their relationship continues to achieve the following objectives:

- build a relationship based on trust and respect for each other's perspectives;
- apply a "solution-oriented" approach to all work to implement this engagement process;
- set timelines; and
- work with due consideration for timelines and share all relevant information in a timely manner.

ICEO engagement enhances the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Province by inviting the parties to engage in open thinking and transparent dialogue with a view to:

- align Indigenous and provincial government decision-making on the policy program options;
- improve the economic, environmental, social and cultural outcomes for First Nations peoples in British Columbia.

Are there challenges?

Pressure to engage on and implement activities under the ICEO Terms of Reference will grow in FY24 and exceed available FNEMC and EMLI resources (staff resources and approved budgets).

Implementation of ICEO activities and outcomes may occur slower than desired by rights holders and First Nation organizations.

Items identified by rights holders as part of 21/22 ICEO engagements are not currently being addressed under ICEO, but may be addressed in future years:

- Resource revenue sharing on BC Hydro projects and compensation from the impacts of past infringements;
- Indigenous clean energy infrastructure ownership;
- Participation in governance, employment, and contracting with BC Hydro;

- Transition from diesel to renewable power generation in remote First Nation communities (currently advanced by EMLI outside of ICEO process);
- Jointly developing recommendations for the Provincial Cabinet on a proposed regulatory framework for Indigenous utilities.

Many Nations are focused on power sales agreements with BC Hydro when new power supply is not immediately required or feasible at prices set in previous procurements.

4.45 Prioritize and increase the number of technology sector training opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and other groups currently under-represented in B.C.'s technology sector. *(Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation)*

Highlights

The Innovator Skills Initiative (ISI), Digital Marketing Bootcamp (DMB) and the Canadian Tech Talent Accelerator (CTTA) provided training to a total of 11,778 participants, 8,536 of these participants identify as IBPOC or belong to an underrepresented group. The Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation, in partnership with these programs, will continue engagement with Indigenous organizations to inform program development to ensure Indigenous Peoples and other groups currently under-represented in B.C.'s technology sector are prioritized to increase the number of training opportunities.

Indicators

- ❖ **Number of engagement participants in programs and events:** In 2022/23, the Innovator Skills Initiative (ISI), Digital Marketing Bootcamp (DMB), and the Canadian Tech Talent Accelerator (CTTA) provided technology sector training to an estimated 2,200 IBPOC participants, of which 791 self-identify as Indigenous.

How are we working together?

A key part of the Innovator Skills Initiative program development process in 2021 involved engaging with a range of organizations representing under-represented groups and Indigenous Peoples. Engagement took place through roundtable discussions to ensure a wide variety of perspectives were considered. Engagement included the Indigenous Business and Investment Council of BC, One Feather and Jelly Digital Marketing. ISI aims to help under-represented people get their first job in B.C.'s tech sector and provides grants to help employers hire a new employee. Innovate BC engaged with the First Nations Technology Council (FNTC) to provide ISI employers free access to post jobs on the FNTC job board to cross-promote initiatives. In addition, Innovate BC engaged Jelly Academy, an Indigenous-led training provider, to provide information on how to hire recent graduates.

The Digital Marketing Bootcamp program is now complete. Future digital skills bootcamps, funded through the StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan and delivered over the next three fiscal years, will be engaging and cooperating with Indigenous organizations regarding development and reporting on the program.

NPower Canada, the Canadian Tech Talent Accelerators' lead delivery partner has been cooperating with Indigenous organizations and other supporters to ensure that the program is relevant and accessible to Indigenous jobseekers. Funding to continue the CTTA program has been approved through the StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan and ministry staff will work with partners to engage with Indigenous organizations to encourage Indigenous participation in the next iteration of the program.

Are there challenges?

While there is a low risk of not meeting program uptake targets, knowing the exact number of Indigenous and under-represented participants is difficult when identification is not a program qualification requirement. Self-identifying is often voluntary and not everyone may feel comfortable answering. Having accurate data is important to monitor and evaluate the success of program development to inform future initiatives to increase the number of tech training opportunities for Indigenous and under-represented groups. Future engagement with Indigenous partners may include discussing how to frame self-identification aspects to encourage more accurate reporting and data.

4.48 Work with the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food and other Indigenous partners to identify opportunities to strengthen Indigenous food systems and increase Indigenous participation in the agriculture and food sector. *(Ministry of Agriculture and Food)*

Highlights

Following two years of co-development with founding members and the Ministry, the BC Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food (IACAF) was inaugurated in June 2021 and launched a 3-year strategic plan (2021-2024) to advance equitable participation of Indigenous Peoples in the food and agriculture sector and support the realization of their food security, food sovereignty and economic development objectives. The Council meets on a quarterly basis to dialogue with the Ministry on priorities and issues impacting Indigenous Peoples and to implement their strategic plan. Work undertaken by the Council in 2022-23 (Year 2 of the Strategic Plan) builds on research and information gathering projects sponsored by the Council in Year 1 and advances work in new areas. Highlights include: four meetings with the Ministry; advice and guidance on the creation and design of a \$1.14 million pilot funding program to support Indigenous food systems; commissioning mapping and survey work on Indigenous food and agriculture initiatives in B.C.; hosting a gathering to support networking and strategic coordination among Indigenous-led organizations supporting Indigenous food and agriculture and the Ministry; and commissioning the first video in a planned series to profile and celebrate Indigenous food and agriculture. The Council's advice on priorities and approaches to support Indigenous Peoples' food systems has also informed the Ministry's prioritization and design of substantial new Indigenous food systems programming to be launched in 2023-24.

Indigenous Food Systems and Agriculture Partnership Program (IFSAP) was launched in Fall 2022 and resulted in \$1.14 million of approved funding for 15 Indigenous food systems and agriculture projects. Program design incorporated recommendations from IACAF to reduce barriers to access and increase the efficacy of funding through larger projects and board eligible activity criteria that included infrastructure costs, which previously were ineligible under other Ministry funding programs.

A \$30 million contribution to New Relationship Trust to develop and implement a 3-year Indigenous food sovereignty funding program was confirmed at the end of 2022-23. This funding program represents the largest single Ministry of Agriculture and Food investment in Indigenous food systems to date and will action a recommendation from IACAF and other Indigenous partners to transition to Indigenous-led funding design and delivery.

Indicators

The Ministry and Council have agreed on three process indicators as marks of progress.

- ❖ **Number of meetings and engagements held:** Four quarterly meetings (two virtual and two in-person) with council and ministry staff and senior executive have taken place, as well as three ad hoc meetings. Meetings have included sessions with Indigenous-led organizations, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada and other provincial ministries.
- ❖ **Number of implementation projects underway:** Three council sponsored projects have been completed in 2022-23 to advance strategic plan priorities, including a mapping and survey project of Indigenous food and agriculture initiatives, a video profiling the council, and a gathering of Indigenous-led organizations supporting Indigenous food systems.
- ❖ **Recommendations actioned:** Eight significant recommendations from the Council have been actioned in 2022-23 through new program design and delivery and three projects to advance strategic plan priorities. Most significantly, recommendations include increase funding to support Indigenous food systems, broadening eligible activities, prioritizing Indigenous-led service delivery and designing for low barrier access. Transversal to these recommendations and other advice that the ministry is actioning, is to adopt a decolonizing approach to Indigenous food systems that reflects Indigenous peoples' food sovereignty, self-determined priorities, distinct approaches, the interconnected role of food in providing cultural, social, environmental and economic well-being and that rejects the deep, long standing colonial bias and racism reflected in definitions and approaches to agriculture.

How are we working together?

The Council meets on a quarterly basis with the Ministry to provide advice and guidance on the Minister's approach to Declaration Act implementation and to work together on IACAF strategic plan implementation, primarily through projects related to IACAF's priority action areas.

Are there challenges?

Risks include data deficiencies or underutilized processes of risk identification and management, adequate time, resourcing and capacity to engage, develop shared objectives, priorities and goals, and adequately communicate and advance those objectives, priorities and goals within the Ministry and to other provincial and federal agencies and partners. IACAF and Ministry coordination and project implementation continue to be advanced through regular meetings and project planning and execution.

Time and competing priorities of Ministry and IACAF Members and adequate, secure secretariat and Indigenous organization and partner resourcing and capacity to action IACAF strategic plan implementation are other obstacles to progress on this goal. Additionally, current funding through MIRR's Indigenous Funding Program is not guaranteed year over year and is not confirmed until several months into the new fiscal year, which risk delays in planning and executing Council activities.

Stories

When the tide is out, the table is set. Restoring Nuu-chah-nulth Sea Gardens

Hughie Watts is from Tseshat Nation and is increasingly concerned about climate and industrial impacts on his territory and way of life.

The 27-year-old father of two says “I couldn’t imagine a world being Nuu-chah-nulth without access to seafood. It’s just a massive part of who we are, feasting, distributing it. Our chiefs had all the seafood, and they would throw big potlatches. And they would show people their wealth and their wealth wasn’t money. It was what they had on their land, what they had access to and what they took care of and all the community put hard work into maintaining it.”

Watts is part of a group of over 100 Nuu-chah-nulth youth aged 12-18, supported by Elders and knowledge holders, who are embarking on a mission to create, monitor, and manage clam gardens throughout the territory.

Clam gardening is a traditional practice that enhances the habitat of intertidal species. It’s been practiced on B.C.’s coast for at least 3,800 years, and involves creating rock walled terraces on the beach so that clams can nest their eggs and are protected. Gardens are maintained through the removal of rocks within the clam bed and turning of sand.

Hayden Seitcher is Tla-o-qui-aht and serves as a Community Coordinator for the Nuu-chah-nulth Youth Warrior Family. The 22-year-old explains that he didn’t know what a clam garden was until a few months ago when fellow Tla-o-qui-aht member Gisele Martin taught him about the ancient practice designed to bring food back to the Nation.

Seitcher says that the time is right to reinvigorate sea gardens. “During COVID we struggled within the community making sure that everyone was fed because a lot of people lost their jobs, their income. We’re hoping that clam gardens can help with food sovereignty and teaching our people again that we can eat local, we can always get food and we don’t really have to worry. We’re teaching our kids to harvest but also to create a clam garden so that it can keep going and so we can take care of it. And so this is a community project so that we can take care of each other.”

Reviving clam gardens throughout Nuu-chah-nulth territory is complicated by overlapping jurisdiction, climate change, and environmental damage. Selecting sites for clam garden restoration includes gauging factors like bio-toxin levels, the presence of algae blooms, and sewage effluent.

“We’ve had trouble restoring some of the existing gardens because of industrial activity and raw sewage,” explains Seitcher “So now we’re creating new ones.”

Seitcher views the establishment of new clam gardens as an assertion of Tla-o-qui-aht presence and stewardship.

“Tens of thousands of tourists visit Tofino and surrounding Tla-o-qui-aht territory every year. Our new clam garden at Meares Island will be an important food source and teaching tool for guests in our territory.”

A little-known fact is that many clam harvesting closures on the coast are due to a lack of monitoring rather than a presence of toxins. Locating a site within a monitored area was the final factor that helped with site selection.

The team has worked with large federal departments like the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada to access much-needed data for new clam garden site selection.

As Tla-o-qui-aht fisheries manager, Andrew Jackson’s job is to look after the resources and the people and his number one priority is safety. Jackson hopes to establish additional bio-toxin monitoring stations throughout the territory to monitor clam gardens old and new.

It’s a lot of work to establish a new clam garden but Jackson says that supply chain issues during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced his community’s need for food sovereignty.

“People were panicking all over the world, but we just got together, got busy and started harvesting clams, halibut, sea urchin, crab, and salmon. The purpose was to make sure our members didn’t go hungry.”

Jackson says that the Tla-o-qui-aht community harvesting program has continued and is the new normal in his community. The stockpiled foods are replenished and available for community use at potlatches, funerals and other events.

Restoring clam gardens is an important part of the picture. Once established, clam gardens increase food production between 150 and 300% and can be sustained with small inputs of time and care. This investment through the Indigenous Food Systems and Agriculture Partnership Program will have lasting impacts on Nuu-chah-nulth food security.

But as Watts explains, there is more than just clam gardens getting built.

“All our Nations have different ways of doing things so we’re pulling in the collective knowledge of all of our communities. And we’re poking at people that are willing to work with us. And we’re poking at our elders and asking them questions about how we did things. And it’s a team effort, it’s being done collectively from our communities.”

Kyuquot mentor Daniel Blackstone adds that working together side-by-side on the land creates lasting connections and confidence that will impact generations to come.

“Soon enough we will have warriors that can stand up in the community and say this is who I am, this is what I believe in, this is what I am about, this what I want to do. They will be clear about who they are and what they are here for.”

Seitcher feels that rebuilding clam gardens will have a lasting impact for his generation too. “It brings a light to Native culture and reminds people that we are living here, that this is our land and we’re taking care of it.”

“They treated me like family” A Lake Babine member finds care and connection and charts her own path to wellness.

At the age of 24, Raquel was diagnosed with QT syndrome (a genetic condition that makes the heart beat un-evenly) and had a defibrillator implanted.

She experienced seizures and cardiac arrests, which were later compounded by liver problems. As a result, she spent much of her time in and out of hospitals and relocated to Vancouver to be closer to care.

Raquel says she felt unseen and unsupported in most of these health care encounters, which contributed to high anxiety and depression.

“I was ready to call it quits, she said, “I had no more fight in me.”

Raquel meets Ange

St. Pauls Hospital is home to the oldest and often busiest Emergency Room in Vancouver. On average, the care teams sees 250 people a day, for a total of over 92,000 visits a year.

Serving the busy downtown core and east side, the hospital is building expertise in specialized care for people experiencing substance use and mental health challenges.

“When I was admitted to St. Paul’s, I couldn’t talk to anybody without crying or like yelling,” explains Raquel. She recalls feeling sad, angry and overwhelmed.

Indigenous Wellness Liaison Ange Thomson showed up at her bedside, and although Raquel was in a fog, she recalls how Ange “Instantly made me feel at ease, safe and comfortable. She was like a mother to me.”

Raquel Joseph says that Ange Thomson was like a mother to her, and that the trusting bond established between the women was essential to Joseph’s healing journey.

Angela (Ange) Thomson is Sto:lo and Kwakwaka’wakw and a member of the Indigenous Wellness Liaison Team (IWL) at Providence Health Care (PHC). She brings over 12 years’ experience in the helping field to the role.

Ange says her role is that of a two-way advocate where she builds rapport with and helps the doctor understand the patient’s needs and questions. She then helps the care provider translate medical terms so they are clear and understood by the patient.

The IWL team are all Indigenous and provide a range of cultural, spiritual, social, and emotional supports across PHC, including St. Paul’s. Last year, the small but mighty team of five provided 1,388 consults to 1,019 patients.

The team is part of a broader network of 71 Indigenous Patient Liaisons providing these services across the province.

Harm Reduction, stigma and stereotyping

Raquel says that she initially couldn’t stay in hospital because they expected her not to drink. “They wanted me to just quit cold turkey, and without meds, that’s just not realistic.” Ineligible for Naltrexone because of her liver condition, Raquel came and went from the hospital as she weaned herself off alcohol.

She said it meant a lot that whenever she came back to St. Paul’s, the IWL’s were there. Raquel says she was able to open up to Ange comfortably because Ange is also in recovery.

“I’m so used to being judged everywhere I go.” Raquel says her eye doctor blamed an eye condition on drinking too much. However, a second opinion revealed that Raquel’s meds were the cause. “So just because you drink, they put a label on you and that is not okay. And I didn’t even realize it. The sad thing is, is that most natives don’t realize when they’re being judged on their addictions. And they just think it’s normal, which is sad.”

Stereotyping by health care professionals had eroded Raquel’s trust in the system.

A familiar face, an occasional baked pretzel, and Ange's non-judgemental outlook and encouragement created some necessary space for Raquel to take control of her health journey.

Healthy boundaries and coordinating care

Because Raquel's health conditions touch on three organs, the heart, liver and brain, there are many care professionals involved in her care and sometimes they didn't talk to each other.

As an inpatient, any given morning, she would see a handful of doctors and nurses waiting outside her door. This constant traffic and answering the same questions over and over was exhausting.

Ange Thomson says the first thing Raquel wanted to work on was setting boundaries around her care.

Ange worked with the medical team to implement a 'do not disturb' sign on Raquel's door so she could sleep and stabilize.

They also put a note on Raquel's chart instructing care providers to call the Indigenous Wellness team if they wanted to conference with Raquel. IWL's played a vital role in these meetings, translating for both medical staff and Raquel.

"Our job is both translating and trust building," reflects Ange. "We're there to help Indigenous patients and their care providers to better understand one another."

Raquel explains that having Ange coordinate between her and the multiple care teams provided immediate relief.

"They talk to me like normal people, we joke and have fun, they don't treat me as a patient. They treated me like family."

These boundaries, and the realization that she could set them, was transformational for Raquel.

Where did time go? I need to get on it.

The hospital stays have become less frequent, and Raquel has paused drinking for the last eight months. Still, her anxiety and other health conditions require a lot of management and self-care, and there are some rough days. She says that when she got out of the hospital and felt more clear, she realized how quickly time was passing. "My nieces and nephews are growing up and I'm like what did I do with all my life? I need to get on it."

Raquel has spent 2023 reconnecting with her family, clan and Nation. She's been in school for the last four months and is preparing for a Ne'duten leadership course this summer.

Ange reflects on Raquel's strength. "We let her know how important she is and asked what can we do to help you through this. But she did the work." Raquel credits the liaison team for reminding her that life is worth living. "They pointed out that there's so much more to fight for, and it's not just for everyone else's sake. It's for my own."

Nowhere but Here

Tracey Herbert is a self-described Secwépemc cowgirl from Stuxwtéws Bonaparte First Nation and the Chief Executive Officer of the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC). Raised by Elders, her gift is that she won't take no for an answer.

When she joined the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) in 2003, the Crown corporation had a mandate to revitalize First Nations languages, arts and heritage with a staff of five and a small annual budget. It was charged with reversing the effects of a century of policy intended to disrupt the 35 unique First Nations languages spoken in B.C.

Shortly after taking the job, Herbert remembers meeting with a group of Elders. She got talking to an Elder who had her arm in a sling. "I learned that this Elder had a broken collarbone but that she was going back to work right away because there was no one else to teach."

This reinforced what Herbert already knew, that many First Nation languages are facing threats to their vitality and that it shouldn't be up to a handful of individuals to keep them alive.

The chance encounter has stuck with Herbert. She has spent the last 20 years promoting a community development approach to language revitalization. "This means it's not just about grant money," Herbert explains. "It's about rebuilding our cultural infrastructure and supporting knowledge keepers to transfer what they know. So they don't have to carry the whole burden alone."

This approach is paying off. There are now more than 17,000 active language learners in B.C. – an increase of 20% over the last four years. In addition, language revitalization employs many First Nations people across the province, 80% of whom are women.

Tracy and Patrick standing in front of a truck, Patrick holding Tracy's hand and a cigarette in his other hand. Tracy smiles at the camera. Listen to the voices of Eleanor Nooski and Dennis Patrick, two Dakelh language revitalization experts, talk about Indigenous Peoples taking their languages back

Dakelh K'uyalhduk

To say the Dakelh language is complex would be an understatement. One hundred and forty-nine characters are required to express the sounds, pops, and pauses of the central Dakelh dialect.

Previously referred to as Carrier people, “Dakelh” means the people who travel by water.

Central Dakelh is spoken by 13 communities, including Nadleh Whut’ en and Stellat’ en First Nations who are partnering to protect the language and build new fluent speakers.

Dennis Patrick is the language coordinator for Stellat’ en Nation. He says that working together with his Nadleh neighbours is natural and knocks down the borders between communities that were established by the Indian Act.

“We are strongly related through blood, marriage, and language. So, we are pulling together all our relatives, all our language champions, because this work takes all of our commitment.”

Eleanor Nooski is Nadleh and a member of the Luksilyoo (Caribou) or “Grand Trunk” clan.

During the Bah’lats ban the clan system went underground explains Nooski, “so Grand Trunk became code for all of us Luksilyoo.”

Eleanor is 68 and comes from a family rich with fluent Dakelh speakers. She stepped into the work of language revitalization following two terms as an elected councillor.

Dakelh is a language of action Nooski explains. Even the name of the Nadleh language program “Nekhunik utsilhchoot means “We are taking our language back, like grabbing and taking it back.”

And the communities are doing it by any, and all, means possible. Language nests have been established to teach kids under five to speak and to bring the language home to their parents. Unlocking the frozen tongues of silent speakers is another strategy that the communities are engaged in.

Patrick says that many Dakelh people know the language but can’t or won’t speak it. Something he says has a lot to do with deeply ingrained stigma and experiences at Indian residential school. The process of working with silent speakers he says is, “like waking up a child that has been asleep for 30-40 years.”

In both communities, many silent speakers are coming forward to brush up on the language in order to keep up with their children and grandchildren who are also learning according to Nooski. “The kids or grandkids come home from school with words and questions, and now grandma feels she needs to keep up.”

Nadleh and Stellat’en have been holding two-hour Zoom sessions for silent speakers.

A cognitive-behavioural specialist joined to help them relax into learning and to break through mental barriers.

Nadleh and Stellako are on the verge of publishing a dictionary. Patrick says this is essential because it captures and explains the language’s complex writing style and syllabics – a language spoken nowhere else in the world. “Once that happens, then we’ll have a universal writing style that explains our language the way we should speak it.”

(he speaks Dakelh)

Nadleh Whut’en and Stellat’en partner to revitalize dialect.

Nemeoodih s-tsetsilh nawsk’as sulhni

Nadleh’s Rez-ame street YouTube channel is the creation of Travis Ketlo. The 35-year-old Nadleh member is using technology and social media to capture and hold the attention of young language learners.

Ketlo’s TikTok channel, @reclaiming_our_language also started this year, featuring short and humorous vignettes designed to make common phrases stick. In three short months, the channel has accumulated over 500 followers.

For small communities like Nadleh and Stellat’en it can be very challenging to manage the backend technology, and platform maintenance necessary to put the language online.

Ketlo spends most of his time adding to the treasure chest of words within the FirstVoices site. FirstVoices is a FPCC-hosted website that provides a platform for community language sites. All content is managed by the communities who retain data sovereignty.

The Nadleh-Stella Whut’enne FirstVoices site now has 1,825 words, and 779 phrases, and the community language teams are working quickly to record and make more language available every day.

The interest that First Nations people have in FPCC's FirstVoices initiative has a lot to do with shifting demographics.

Over 60% of First Nations people in B.C. now live away from their home community, Tracey Herbert says that FirstVoices is often a gateway into the language for urban First Nations folks. "It can be that initial catalyst where it's safe, you're by yourself interacting with the language, and then you get a bit of confidence and maybe sign up for the mentor-apprentice program."

A man wearing R2D2 hat sits at a table with his laptop. A woman in a plaid blue shirt stands over him looking at the screen.
(our boss told us to resharpen our axe)

Using every tool to promote the language

Kwaya nahudli shun

Herbert says it will take time and investment to build the foundation for the right relations between First Nations in B.C. and the Province. She is optimistic that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act (Declaration Act) helps in this regard because it provides guidance to all provincial ministries on how to work with First Nations.

"The Declaration Act is all really new, and nobody has the answers," reflects Herbert. "I do feel like there is less racism in the day-to-day work and more openness. Back in the day, there was less interest in talking about Indigenous languages."

This year, for the first time in its 33-year history, and as committed in the Declaration Act Action Plan, FPCC received a permanent lift to its core operational funding from the provincial government. The organization runs more than 17 programs and has a staff of more than 50. In 2022/23, it provided \$31 million in grants to communities with funding from more than 13 sources.

Herbert would like to see more investment directly into communities like Nadleh and Stellat'en so that First Nations can self-determine the best way to revitalize languages.

Nooski says that this investment is owed. "Government have taken our language when they sent our ancestors, our family to residential school. And now that they are trying to give back, we'd like to say thank you for that. But it's something that is owed to us. We're considered chattels by the Indian Act, we were not considered humans, and a lot of harm has been done to our people. It is, I think, their fiduciary duty to be able to help us retain and regain and revitalize our language."

(face-saving song)

The Declaration Act

Tsalhts'ul whuzdli te 'uhoolhkes

Herbert has observed a growing appreciation for the role that language, arts and heritage play in First Nations' self-determination. And with it, a greater understanding by government that "the knowledge that we have as Indigenous People comes from this land – this particular land – and nowhere else in the world. Language is not just about speaking; it contains thousands of years of knowledge that gives you the guidance to live your best life as an Indigenous Person."

Dennis Patrick agrees, "Our language goes along with the land, it is land-based and touches everything."

He further says that the code of how to be a good self-sufficient human is embedded in the language and the stories: "When a child is born, there's a blue flame that connects with his body that creates his soul. When we do a welcoming of a child into this world, we sing a song and bring him into being as a human being as well as a spiritual being. And they invite the family, the relatives and the community. So it becomes a bigger picture of not just the child, but a child that's part of a family. That's part of the community that's part of the Nation. And we express wishes that if he's to become a hard worker, then there are things that you do slapping with a beaver tail. Or if she's become a hunter, you do things that gives him the value of a hunter. And that's done at the time that they're born. And this child will have the values of our ancestors that when he moves forward into the world, he does it in a healthy and proper way."

Helping to right past wrongs and uphold legally protected treaty rights

In January 2023, the B.C. government and Blueberry River First Nations signed a historic agreement that will guide them forward in a partnership approach to land, water and resource stewardship. This agreement ensures Blueberry River members can meaningfully exercise their Treaty 8 rights, and provide stability and predictability for industry in the region. The Blueberry River First Nations Implementation Agreement responds to a B.C. Supreme Court decision on June 29, 2021, that found the Province had infringed upon Blueberry Rivers' Treaty 8 rights due to the cumulative impacts of decades of industrial development.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/DwWtbKKkcyo>

New graduation requirement will contribute to a more just and equitable province

We have great minds in our own communities

Deborah Jeffrey is the Executive Director of the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and a member of the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation with deep roots in the north coast. As the third oldest of 10 siblings, she has always been a teacher.

Jeffrey brings a long view on the transformation of Indigenous education in the province. She spent 14 years as a teacher in the public system before achieving her Master of Education. Following a term as tribal council president, Jeffrey went back to law school and was called to the bar in 2008.

Deborah Jeffrey in a red blazer stands smiling in front of Indigenous artwork of a paddle with a fish painted on it and eagle statue.

Deborah Jeffrey is the Executive Director of the First Nations Education Steering Committee

In 1993, Jeffrey was involved in the creation of B.C. First Nations Studies 12 – the first Indigenous-specific course offering for the B.C. public school system. She also oversaw the course's certification as equivalent to Social Studies 12 through the BC Teachers Federation Task Force from 1997-1999.

Jeffrey recalls how English First Peoples 12 was born through jurisdiction talks with the Province. "We were at the negotiation table, and we said, "Why do our kids have to learn Shakespeare? We also have great minds, in our own communities. And our kids, well, all kids in the province need to have exposure to them."

The enrollment never took off.

Despite the course being supported by a strong set of teaching resources and available to schools and districts for 30 years – enrollment levels in English First Peoples 12 and newer courses like BC First Peoples 12 remain quite low. Of the more than 38,000 students graduating in 2022, less than 17% had taken any Indigenous-specific courses.

FNESC undertook informal analysis and saw that the course simply wasn't offered in most districts.

Jeffrey says "The enrollment never took off. And I think that just speaks to racism and Indigenous curriculum being viewed as less than."

A north shore school gets an early start.

In 2022, a year ahead of the new graduation requirement coming into effect, the leadership team at Windsor Secondary School replaced English 11 with English First Peoples 11. Principal John McGowan says that teachers at Windsor were excited about the Ministry of Education and Child Care announcement because “it gave us the right leverage to do the work that we always wanted to do.”

However, McGowan said he encountered resistance from a few parents.

“No one is going to come right out and say it. Instead, it comes in the form of ‘Yeah but will my child get into university without traditional literature and composition?’ I found the best way to respond is respectfully and objectively. The fact is that this is a new graduation requirement in B.C., and your child won’t get into university without it.”

Principal McGowan takes issue with the word mandatory though. “I think for people who are critical, often the word mandatory means something that’s being done to them. When we looked at the new graduation requirement, we heard that we needed to embed a course where students experience, are exposed, and become more knowledgeable, about Indigenous education, rights, and history. I think it’s the role of public education to prepare students for the world they live in.”

He doesn’t think that the implementation of the requirement across the province will be easy though. That’s because many teachers and administrators are afraid of doing the wrong thing while trying to do the right one.

The principal becomes the student.

Recently, during a visit to Lil’wat territory, Principal McGowan encountered his own fear of failure “We made these salmon sticks for barbecuing salmon. And for me, I was worried what if I do this wrong? What if the hole isn’t deep enough? What if I make mistake? Why do I do if I break the stick? And the instructor said- ‘If the stick breaks you make another stick, or you fix a stick.’”

A group of people sitting and whittling.

Principal John McGowan carving salmon sticks

That the instructor would not interfere while he was struggling but merely walked beside him was frustrating and made McGowan feel vulnerable, but it was also a bit of an a-ha moment.

“This fear around mistakes is very much a Western construct. I guess the first thing you have to do – and I know it’s easy to say and hard to do – is you have to be willing to make a mistake.”

Windsor Dukes meet the Windsor Wolves

Embedding English First Peoples 11 a year early is only one piece of the school's larger reconciliation pathway. Principal McGowan explains that that the time felt right to update the school logo and name too.

"Windsor is home of the Windsor Dukes, which is a very much a part of colonial architecture. We knew we needed to change, and we knew we could not take a pan-Indigenous approach."

Through working closely with Tsleil-Waututh Nation, the Windsor Wolves were born.

Windsor students Kai Earl Thomas and Koji Kasubuchi presented the concept to Chief and Council and got unanimous blessing to use the wolf. Tsleil-Waututh Nation artist Jonas Jones designed the school's new logo.

Three youth stand together, smiling at the camera, wearing tasseled shawls and bandanas next to a tapestry. A sign with "The Wolves' Den" written on it is seen in the background.

Tsleil-Waututh Nation artist Jonas Jones (left) with Grade 12 students Kai Earl Thomas and Koji Kasubuchi reveal the new Windsor wolves logo. Whonoak (Dennis Thomas) is an Alumni of Windsor Secondary and an Elected Councilor for Tsleil-Waututh Nation, he says "The Wolf represents who we are as Tsleil-Waututh People, a reflection of unity, pride, and supporting one another. It was such an honor to see this journey of reconciliation be driven by two non-indigenous students. It shows strength and spirit that our society wants to be allies with our Nation as we move together and create welcoming spaces for student to learn of our deep connection to these lands. I raise my hands to the Windsor community for taking this important step."

Districts encouraged to work with First Nations

The partnership between Tsleil-Waututh and Windsor illustrates the power of relationships in this work.

Jeffrey says she is excited to see how districts will develop their own courses to satisfy the requirement – in collaboration with local First Nations. "It has to be a co-developed course, with the First Nations on whose territories, the district operates schools. And so, we're really hoping through that mechanism, we'll see more and more localized content, we'll see First Nations priorities in the provincial curriculum at the local level."

Accountability and doing the work.

Reflecting on this moment 30 years into the journey, Jeffrey says that "The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act Action Plan has been an accelerant and an accountability mechanism. Because now you have to report annually to the legislature, and to the public of British Columbia about what you're doing and what you're not doing."

She explains that accountability has been missing from past strategies, plans and projects. She says that newly established policy and legislative tables for K-12 and advanced education are finally giving Indigenous Education the platform that they deserve.

Jeffrey also views the new grad requirements as an important equity and anti-racism strategy. “When I think of racism in this country and how people are treated, it’s heartbreaking. So, what better anti-racism strategy than through education. If we have the population of British Columbia better understanding what our rights are, perhaps we don’t have to go to court so often. As we move forward implementing the standards in the Declaration Act and the alignment of laws, the best way to change that narrative is through the education of young people, not just ours, but all.”

Principal McGowan agrees and encourages other non-Indigenous people to learn, grow and find their way. “As I moved into educational leadership, I felt I had a responsibility, as an educational leader, but also as a person, as a Canadian. I couldn’t change the past. But I could change the present and the future, through my actions. I try not to get into it with people about, ‘well, that wasn’t my fault. That wasn’t my thing, right?’ I just look at it in this way – I can control the present. And by controlling what I do in the present, I do have an influence on changing the future.”

Unwinding a Century of Harm

The quiet guy on the crew

Michael LaRoche is Tsimshian from Kitkatla. The father of five works at Alta Gas in Prince Rupert offloading propane rail cars into ocean-going tankers.

He’s been at the Alta site for a while – first as part of the construction crew that helped to build the facility, and then as an operations tech for the last four years.

The work is dangerous because it involves handling contents under pressure. LaRoche is known as a steady hand, and the quiet guy on the crew.

Michael LaRoche, dressed casually, is seen signing papers at a business' front desk.

Michael LaRochelle said he was very young, about 13, when he learned about the power of alcohol to numb the strong feelings of his many losses. His wellness journey has inspired other men in his life who he encourages to reach out and ask for help.

Numb

Growing up in Rupert, LaRochelle was raised by his grandparents and an aunty.

“I lost my dad at a very young age, it was actually me who found him,” LaRochelle recalls. After that “It was just the two of us, me and my brother.”

LaRochelle’s mother wasn’t able to care for him. He said that although his grandparents were good to him, the grief of losing his dad and not seeing his mom at that young age was too much to understand and cope with.

LaRochelle said he was very young – about 13 – when he learned about the power of alcohol to numb the strong feelings of his many losses.

Over the years, he says he ended up involved with the police more and more. LaRochelle self-diagnosed the once-helpful coping strategy of alcohol use to be the root cause of this increasing involvement with the justice system.

When he was charged with assault and resisting arrest in 2021, he connected with a new legal service being offered in Prince Rupert.

A different kind of helping

The Prince Rupert Indigenous Justice Centre (IJC) serves six northern First Nation communities including Metlakatla, Lax Kw’alaams, Gitxaala (Kitkatla), Gitga’at (Hartley Bay), Haida Gwaii, and Nisga’a.

Operated by the BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC), IJC’s provide advice, support, and representation directly to Indigenous Peoples at the community level, currently with primary focus on criminal law and child protection. There are currently four bricks and mortar IJCs (Prince Rupert, Merritt, Chilliwack, and Prince George) and a virtual IJC, which serves Indigenous Peoples across the province. Five more centres will open this year.

BC First Nations Justice Council Chair, Kory Wilson, states that the IJC’s are unwinding a century of harm. The BC First Nations Justice Strategy contains 43 actions for change along two tracks. The first track involves offering Indigenous Peoples access to immediate and culturally safe legal support.

“We know that for far too long the legal system has been used as a tool of oppression and disenfranchisement. We can and must do better – all Indigenous People must have access to justice and wraparound support services. We must disrupt and redesign the justice system to ensure that Indigenous People are no longer overrepresented at the negative end of every justice-related statistic.”

The second track, says Wilson, is longer-term. “We are working to restore Indigenous sovereignty by putting First Nations legal orders back into the centre of the circle. We envision a time when harm is dealt with at the community level. We are building these IJCs so we can walk alongside First Nations leadership as they achieve sovereignty over justice and fully realise self-determination.”

According to Amanda Carling, BC First Nations Justice Council CEO, justice issues do not exist in isolation but are linked to social and health determinants.

She says IJCs take a holistic approach to individual and community wellness by facilitating connections to supports such as housing, mental health and addiction treatment, and employment services.

When an IJC staff lawyer visited LaRochelle in his holding cell, they asked a simple question that no past lawyer had ever asked him: “Have you ever thought about treatment?”

Michael and a woman with long grey hair are seen at a front desk, smiling together, at the BC First Nations Justice Council.

Michael LaRochelle at the Prince Rupert Indigenous Justice Centre (IJC) meeting with staff lawyer, Sandra Staats. The Prince Rupert IJC serves six northern First Nation communities including Metlakatla, Lax Kw’alaams, Gitxaala (Kitkatla), Gitga’at (Hartley Bay), Haida Gwaii, and Nisga’a.

Creating a healthy path

Diverting Indigenous People away from incarceration and to a healthy path away from justice system involvement is a stated goal of the IJCs.

Going to jail wasn’t going to help LaRochelle, his family, or society at large.

The IJC staff lawyer requested a Gladue report – an independent report that gives the court a complete picture of an Indigenous person’s life, unique background factors and local community and colonial circumstances. Gladue reports are used in sentencing and also set out customized healing plans.

Larochelle didn’t contest the charges against him and pursued residential treatment. He says that his kids gave him the strength to change the course of his life.

Contents under pressure

It wasn't until he attended a seven-week residential treatment program that LaRochelle began to unpack his family history. "Growing up seeing my dad hurt my mom, I came to reflect this in my own life."

Like the liquid propane that he worked with day after day, LaRochelle came to understand that he was living with contents under pressure.

"At treatment, they taught me about communication, not holding anything in and bottling it up," said LaRochelle. "Bottling it up" is something he observes with a lot of men his age. He recently lost a good friend who had also suffered many losses.

LaRochelle's 18-month journey has inspired others in his family. Although his legal issues have been resolved, LaRochelle and his lawyer stay in touch. Just this year, his brother got connected to the Prince Rupert IJC and started down his own healing path.

Recently, the quiet guy has started talking – encouraging other men in his life to come out of the darkness.

When asked what advice he's share with someone in similar circumstances, LaRochelle offers "You can recover. You don't have to live in the past, live in the present and look forward to the future. Most of all, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help."

Moving Home Connects Syilx Family to Cultural Inheritance

Leaving & Returning

Lauren Marchand is Syilx and Secwepemc and recently moved home to Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) lands after being away for 10 years.

She is one of three sisters from a boisterous and tight-knit family. The 31-year-old left home as a young person to pursue educational and employment opportunities.

Marchand worked for years as an early childhood educator before translating her passion for art into a career as a digital artist and visual communicator. She is now a partner in Your Syilx Sisters, an Indigenous Storytelling Agency.

Health, Community, Culture, and a Sense of Security

When she became a parent, Marchand wanted to move home so her daughter could grow up like she did – close to family. She says it was important that her daughter had access to her inheritance – Syilx language and culture.

Prior to moving home, access to language and culture was harder for Marchand.

“We were living in town at Native housing, and I’d drive my daughter two hours a day to bring her to the cultural immersion school.” recalls Marchand. “She is now able to take the bus for 35 minutes and I feel so much gratitude for this every day.”

Marchand laughs “Well, the novelty of the bus has worn off for her, so we are constantly negotiating!”

Lauren Marchand smiles down at her smiling daughter outside their house.

Lauren Marchand and her daughter pictured outside on of Okanagan Indian Band’s new four- plexs. Marchand wanted to move home so her daughter could grow up like she did – close to family. She says it was important that her daughter had access to her inheritance – Syilx language and culture.

Part of access to culture is being part of a protective community living Indigenous values. Marchand says that moving home is providing access to this network of protection and safety.

Years ago, she was the target of a malicious report to the Ministry of Child and Family Development that resulted in an investigation of her home. She said she was grateful that OKIB Chief and Council intervened, but the damage had been done – her home searched without her permission, and her sense of security eroded.

“Living in community now, there is a sense of security regarding outside agencies, the RCMP, or the Ministry, they have to go through a few more steps in order to access families. And I think that is really amazing. Because I do have that sense of security.”

Now, she says “If anything were to happen, I have people around me that are actually witnesses. I feel like I have a lot more control over my environment.”

She says this accountability goes two ways.

“Honestly, you’re kind of surrounded by people you’re accountable to which is like something that I never really thought about.” says Marchand. “Because living in town you don’t know your neighbour. So no matter what happens in my house, I’m accountable to somebody.”

Playing Catch-up. The on-reserve housing gap

Marchand says it wasn’t easy to get housing on-reserve.

These sentiments are echoed by OKIB Public Works and Housing Director Jolene Vincent, who says that several factors are contributing to the crunch, including the rising cost of rent in urban centres, higher lending rates due to inflation, and pressures on existing housing stock. Once construction is green lit, rising cost of materials and supply chain issues have complicated the building process. OKIB's waiting list has tripled in the last three years.

"Thankfully, BC Housing chose to fund housing on-reserve and it worked in our favour," said Vincent. "The four-plex housing project is a good start in expanding our housing inventory, and our hope is to see more projects take shape."

The on-reserve housing gap is wide, deep, and historic. A century of neglect by federal and provincial programs and policy means that First Nations have been ineligible to participate in most social housing initiatives.

Social and land management policies have incentivized First Nations people to move away from home too.

Marchand observes, "So many of our kin are houseless or couchsurfing – have no fixed address because of the fact that we don't have access to affordable housing."

Now First Nations are playing catch up but it's hard to get ahead of the wave. That's because more and more people are wanting to move home.

According to OKIB Chief Byron Louis. "Many OKIB members want to move to the reserve to be immersed in their culture and to be among family and friends. The opportunities for OKIB members to return to the land are hampered by a lack of housing, so many members cannot find housing on Band land and therefore cannot live among the people in their own culture. This must change, so any and all housing options are considered."

Marchand says that housing has been especially hard to access for single people like herself.

OKIB Chief Byron Louis agrees. Historically, tranches of housing dollars have focused on stand-alone single-family homes. That's why Chief Louis was excited at the prospect of building a 16-plex of apartment-style homes.

"One of our demographics that is often overlooked is people that are single." Chief Louis continues "So it's not a one-size-fits-all approach, you got to have a very good mix when it comes to homes. So you provide those options to the greatest extent for your community or your population, it's really no different than anywhere else when it comes to housing needs."

The new 16-plex was built on time and on budget with Provincial funding through BC Housing. It accounts for 16 of the 1,519 units of new social housing built or underway through funding from the Indigenous Housing Fund.

The building process itself wasn't easy. Fluctuating cost of materials, supply chain issues, and timely access to funding.

Louis says it was the first time his community worked with BC Housing and that it was a very positive relationship and engagement. "With the success of this project, we are looking forward to further opportunities to develop homes on reserve land."

Marchand observes that having a place to call home has been really liberating for young folks. "I noticed a lot with this younger generation being able to have, especially the single unit out here, for them to be able to find a home and move out of their family's house is amazing."

A rightful inheritance

For Marchand and her daughter being home has been good medicine. She recognizes that not everyone wants to move home but feels having the option to do so is important.

"It's good to know that people that want to come home, can. It really helps with, I guess, the impacts of colonization, and being so far removed from your home, your teachings, your family, things that even you would just kind of catch in the environment. If you walk into a building that has your art style on the walls, it has your language on the walls, something that kind of makes you feel connected to who you are as an indigenous Person or a sqilx^w." In this way, the new housing project at Okanagan Indian Band is reconnecting its members to their rightful inheritance, of culture, language, and community.

Sharing information is the first step to sharing power

It took us away from our territory.

Dallas Nikal is a 32-year-old Wet'suwet'en Wildlife and Fisheries biologist from Tsayu (Beaver) clan. He is the co-chair of the Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum, a collaborative initiative involving between six and ten Skeena Nations and provincial agencies working together on environmental stewardship.

The seeds for his journey to collaborative stewardship were planted 27 years ago when he abruptly stopped going to the family cabin on their territory outside Houston B.C. As a kid, he didn't understand why. The cabin was an important place for family and clan connection and teaching and a jumping off point for catching beaver, moose, and fish.

"It was devastating. We just stopped going. Later, I learned that the water at the lake was polluted from mining, and it wasn't safe to go there anymore."

In college, Nikal learned about how industrial site selection often disproportionately impacts First Nations lands and came to recognize this childhood experience as environmental racism. He felt motivated to never be in this position again.

"It had a big impact on my life, my grandma's life, my family's life, because it took us away from our territory."

I knew people did that, but I didn't know I could do that.

"Growing up in my community the only employer was the band office, and the 90's was a total different time for Indians. There was lots of discrimination."

Nikal was only 19 when he became a dad.

"I did my journey backwards," he laughs. "I had my son first and then figured out my career." After working a variety of retail and desk jobs, he landed a job with the Wet'suwet'en fisheries department marking and recapturing salmon, in 2013.

The fisheries job meant Nikal accompanied biologists in the field. This was his first real introduction to what would soon become a lifelong passion and career. "Seeing the biologists out on the land – I knew people did that, but I didn't know that I could do it."

He says he decided then and there, "I want to be out here, getting paid to be in the bush, having purpose, monitoring the land. It felt good. Like I was doing something good for my people."

Growing up at the collaborative table

Nikal went back to school in 2014 and essentially grew up within the Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum. He interned every summer as a technician while completing his education.

Dallas Nikal in hi-vis vest and black baseball cap crouched next to water, holding device in the water to take environmental data.

Dallas Nikal testing water in Wet'suwet'en territory, he is a co-chair at the Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum that creates and uses shared data sets for decision-making.

His journey was closely watched and supported by First Nations at the table, including Evelyn George, Forum Representative for Lake Babine Nation.

“Dallas believes in what he was taught,” says George “He loves his land and very passionate about it.” George also says that Dallas’ presence at the table gives her intergenerational hope. “I always tell him that the world is a better place with him standing up for our land. We need more young people to stand with education and traditional teaching behind them.”

The Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum is eight years old and has seen its share of stalemates and tension, according to Nikal.

“First Nations would raise ideas and hear a lot of ‘No’s’ from the Province,” reflected Nikal. “Federal and provincial legislation puts us in a box that wasn’t created for us. While we understand that government is constrained in that box, we as First Nations who have unceded territory and self governance, we don’t necessarily have to be in that box.”

As First Nations strive for true co-management, Nikal says that the province is still in its infancy. “I have a lot of people reach out just asking, how do we engage?” He says this is important step but can also lead to frustration from First Nations at the table who are eager to get to joint decision-making.

Nikal shares three factors that have made the relationship better at the table he grew up at.

1. Co-designed and trusted data

Trusted data, trusted decision is the first mantra of the forum.

Nikal says government officials have a history of working in isolation on major projects and initiatives and then coming to his community with an almost finished product and a short window to make a decision.

“Our Nations are complex, and they have lots of decisions to make,” explains Nikal. “When we are not part of it from the beginning, they [the members] don’t trust it, and they don’t trust you.”

The forum itself isn’t a decision-making table. Rather, it’s a co-management space that gathers data, knowledge holders, and western expertise to make recommendations to support government-to-government decision-making.

Table membership is currently collaborating on the timber supply review process, which determines how much wood can be taken from an area. Traditionally, it has been the Province working with licensees through a structured process to come up with a recommendation that the chief forester would make. In the Skeena, the forum members are working directly with the Chief forester using co-developed data to make decisions.

Braiding together multiply forms of knowledge and data is the table's strength. The forum now possesses a treasure chest of shared and trusted data sets for environmental monitoring of medicinal plants, grizzly bear, fish and fish habitat, moose, and wetlands.

Nikal says that shared data is an important decision-making tool for First Nations and that soon the parties will be making decisions together.

The forum is finalizing a collaborative decision support tool that the Province and the Nations will use to make decisions regarding cumulative impacts.

He says, "We've learned that we need to be able to build it together, or else it's not going to work. Data that we collect is helping to drive big decisions in our territory."

2. A changing public service

The forum's provincial team is composed of a lot of younger non-First Nations scientists who Nikal says are open to working in new ways.

"I've seen a lot of changes within the staff where, we were really bumping heads at the beginning. We are all victims of our time and it's no secret that the older you are the more you can get stuck in your ways. The scientists, the provincial staff at our table, are from a new generation of Canadians that want to collaborate. They are learning more about First Nations history, and residential school and other harmful policies."

The forum also spends time orienting one another. Last summer, the table hosted a large workshop where each of the ten Nations gave a 101 presentation. It included cultural and territorial overviews, and how things work in community. Dallas says this is something that is not taught in schools but is vital to the relationship.

For those that are stuck in the old ways, Nikal encourages them. "People just need to see the world is changing. And that First Nations now have a say."

Dallas Nikal points out across rushing water, guiding the attention of a young adult standing next to him.

Nikal pictured with his son. He says “I did my journey backwards. I had my son first and then figured out my career.” After working a variety of retail and desk jobs, Nikal found his calling, working on the land.

3. Safe spaces to disagree.

Part of Nikal’s job as a co-chair is to hold and manage the inevitable conflicts that arise at the forum. He says the cost of unmanaged conflict is silence and lost opportunity.

“To quote Dan George, ‘Not one of us are as smart as all of us.’ We should feel comfortable speaking up, and it has to be two-way. We have to have those provincial workers feel safe too. We’re all always learning.”

Tangible steps to create safe space include the development of a shared vision and protocols and predictable decision-making processes.

“There are a lot of people from the province who do really good work. And it’s about building that relationship and that trust on both sides.”

Bringing two worlds together

When Nikal reflects on being disconnected from his family territory as a kid, he says that could never happen today.

“When a proponent comes to my family or community, we’re not reliant on outside consultants who may have other motives. Now, I’m able to speak the language back to the proponent. I’m also able to tell my family, my people- This is what they mean.”

Nikal says that a science background has enabled him to see and walk in both worlds.

He and his partner Alexandra took the leap during the COVID-19 pandemic, and opened Nico Ridge Consulting, which provides technical and environmental services to First Nations, NGO’s and government in culturally safe and appropriate ways.

Dallas says that he draws a lot of strength from his Grandma Helen Nikal. Her Wet’suwet’en name Misilos, means the tall person (while she is actually quite short). “She is definitely one of the strongest people I know. She fights for our clan; she fights for our people.”

It’s this fighting spirit that keeps Nikal focused on his life work to increase power-sharing between First Nations and the Province. “People always think it’s selfish why First Nations want power and want stewardship. But it’s not just for us, it’s for them, these Canadians that live here. We want to make sure there’s enough moose for all of us. Fish for all of us. It’s bigger than just the Nation, it’s because we’d like our future generations to have what we grew up with.”

Metis Family Services Reconnects Kids and Caregivers to Culture and Community

If you could be white passing, it's what you did

Clara Hunter* says that while growing up, her Métis identity was a secret. "If you could be white passing that is what you did. It's not like today where my kids have pride in who they are."

Twenty-six years ago, she became Métis Family Services (MFS) very first caregiver (foster parent). She says that it was within the walls of MFS that she strengthened her Métis identity. "It wasn't until I started fostering, that I was able to work with one of the elders and learn my culture. And I did it side by side with my kids."

Hunter and her husband have since adopted three Métis children through MFS which offers a first-of-its-kind adoption service for Métis kids in BC.

Not every Métis child can go home, but every Métis child deserves a home.

MFS is one of 24 Indigenous Child and Family Services providers in B.C. The Surrey-based agency provides guardianship, prevention, family strengthening, child protection and a whole range of services to hundreds of mostly urban Métis families.

Executive Director of MFS, Adam Calvert explains that permanency planning is an essential and vital service on the continuum of care for Métis children and youth. "Colonization, and disconnection from homelands, family, and culture are destructive forces we are dealing with. Not every Métis child can go home, but every Métis child deserves a home."

The concept of permanency or adoption brings a fraught history for Indigenous Peoples, and now, under provincial and federal legislation, it is the option of last rather than first resort for Indigenous children and youth.

There are 20,000 Métis families in MFS's permanency and adoption catchment area from Boston Bar to Surrey, and it is one of only two Indigenous agencies in B.C. that is authorized to do adoptions.

Over the last seven years, MFS has worked with over 50 children to find places of permanency and adoptions, and they also support the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) and other Indigenous child and family service agencies to do culturally safe Métis adoptions. The program received additional funding this year from MCFD.

Three women smiling while wearing woven Métis sashes, standing under a wall with hanging drums and words "Métis Family Services." Catherine Caldwell and the permanency planning team. When asked what makes MFS adoptions different from mainstream adoptions, Caldwell says it's the emphasis on relationships and culture.

'Catherine Caldwell is the champion of moving the work for MFS's Métis permanency and adoption program. "We are always thinking long-term," explains Caldwell. "When we look at permanency planning, our main goal is having the family drive the ship. This starts with gathering the circle and exhausting all possible family connections- looking at every auntie and granny in this kid's life and making sure that we've spoken with them not just once but multiple times."

Caldwell and her team spend a lot of time playing detective and tracking down relatives across the country. It's time consuming and expensive and this year received additional funding to support.

Caldwell explains that if it's not possible to place the child with their own family, the next step is to pursue a cultural match and find another Indigenous home. Non-Indigenous homes are considered last and always under the guidance of the family.

Family openness is an absolute requirement for all adoptions through MFS. "If we see any resistance from prospective adoptive parents to openness with the birth family that becomes a hard no from us."

It's not the tool that's culturally sensitive, it's the worker

When asked what makes MFS adoptions different from mainstream adoptions, Caldwell says it's the emphasis on relationships and culture.

Ceremony is a big differentiating factor in the MFS adoption process. Every child or youth helps to shape their own ceremony which is usually attended by birth family, adoptive family, MFS staff, and other important people in the child's life.

Hunter agrees. "The paperwork requirements were the same but that's where the similarities end."

To adopt in B.C., prospective parents need to complete what's called a home study to ensure the home is safe and parents are ready. As a caregiver and adoptive parent, Hunter has been through several home studies. She says it's an invasive process made worse when that person is a stranger.

"They are writing the story of your family, it's so important they get it right." she says. "Métis Family Services was the best home study process we had been through and that's because they have known us and our kids for a long time, have seen us at our best and worse. They are not just social workers. They are people who have bounced my little people on their knee, they are people who have disciplined my kids, kissed their

scrapes. They've celebrated my kids' achievements, walked them through ceremony and helped them maintain connections to birth families. They had the right lens to describe our household and the people in it."

Folded woven sash in red, blue, yellow, white, and black rest on a person's outstretched arms.

Metis child and family services is one of two Indigenous Child and Family Services organizations that does permanency planning in B.C. Executive Director Adam Culvert says that "Colonization, and disconnection from homelands, family, and culture are destructive forces we are dealing with. Not every Métis child can go home, but every Métis child deserves a home."

The changing child welfare landscape for Métis kids

Hunter has witnessed big changes over the last 26 years as a caregiver and adoptive parent. She has had a hand in raising more than 27 children and youth, nine of whom are still at home.

Over the past two decades she has seen the benefits of consistency of placement. "It's critical to children's wellbeing" explains Hunter, "because it allows kids to settle and relax into being parented."

She welcomes increases in family placements but recognizes that they aren't always possible and that the adoption process itself can be traumatic. That's why, she says it must be attended to with care and ceremony.

"Every Indigenous child in care, she explains "has a history that is rife with loss and a history that predates me."

When she adopted her daughter Nora*, Hunter was given a rough ride. "Nora's whole thing was everybody who's ever claimed to love me and promised me forever, let me down. And she was 100% right. And so, it was not her job to believe me. It was my job to prove that what I said when I said forever, was actually forever."

"If love and want were enough, all of our parents would get their kids back, every single one of them. And so, the difference for our kids is that they have settled into a family that can acknowledge the journey that they've been on. Have the ability to like them and love them for who they are."

Culvert says that recent amendments to the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) are an important first step for improving child welfare, but there is still room for improvement for Métis families.

Reconnecting

Hunter says that foster care is no place for children and youth to grow up. Especially Indigenous children and youth. The 60's scoop and residential school disrupted excellent parenting that was honed over millennium. "When we first started fostering there was the idea that a foster parent was a better parent," she says. "There was an automatic idea that no matter what trauma a parent had been through, the answer was foster care. And once a child went into care, it was near impossible for a family to get them back."

In 2016, she learned that an infant who had come into her care was the daughter of a child that she had provided relief care to more than 19 years earlier. Seeing this cycle of kids-of-kids ending up in care motivated her to aid in the creation of a non-profit dedicated to teaching parents how to parent with an emphasis on family unification and preservation.

Hunter's non-profit works with MFS and other Indigenous child and family service agencies and has helped over a dozen families reunify/stay together. In this way, her personal and professional world have coalesced around a simple and lifelong mission.

"Our number one job as parents is to help kids to know themselves and love themselves. But if you don't have the basics of parenting and you haven't been loved and parented yourself, how are you able to care for the complex needs some of our kids have today? In the past, we would have the help of our kookum and uncle down the road. Now organizations like MFS and the Growing Up Hope Society are stepping in to fill that void."

A Journey to Right Relations

Skú7pecen's Journey

"Skú7pecen re Stseptékwlls is Secwépemc law," explains Sunny LeBourdais, Director of Transformation for the Qwelmínte Secwépemc. "It ordains how we work together in times of uncertainty."

In this story, as told in 1900, it is said that two peoples lived in conflict with one another. Their Chiefs were Elk and Swan. They were interfering with each other's business leading to difficulties in putting away food and living in peace.

What one group did well, the other group did poorly, and because of this, the people suffered and were pitiful.

Skú7pecen's Journey has been adopted by the provincial government and Qwelmínte Secwépemc to chart a path to restoring right governance and fiscal and territorial relations.

Sunny LeBourdais standing next to a horse, holding a purple woven harness.

LeBourdais at home in Secwépemc territory says that the foundational issue of the current fiscal framework is that it doesn't adequately fund key governance activities of First Nations, including engagement with the Province and other levels of government.

Walking on two-legs

Qwelmínte Secwépemc is an organization working under the direction and tutelage of eight Secwépemc communities. In April 2022, Qwelmínte Secwépemc and the provincial government signed Skú7pecen's Journey Letter of Commitment (LoC) towards a Recognition and Reconciliation Agreement.

LeBourdais says "We are working with B.C. under the principle of 'walking on two-legs' and that means upholding respect and equity for Secwépemc and Western worldviews in all of our deliberations," and LeBourdais feels that now, more than ever, the Province needs Indigenous worldviews, teachings, and ideas.

It was the creator's work

Qwelmínte Secwépemc leaders prioritized forestry discussions with B.C. due to the impact of wildfires, floods and climate change in their territories and were penning a forestry transformation agreement based on Skú7pecen's journey through the Earth World when B.C. announced their intention to transform the FCRSA (Forest Consultation and Revenue Sharing Agreements).

The Province set a two-year timeframe for the work, along with an immediate 5% increase in revenue sharing (\$63 million 2022/2023). The increase meant that First Nations share increased from 3, 4 or 5 % to 8, 9, or 10 %.

She says it's no accident that engagement on the new fiscal framework arose when it did.

"It was the creator's work," said LeBourdais. "We were already sharing information and discussing the challenges of FCRSA, so we dove right in."

LeBourdais describes the FCRSA model as problematic. "It's antiquated, arose from a court case, and continues to infringe our rights. When we heard the Province was looking to transform FCRSA as part of a new fiscal framework, we wanted to be a part of fixing it."

A new fiscal framework– Two tracks of change

Revenue derived from resource development supports provincial and federal governments to deliver programs and services and First Nations governments have a similar need for revenue to deliver programs and services to their members and to make decisions about their lands and territories.

The Province has committed to a new fiscal framework that will shift from transactional, ad hoc, or short-term arrangements with First Nations to an ongoing and predictable framework.

“Getting into right relations with BC First Nations is a priority” said a subject matter expert from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, who goes on to describe two tracks of change needed to get there: high-level new fiscal framework visioning, and near-term changes (initially, forestry revenue-sharing).

Track one is about the big picture as set out in the Declaration Act Action Plan: Co-develop with Indigenous Peoples a new distinctions-based fiscal relationship and framework that supports the operation of Indigenous governments, whether through modern treaties, self-government agreements or advancing the right to self-government through other mechanisms.

While discussions have started toward this larger framework, provincial representatives and First Nations continue to reckon with the complexity of multiple valid worldviews and sources of law that must coexist to manage resources and the value they generate.

The second track, dubbed near-term changes, is sector-based and intended to test the principles being developed in track one, as well as fixing immediate problems. The replacement of the FCRSA is an example of this approach.

The ministry’s subject matter expert says that reimagining revenue sharing is a transformative step. “Historically, the provincial and the federal governments have been the ones making decisions about how lands and resources create value for the Crown. Non-Indigenous people have largely been seeing the benefits of that economic activity and resource development.”

Skú7pecen’s Journey Artwork by Colleen Seymour, Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc Knowledge Carrier. “Skú7pecen re Stseptékwlls is Secwépemc law,” explains Sunny LeBourdais, Director of Transformation for the Qwelmínte Secwépemc. “It ordains how we work together in times of uncertainty.”

Skú7pecen brings the people together

It was Skú7pecen (Porcupine) who brought the two People together.

“When it comes to the new fiscal framework, it quite honestly is one of the biggest opportunities for us as Indigenous people,” says LeBourdais. “It’s about the recognition of the undeniable economic component of Aboriginal title.”

The Qwelmínte Secwépemc First Nations are among of the 90+ First Nations communities and organizations the province has engaged with on the framework so far. The organization has been meeting monthly with B.C. and has dedicated hundreds of hours of staff time.

LeBourdais says that “The reality of what it has taken us to engage in this process so deeply is that we would never have the capacity to do this across the multitudes of provincial engagements that are out there and ongoing right now.”

The foundational issue of the current fiscal framework is that it doesn’t adequately fund key governance activities of First Nations, including engagement with the Province and other levels of government, explains LeBourdais. “We have chosen to work closely with the Province and other First Nations to co-develop the new fiscal framework which is intended to reset this fiscal relationship and properly provide for the responsibilities of First Nations governments.”

“Quite honestly it is a bit scary too right, because there’s a fear, what if you forget something? What if you didn’t think of something? To be on the cutting edge of a blade means that you are in a position to have impact for so many. You carry that responsibility very seriously and very heavily, right? Because a misstep could have such large implications as well.”

The Province faces their own challenges when it comes to co-development.

“I don’t know that we know how to do co-development very well yet,” says the ministry subject matter expert. “This is hard work and we need to be adaptable and open-minded as we create a future that is better than the past.”

The People humble themselves

Swan and his relatives knelt before Elk. Swan shared his wisdom with them and told them how they could fix one another. This is how he gave Elk all his knowledge. Then Elk and his relatives knelt before Swan and Elk shared all his thoughts and his advice. And this is how they learned from one another, and they were able to look after one another...

LeBourdais says that “A lot of the times, our two worlds are so different when it comes to this concept of economy. One of the hardest things is knowing that Secwépemc Tmícw (land) is starting with a balance sheet that’s in the red. Our territories are so hurting right now. We are seeing the impacts from drawing on trees – from taking and taking. A new fiscal framework is bigger than money. It’s the landscape. It’s sharing the responsibility and access for resources in a way that’s going to be sustainable.”

The ministry’s subject matter expert agrees, “This is about moving forward in a good way where we bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews together to create a future that works for everyone. This framework will respect First Nations’ worldviews, and their rights to make

and participate in decisions about their lands, waters and resources and will help us work together to make decisions about lands and resources, both vital aspects of our economies.”

Skú7pecen’s journey is far from over, but their teaching provides the vision, the end-state that is so important when undertaking transformational work.

When the People humbled themselves and shared their knowledge, they were able to learn from one another and consequently lived in peace and prosperity.

