

Ministre des Services  
aux Autochtones



Minister of  
Indigenous Services

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0H4

Yves Giroux  
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Dear Yves Giroux:

This is in response to your correspondence of April 14, 2021 (IR0592), in which you requested the following information regarding the water and wastewater programs for First Nations on-reserve:

- historical spending from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020 and planned spending for 2020-2021 to 2025-2026 for the planning; design; construction; capital; training; operations and maintenance; and monitoring of First Nations water and wastewater programs, broken down by annual base funding and other funding investments;
- population data for all First Nations living on-reserve, including:
  - population and number of households by community, from 2011-2012 onward, and
  - population projections and assumed population growth rates;
- results from the annual risk assessment for all public water and wastewater systems in First Nation communities for 2011-2012 and onward;
- for the 694 water and wastewater-related infrastructure projects: estimated costs of completion and estimated completion dates for all ongoing projects;
- if an updated assessment of First Nations water and wastewater systems exists (similar to the Neegan Burnside National Assessment 2011), whether on a national or regional level, we also ask for the results of that assessment; and,

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- if available, any comparative studies that estimate: (1) the total cost of on-reserve First Nations water and wastewater systems; and (2) the cost needed to solve on-reserve water and wastewater issues for First Nation communities.

Please find attached a response to your request as well as the duly completed reply form, as requested.

Officials from Indigenous Services Canada are available to provide a briefing on the information provided to facilitate an accurate interpretation of the data and discuss any data limitations.

I wish to emphasize that the Government of Canada's commitment to supporting water and wastewater systems for First Nations on-reserve includes lifting all long-term drinking water advisories while building a sustainable foundation for safe water. This commitment involves a wide range of water and wastewater initiatives. As of December 31, 2020, there were 694 water and wastewater projects underway and 393 completed projects in 581 First Nations communities. These include:

- 99 new water and wastewater treatment plants and lagoons (of which 60 are completed and 39 are ongoing);
- 436 projects to renovate or upgrade existing infrastructure (of which 268 are completed and 168 are ongoing);
- 70 projects for feasibility studies or design work (of which 43 are completed and 27 are ongoing); and
- 89 supporting projects or initiatives (of which 27 are completed and 67 are ongoing).

Since November 2015, with support from the Department, First Nations have lifted 107 long-term drinking water advisories and 180 short-term drinking water advisories (in effect between two and 12 months), preventing them from becoming long-term drinking water advisories. Projects are underway in 33 communities to resolve the remaining 52 long-term drinking water advisories, and the Government of Canada is committed to completing long-term solutions where interim solutions have been used to provide clean water to communities sooner.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on water and wastewater projects, resulting in delays to expected milestones. Challenges and solutions are unique to each community. These challenges include difficulties in accessing communities, winter road issues, contractor coordination and retention, unforeseen construction issues, other operational challenges, and political considerations. The Department will continue to work closely with Indigenous community partners in resolving issues and meeting community needs.

In the Fall Economic Statement 2020, the Government of Canada committed \$309.8 million to accelerate ongoing work to lift all long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on-reserves. Over 60 percent of the acceleration funding has been allocated to 94 projects that address long-term drinking water advisories and short-term drinking water advisories.

To date, Indigenous Services Canada's regional offices have identified projects that are eligible for this funding, valued at \$192.3 million. A contingency amount was built into the acceleration funding, which will be held temporarily should these projects require additional funding or additional needs emerge, and to cover further COVID-19-related cost increases on these and other advisory-related projects. The remaining funding will be allocated no later than the fall of 2021.

As part of Budget 2019, the Government of Canada invested \$605.6 million over four years, with \$184.9 million per year ongoing, to support the operations and maintenance of First Nations' community water and wastewater assets. On November 30, 2020, an additional \$616.3 million over six years, and \$114.1 million per year ongoing, was announced to increase the support provided for operations and maintenance of water and wastewater infrastructure on-reserves. With these new investments combined, by 2025, Canada will increase the annual funding that it provides to support the operations and maintenance of water and wastewater systems on a permanent basis by almost four times. The additional funds will enable an increase of 100 percent, up from 80 percent, of formula-based funding for operations and maintenance. Specifically, the funding will allow First Nations to improve water operator salaries and to better retain qualified operators in their communities, train new operators to build water maintenance capacity, improve or maintain asset condition ratings, and ensure longer lifecycles for water assets.

Further, Budget 2021 announced an additional \$125.2 million over four years, beginning in 2022-2023, to continue to support First Nations communities' reliable access to clean water on-reserve. Those investments are supplemented by an additional \$6.0 billion over five years, starting in 2021-2022, to support infrastructure in Indigenous communities, including ongoing operations and maintenance costs of community infrastructure. Allocations of the Budget 2021 infrastructure funding among asset classes and distinctions is currently under consideration.

Access to reliable and culturally relevant data on Indigenous peoples is critical to building a complete portrait of Indigenous lived experiences, unmasking inequalities, and ensuring delivery of effective policies and programs. Budget 2021 proposed a number of investments that will contribute to improved data, including: \$73.5 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to continue work towards the development and

implementation of a First Nations Data Governance Strategy and \$8 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to support Inuit and Métis baseline data capacity and the development of distinctions-based Inuit and Métis Nation data strategies. Outside of Budget 2021 announcements, the Department has committed to improving data, through tools like the 10 year grants, and the First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Survey. The Department also funds Indigenous organizations directly, in order to support Indigenous peoples in identifying and addressing data gaps impacting their populations.

Within Indigenous Services Canada, a greater alignment and focus on results-based management in the evolution of the integrated business planning process has seen greater cooperation and governance across the Department, especially in aligning programs with their regional delivery counterparts. This increase in alignment, focus and understanding has led to improvements in information for decision making and will lead to better results for the communities that we serve.

Should you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or Christiane Fox, Deputy Minister, Indigenous Services Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

The Honourable Marc Miller, PC, MP

Encl.