



## **Canada's Premiers Reiterate Priorities**

**QUÉBEC, September 24, 2020** – Canada's Premiers held their annual meeting by teleconference<sup>1</sup> to discuss their consensus priorities and the federal Throne Speech, along with their responses to COVID-19 and actions to support economic recovery in every province and territory.

Premiers expressed disappointment at the absence of their top priority in the federal Throne Speech: a sustainable health funding partnership through a significant increase to the Canada Health Transfer (CHT). Instead of putting forward a firm commitment to addressing the long-term sustainability of Canada's public healthcare systems, the federal government signaled investments in new time-limited initiatives; many in areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, such as health, early learning and childcare, skills training, and housing.

Premiers urge the federal government to immediately address their top priority, a sustainable health funding partnership. In addition, they reiterate their proposals regarding the Fiscal Stabilization Program and infrastructure needs, as outlined on September 18, 2020:

- 1) Rebalancing Health Care Funding:** Immediate and unconditional injection to the CHT to bring the federal share from 22% to 35%, a ratio to be maintained over time with an appropriate increase to the annual escalator. Premiers continue to urge the Prime Minister to work with them to confirm a date for a First Ministers' Meeting this fall focused exclusively on the CHT, with the goal of reaching a long-term agreement in time for the next fiscal year.
- 2) Fiscal Stabilization Program:** Improve this federal program so it can fulfill its intended purpose: to assist provinces facing significant annual declines in revenues due to extraordinary economic circumstances and downturns. The Council of the Federation has proposed concrete solutions and called on the federal government to simplify and modernize the program, as well as make it more responsive to provincial needs without compromising other transfer programs.
- 3) Infrastructure:** Increase total federal support to provinces and territories by \$10 billion per year for 10 years and streamline the federal approach to infrastructure so current investments can be used without further delays to support provincial and territorial priorities.

Premiers also discussed the recent rise in COVID-19 cases across the country, and shared their approaches to ensuring public health and safety in their jurisdictions. Provinces and territories have been constantly raising their testing capacity and are expecting the new federal commitment for faster testing to translate into expedited Health Canada review and approval of new methods of testing, in line with those that have been reviewed and approved in other similar jurisdictions around the world. Collaboration among governments throughout the pandemic has been unprecedented. During this time, Premiers have spoken on an almost weekly basis and demonstrated solidarity and leadership in facing this crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> BC Premier John Horgan was unable to participate in the conference call due to the provincial election.

Continued cooperation amongst provinces and territories, and with the federal government, will be critical to ensure a strong economic recovery. This cooperation has resulted in unparalleled investments by all governments. Premiers recognize the additional commitments the federal government has made in the Throne Speech to support Canadians during the pandemic and beyond. They welcome the federal government's interest in supporting economic recovery and job creation throughout Canada.

Premiers remain committed to enhancing internal trade and call on the federal government to also do its part. In addition, it is imperative that the federal government involve provincial and territorial governments in the design of federal measures to support Canadians, including Employment Insurance reform. This will ensure federal measures are suited to the various needs and realities of provinces and territories, complement provincial and territorial measures, and respect their jurisdiction.

During the call, Premier François Legault officially assumed the role of Chair of the Council of the Federation. All Premiers extend their appreciation to outgoing Chair, Premier Scott Moe, for his exceptional service in this role over the past year.

The Council of the Federation comprises all 13 provincial and territorial Premiers. It enables Premiers to work collaboratively, form closer ties, foster constructive relationships among governments, and show leadership on important issues that matter to Canadians.

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