



## **Premiers Committed to Action to Support Strong Communities**

**WINNIPEG, July 11, 2023** – Canada's Premiers began their annual summer meeting by expressing their support for communities across the country coping with the effects of wildfires and praising the dedication of emergency responders in these challenging times.

At their meeting today, Premiers focused on provincial and territorial actions to support the top priorities of Canadians, including affordability and improving health care.

All Canadians deserve access to affordable housing and other necessities, timely health services, safe and resilient communities, and good jobs. In the face of major social, economic, environmental and security challenges, Premiers are committed to collaborative work and action on the issues that matter most in our communities.

Canadians are feeling the effects of inflation and high interest rates. Provinces and territories are taking steps to support their residents amid major affordability challenges. Other key priorities discussed today by Premiers include:

- Improving health care;
- Building a strong labour force;
- Enhancing public safety;
- Ensuring Arctic security and sovereignty; and
- Addressing housing needs.

Premiers are undertaking actions in these areas, both collectively and within their respective jurisdictions. This includes a focused commitment to immediate and ongoing work to address labour shortages, particularly health human resources.

The meeting of Canada's Premiers is taking place in the Council of the Federation's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. The Council was founded in 2003 to improve the quality of life of Canadians through:

- Strengthening interprovincial-territorial cooperation, forging closer ties among the members and contributing to the evolution of the Canadian federation;
- Exercising leadership on issues of importance to Canadians and in improving federal-provincial-territorial relations; and
- Promoting relations between governments that are based on respect for the Constitution and recognition of the diversity within the federation.

Premiers remain united in their commitment to these objectives, and to building on effective intergovernmental cooperation in recent years. This has included collaborative work to grow the economy through reduced trade barriers, billions saved on prescription drug costs, and advocacy to the federal government on increased health funding and public safety measures.

Canada's Premiers are taking action to address affordability challenges, improve health care, and position Canada for prosperity into the future.

## **Improving Health Care**

Ensuring Canadians have timely access to high-quality, sustainable, publicly-funded health care is a top priority for all Premiers. Provinces and territories are continuing to take immediate and long-term [action](#) in areas such as health human resources, mental health and substance use, primary care, long-term care, home care, pharmaceuticals, and digital and physical health infrastructure. This includes a focus on supporting culturally-appropriate delivery of services.

Canadians depend on having access to qualified health care professionals ready and able to do the jobs they were trained to do. As the jurisdictions responsible for health, provinces and territories are focused on initiatives to retain, train and recruit health care workers through provincial and territorial-led action. Premiers will continue to take further actions to support a strong health workforce, including in the areas of:

- Streamlining credential recognition and licensure for internationally-educated health professionals;
- Improving mobility of health professionals within Canada;
- Advancing collaboration with and among regulatory bodies;
- Enhancing training and recruitment practices; and
- Addressing issues created by health human resource competition between provinces and territories.

Premiers committed to further action and results on this priority over the coming year, including holding a dedicated health summit aimed at advancing innovative work.

## **Building a Strong Labour Force**

Labour shortages are affecting many sectors of Canada's economy across all regions. As the jurisdictions responsible for education, training and employment development, provinces and territories are best positioned to address the needs of their respective labour markets and growing economies. Premiers are focused on innovative work to support a diverse, productive and well-trained workforce, including action on international recruitment, credential recognition, and skills training. This involves particular attention to the needs of rural and remote communities.

Meeting changing market demands and distinct regional pressures requires a flexible approach to labour recruitment and retention. Premiers urged the federal government to support their respective efforts to address skills gaps through immigration by:

- Expediting existing pathways and accelerating processing of applications to address specific labour market needs, including the issuance of required work permits;
- Increasing the share of provincial and territorial Nominee Programs in the selection of economic immigrants;
- Increasing the responsibility and involvement of provinces and territories in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program; and
- Ensuring any new immigration pathways are developed in partnership with provinces and territories to support alignment with local labour market needs.

Under the Canada-Québec Accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of immigrants, Québec fully assumes sole responsibility for establishing immigration levels, and for the selection, francization and integration of immigrants. Premiers called on the federal government to enter into additional agreements with interested provinces and territories.

Premiers emphasized their commitment to supporting displaced Ukrainians. They noted that through the current Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program, the federal government is not providing sufficient funding and support. They urgently called on the

federal government to establish an improved program with a new funding partnership, particularly given the July 15 deadline for international applications to the CUAET.

Premiers discussed the federal government's plans to modernize the employment insurance system and shared views on potential changes. Labour Market Transfer Agreements (LMTAs) are the best way for the federal government to invest in workers and employers' training and retraining opportunities that meet local market needs and contribute to Canada's continued economic prosperity. Premiers expressed concerns about the absence of a plan for funding certainty for LMTAs. Premiers urged the federal government to:

- Urgently engage with provinces and territories on the future of these agreements; and
- Respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction over labour market development and skills training so that programs can be effectively aligned with the unique regional and local job market needs.

### **Enhancing Public Safety**

Premiers are focused on the safety and wellbeing of Canadians and working with key partners in their respective jurisdictions to improve public safety. This includes multifaceted work to respond to the complex factors involved, such as investments in mental health and addictions supports, and combatting gang activities through both prevention and intervention. Provinces and territories will continue to deploy measures individually and collectively to address racialized and gender-based violence, including violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people.

As part of this ongoing work, Premiers have advocated for changes to the Criminal Code and Canada's bail system to ensure community safety by addressing concerns related to repeat violent offenders and those charged with offences involving firearms. Premiers are deeply disappointed that the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code have not been passed. It is critically important that the federal government prioritize the amendments to improve the bail system, and target repeat violent offenders and serious offences committed with firearms and other dangerous weapons. Premiers call on the federal government to pass these amendments on the resumption of Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity.

Additional federal funding is required to support provincial and territorial efforts to expand and enhance bail programs. Collaboration is required to ensure these changes are effective, while considering the impact they may have on the disproportionate representation of Indigenous and racialized persons in custody.

Premiers also call on the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to ensure that individuals convicted of sexual assault are ineligible to receive conditional sentences which could allow them to serve their sentence at home or in the community.

Further work is needed to address escalation of illegal gun and gang violence and violent crime, including community safety in rural and remote regions. Premiers call for federal action and partnership on a range of priorities, including:

- Strengthening borders and ports and providing permanent federal funding for gun and gang violence prevention;
- Addressing the growing problem of privately made firearms, including "ghost guns" made with 3D printers; engaging directly with Indigenous communities to address distinct public safety challenges, and increasing federal resources towards the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program and other Indigenous-led community safety initiatives;

Public safety is dependent on effective policing. The federal government has committed to engaging provinces and territories on the future of the RCMP. This is needed now to address chronic RCMP recruitment challenges and staffing shortages, and effectively plan for community policing.

## **Ensuring Arctic Security and Sovereignty**

Premiers discussed the need to strengthen national security and Arctic sovereignty in the context of geopolitical instability and recent security related incidents in Canada's North. This requires enhanced military presence in the North including investment in dual-use infrastructure that meets security needs while supporting communities, promoting social and economic growth, as well as increasing integration of the North with the rest of Canada.

Investments in reliable transportation, telecommunications, and energy will not only keep Canada safe and secure, but also create healthy, vibrant Northern communities that will enhance our country's sovereignty in the Arctic, an area that is increasingly attracting global interest for its natural resources and strategic geography. Premiers underscored the importance of provincial and territorial engagement on necessary investments to ensure that the voices and knowledge of those Canadians that make the North their home are part of the decision-making process. Premiers stand united for a strong and secure Arctic, and efforts that ensure the economic prosperity and well-being of the communities and the people that live there.

## **Addressing Housing Needs**

Premiers discussed the real and growing housing affordability and supply challenges experienced across the country. Meeting labour market needs, welcoming newcomers to Canada, helping seniors stay in their homes longer, addressing rising homelessness and improving housing for Indigenous communities require a quality and affordable supply of housing.

Provinces and territories are making significant investments in housing, as well as policy and regulatory changes to support expansion of the housing supply. Premiers call on the federal government to collaborate closely with provinces and territories and take action to:

- Increase its financial commitment to housing, including support services, operational funding, capital funding, and incentives to promote creation of new supply;
- Ensure funding flows through provinces and territories rather than municipalities;
- Ensure programs are flexible, sufficiently funded, and meet the unique needs, priorities of provinces and territories;
- Streamline approval processes and program management through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; and
- Amend tax policies to incentivize development of new housing, especially the development and retention of purpose-built rental properties.

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### **For more information:**

**Miranda Dubé**

Press Secretary

Executive Council, Government of Manitoba

(431) 334-6009, [Miranda.Dube@manitoba.ca](mailto:Miranda.Dube@manitoba.ca)