



Premiers discuss ways governments can work together to better support Canadians

HALIFAX, July 17, 2024 – Canada’s Premiers concluded their annual summer meeting by reflecting on the state of federal-provincial-territorial relations and ways to improve the federation for the benefit of all Canadians.

The federal-provincial-territorial relationship is central to a strong Canada, domestically and internationally. Canadians expect their governments to work together.

Ensuring Canadians have access to high-quality, timely, and publicly funded health care is an ongoing top priority for Canada’s Premiers. Premiers reiterated their commitment to taking action to improve health outcomes.

Premiers also discussed the importance of Canada’s Arctic sovereignty and security, relationships with international partners, and meeting NATO commitments.

Governments Working Together for Canadians

Federal engagement with provinces and territories has become increasingly limited and inconsistent, as the federal government seeks to unilaterally advance programs in areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

Our federation works best when all orders of government respect constitutional authority. In recent years, federal actions have repeatedly encroached on provincial/territorial jurisdiction without adequate consultation, collaboration or funding. When the federal government unilaterally overreaches through legislation, regulation, selective investments and taxation in areas of provincial and territorial responsibility, Canadians end up with ill-suited one-size-fits-all programs that are underfunded and do not meet the needs of residents in all regions of the country. If federal funding ends, provinces and territories can end up footing the bill for federal programs. The federal government must secure the agreement of provinces and territories prior to acting in areas of provincial or shared jurisdiction.

Adequate long-term funding, collaboration throughout the design and implementation processes, and program flexibility are essential to ensure provinces and territories can continue to meet the unique needs and priorities of their residents.

Premiers expressed significant concerns with some of the current management practices of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Greater engagement and collaboration are needed on the management of fisheries resources overseen by the federal government. Premiers support the position of Newfoundland and Labrador that these fisheries be jointly managed and call on the federal government to develop such an approach.

Health Care

Taking action to improve health outcomes for Canadians is a key focus for premiers, including recruitment and retention of health care workers and improvements to the delivery of quality, timely, and culturally appropriate health services. Partnership, cooperation, and respect for unique needs across the country are fundamental to ensuring health care systems have the resources and flexibility to meet the needs of Canadians.

Provinces and territories urge the federal government to respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction, and to collaborate as a true partner on the long-term sustainability of health initiatives and improved health outcomes. Federal initiatives such as dental care, pharmacare, and long-term care must be developed in a way that is truly collaborative, aligns with provincial and territorial priorities, and respects jurisdiction.

Premiers remain fully committed to ensuring all Canadians receive the care they need through effective health care systems across the country, funded appropriately by the federal government. Premiers also agreed to continue to focus on health care innovation and discussed the importance of accelerating patient access to new and life saving publicly funded medicines and committed to further work in this area. Premiers agreed to work toward a common, streamlined licensing process for doctors, based on the Atlantic Physician Registry, while respecting Québec's specific context.

Public Safety

Premiers are taking action to improve public safety and keep violent offenders and drug traffickers off the street. This includes multifaceted work with community partners in response to complex factors such as growing requests for investments in mental health and addictions supports, combatting gang activities through both prevention and intervention, and addressing community safety in rural and remote regions.

Premiers have serious concerns about repeat violent offenders. Last year's amendments to federal bail legislation represent valuable progress, but recent troubling incidents suggest this legislation may not be functioning as intended. Premiers call for a thorough review of the implementation and application of bail reform and urge the federal government to consider any necessary changes, including further legislative amendments.

Public safety requires ongoing efforts on a range of interconnected issues – including poverty and homelessness, addiction, trauma, and mental health challenges – and provinces and territories are committed to continuing to do their part. Premiers are calling on the federal government to increase support for and collaboration with provinces and territories on rehabilitation to address the underlying causes contributing to recidivism, as many people in correctional centres experience substance use and mental health disorders.

Arctic Security and Sovereignty

A strong and secure Canada depends on a strong and secure Canadian North. Premiers welcomed the federal defence policy update and its potential contributions in the North. Canada's trade and economic relations with the U.S. is also founded on Canada being a strong, safe, a secure ally, and partner.

Premiers also emphasized that more must be done to safeguard Arctic security and sovereignty and show Canada's commitment to its North and northerners. This includes maximizing use of existing underutilized federal assets, while furthering investments in robust multi-use infrastructure that protects our country and supports the well-being of northern communities.

Premiers highlighted that provinces and territories can be effective partners in Canada's security, maintaining vigilance against foreign interference, supporting the development of domestic critical minerals supply chains, and helping to ensure the security of transportation corridors, energy sources, and vital infrastructure. Premiers look forward to working more closely with the federal government to address these important concerns.

Canada-U.S. Relations

The prosperity and security of Canadians and Americans are integrated and mutually beneficial. Canada's provinces and territories are stable, democratic, and peaceful allies of the United States. Further, provinces and territories are key strategic partners in priority areas including critical minerals, and energy. This relationship is a strategic asset in providing North American energy security.

Premiers discussed the importance of maintaining strong and mutually beneficial relations across North America, including strengthening Arctic security, maintaining well-functioning integrated supply chains, and continuing open, rules-based trade. The free trade agreement review in 2026 provides an opportunity to further strengthen our trading relationship.

Premiers will continue to work collaboratively with each other and the federal government to ensure U.S. leaders and policymakers are fully aware of the benefits of the unparalleled North American relationship. Premiers are strongly committed to representing provincial and territorial interests in that relationship, including communicating provincial and territorial jurisdiction over natural resources to our U.S. partners.

Provinces and territories continue to monitor and address issues that may affect the Canada-U.S. relationship. Premiers will continue to build and maintain relationships with key partners at the U.S. federal, state, and local levels, as well as with key business, labour, and community partners.

Canada and the World

Premiers discussed Canada's role as a trusted, stable ally in addressing global challenges, including through long-standing commitments to democracy, multilateralism, diplomacy, upholding the rule of law, and humanitarian efforts. Provinces and territories continue to play an important role as stable economic partners and sources of essential goods that the world needs, including food and energy. Canada fulfilling its NATO obligation of defense spending of 2% of GDP is an important element of being a stable ally and strong economic partner. Premiers urged the federal government to work with them to prevent foreign interference particularly towards our institutions, the economy, vital infrastructure, and critical supply chains by ensuring the sharing of timely and accurate information and intelligence.

The federal government must respond to organized crime activities at our border, including by increasing RCMP, Port Police, and Canada Border Services Agency resources. Federal leadership is also needed to deter and prevent the importation of chemical precursors that are

used in the production of deadly illicit drugs. Provinces and territories are committed to collaborating with the federal government on these critical public safety issues.

Ontario's Premier Ford to Chair the Council of the Federation

On August 1, 2024, Ontario Premier Doug Ford will assume the Chair of the Council of the Federation. Ontario will host the next summer meeting of Canada's Premiers on July 21 – 23, 2025.

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