



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**B.C. First Nations Languages Report Shows Increase in Language Learners, Needs Long-term Support**

**WJŌŁŁP, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF WSÁNEĆ NATION / BRENTWOOD BAY, B.C.** – A comprehensive survey of B.C. First Nations languages reveals that investments in language revitalization are working, resulting in more B.C. First Nations people engaged in learning their language than was previously reported.

Now in its fourth edition, the First Peoples' Cultural Council's (FPCC's) *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* provides benchmark data to First Nations communities, leadership and all levels of government to support language revitalization planning, evaluation and advocacy efforts. For the first time, the report includes data on all 34 First Nations languages in B.C. According to the 2022 report, there has been an increase in semi-speakers and immersion learning opportunities, as well as more than 3,000 new learners. Access to immersion opportunities across all domains for children or adults is critically important to building language fluency.

"The *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* is vital to our understanding of what resources and supports are needed in communities and is a testament to the hard work of the many language champions, Elders, youth and kids who are speaking, learning and passing along their languages," said Tracey Herbert, FPCC CEO. "It is great to see the positive impact of increased funding from both levels of government on the number of First Nations language speakers and learners in communities across B.C. We will continue to work collaboratively with our community partners to achieve long-term sustainable funding to make sure this positive momentum continues long into the future."

Published every four years since 2010, the 2022 report gathered information from 167 First Nations communities in B.C., reporting on 140,195 First Nations people. This was challenging in a period in which First Nations in the province faced many difficult circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic and record wildfires and flooding, which caused widespread evacuations and disruptions to people's lives. Despite this, communities have worked hard to continue language revitalization work, developing more learning opportunities than ever before with support from FPCC.

The report highlights many positive developments in the growth of community-based language revitalization projects across the province. Of note are the number of language nests for pre-school-aged children, which more than tripled, from 10 to 32, since the last report four years ago. More children are also learning their First Nations language as their mother tongue at home. To celebrate these findings, the report highlights several families who are bringing back language within the home, including Roxanne and Cody Dool who are raising their three children to speak Halq'eméylem.

Adult language learning opportunities are also on the rise. Many adults who may not have access to community-run language programs are learning their languages with online language tools such as FirstVoices.com and through one-on-one immersion programs such as FPCC's Mentor-Apprentice Program. This program pairs fluent mentors with language learners and has grown from 27 teams to over 150 over the last four years. Growth in both the number of adult learners and immersion opportunities for young children support the intergenerational transfer of strong, living languages for First Nations in B.C. and is a very positive development.

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Since 2018, unprecedented positive actions taken by the provincial and federal governments have directly increased the funding and program support FPCC provides to communities, which has in turn contributed to the growth observed in this report. With government pledges to provide adequate, sustainable and long-term funding, we are optimistic that the growth observed in this report will continue.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action Report and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples both outline the need to protect and invest in the restoration of Indigenous languages as a human right. Additionally, the United Nations has declared 2022–32 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to raise awareness about language revitalization efforts around the globe.

This *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* was funded by the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, the B.C. Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

**Quotes:**

**Regional Chief Terry Teegee, British Columbia Assembly of First Nations –**

"As we mobilize for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, 2022–32, I'm pleased to learn from this report that many First Nations communities are making progress on their goals to bring their languages to life. The hard work of the First Peoples' Cultural Council and other First Nations organizations and the growth of funding and programs are nurturing the progress of language revitalization in the province. The federal and provincial governments have committed, through legislation and action, to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms rights related to Indigenous languages. Much more work needs to be done to reverse the damage done by a long history of discriminatory government policies and practices, and I urge all levels of government to intensify and strengthen their support for First Nations in order to build on these successes. I would like to congratulate our youth, adult learners and language teachers and speakers who have successfully utilized resources during a very difficult time – the COVID-19 pandemic and climate emergencies – and have continued the work to revitalize and maintain languages within their families and communities. 'Mussi cho!'"

**Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams, Board Chair, First Peoples' Cultural Foundation –**

"It is encouraging to see Indigenous communities who are collaborating and finding different ways to support their language work in all areas of the family and in the community, including schools and community events. The 2022 *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* is a reminder that we must put all our hearts and minds together towards language revitalization. Funding and resources to create opportunities for younger generations to learn their languages help all of us to connect the past, present and future. Together is how we will get there."

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**Honourable Murray Rankin, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –**

“We want to help build a province where First Nations languages and cultures are living, used, taught and celebrated throughout their respective territories. Despite the many challenges that language revitalization has faced over the last four years, the 2022 *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* shows encouraging increases in the number of child and adult language learning opportunities. Much of the current work by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council is accelerating to meet the increased demand from communities across B.C. as they adopt new and creative approaches to language learning, and our government is here to support that.”

**Roxanne Dool, Halq’eméylem learner from Squiala –**

“My great grandma played a really big role in language revitalization here in Stó:lō territory. I feel like the only way I can give thanks to her and fill her shoes is by contributing to the language, and not only me, but taking my entire family along for the ride. It’s a part of our culture and who we are, and what we’re supposed to be doing.”

**Cheyenne Morgan Gwa’amuuk, Gitsenimx speaker who is teaching the language to her children in their home in Gitanmaax –**

“One of the main values I see from the 2022 *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* is that it helps us understand the strategies we should be using in community. There needs to be more training on effective strategies for creating immersion environments and for increasing speaking proficiency. For a long time, our communities have focused on children through the elementary school strategy, but we lacked that adult immersion strategy to train teachers and parents to teach their kids. The most important thing is speaking in the home.”

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**Learn More:**

Download the fact sheet for the *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages*: [here](#)

Download the full *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages*: [here](#)

Images available for media click [here](#)

A backgrounder follows.

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**Media Backgrounder**  
**February 21, 2023**

**B.C. First Nations Languages Report Shows Increase in Language Learners, Urges Action**

**Report on the Progress of Language Revitalization in B.C., 2022**

Every four years since 2010, the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) surveys First Nations communities to collect information that tracks the accomplishments around language learning and celebrates the successes we see over time. This report is the fourth edition and is the first time that data on all 34 First Nations languages in B.C. are reported.

The goal of the report is to provide current information to First Nations communities and leadership and all levels of government to assist with language planning and revitalization. This year, we are pleased to report several areas of growth, due in large part to increased funding from provincial and federal governments. Long-term sustainable funding will be needed to continue the positive momentum.

**Increase in Semi-Speakers and Learners**

Increased investment in language revitalization has created many more language learning opportunities. Communities have been working very hard, and we are excited to share that there are growing numbers of speakers and more new language learners than ever before.

There are 3,370 speakers of First Nations languages, or 2.4% of the population who reported to us.

- There are 6,985 semi-speakers, or 4.98% of the population who reported to us. Overall, this is an increase since our last report in 2018.
- Nearly a quarter (21.3%) of semi-speakers are under the age of 25.
- With speakers and semi-speakers combined, there are 10,355 speakers of First Nations languages in B.C., or 7.39% of the population who reported to us.
- First Nations language learners make up 12.2% of the total population who reported to us – 17,103 learners. This is a 21.4% increase of 3,106 new learners since 2018.

**Adult Language Learning Is on the Rise with More Adult Language Programs than Ever Before**

The majority of FPCC's programs support adult learners. Adult language learning opportunities have significantly increased since our last report, including full-time adult immersion programs.

- Part-time language programs: 1,634 adults participated in 95 language programs, averaging 5.29 hours of learning per week.
- Full-time language programs: There were only two full-time immersion programs for adults in 2018, but there are now eight programs offered in seven different languages.
- There has been an increase of 1,964 adult learners aged 20–64 since 2018.

**Increased Language Learning Opportunities for Children**

An increasing number of adults are passing their language to the next generation, with many more children learning their First Nations language as their first language in the home.

- There are 2,417 children learning their language in 157 early childhood facilities (including language nests, Head Start programs and other centres).

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- There are 32 language nests, more than triple the number since 2018, providing at least 15 hours of immersion programming per week. There are 380 children attending language nests across B.C., up from 119.
- B.C. is home to 139 public schools providing instruction in a First Nations language.
- In the 79 First Nations schools that reported to us, 6,380 students receive an average of 3.07 hours per grade per week of language instruction.
- Three First Nations schools in the province offer immersion and bilingual education.
- New since our last report, one public school now offers a bilingual program.

### **The Current Climate for B.C. First Nations Languages**

B.C. has exceptional language diversity with over half of all Indigenous languages in Canada located here. Across the province, 34 unique First Nations languages are spoken.

- In 2018, the Province of British Columbia contributed \$50M over three years to support language revitalization.
- In 2019, the Government of Canada passed the Indigenous Languages Act. Its subsequent implementation has resulted in higher levels of funding than ever before, approximately \$44M in B.C. between 2019 and 2022.
- Both provincial and federal governments have enacted legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### **About the First Peoples' Cultural Council**

FPCC is a First Nations–governed Crown corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of First Nations languages, arts, cultures and heritage in British Columbia. The organization provides funding, resources and skills development, monitors the status of First Nations languages, develops policy recommendations for First Nations leadership and government and collaborates with organizations on numerous special projects that raise the profile of arts, languages, cultures and heritage in B.C., Canada and internationally.

### **Learn More:**

- FPCC supports language learning, documentation and resource development for First Nations languages in B.C. Learn more about FPCC's Language Programs: [fpcc.ca/language](https://fpcc.ca/language)
- Learn more about First Nations languages by visiting the First Peoples' Map of B.C.: [maps.fpcc.ca](https://maps.fpcc.ca)
- Visit community language sites at FPCC's online language platform: [FirstVoices.com](https://FirstVoices.com)
- Learn more about the government of B.C.'s investment in the revitalization of First Nations languages, arts, heritage and culture: [fpcc.ca/news/june-14-2022](https://fpcc.ca/news/june-14-2022)
- Both provincial and federal governments have enacted legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: [BC DRIPA](#); [UNDRIP Act](#)
- Find out about FPCC's Arts Programs: [fpcc.ca/arts](https://fpcc.ca/arts)
- Find out about FPCC's Heritage Programs: [fpcc.ca/heritage](https://fpcc.ca/heritage)
- Browse the FPCC Resource Library: [fpcc.ca/resource](https://fpcc.ca/resource)

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