



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 18, 2024

RESPONSE TO FEDERAL BUDGET 2024

**The First Peoples' Cultural Council expresses concern over budget's limited support
for First Nations language revitalization in B.C.**

WJOLELP, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF WSÁNEĆ NATION / BRENTWOOD BAY, B.C. – Funding outlined in Tuesday's federal budget destined to support First Nations language revitalization in British Columbia falls far short of what is needed to meet the government's obligations under the Indigenous Languages Act (C-91). Instead of growing and expanding programming as the legislation proposed in 2019, this funding level will yield less than the amount received last year, says the head of the province's First Nations-led Crown Corporation whose mandate is to enable language revitalization in B.C.

B.C. has a globally recognized model for language revitalization and its programming is now in jeopardy, including community-based jobs for hundreds of women. B.C. has the greatest diversity of First Nations languages in Canada, with half of all languages in the country originating in this province. There are 36 unique languages across B.C.'s 204 First Nations, and more than 95 dialects.

The federal government has allocated \$225 million over five years for Indigenous language programs across the country. Starting in 2024-25, \$45 million will be allocated per year. B.C. will receive a portion of that amount based on a funding formula.

For the past five years, following the introduction of the federal Indigenous Languages Act, Bill C-91, funding for languages increased significantly, greatly expanding access to language learning in B.C. Between 2018 and 2022, B.C. saw a 20 per cent increase in the numbers of people who were learning their language. Last year, FPCC received \$40.3 million in federal funding for 2023-2024. Based on the budget and funding formula, FPCC estimates receiving about half that amount in 2024-2025.

FPCC appreciates that the funding is multi-year, but is disappointed by a weak commitment that falls far short of what is needed – not only in B.C. but across the country. FPCC's evidence-based research shows the actual need to fully implement the work with communities to revitalize First Nations languages in B.C. alone is \$69 million for 2024-25 and increasing amounts ongoing annually.

"We are grateful that the funding announced in Tuesday's federal budget is on-going but are nevertheless deeply concerned for the future of First Nations languages in B.C. as underfunding persists despite legislative commitments. The amount announced only partially covers what is needed to continue many of the valued programs that are underway and fails to establish adequate support to fully realize languages being spoken fluently, and used in all aspects of daily life," said Tracey Herbert, CEO of the First Peoples' Cultural Council. "We have been advocating for adequate, long-term, sustainable funding so language revitalization can continue uninterrupted, but again we find that the

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positive momentum and growth in recent years is threatened as many programs won't continue at this level of funding."

First Nations communities are gravely concerned not only for the sustainability of their existing programs but the ability to fully envision the language revitalization plans they have built with FPCC's support in recent years.

The First Peoples' Cultural Council, First Nations communities and First Nations leadership organizations will continue to advocate for long-term sustainable funding to demonstrate the national commitment to reconciliation and the commitment of "adequate, sustainable and long-term funding" as described in Bill C-91, the Indigenous Languages Act. The organizations will consider all options to achieve this goal.

"Generations of oppressive and assimilationist federal and provincial policies have aimed to wipe out First Nations languages. Through dedication and hard work, our people have fought for language rights to keep our languages alive. But many of our languages have few speakers left and most fluent speakers are elderly. Our languages hold our culture, history and ways of being," said Carla Lewis, Chair of the First Peoples' Cultural Council. "We can't over emphasize the urgency of the situation and we can't wait another five years to get the funding needed to breathe life into our languages that were stolen from us. We need long-term, sustainable funding now. We need sufficient funding for each and every language across Canada. We are beyond frustrated at being expected to do this urgent work with insufficient resources. This is not reconciliation."

Providing a comparison to the \$225 million committed over five years for all the country's Indigenous languages - the original languages of this land - is the \$4.1 billion allocated by the Federal Government on-going and in prior budgets for official languages support.

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.

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