

## Council of Atlantic Premiers' Communiqué

### Atlantic Premiers Working Together to Improve Health Care and Promote Prosperity

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**September 28, 2021** - Atlantic Premiers met today to renew their commitment to improving health care, addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, and promoting a robust recovery for the region's economy.

Premier Blaine Higgs chaired the virtual meeting of the Council of Atlantic Premiers, with Premier Dennis King of Prince Edward Island, Premier Tim Houston of Nova Scotia and Premier Andrew Furey of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Premiers recognize the continuing impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on Atlantic Canada, but also the positive collaboration among provinces. Premiers will continue to work together to protect residents, limit the spread of the virus and safely stimulate economic growth as we emerge from this pandemic. Premiers urged every eligible Atlantic Canadian to become fully vaccinated against the virus as the most effective means of controlling the spread of COVID-19.

Premiers thanked the region's doctors, nurses, and other health professionals for their tireless efforts in addressing the crisis and pledged to continue to base decisions on medical science and expert public health advice and guidance.

#### Improving Health Care

Premiers agree that urgent action is required to address the growing crisis in health care services for Atlantic Canadians. The region faces unique challenges in delivering health care – an aging population, dispersed and rural communities, and higher-than-average incidence of chronic illness – which must be recognized and addressed.

Premiers agreed in principle to develop an accord setting out guiding principles to enhance collaboration on improving health care services to Atlantic Canadians. They agreed to explore innovative ways to recruit and retain doctors, nurses and specialized health care professionals, improving mobility for workers within the region and accelerating the process for certifying foreign-trained workers.

Premiers affirmed the value of existing specialized care centres across the region and will work together to limit duplication of these specialized services. They agreed to explore innovative means to deliver high-quality specialized health care to Atlantic Canadians, such as virtual care and specialized training.

Premiers will identify key priorities for regional alignment to improve health care service for discussion at their next meeting.

Premiers noted the significant challenges in delivering mental health care services in Atlantic Canada. Provinces need the flexible funding arrangements to address their unique health care needs. For this reason, they urged the federal government to enhance funding to provinces and territories through the Canada Health Transfer, to raise the federal government's share to 35 per cent of all health costs, along with an annual escalator to maintain federal funding at that level.

### **Meeting Energy Needs**

Atlantic Canadians deserve access to reliable, sustainable and affordable electricity that reduces greenhouse gas emission, creates jobs and supports continued growth of the region's economy. Atlantic Canada has the resources to be a powerhouse in the development and transmission of non-emitting energy, but urgently requires a commitment of federal support to realize this goal.

Development of an Atlantic Loop transmission network offers the promise of moving hydroelectricity from Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec to meet Maritime and Atlantic energy needs and creates opportunities for further development of renewal energy within the region. Premiers will work with the federal government to advance this project in a way that secures the region's present and future energy needs, assists with reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, and helps to keep electricity rates affordable. Premiers will seek a meeting with the Prime Minister to explore ways to collaborate on unlocking Atlantic Canada's energy potential.

### **Promoting Prosperity**

Canada's future growth is best ensured by the prosperity and well-being of all Canadians in every region of our country. Atlantic Canada needs to be ready for immediate and sustained growth as the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. In a post-election letter to the Prime Minister, Premiers urged the federal government to work with them to seize the opportunity to accelerate growth for Atlantic Canada.

Premiers emphasized Atlantic Canada's continuing need for more people, as a growing population is required to meet the demands of a new economy and support valued public services. Premiers noted the success of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot in meeting the needs of employers and communities and are pleased it will become a permanent program. Premiers also urged the federal government to improve processing time for prospective immigrants, increase the number of immigrants who may settle in the region through provincial nominee programs and encourage new Canadians to call the Atlantic region home.

Premiers discussed the challenges in ensuring all Atlantic Canadians have access to housing. They called on the federal government to develop new programs that address housing market challenges in communities throughout Atlantic Canada.

All Premiers are concerned by the shortage of workers and its impact on Atlantic Canada's economic recovery. Supports to businesses and workers have been important to Atlantic Canadian families during the pandemic. As the economy recovers, Premiers urge the federal government to work with them to

develop innovative approaches that will support those who need assistance while encouraging a return to the labour force.

Students from across the world come to Atlantic Canada to continue their education in the region's colleges and universities. Premiers urged the federal government to work with them on initiatives to support the retention of international students who study in Atlantic Canada, which would promote the attraction and retention of new Canadians in the Atlantic region.

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