

September 28, 2021

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

On behalf of the Council of Atlantic Premiers, please accept our congratulations on your party's success in the federal election held on September 20, 2021. As you prepare to select a Cabinet and consider the future direction of our country, we wish to bring to your attention the priorities of Atlantic Canadians, and the issues that will be foremost in mind in our individual and collective discussions with you and your government.

Canada's future growth and unity are best ensured by the prosperity and well-being of all Canadians in every region of our country. We believe an opportunity exists to accelerate growth in our region as Canada emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge you to act upon the unique challenges that face our region.

To assure its continued prosperity, Atlantic Canada must address the challenges we face due to our demographic and geographic realities. We must ensure that health care services are available when they are needed, valued public services are sustainable and our environment is protected. We need to recruit new families to grow our population and retool our economies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Health care is our top priority. Canada's health care systems are facing a funding crisis. The federal share of Canada's health spending has now fallen to 22 per cent. During the election campaign, you identified areas for additional funding, including physician recruitment and the Canada Mental Health Transfer. Premiers are interested in learning more about these initiatives. To ensure that provinces have the flexibility to make investments in health care that meet their unique needs, Atlantic Premiers support an immediate and sustained infusion of federal funding for health care through the Canada Health Transfer, to raise the federal share to 35 per cent of all costs, with an annual escalator to maintain funding at that level over the long term.

Atlantic Canada has unique needs in delivering health care services, including an aging population largely inhabiting rural areas, higher-than-average rates of chronic disease, and challenges in recruiting and retaining valued health professionals. We call on the federal government to work with the Atlantic provinces to ensure that Atlantic Canadians continue to have access to health care services of the same quality as other Canadians.

The future prosperity of Atlantic Canada depends on access to affordable, clean, and sustainable energy supplies. The Atlantic region has a diverse mix of clean energy ready to be developed to drive growth in this region and beyond. The Atlantic Clean Power Roadmap has set out a vision for moving hydroelectric power from Labrador and northern Quebec to help address the needs of the Atlantic region and support Canada in achieving its greenhouse gas emission goals. To be successful as a regional effort, the challenges faced by each Atlantic province must be considered and addressed, and opportunities harnessed. By working with us, your government can help make the Atlantic Loop a reality to the benefit of all Canadians.

One of our region's greatest needs is for more people. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program has been successful in helping employers meet their labour needs since it was introduced in 2017 and has resulted in 8,924 people coming to our region. We are seeking your continued commitment to making this program permanent in early 2022. While we appreciate that measures have been taken to improve immigration processing times by increasing staff and digitizing the application process, further action is needed to reduce the backlog caused by COVID-19. These measures, along with predictable increases in our provincial nomination allocations under both the Provincial Nominee Program and the Atlantic Immigration Program, would help support our population growth efforts.

Students from across the world come to Atlantic Canada to continue their education in the region's colleges and universities. We ask you to work with us on initiatives to support the retention of international students who study in Atlantic Canada, by providing them with the ability to participate in the Canadian labour market on the same terms as their Canadian counterparts. At present, some federal labour market and student job funding require beneficiaries to be permanent residents or citizens. Expanding this eligibility criteria to include international students enrolled at Canadian institutions would improve the attraction and retention of new Canadians in the Atlantic region.

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, Atlantic Canada needs to be positioned for immediate and sustained growth. We urge your government to continue to work collaboratively with us to identify and support sectors that are primed for growth, including tourism, clean technology, and the ocean economy, and to commit to investing in the infrastructure necessary for a strong economy through investments in transportation, internet, and housing. We urge you to implement programs that will 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.

We are confident that you agree that growth and prosperity for Atlantic Canada will be a benefit not only to Atlantic Canadians, but our entire nation. We urge you to consider these issues and the unique needs and challenges facing our region.

Sincerely,

Blaine M. Higgs  
Premier of New Brunswick  
Chair, Council of Atlantic Premiers

Cc: Hon. Andrew Furey, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Hon. Tim Houston, Premier of Nova Scotia  
Hon. Dennis King, Premier of Prince Edward Island