

Premiers Discuss Rising Costs of Living, Healthcare, and Atlantic Priorities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pictou, NS (June 29, 2022) – Atlantic Premiers met today to continue working together to better manage health care, address the impact of inflation on the region's economy and identify opportunities to enhance energy security and self-sufficiency to meet the region's long-term needs.

As Chair of the Council of Atlantic Premiers, Premier Tim Houston of Nova Scotia welcomed Premier Blaine Higgs of New Brunswick, Premier Dennis King of Prince Edward Island, and Premier Andrew Furey of Newfoundland and Labrador to Pictou, Nova Scotia.

Premiers acknowledged British Columbia Premier Horgan's contribution as Chair of the Council of the Federation and wished him well on his recently announced retirement.

Premiers expressed solidarity with Ukraine and its people, who continue to suffer the effects of Russia's unprovoked invasion of their country. All four Atlantic provinces welcomed Ukrainian refugees, and look forward to the positive contribution they will make to the region's economy and social fabric.

Premiers noted a recent report by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council shows the strength of the region's economy, though labour shortages and affordability present significant challenges to residents and businesses. Premiers discussed ongoing supply chain interruptions due to global events, the impacts of climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events are creating challenges for Atlantic Canadians in accessing affordable food and housing, as well as the impact of rising fuel costs. While global issues are contributing to these pressures, Premiers remain committed to addressing affordability, increasing the housing supply and improving food security for the region.

Premiers discussed moving forward with actions under the Atlantic Health Care Accord including engagement of Atlantic colleges responsible for physician licensing to work urgently to address the barriers facing the recruitment and retention of international health care workers, and to allow physicians to move seamlessly within the region.

Premiers also renewed their commitment to action through the Council of the Federation, where Canadian Premiers are calling for a revitalized health funding partnership with the federal government. Premiers continue to call on the federal government to increase their share of health funding from 22% to 35% through an increase in the Canada Health Transfer. This increased funding would have a significant impact on the ability of provinces to provide quality health care services and respond to the strain on health care systems.

Immigration and the retention of international students who choose to come to Atlantic Canada to further their education are critical to the continued growth of the region. Atlantic Premiers discussed Atlantic immigration policy priorities and urged the federal government to work with them to enhance the region's capacity to develop, deploy and retain a skilled workforce. Premiers are committed to work with the federal government to address labour market needs and address barriers to immigration that will strengthen Atlantic Canada's position as a destination of choice for immigrants.

The global situation has brought attention on Canada's dependence on imports to meet our energy needs. The Atlantic provinces are uniquely placed to become a hub for export to international markets in traditional and sustainable energy sectors. Atlantic provinces will continue to work together to demonstrate leadership in the pursuit of emission reductions, clean power generation and transmission, and future-oriented energy development. In particular, Premiers discussed potential renewable energy opportunities, including hydrogen development and use, as well as wind, solar and tidal power, and small modular nuclear reactors. Atlantic Premiers acknowledged the Atlantic Loop will benefit the region but concerns regarding the costs and timelines were expressed. The loop will not fully satisfy the region's future energy needs, which will require multiple energy sources. Energy planning will be required to improve affordability and while balancing environmental goals. The Atlantic provinces remain four willing partners; they call for further clarity and commitment from the federal government to support these major investments and to meet federal climate targets and timelines. Premiers highlighted the urgency for this clarity and the importance of maintaining reasonable and fair electricity rates.

Continued collaboration with the federal government is key to achieving national and local emissions targets, as well as working towards future sustainable development goals. Premiers look forward to upcoming Atlantic Growth Strategy discussions with federal ministers on July 24-25, 2022, in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. The Atlantic Immigration Program and the Clean Power Road Map for Atlantic Canada and Atlantic Loop initiative are examples of collaboration under the Strategy. Premiers look forward to renewing this partnership in areas such as immigration and workforce development, health innovation, infrastructure, climate change and clean growth, and trade and investment.

Premiers noted the role aquaculture plays in Atlantic Canada, and across Canada, in creating sustainable economic opportunities for many rural, coastal, and Indigenous communities. The ongoing changes to the federal approach to aquaculture in British Columbia were also discussed. While the federal government has responsibility in managing Canada's fisheries, the aquaculture sector is well managed under provincial regulation in this region. Premiers are wholeheartedly committed to maintaining the existing system for licensing and overseeing aquaculture operations in Atlantic Canada.

Premiers announced the Atlantic Vision Conference, to be hosted by Premier King in partnership with the Public Policy Forum on October 13 and 14, 2022, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The 2022 Atlantic Vision Conference marks the 25th anniversary of the 1997 conference of the same name. It will provide an opportunity for leaders from various sectors to discuss how to shape the Atlantic economy, society, and environment to be more sustainable, inclusive, equitable, and diverse over the next 25 years.

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