

Premiers Discuss Atlantic Priorities for 2024 and Reflect on Successes in 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI (Dec 11, 2023) – Atlantic Premiers met virtually to discuss priorities for Atlantic Canadians, including health care and housing, and to reflect on regional successes this year while plotting a course for continued progress in 2024.

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

Premiers discussed immigration as key to meeting the region's growing labour demands and bolstering economic growth, noting that newcomers make important contributions to Atlantic Canada's communities. Atlantic provinces are leading the way in efforts to address labour mobility, streamline foreign credential recognition, and address labour shortages, including through legislative changes, launching the Atlantic Physician Registry, and advancing collaborative work on international recruitment of health care professionals. While improving internal labour mobility can support economic growth, it will not increase the total labour supply. Collaboration with the federal government on targeted immigration programming combined with improved foreign credential recognition is needed to assist in relieving current labour shortages.

Premiers were disappointed by the reduction in Atlantic Immigration Program levels and lack of increase to Provincial Nominee Program levels in the federal government's 2024-2026 Immigration Levels Plan. Atlantic provinces are best positioned to determine immigration needs based on local labour market demands and domestic capacity, and must have the ability to meaningfully collaborate with the federal government on immigration levels planning given the significant impact changes to these levels can have on the region. Premiers also recognize the need to balance welcoming newcomers with the ability to meet demand for services and amenities, such as housing, health care, and education.

On November 21, the federal government released their Fall Economic Statement, which had a significant focus on housing. Engagement with the Atlantic provinces will be required as federal programs are developed to align provincial and federal actions to address the housing crisis. To ensure that federal funding and programming can deliver the maximum benefit to Atlantic Canadians, program and funding parameters must recognize the opportunities and challenges in the Atlantic region. Atlantic provinces are working with the federal government to explore new approaches to increase the housing supply, especially those that take full advantage of regional innovations in construction.

Premiers noted their concern that no details on the next iteration of federal infrastructure funding were included in the Fall Economic Statement. Adequate and predictable funding is essential to multi-year provincial infrastructure planning. Atlantic Premiers call on the federal government to share details on future infrastructure funding and to maintain a base plus per capita allocation approach to recognize the unique needs of small and rural jurisdictions. They

also reiterated the Council of the Federation request for a First Ministers Meeting on strategic infrastructure and competitiveness.

Premiers are committed to improving the delivery of health care services for Atlantic Canadians and are working together under the Atlantic Health Accord to address regional health care challenges. Premiers agreed to continue their collaborative efforts in 2024, including working together to ensure that Atlantic Canadians can access critical specialized services.

Interprovincial ferry services in Atlantic Canada are a key enabler of provincial and national economies, and play a vital role in contributing to the health, social and economic well-being of Atlantic Canadians by supporting domestic and international trade, tourism, and family connections. Premiers discussed the integral role of the federal government in ensuring the dependability of ferry service in the region, and the importance of a meaningful partnership with the federal government for these critical transportation links. Premiers urged the federal government to work closely with Atlantic Canada to ensure necessary federal plans are in place, so these crossings are affordable, reliable, and available into the future.

Premiers extended their appreciation to Premier King, the outgoing Chair, for his leadership and collaborative approach throughout 2023. In 2023, the Council of Atlantic Premiers successfully lobbied for the federal government to recognize the unique heating challenges faced in the region, leading to home heating oil being exempt from the federal carbon tax for three years, and enhanced supports for Atlantic Canadians who are transitioning to heat pumps. They also launched the Atlantic Physician Registry to improve physician mobility within the region, with 226 physicians joining the Registry since May.

At the conclusion of the meeting, it was noted that Premier Furey will assume the CAP Chair in January 2024.

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