

March 27, 2024

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

Atlantic Premiers met recently to discuss the priorities of Atlantic Canadians. On behalf of the Council of Atlantic Premiers, I am writing to share with you some of the issues facing our region and to seek clarity on the federal government's intended actions regarding these priorities.

Housing

Atlantic Canadians are being profoundly impacted by the current housing crisis. As Atlantic Premiers, we are responding with record supports and investments and have engaged a wide variety of stakeholders on the matter, including community groups, non-profit agencies, the private sector, and the financial industry.

Through partnerships and formal agreements with the Government of Canada, we are continuing to collaborate on this issue. We also appreciate the ongoing collaboration between Atlantic Housing Ministers and Minister Fraser to explore housing solutions for the region. As provincial governments, we have dedicated significant resources to working with our stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach that delivers immediate and enduring solutions.

We value investments made by the federal government to date in this area but suggest that prior engagement take place so federal investments can deliver the maximum benefit to Atlantic Canadians and be incorporated into provincial budgeting and planning.

It is important that we prioritize this communication regarding areas where our interests align. Without this engagement, recent housing decisions and announcements by your government in our provinces are creating uncertainty about the future sustainability of these projects. Prior discussion with provinces before initiatives are announced would allow for both levels of government to work together in providing the housing options we all want to see.

Infrastructure

Municipal leaders have been inquiring on the status of federal infrastructure investments. The Canada Community Building Fund (CCBF) is a well-regarded approach and has provided the consistency and flexibility that municipalities need to address the diverse needs of their communities. The proposed changes to the fund, and the resulting ambiguity surrounding the federal government's requirements of PTs and municipalities to ensure ongoing access to infrastructure funding is particularly concerning as the construction season approaches.

Without a clear understanding of the federal government's plans, we risk delaying or missing our short construction season. Without this information, we also have been unable to provide any assurances to stakeholders. As we have frequently stated, adequate and predictable long-term funding is essential to multi-year infrastructure planning, particularly for Atlantic Canada.

Labour Market Transfer Agreements

We remain concerned about the future of the Labour Market Transfer Agreements (LMTAs), which are the cornerstone of labour market programming across the region. This includes a lack of clarity around the incremental funding that is set to expire at the end of this month and the agenda to modernize the agreements. Since 2017, LMTA incremental funding has helped hundreds of thousands of Atlantic Canadians upgrade their skills, find work, and earn more. Not knowing if these funds will remain past March puts our service providers, clients, and their families in a very difficult position and risks the continuity and real impact of these valuable programs and services. We need to work together to stabilize and modernize the agreements to better enable the design and delivery of responsive programming that builds Atlantic Canada's workforce and future prosperity.

International Students

Students from across the world come to Atlantic Canada to continue their education in the region's colleges and universities and make valuable contributions to the region's communities, culture and economies.

Atlantic Premiers support efforts to ensure that our welcoming of international students is sustainable and maintains the continued integrity of the high-quality learning experiences our region offers. The allocations identified for the Atlantic Provinces diverge significantly from the initial announced cap and "weighted by population" commitment by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). This unbalanced approach creates particular challenges for our region, especially considering the lower numbers of international students compared to other jurisdictions.

The 60 per cent approval rate referenced by the federal government is also problematic, and cannot be assumed, as there are significant differences among provinces in study permit application approval rates. The negative impact on our francophone post-secondary institutions, which tend to be more reliant on international students to maintain enrollment, will likely be even greater.

Additionally, under current federal policy, international students are able to transfer to another jurisdiction after they obtain a study permit. This policy impacts Atlantic provinces and institutions as applicants can use Atlantic provinces as pathways to move elsewhere in the country. Addressing this policy loophole would be impactful and enhance predictability and sustainability within our post-secondary environment.

While we are encountering issues with this new process, we do appreciate Atlantic Education and Immigration Ministers working with Minister Miller to ensure that these challenges in allocation are not unduly impacting the arrival of students this year who are waiting for regular processing to resume.

Pharmacare

Premiers also discussed the federal government's plan for a national universal pharmacare program. We look forward to learning more about your plans for this program, such as how it will be integrated with existing provincial plans and private-sector insurers. We welcome the federal government's commitment to work with provinces and territories on the development of this new program.

Atlantic Premiers continue to work closely to advance the priorities of the region. We urge you to consider the issues raised above, and to share information where requested, to ensure the greatest positive impact of federal priorities on the lives of Atlantic Canadians.

Yours truly,



HONOURABLE DR. ANDREW FUREY
Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador
Chair, Council of Atlantic Premiers

Copied To: Honourable Dennis King, Premier of Prince Edward Island
Honourable Tim Houston, Premier of Nova Scotia
Honourable Blaine Higgs, Premier of New Brunswick
Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities
Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans
Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Honourable Mark Holland, Minister of Health