

Driving Progress: Atlantic Premiers Focus on Affordability, Housing, Health Care and the Economy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ST. JOHN'S, NL (June 25, 2024) – Atlantic Premiers met virtually today to discuss shared priorities and progress on collaborative work in areas of importance to Atlantic Canadians. This includes initiatives to improve affordability, housing, and health care, along with opportunities to address labour shortages and strengthen the region's economy.

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

Premiers reiterated their commitment to support Atlantic Canadians, and indeed all Canadians, as wildfire season intensifies, including those affected by the ongoing fires near Churchill Falls, Newfoundland and Labrador, who remain under evacuation order. Premiers also discussed forest management best practices as well as the establishment of a Regional Centre of Excellence, located in central Newfoundland and Labrador, for training in fire preparedness and response. These efforts seek to improve the region's resilience and readiness for present and future challenges by strengthening communities' ability to manage forests sustainably and respond effectively to wildfires. Premiers discussed pilots underway to improve cell service during emergency situations. They urge the federal government to expand this initiative to all Atlantic Canada.

Affordability and Housing

Atlantic provinces are all making unprecedented investments to address the pressing issue of affordability, including the availability and rising costs of housing and shelter. Premiers shared their experiences and best practices in launching a variety of initiatives, including low-interest loans for the development of affordable rental properties, assistance for first-time homeowners, and in-law suites. Premiers recognize that access to housing remains a challenge and is crucial to growing vibrant communities.

Premiers underlined their commitment to continue their work together and with key partners to expand housing supply and access to affordable housing options as rapidly and responsibly as possible. This includes continuing to work with the federal government to ensure that housing investments are maximized for Atlantic Canadians and done in a manner that is sustainable for the future.

Health Care Collaboration

Through the Atlantic Health Accord, the Atlantic Provinces work together to improve patient-centered healthcare access, system efficiency, and patient outcomes.

Premiers have joined forces to help build a stable and sustainable healthcare workforce in Atlantic Canada. Committed to sharing resources and expertise, Atlantic Premiers, through the Atlantic Working Group on International Recruitment, are collaborating to help alleviate healthcare worker shortages and improve healthcare access in underserved areas.

Labour Market and Productivity

All provinces and territories are feeling the impacts of labour shortages, which are slowing economic growth, productivity, and innovation. In Atlantic Canada, these shortages are especially acute in the health

care, construction, and service sectors. Federal Budget 2024 brought an unexpected reduction of \$625 million in workforce development programs that help people find and maintain jobs in sectors facing critical labour shortages such as construction, early learning childcare, and healthcare. These Labour Market Transfer Agreements (LMTAs) support persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, women and newcomers, helping them to get the training and supports necessary to secure meaningful work, while also assisting employers to meet their labour demands.

With this cut, LMTA funding will revert to pre-2017 levels at a time when inflationary costs continue to have profound impacts on citizens. Provinces and territories were not notified of this cut prior to the release of the Budget on April 16, 2024. Premiers noted the negative impact the funding cut will have on the 120,000 individuals and 8,500 employers and organizations that have benefitted annually from these programs throughout Atlantic Canada. Premiers urged the federal government to immediately reverse these cuts to Labour Market Transfer Agreements.

Infrastructure, Economic Growth and Competitiveness

Atlantic Premiers discussed the critical infrastructure needed to power economic development in the region, including infrastructure that supports resilient and reliable supply chains, transportation and communications networks, energy distribution, and community development. Premiers noted the federal government has yet to announce an adequate successor to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which is now closed. Without dedicated support for the full range of infrastructure needs and the program flexibility to address the region's unique requirements, Atlantic Canada's economic growth and community development will be hampered.

Investing in well-functioning trade corridors improves the flow of people and goods in Atlantic Canada and helps Atlantic Canadians compete in key global markets, trade more efficiently with international partners, and keeps the region's supply chains competitive and resilient. As a business and leisure destination, Atlantic Canada needs a strong and reliable domestic and international air service network to support economic growth, tourism and competitiveness. Atlantic Premiers are working together to identify gaps and ways to improve air linkages within the region.

The Chignecto Isthmus, which joins New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, contains the only road, rail, and telecommunications connection between the two provinces, and between Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada. Approximately \$35 billion in goods and services moves through the isthmus every year. Collaboration with and support from the federal government is vital to protect this critical economic trade link, which faces increasing threats from more frequent and severe weather events.

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