



**Chiefs of Ontario
Annual Report**

**2025
2026**

Artist's Statement



Kyle Sauve (Mnaabndam)

Where the Waters Meet

This artwork represents the historic fishing weirs at the Narrows, where Lake Couchiching meets Lake Simcoe. Long before colonization, this place was an important gathering site for the Anishinaabek, where the lakes provided food, connection, and community.

The fish symbolizes food sovereignty and the deep relationship between the Anishinaabek and the waters that sustain life. The flowing water reflects the meeting of the two lakes and the movement of life through this territory. The surrounding landscape represents the natural environment and the responsibility of protecting clean water and caring for the land.

The circular composition reflects gathering and unity, echoing the way communities and leaders come together in this place. This piece honours the enduring relationship between the Anishinaabek and these waters.



My work explores identity, place, and cultural continuity through a contemporary Indigenous design language.

I create clean, emblematic compositions that draw from Anishinaabe teachings, focusing on relationships between land, water, and community. Each piece is rooted in storytelling, using simplified forms and bold structure to communicate meaning in a way that feels both grounded and current.

This work reflects the significance of the Narrows, where Lake Couchiching meets Lake Simcoe, a place that has long been a site of gathering, sustenance, and connection for the Anishinaabe.

The imagery highlights the historic fishing weirs and the movement of water as a representation of life, exchange, and continuity. The composition brings together elements of land, water, and wildlife to express balance and interdependence.

My practice is part of an ongoing body of work that explores clan animals and Indigenous symbolism through a unified visual style. While each piece stands on its own, they are all connected through a shared design language that continues to evolve. Through this approach, I aim to honour tradition while creating space for contemporary Indigenous expression.

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Ontario Regional Chief

Aanii, Boozhoo, Kwekwe, Shekoli, Sekoh, Waachiyaa

It is my pleasure to present the Chiefs of Ontario 2025-26 Annual Report as the Ontario Regional Chief. This past year, my office advanced critical mandates handed down by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. This period required sustained advocacy on several key issues, including child and family services, cross-border mobility, environmental protection and legislative reform. By engaging directly with federal and provincial partners, regional Leadership consistently defended First Nations jurisdiction, inherent rights and economic sovereignty.

This report outlines the strategic highlights, key meetings and ongoing initiatives that shaped the political landscape for the 133 First Nations in Ontario over the past year.

Overview

As the Ontario Regional Chief, with support of the Leadership Council, I maintained a rigorous schedule of advocacy, negotiations and community support. Much

of my focus was devoted to addressing urgent and emergent crises, such as the operational backlogs within Jordan’s Principle, the ongoing opioid epidemic, critical infrastructure failures in northern communities and Bill 5 and Bill C-5. Leadership also concentrated heavily on advancing and securing the Ontario Final Agreement while preparing for national dialogues.

Key Accomplishments and Highlights

Child and Family Services & Jordan’s Principle

Securing reliable access to health and social services for First Nations children was a top priority throughout the year. I met dozens of officials from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), to address the severe backlog in Jordan’s Principle applications caused by a recent operational bulletin. Leadership consistently pushed for a coordinated regional approach to reduce this backlog.

It was a marque year for reforming the First Nations Child and Family Services system and our collective advocacy and leadership was a big part of that success. This past March marked a significant milestone for First Nations children and families in Ontario. The decision from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) affirms the inherent right of First Nations to care for their children and design culturally grounded services aimed at addressing systemic racial discrimination in First Nations Child and Family Services. Leaders from the Chiefs of Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation celebrated this ruling as a step toward equity, self-determination and substantive equality. The agreement establishes a framework for long-term reform, ensuring accountability and sustainability while maintaining the tribunal’s

binding orders to eliminate discriminatory practices. The focus now shifts to implementing the agreement at the community level, with ongoing support and engagement from First Nations and stakeholders.

Opioid Crisis Advocacy and Media Engagement

The ongoing opioid crisis requires immediate and sustained intervention. On October 7, 2025, the Chiefs of Ontario released a comprehensive report revealing that First Nations people in the region are nine times more likely to die from opioids than non-First Nations people. Numerous media interviews were done to amplify the reports issues and alert the public to this disastrous public health crisis. These included TV, radio and print interviews with APTN, CTV Northern Ontario and the Investigative Journalism Bureau. Our goal was to highlight the need for adequate mental health and addiction strategies that support all First Nations grappling with the opioid crisis.

Strategic Priorities and Intergovernmental Relations

Federal and Provincial Legislative Monitoring (Bills C-15, C-61, S-2)

Protecting First Nations rights from legislative overreach required direct intervention throughout the year. On December 10, 2025, I was invited to appear before the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications to testify regarding Bill C-15. My testimony emphasized the absolute necessity of obtaining free, prior and informed consent from First Nations, and rejected legislative exemptions that would

remove environmental protections for high-speed rail projects. Leadership also lobbied extensively for the reintroduction of the First Nations Clean Drinking Water Act (Bill C-61) and actively monitored Senate Bill S-2 regarding citizenship rights.

Jay Treaty Border Alliance (JTBA) and Cross-Border Cooperation

Defending mobility rights across the United States-Canada border is a major focus of my office. On December 1, 2025, our office convened a Jay Treaty Border Alliance governance table meeting alongside the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). Throughout the fall, the JTBA held meetings with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to pursue legislative amendments to Canada’s Bill C-12 and to address border crossing experiences, document controls and community safety. Work is underway to keep the JTBA website updated so information can be easily accessible to First Nations citizens, communities and Leadership. You can see more about this work here: <https://www.jaytreatyborderalliance.com/jtba-ci>

Sector-Specific Updates

Justice and Policing

I presented to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on the crisis impacting First Nations policing on October 20, 2025. It was important to address the devastating impacts of gang violence and drug trafficking in northern Ontario. For example, there has been a 300-per-cent increase in cocaine and fentanyl seizures in Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory. Leadership

called for federal legislation to officially recognize First Nations policing as an essential service.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship is inextricably linked to economic development. On October 21, 2025, the Great Lakes Gathering convened in Niagara Falls under the theme "Water is Life." Leadership reinforced First Nations jurisdiction over source water protection. The practical realities of infrastructure deficits were highlighted on January 15, 2026, when I joined other leadership to travel to Kashechewan First Nation to assess the state of emergency caused by wastewater contamination and nursing station flooding, underscoring the urgent need for reliable infrastructure investments.



Economic Development

The Chiefs of Ontario, in partnership with the Government of Ontario and supported by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, announced the upcoming launch of Ontario’s first First Nations-led and certified First Nations business directory. This platform will register, validate and showcase First Nation-owned businesses across the province. The directory will adhere to OCAP principles to ensure authenticity, protect against identity fraud and uphold First Nations data sovereignty rights. Certified businesses will gain increased visibility, access to procurement opportunities, and formal recognition which will foster trust and advance economic reconciliation.

Promoted across Ontario ministries, the directory will be a key resource for strengthening supply chains and meeting Indigenous procurement targets. It aims to drive economic activity, support self-determination and create lasting prosperity for First Nations. Business owners who completed the initial application will soon be invited to the certification process; those who have not yet registered can apply still via the Chiefs of Ontario website: <https://chiefs-of-ontario.org/priorities/economic/ofnbd-listing/>



Looking Ahead

Highway Safety

My office is pushing the federal and provincial governments to improve safety on northern highways following a series of deadly collisions, including a tragic accident in January on Highway 11 that claimed three lives from Constance Lake First Nation and Naotkamegwaning First Nation. With northern communities heavily reliant on limited transportation routes for essential services, Leadership is highlighting the disproportionate impacts that unsafe highway conditions have on First Nations. Chiefs of Ontario is supporting Leadership's call for immediate actions to enhance oversight of commercial transport vehicles, improve highway infrastructure and winter maintenance, and collaborate with First Nations to develop effective, region-specific solutions.

First Ministers' Meeting

In December 2025, the prime minister committed to hosting a First Ministers' Meeting with First Nations, tentatively scheduled for September 2026. The Assembly of First Nations has held meetings for Leadership to prepare for the upcoming meeting. In the coming months, COO will host planning sessions with regional Leadership to establish a unified mandate and define specific priority areas to present to the premiers and the prime minister.

AFN Portfolio Overview

As the Ontario Regional Chief, I sit on the AFN Executive Committee and hold various portfolios, including: justice

and policing; border crossing; lands, territories and resources; and the management committee.

Justice and Policing

To advance justice reforms and support First Nations, the Justice Sector prioritizes collaboration and advocacy. Advocacy efforts over the last year included pushing for sustained funding for the Indigenous Justice Strategy and the First Nations Justice Strategy, including a proposed \$2.6 billion implementation fund. These programs aimed at addressing systemic issues like overrepresentation of First Nations in the justice system. The committee is also addressing legislative developments while navigating political dynamics. Systemic challenges such as bail reforms or the Combatting Hate Act underscore the importance of culturally responsive tools like Gladue principles to ensure equitable outcomes for First Nations in the justice system.

AFN Lands, Territories and Resources Portfolio

The goal of the Chiefs Committee on Lands, Territories and Resources is to advocate for the reforms and improvements to the additions-to-reserve and specific claims processes. Along with ongoing advocacy on these files this year, we highlighted the significant funding

shortfalls affecting research for specific claims. Requests to the Prime Minister's Office emphasized the critical role of research funding in enabling First Nations to resolve historical breaches and injustices to advance reconciliation. We pushed the federal government to address these shortfalls and establish a sustainable funding program in Budget 2025. Unfortunately, restructuring at the AFN saw the Land Rights & Territories Sector dissolved. The Chiefs Committee on Lands, Territories and Resources was absorbed into the AFN Economy & Infrastructure Sector. These changes mean the Chiefs committee will now frame lands-related mandates through an economic development lens.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward

The accomplishments over the last year demonstrate a firm commitment to building healthy, self-determined communities. While there are serious legislative challenges and economic, social and health deficits that are impacting First Nations, the Chiefs of Ontario and regional Leadership are resolute in advancing the inherent rights of First Nations. My office will continue to fulfill the mandates provided by the Chiefs-in-Assembly with precision and transparency.



Chief Operating Officer

Shekoli,

On behalf of the Chiefs of Ontario Secretariat, I am pleased to share the 2026 Annual Report. This year's Annual Chiefs Assembly (ACA) theme, "Rooted in Community: Together We Lead, Together We Thrive," reflects our shared commitment to collective strength and community-driven leadership.

Yaw^ko (thank you) to our hosts, Chippewas of Rama First Nation, long recognized as a caring and welcoming people. Their territory has historically been known as a gathering place where travelers rested, important meetings were held, and agreements were made. This year's Annual Chiefs Assembly will be held in person, with a virtual component to support broader participation.

The Annual Report, produced in-house by the Policy and Communications Sector, provides a comprehensive overview of the Secretariat's work and achievements over the past year. Under the oversight of the Board of Directors, the Secretariat has continued to strengthen its operations and expand its capacity, with staff growing

to approximately 100 employees. Our team remains committed to supporting First Nations Leadership in Ontario with the information and resources needed for informed decision-making.

Over the past year, we have made meaningful progress across several areas. This includes enhancements to our website and the successful delivery of a collaborative Wellness Conference that brought together all sectors to highlight both Secretariat and community-led work. Advocacy remains central to our mandate, and we have coordinated rallies and campaigns in response to government legislation, supporting communities in raising awareness and advancing political dialogue.

Communications continues to be an essential service within the organization. Our team works closely with all sectors and the Ontario Regional Chief's office to ensure that Chiefs and communities remain informed on key issues and initiatives. The continued use of hybrid meeting formats has increased accessibility and participation, and we remain committed to maintaining this approach moving forward.



Operationally, the Secretariat has strengthened its governance and administrative practices. Updated bylaws and policies in Human Resources and Finance have improved accountability and efficiency, alongside Board-directed updates to the employment manual to ensure compliance with current standards. Financial processes have been further streamlined through the implementation of Electronic Funds Transfers (EFTs) and an upgraded purchase order system.

We have also improved event coordination through online registration systems, enabling real-time participation tracking and the distribution of materials through digital platforms such as QR codes.

The Chiefs of Ontario Charter underwent its mandated review by the Leadership Council and was subsequently approved by Chiefs in Assembly. It remains a foundational document guiding the work of the Secretariat and strengthening accountability to Chiefs-in-Assembly. The next review is scheduled following the 2027 Regional Chief election.

The Secretariat continues to operate in a hybrid work environment, with staff returning to the office on a staggered basis while maintaining flexible remote work options. Although our team has outgrown the current Toronto office space, this hybrid model has supported continued productivity and collaboration. The boardroom remains available for Chiefs and committee meetings.

Throughout the year, we supported Leadership and technical staff through regular updates and engagement opportunities, including Special Chiefs Assemblies focused on key decisions such as the Child Welfare

settlement agreement. These forums ensured that Leadership remained informed on sector priorities and ongoing work.

As we move forward, the Secretariat remains committed to strengthening relationships and advancing solution-driven approaches. In alignment with this year’s theme, we will continue to advocate for governments to work in partnership with First Nations communities to support recovery efforts, address ongoing challenges, and improve outcomes for children and future generations.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Directors, Policy Analysts, Coordinators, and all members of the Chiefs of Ontario team for their dedication and hard work. I also extend my gratitude to the Board of Directors for their continued guidance and support.

Yaw^ko

Tracy Y Antone
Chief Operating Officer



History

In the very heartland of Turtle Island (known today as North America) around the Great Lakes and James and Hudson Bays is the bounty of creation that provided a homeland for the original peoples—the 15 Nations in the province now known as Ontario. Living by sacred laws given to us by the Creator, we were – and continue to be – sovereign Nations.

We governed ourselves according to our own constitutions and exercised inherent jurisdiction through our systems of governance. Using the expansive ancient trails and the waterways of the western hemisphere, we established social, economic, cultural, and political relationships. Many of these networks were formalized into treaties, alliances, and agreements of the highest order of international relations.

The establishment of political organizations is rooted in the inherent freedom of association and the power of First Nations to create alliances. In March of 1975, at the first annual All Ontario Chiefs Conference, a joint Indian Associations Coordination Committee was formed, constituting a federation of four First Nation political territorial organizations in Ontario. The purpose of the Committee was to provide a single Ontario representative to the Assembly of First Nations (then, the National Indian Brotherhood). From this Committee emerged the Chiefs of Ontario.

The Chiefs of Ontario's basic purpose is to enable the political leadership to discuss and decide on regional, provincial, and national priorities affecting First Nations peoples in Ontario. The Chiefs of Ontario has become a

vehicle to facilitate relationships between the federal and provincial governments and First Nations peoples in Ontario. The activities of the Chiefs of Ontario are mandated by the Chiefs-in-Assembly and guided by the Leadership Council (LC), which is comprised of the Grand Chiefs and representatives of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians; Grand Council Treaty #3; Nishnawbe-Aski Nation; Anishinabek Nation; Mushkegowuk Council; Mohawks of Akwesasne; Six Nations of the Grand River; Independent First Nations; and the Ontario Regional Chief.

Mission Statement

The Chiefs of Ontario supports all First Nations in Ontario as they assert their sovereignty, jurisdiction and their chosen expression of nationhood.

Vision Statement

First Nations in Ontario are united towards self sufficiency and vibrancy while never forgetting who we are; this unity is facilitated through the Chiefs of Ontario. We envision a future where our inherent laws, lands, and traditions are recognized and respected by governments, industry and the general public.

Chronology of Ontario Regional Chiefs

1. Peter Tobasonakwut Kelly - June 1982 to Spring 1983
2. Patrick Madahbee - Spring 1983 to June 1983
3. Wally McKay - June 1983 to June 1985
4. Gordon Peters - June 1985 to June 1997
5. Tom Bressette - June 1997 to June 2000

6. Charles Fox - June 2000 to June 2005
7. Angus Toulouse - June 2005 to June 2012
8. Stan Beardy - June 2012 to June 2015
9. Isadore Day - June 2015 to June 2018
10. RoseAnne Archibald - June 2018 to June 2021
11. Glen Hare – June 2021 to June 2024
12. Abram Benedict - June 2024 to Present

Organizational Objectives

The main objective of the Chiefs of Ontario office is to facilitate the discussion, planning, implementation, and evaluation of all local, regional, and national matters affecting the First Nations people in Ontario. The intention of basing the central office in Toronto is to maintain a presence for First Nations in Ontario that is non-governmental and non-political in order to communicate with government officials on an urgent basis.

In accordance with its role as a coordinating body, the Chiefs of Ontario office carries out its responsibility by ensuring that all information on matters affecting and/or impacting First Nations is disseminated to the communities, Tribal Councils, and Political Territorial Organizations. Analysis of these issues is conducted through the various committees and/or councils, and is then raised to the Leadership Council (LC) for implementation.

This initiative is accomplished through the development of a portfolio system, which designates specific areas of responsibilities to the Chiefs of Ontario Sector Directors.

The Directors provide support to the Leadership Council based on their respective priority areas.

Priorities

Chiefs of Ontario initiatives have been organized into a number of different priority areas:

Education

The Education Sector provides the Ontario Education Portfolio Holder with information on key issues, prepares briefing notes, and supports the development of strategic approaches for political action.

Environment

The Environment Sector addresses priorities including water, climate change, species at risk, contaminants, environmental assessments, and the protection of traditional knowledge and intellectual property as part of collective knowledge systems.

Health

The Health Sector supports increased opportunities for First Nations to participate in and influence regional and national health policy, health systems (federal and provincial), and program development across all health areas, as mandated by leadership.

Justice

The Justice Sector advocates for First Nations in Ontario on justice-related issues, ensuring representation and coordinated responses to emerging priorities.

Social Services

The Social Services Sector supports First Nations participation in the development of social service policies and programs across regions.

Research and Data Management

The Research and Data Management Sector supports First Nations-driven research, advancing data sovereignty and supporting First Nations' ways of knowing.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Sector promotes healthy, prosperous, and sustainable First Nations communities by providing information, guidance, and recommendations to the Leadership Council and Chiefs of Ontario on economic development priorities.

Women's Initiatives

The Women's Initiatives Sector supports and coordinates the First Nations Women's Council, the 2S/LGBTQIAPD+ Council, and promotes the safety, well-being, and empowerment of First Nations women, girls, Two Spirit, and gender-diverse people in Ontario.

Policy and Communications

The Policy and Communications Sector develops, coordinates, and oversees communications and policy initiatives as mandated by the Chiefs-in-Assembly.

Youth and Knowledge Keepers

This area supports the Ontario First Nations Youth Peoples Council, which represents First Nations youth

across Ontario and advocates for youth priorities at all levels of government, while also uplifting the role of Knowledge Keepers.

Housing and Infrastructure

The Housing and Infrastructure Sector supports First Nations in advancing safe, sustainable, and culturally appropriate housing and infrastructure through advocacy, coordination, and strategic guidance.



Leadership Council

Overview

The Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the four political-territorial organizations; and includes representatives from Six Nations of the Grand River, Mushkegowuk Tribal Council and the independent First Nations.

Leadership Council

- Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation
- Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
- Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
- Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh, Grand Council Treaty #3
- Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Teme-Augama Anishinabek (Temagami First Nation), Independent First Nations
- Elected Chief Sherri-Lyn Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River
- Grand Chief Leonard Lazore, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
- Grand Chief Leo Friday, Mushkegowuk Tribal Council

The Leadership Council is the Ontario First Nations political coordination body that is authorized by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. With their collective wisdom and experience, the Leadership Council provides guidance to the Ontario Regional Chief and works to implement the priorities of First Nations and mandates of Chiefs of Ontario.

Leadership Council creates space for Leadership to discuss nationhood and governance, as well as emergency issues between assemblies. Their primary, but not exclusive, responsibility is to oversee the implementation of resolutions that director Leadership Council's guidance or involvement. The Leadership Council may adopt strategic plans to advance a consolidated approach on issues of concern to First Nations.

To complete its work, Leadership Council uses a portfolio system to delegate responsibilities in sectors such as health, education, environment and social services.

Members of the council take responsibility for a given portfolio, ensuring that each sector has a dedicated champion, an advocate and a strong leader.

Leadership Council relies on the work of the COO Secretariat and works closely with sector directors to ensure the council has the most current analysis and information. This relationship between the Leadership Council and sector directors allows the council to focus on good governance and navigating both the organization and First Nations Leadership through federal and provincial political landscapes.

The Leadership Council plays a vital role in the Chiefs of Ontario, providing a valued source of strength, wisdom, and leadership. Through their dedication and hard work, the

Leadership Council helps guide First Nations in Ontario with great minds, hearts and spirit.

Leadership Council Accomplishments

In 2025-26, the Leadership Council guided and supported several policy initiatives, managed federal and provincial government relations and oversaw emerging initiatives from the COO Secretariat and Political Office as requested. Leadership Council has also successfully followed up on a variety of resolutions passed by Chiefs in-Assembly and supported First Nations in Ontario.

The Leadership Council has been instrumental in advocating for several critical initiatives. Some notable achievements include:

- Creating a task force for resource development on First Nations land and the impact on their rights.
- Developing recommendations following the Health Sector's Opioid surveillance project and report.
- Developing a procedure for external appointment and appointments to various boards.
- Recommending a representative to observe the Nutrition North external review
- Finalizing the Women's Council terms of reference.

- Overseeing the incorporation of the First Nations Off Reserve Housing Centre.
- Guiding and overseeing regional responses to Bill 5 and Bill C5.
- Guiding and assisting COO through the provincial and federal elections.

These are just some of the issues that Leadership Council has worked on over the past year. In addition to their work in their respective regions, Leadership Council worked to increase transparency and accountability within the Chiefs of Ontario and advanced relationships and networks with all levels of government. Leadership Council meets regularly to move forward on a variety of pressing issues affecting First Nations in Ontario.



Members of the Leadership Council



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Board of Directors Report

The Board of Directors for the Chiefs of Ontario is pleased to present its 2025–2026 Annual Report.

Under the bylaws approved in June 2019, the Political Territorial Organizations (PTOs) appoint representatives to the Chiefs of Ontario Board of Directors. Current Board members are as follows:

- Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians – Geoff Stonefish, Treasurer
- Nishnawbe Aski Nation – Gary Dokis
- Grand Council Treaty #3 – Gary Allen
- Anishinabek Nation – Brendan Huston

The Board met five times during the 2025–2026 fiscal year since reporting to the Chiefs-in-Assembly in June 2025. The Board continues to explore opportunities for a permanent office presence in Northern Ontario.

The Board works closely with Tracy Antone, Chief Operating Officer, to ensure strong governance, accountability and oversight of the organization's corporate mandate. The organization remains stable and continues to fulfill its operational responsibilities effectively. Quarterly Board meetings and regular finance meetings are held to review financial statements, support accountability and prepare items for Board approval.

During the fiscal year, adjustments were made to strengthen support for the Knowledge Keepers Council, Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council (OFNYPC), First Nations Women's Council and the 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council within the organization. The Secretariat also

continues to provide financial support to the Office of the Ontario Regional Chief to strengthen regional political advocacy and support the implementation of Chiefs-in-Assembly mandates.

In accordance with Resolution 21/22, measures to strengthen accountability to Ontario First Nations Leadership continue to be implemented. Outreach has taken place with Independent and unaffiliated First Nations to provide presentations on the Secretariat's financial activities and operations.

The Board's Terms of Reference, approved by the Chiefs-in-Assembly and reflected in the Charter, remain unchanged. This framework continues to guide accountability and communication with the Leadership Council. During this fiscal year, the Board and Leadership Council continued discussions focused on strengthening accountability and collaboration between both bodies. A joint review process for Secretariat directors' workplans was also initiated to ensure alignment with resolutions passed by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. Chiefs of Ontario will continue working with the Leadership Council to refine and improve this process as needed.

Staffing across the organization remains stable, with funding secured for all positions. Annual staff evaluations have been completed, and the Board continues to oversee organizational policies, procedures and internal processes, including budgeting and operational communications. Directors' annual workplans were presented to and approved by the Board as part of ongoing governance and audit requirements.

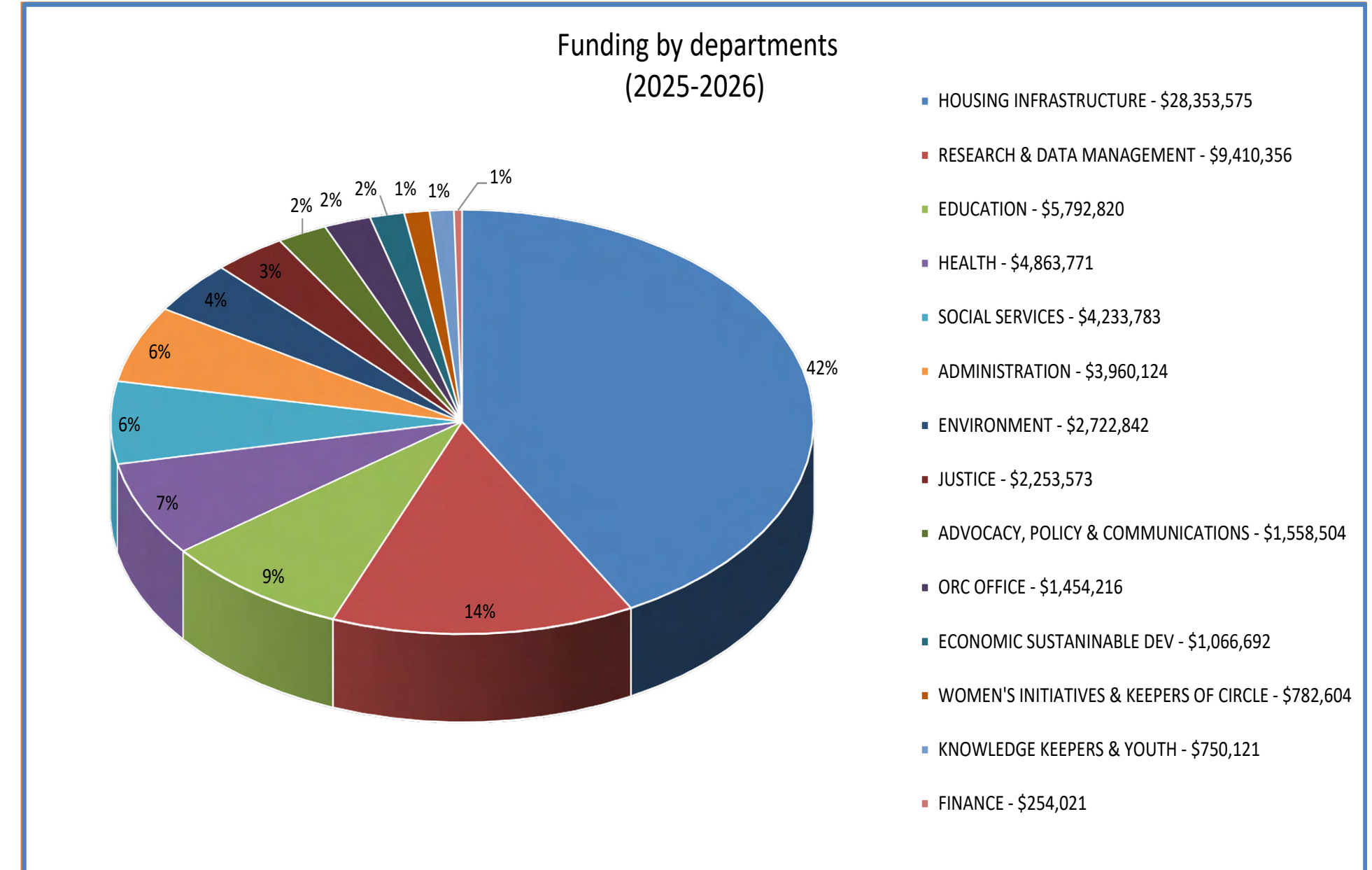
The annual audit is currently underway and will be presented to Ontario First Nations Leadership at the June 2026 Annual Chiefs Assembly. Based on quarterly financial reviews conducted throughout the year, the Board anticipates a positive audit outcome, supported by strong financial management processes, employment and consultant agreements, and asset management practices. The Board also continues to monitor government funding reductions to ensure organizational capacity and stability are maintained.

Chiefs of Ontario Leadership can remain confident that the organization continues to operate effectively and responsibly, with a clear separation between corporate governance and political advocacy in service to Ontario First Nations.



Financial Report

April 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026



Human Resources Sector

Total Employees as of March 31, 2026: 102

Total Employees as of March 31, 2025: 88

In 2025-2026, one employee retired, four employees left, and one employee unfortunately passed away.

Employee Engagement Initiatives

The Human Resources Sector continued prioritized employee engagement in 2025-26, fostering a positive and connected workplace culture. Key initiatives included:

All-staff meetings, held in April and December, providing opportunities to:

- Build team collaboration and strengthen cross-sectoral relationships
- Recognize employee milestones such as years of service
- Deliver organization-wide employee training and knowledge sharing

Professional Development Opportunities

- Provided staff with a continuing education allotment to support ongoing professional learning and skill enhancement.
- Enabled employees to pursue relevant courses, certifications, and training aligned with both individual career goals and organizational needs.

Enhanced Communication and Engagement

- Introduced a monthly employee newsletter as a central communication tool to share organizational

updates, highlight key initiatives, welcome new employees, and celebrate employee achievements.

Health and Safety Update

The HR Sector strengthened the organization's commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy work environment.

Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) Activities:

Regular JHSC meetings were held throughout the year, supporting consistent dialogue on workplace health and safety matters. Meetings provided a forum to review safety concerns, identify potential hazards, and recommend preventative measures to enhance overall workplace safety.

These ongoing efforts reflect the organization's proactive approach to employee wellbeing and regulatory compliance, reinforcing a strong and sustainable culture of health and safety across the organization.

Inclusive and Culturally Respectful Workplace Practices

The organization promoted opportunities for First Nations individuals to apply for employment with the Chiefs of Ontario, supporting equitable access to employment and fostering a culturally respectful and inclusive workplace.

To take a look at the positions that are available, please scan the QR code:



Economic Development Sector

Arvind Sharma, Economic Development Director

Jey Pakeerathan, Sr. Policy Analyst

Nima Nikouie, Policy Analyst

Stephen Kanagaratnam, Policy Analyst

Josh Drew, Student Worker

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI)

Chiefs Committee on Economic Development:

Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Chief Tesha Rourke, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Councilor Dean Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River

Chief Joe Miskokomon, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation

Steve Williams, Independent First Nations

Chief Jason Gauthier, Missanabie Cree First Nation

Alternative Representatives:

Councillor Larry Sault, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Grand Chief Leonard Lazore, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Northern Superior Regional Chief Melvin Hardy, Anishinabek Nation

Deputy Grand Chief Natasha Martin, Mushkegowuk Council



CCoED Technical Representatives:

Jessica McLaughlin, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Kylee Tarbell, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Brandon Manuel, Anishinabek Nation

Darlene Solomon, Anishinabek Nation

Edward Roundpoint, Independent First Nations Alliance

Albalina Metatawabin, Mushkegowuk Council

Gary Allen, Grand Council Treaty #3

Albalina Metatawabin, Mushkegowuk Council

Vern Cheechoo, Mushkegowuk Council

Employment Table Working Group:

Polly Bobiwash, Anishinabek Nation

Russell Roundpoint, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Dean Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River

Carol Turner, Mushkegowuk Council

Overview

The Economic Development Sector's mandates are driven by several resolutions passed by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. Economic Development Sector's goal is to support First Nations sovereignty and self-determination through First Nations' economic rights and to address current legislative and policy barriers to economic prosperity for First Nations.

The Economic Development Sector supports the Chiefs Committee on Economic Development (CCoED), the Prosperity Table, the Employment Table and manages the Supply Chain and Procurement Project. The sector shares information, guidance and recommendations to the CCoED and the Leadership Council on economic matters. Economic Development is mandated to support the development of healthy, prosperous and sustainable First Nations.



The sector works with the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation (IAFNER) and the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skill Development (MLITSD) to ensure that the CCoED and First Nations are aware of current government programs. It also circulates relevant grant and funding opportunities to First Nations. Strengthening relationships with existing stakeholders and solidifying the sector's strategy were key activities in 2025-26.

Economic Development Sector Highlights:

The sector, CCoED and the Prosperity table worked on several issues this year, including concerns related to trade and tariffs, banking and taxation, consultation rights in the realm of mining and advocating for First Nations economic needs. Community engagements were held on the First Nations Employment Transformation Framework, supported by the Employment Transformation Working Group (ETWG), consultants Indigenous and Community Engagement (ICE) and other employment stakeholders. Work related to the First Nations supply chain portal was also a focus this year.

Meetings with IAFNER and MLITSD were held successfully throughout the year.

Chiefs Committee on Economic Development meetings were held on June 25, 2025, and February 17, 2026. A virtual First Nations trade agreement and economic rights roundtable was hosted on February 26, 2026, with Dr. Jane Kelsey from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and representatives from Indigenous Services Canada to discuss First Nations rights in a shifting economic landscape. First Nations Leadership, including Ontario Regional Chief, met with the US Consul General Baxter Hunt in September 2025 to discuss the Jay Treaty Border Alliance, consultation rights and border mobility concerns.

The Economic Development Sector also helped to coordinate the 2026 PDAC panel on consultation rights in the mining industry. Speakers included Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict; Lake Huron Regional Chief Scott Mcleod, Anishinabek Nation; Jason Batiste, Wabun Tribal Council; and Deputy Grand Chief Natasha Martin, Mushkegowuk Council.



Sector staff attended certain conferences, including the 2025 Anishinabek Nation Economic Development Opportunities Forum, and the 2025 Ontario First Nations Economic Developers Association (OFNEDA) gathering. At OFNEDA, staff made a presentation on presented the Supply Chain and Procurement Project after IAFNER announced its support of the initiative. At the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association's Ishkoday conference in October 2025, Chiefs of Ontario presented on its mandate, purpose and employment transformation services.

Food Security

Food security remains a priority for the Economic Development Sector. In March 2025, the sector hosted the Food Sovereignty Forum, which explored key challenges, barriers and programs related to First Nations food security and sovereignty. In 2025-26, the sector continued to work on this file alongside the Health and Education sectors, supporting organizations such as the Wiiche'iwaymagon Alliance.

Banking

The sector secured federal funding to undertake a legal review of the First Nations financial entity study, which is supported by Resolution 23/14A. Recommendations on potential changes in the banking sector for to address the hurdles faced by First Nations also being drafted for the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions.

Employment Table Highlights:

Economic Development supports and coordinates the work of the Employment Table Working Group (ETWG).

The ETWG meets monthly and provides the Chiefs of Ontario, Leadership Council and the Chiefs-in-Assembly with advice and recommendations to design an employment services framework for Ontario First Nation people on- and off-reserve. This framework includes improving employment, training, and skills development services and programming.

Regular meetings were held with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD) to exchange developments on the First Nations Employment Framework.

Resolution 24/14A, passed in June 2024, mandates the creation of a joint table on employment services (JTES). The Terms of reference have been drafted for the proposed table but have yet to be finalized by MLITSD and COO.

The purpose of the employment table is to create a forum for First Nations and the Government of Ontario to engage in dialogue and provide joint recommendations on the co-development of a First Nation employment services framework.

To develop the framework, consultants from Indigenous and Community Engagement (ICE) led the engagement and research components of the First Nations employment framework project. There were four engagement sessions in 2025-26; two in Toronto, and two in Thunder Bay with a focus on northern communities. These sessions brought together First Nations representatives, service providers and key stakeholders to identify community-driven approaches and priorities to improve employment outcomes and develop the

employment services framework. Topics included enhancing employability through skills development, integrating wellness supports and ensuring culturally appropriate, client-centred service delivery. There were also one online session and two surveys circulated throughout the year.

Supply Chain Project Highlights:

Resolution 24/17A, passed in June 2024, mandates Chiefs of Ontario to develop the First Nations Business Directory and support First Nations participation in procurement and supply chains by creating a distinctions-based business directory, as well as verification and certification processes. Throughout 2025-26, the Economic Development Sector finalized the verification and certification procedures, which include a two-tier seal of authenticity and received Leadership Council approval. Provincial funding will support the continued implementation and long-term sustainability of the project.

Significant progress was made on the development of the business directory's portal with the support of external consultants. Recent improvements include the front-end user interface, back-end data infrastructure and alignment with OCAP® principles and First Nations data governance standards. In September 2025, a joint press release was issued by Minister Rickford and Ontario Regional Chief Benedict to announce support for the project and the potential it has to strengthen First Nations economic participation across the province. Toolkits and supplementary resources were also developed to support First Nations businesses and

communities in accessing procurement opportunities. The project is now set to move into its next phase in the coming year, which includes launching supply chain research, the verification and certification process and the business directory itself.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

In the year ahead, the Economic Development Sector will:

- Work in collaboration with the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Reconciliation.
- Secure federal partners and funding for First Nations' economic development and ensure their economic priorities are on the federal government's radar.
- Raise awareness of any economic issues affecting First Nations through press releases, articles and editorials.
- Begin a legal review of the First Nations financial entity study and continue the study of the legislative changes needed to overcome barriers First Nations face in the banking industry.
- Host an economic development conference focusing on food security programming for First Nations.
- Promote tariff and trade discussions and share opportunities for First Nations to leverage and succeed in these uncertain times, while fostering partnerships with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, and the Global Affairs Canada Indigenous Trade Working Group
- Continue meeting with Political Territorial Organizations and Independent First Nations

economic development teams represented in the TCoED to discuss strategies and opportunities for collaboration.

- Explore opportunities for equity ownership for First Nations and provide strategic resources and expertise on how to access equity positions.
- Circulate relevant funding opportunities and government grants for economic development to CCoED members and First Nations economic development officers.
- Finalize the terms of reference for the Joint Table on Employment Services and ensure its operation.
- Integrate findings from ICE's engagement sessions, surveys, desktop research, and interviews into the employment transformation framework and finalize it in collaboration with the framework's working group and the Ontario labour ministry.
- Co-develop a pilot employment services model with a willing First Nation, group of First Nations, or First Nation organization and implement it.
- Develop capacity for verification and certification work for the First Nation Business Directory
- Verify and certify the businesses already listed in the directory ahead of its December 2026 launch.



Education Sector

Mick Staruck, Director of Education

Angel Maracle, Associate Director of Education

Patrik Lowen, Associate Director of Education

Ashley McGregor, Education Coordinator

Ocean Song-Bui, Education Coordinator

Karleigh Palmer, Senior Policy Analyst

Holly Golabek, Policy Analyst

Sarah MacLeod-Beaver, Policy Analyst

Ashley Deacon, Special Education Support Technician

Patricia Magiskan, Special Education Support Technician

Kallie Diabo, Communications Officer

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Teme-Augama Anishinabek (Temagami Fist Nation)

Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Languages Portfolio Holder

Ogimaa Tim Ominika, Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory

Chiefs and Technical Committee on Languages and Learning (CTCLL)

Mandated by the Leadership Council to support First Nations and regional organizations through consensus building to address and advance First Nation jurisdiction over languages and learning systems and environments.

Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, Co-Portfolio Holder and Co-Chair

Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Teme-Augama Anishinabek (Temagami Fist Nation), Co-Portfolio Holder and Co-Chair

Mick Staruck, Chiefs of Ontario, Co-Chair

Mallory Solomon, 2S/LGBTQIQAPD+ Council

Alice King and Shayleen Thompson, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education

Councillors Audrey Powless-Bomberry and Amos Key Jr., Six Nations of the Grand River

Debbie Ross, Mushkegowuk Council

Paige Sillaby, Anishinabek Nation

Deborah Terrance, Independent First Nations

Kyla Stonefish, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Diana Cowley, Grand Council Treaty #3

Vance McPherson, Sagamok Anishnawbek

Sherry Britton, Emma Krakower and Jennifer Wrigley, Nishnawbe

Aski Nation

CTCLL Observers:

Alicia Cameron, Ontario Native Education Counselling Association

Anna Zecharia, Maggie Gallant, Marsha Josephs and Morgan

Roach Pine, Indigenous Institutes Consortium

Cassandra Bundtz, Grand Council Treaty #3

Deborah Pine, Anishinabek Nation

Diane Maracle-Nadjiwon, Independent First Nation

Jen Elgie, Geoff Stonefish, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Claudette Fournier and Jennifer Owl, Sagamok Anishnawbek

Kathy Beardy and Melinda Siemens, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

District Chief Lisa Francis-Benedict, Mohawk Council of

Akwesasne



Advisory Committees to the CTCLL:

Ontario Bilateral Education and Learning Table (OBELT):

Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Teme-Augama Anishinabek

(Temagami Fist Nation), Co-Portfolio Holder

Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft, Association of Iroquois and

Allied Indians, Co-Portfolio Holder

Mick Staruck, Chiefs of Ontario, Chair

Angel Maracle, Chiefs of Ontario

Indigenous Services Canada, National

Indigenous Services Canada, Ontario Region

District Chief Lisa Francis Benedict and Alice King, Mohawk

Council of Akwesasne

Councillors Audrey Powless-Bomberry and Amos Key Jr., Six Nations of the Grand River

Diana Cowley, Grand Council Treaty #3

Debbie Ross, Mushkegowuk Council

Kyla Stonefish, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Paige Sillaby and Deborah Pine, Anishinabek Nation

Sherry Britton, Jennifer Wrigley and Kathy Beardy, Nishnawbe

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Vance McPherson, Sagamok Anishnawbek

Diane Maracle-Nadjiwon and Debbie Terrance, Independent First

Nations

Holly Golabek, Chiefs of Ontario

Belinda Koostachin, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education

Ontario Technical Table – Interim Funding Approach (OTTIFA)

Angel Maracle, Chiefs of Ontario

Kyla Stonefish, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Debbie Terrance and Diane Maracle-Nadjiwon, Independent First

Nations

Paige Sillaby, Anishinabek Nation

Diana Cowley, Grand Council Treaty #3

Sherry Britton and Kathy Beardy, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Donna Lahache, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education

Councillor Audrey Powless-Bomberry, Six Nations of the Grand River

Holly Golabek, Chiefs of Ontario

Mick Staruck, Chiefs of Ontario

Post-Secondary Engagement Committee (PSE Committee)

Angel Maracle, Chiefs of Ontario, Chair

Deborah Terrance, Independent First Nations

Sherry Britton and Kathy Beardy, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Paige Sillaby and Deborah Pine, Anishinabek Nation

Claudette Jones, Sagamok Anishnawbek

Audrey Powless Bomberry and Justine Bomberry, Six Nations of the Grand River

Kyla Stonefish, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Diana Cowley, Grand Council Treaty 3

Kristin Kewaquom, Kinooaadziwin Education Body

Marsha Josephs and Morgan Roach-Pine, Indigenous Institutes Consortium (IIC)

Norma Sunday, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education

Holly Golabek, Chiefs of Ontario

Leadership Committee on Languages (LCOL)

Ogimaa Tim Ominika, Wiikwemikong Unceded Territory, Portfolio Holder

Angel Maracle, Chiefs of Ontario, Chair

Donna Debassige, Chiefs of Ontario Knowledge Keepers Council

Ali Darney, Barbara Noland and Paige Sillaby, Anishinabek Nation

Alice King and Shayleen Thompson, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education

Amos Key Jr, Ian Martin, David Leitch and Andrea Bear-Nicholas, Language Defenders

Martha Sutherland, Arlene Ash, Matthew Angees, Kathy Beardy,

Bruce Beardy and Judy Barratt, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Ashley Timothy, Brandon Doxtater and Kimberly Snake,

Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Charlotte Neckoway, Fort Hope/Treaty # 9

Deborah Terrance, Independent First Nation

Councillor Erma Ferrell, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Jake King, Chimnissing First Nation (Beausoleil First Nation)

Jeannette Lavell, First Nations with Schools Collective

Julie Williams, Chippewas of Rama First Nation

Karen Sandy, Six Nation Language Commission

Michele O'Brien, Georgian College

Monty McGahey, Chippewas of the Thames

Nelson Toulouse, Sagamok Anishnawbek

Olive Elm, Darelyn Doxtater and Erica Elijah, Oneida Nation of the Thames

Rhonda Hopkins, Wiikwemikong Unceded Territory

Sarah Chaloux, Wahta Mohawks

First Nation Lifelong Learning Table – Planning Circle:

All CTCLL Members

Chiefs of Ontario

Knowledge Keepers

Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU) Associate Deputy Ministers

Ontario Ministry of Education Indigenous Education Office

First Nation Lifelong Learning Table – Collaboration Circle:

Patrik Lowen, Chiefs of Ontario, Chair

Kyla Stonefish and Ashley Timothy, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Diana Cowley and Cassandra Bundtz, Grand Council Treaty #3

Debbie Ross, Mushkegowuk Council

Deborah Terrance, Independent First Nations

Donna Lahache, Raweras Mitchell, and Shayleen Thompson,

Akwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education

Sherry Britton, Jennifer Wrigley and Melinda Siemens, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Kristi Jamieson, Six Nations of the Grand River

Paige Sillaby and Natasha George, Anishinabek Nation

Karleigh Palmer, Chiefs of Ontario

Sarah MacLeod-Beaver, Chiefs of Ontario

Overview

The Education Sector at the Chiefs of Ontario provides coordination and technical support for the various education and language advisory committees and associated sub-committees to facilitate and inform the work of the Chiefs and Technical Committee on Languages and Learning (CTCLL). The CTCLL is mandated by the Chiefs-in-Assembly to facilitate the discussion, planning, implementation and evaluation of all local, provincial and national matters affecting the First Nations languages and education in Ontario. The CTCLL reports to and receives direction from the Leadership Council and the Chiefs-in-Assembly through the portfolio holders on languages and education.



Education and Languages Highlights:

K-12 Education – Provincial

Guided by the mandates of the Chiefs-in-Assembly via Resolution 23/14S, the First Nations Lifelong Learning Table (FNLLT) facilitates essential collaboration between First Nations, the Ministry of Education (EDU) and key stakeholders to address educational priority objectives. The FNLLT provides advocacy for First Nation students to receive improved, culturally responsive support throughout the provincial school system. In accordance with Resolution 23/14S, the Chiefs-in-Assembly approved a strategic restructuring of the FNLLT to optimize bilateral relations. This reorganization introduced the FNLLT Planning Circle and the FNLLT Collaboration Circle, two distinct engagement tables dedicated to joint work and fostering deeper cooperation between First Nations and the education ministry.

The Planning Circle includes the members of the Chiefs Committee of Languages and Lifelong Learning (CTCLL) and the Ministry of Education’s assistant deputy ministers (ADMs) representing all divisions within the ministry. The Planning Circle meets bi-monthly to identify shared priorities in provincial education, develop collaborative pathways forward and guide the Collaboration Circle.

The Collaboration Circle is comprised of coordinators from each of the provincial territorial-organizations (PTOs), coordinators from the Independent First Nations, Six Nations of the Grand River, Mushkegowuk Council, Ahkwasāhsne Mohawk Board of Education, COO representatives, and representatives from the Ministry of Education. The primary function of the Collaboration

Circle is to engage directly with First Nations, ensuring that regional perspectives and priorities are accurately reflected to inform and shape the broader provincial education strategy.

The FNLLT Planning Circle and Collaboration Circle have made significant progress in the past year, including:

- Chiefs of Ontario successfully secured new funding from the Ministry of Education to implement First Nations-identified priorities within the provincial curriculum review and revision process. To lead this initiative, the FNLLT and COO established a Curriculum Task Team Working Group, which includes representatives from the FNLLT, COO, and First Nations community members selected for their specialized expertise in curriculum development. This working group is currently on track to deliver a comprehensive suite of resources, including a First Nations glossary, a dedicated network of curriculum reviewers, an environmental scan of existing instructional materials and a strategic framework designed to ensure successful First Nations engagement with the province’s curriculum review processes.
- Working in partnership with First Nations, the CTCLL, EDU, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and Indigenous Institutes to explore alternative accelerated pathways to Indigenous language OCT teacher certification.
- Negotiating and securing a new data-sharing agreement with the education ministry for an additional two years, allowing COO to conduct in-depth analysis of First Nations data collected by

Ontario school boards.

- Analyzing the data received through the provincial data-sharing agreement and creating an interactive data dashboard to enable First Nations to analyze aggregated provincial school data on their own.
- Supporting First Nations as they implement Indigenous Services Canada’s 2025 operational bulletin on Jordan’s Principle, facilitating opportunities for First Nations to share challenges for students and families with the Ontario education ministry and advocating for potential short and long-term solutions related to the removal of previous supports for students no longer covered by Jordan’s Principle.
- Participating in various K-12 Ontario curriculum revisions and reviews.
- Participating in the Reciprocal Education Agreement working group to inform recommendations to EDU regarding future policy options or potential legislative amendments related to the agreement.
- Participation in the Education Quality and Accountability Office First Nations Data Stewardship Advisory Committee
- Working with First Nations to analyze and provide feedback to EDU on various emerging policy initiatives, such as:
 - Bill 33, related to implementing a school resource officer program and trustees in publicly funded provincial schools.
 - PPM 161, related to supporting students with prevalent medical conditions in schools.

- Growing success related to EDU’s assessment, evaluation and reporting policy.
- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation 2026, related to developing a guiding document and new comprehensive curriculum resources to be taught annually in provincial schools on Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.
- Conducting a legal analysis on the consequences of the “other pupil” designation under the Ontario Education Act for on-reserve First Nation students attending provincial schools.

The FNLLT is dedicated to improving outcomes for First Nations students by fostering collaborative partnerships and integrating regional perspectives into its strategic initiatives. Future efforts are focused on bridging the achievement gaps that persist within the provincial education system and securing revisions to the 1999 Native Language curriculum to better serve students. In addition to supporting the implementation of Education Agreements, the FNLLT is actively advocating for First Nations students who have experienced a loss of special education supports following the operational changes to Jordan’s Principle.

K-12 Education – Federal

Resolution 23/12A mandates that the Ontario Technical Table on the Interim Funding Approach (OTTIFA) develop recommendations to improve the Interim Funding Approach (IFA), which is the federal funding formula that funds First Nations elementary and secondary education.

In 2025–26, OTTIFA teams were restructured to improve effectiveness as the IFA entered its first year aligned with

the provincial Core Education Funding. The restructuring was an effort to increase ISC’s approval of OTTIFA recommendations for IFA improvements, as ISC has deemed recommendations over the past few years as being outside the scope of provincial comparability. The new OTTIFA teams focus on the following priority areas:

- Examining the effectiveness of proxy school boards;
- Examining special education funding;
- First Nation data collection;
- Examining how provincial responsive education programming is applied in the IFA;
- Examining how provincial school board administration funds are applied; and,
- Reconfiguring the First Nation Education Authorities (FNEAs).



OTTIFA also examined isolate school boards within the provincial system, as their circumstances are potentially comparable to First Nation schools, due to smaller classes and a lack of support from large school boards or nearby schools. COO is working with the Ministry of Education to secure the data for the isolate school boards, which will enable ISC to develop a new IFA model. OTTIFA will assess the merits of the new model once it is developed.

The 2021 Ontario budget’s five-year Adult Education investment supported learners aged 21 and older in areas of secondary education or equivalency completion and upgrading, literacy and basic skills. This investment topped up the per-student funding allocation to be on par with under-21 counterparts in the same program type, as mature students are funded

at a much lower rate in the provincial comparability model. It also provided start-up and expansion funds for communities wanting to start or expand adult education programs. The investment was successful in the Ontario region, supporting 20 new adult programs with seven new schools admitting adult students. In total, 774 additional students enrolled in adult education for a total enrollment of roughly 2,200 (ISC 2024/25 nominal roll data). With the program sunseting in March 2027, COO engaged First Nations to develop the Adult Education Program Delivery and Cost Analysis Report, which demonstrates the need for sustained funding to improve program stability, student access and success. The report was shared with ISC to inform a submission to the Treasury Board of Canada continued investment. COO also held engagement sessions with First Nations in March 2025 and March 2026 to inform the development of the adult education formula.

In 2025-26, COO and the CTCLL supported ISC in its evaluation of the elementary and secondary education program. COO and the CTCLL reviewed and refined the evaluation framework, discussion guides and early emerging themes. The evaluation will wrap up in the new fiscal year.

COO and CTCLL undertook Jordan's Principle advocacy and cross-sectoral work by developing resolutions for the COO ACA and joint meetings to provide information and strategize on advocacy efforts. This work continues with the development of the COO Jordan's Principle Advisory Council.

COO is working with ISC to secure aggregated education data for First Nations in Ontario. This data will support COO, the CTCLL, and PTOs in K-12 education work, as well as provide information to communities.

In December 2025, COO sent a letter to Prime Minister Carney to address the component cuts to the 2025-26 IFA, the impacts of changes to Jordan's Principle to First Nation students, the need for additional special education funding and the need to continue the adult education investment. While there has not yet been a response, the Ontario region did receive an additional \$1.24 million for the 2025-26 special education high-cost, needs-based process.

Ontario Bilateral Education and Learning Table (OBELT)

The Ontario Bilateral Education and Learning Table (OBELT) framework was established in November 2023 via COO Resolution 23/15S with the terms of reference approved by COO Leadership Council in March 2025. OBELT forms a bilateral relationship between COO Chiefs and Technical Committee on Language and Learning (CTCLL) and Indigenous Services Canada's Strategic Planning and Policy Directorate, as COO no longer participates on the AFN national education tables. The bilateral partnership is a mechanism for First Nations in Ontario to have a voice in reforming and developing education funding, policies, processes, programs and services. This supports First Nations in Ontario as they assert their rights, sovereignty and jurisdiction over education and learning that meets their needs.

This past year was OBELT's inaugural year. During this time, COO secured a five-year funding agreement with ISC, providing stability for the table's work and the relationship with ISC. Monthly meetings occurred for discussion that centered on the priority areas outlined in the OBELT five-year strategic plan and connecting

appropriate ISC department personnel with the CTCLL. The six initial priority areas within the strategic plan and the work within OBELT include:

- Governance and advocacy;
- K-12 Education and the Ontario Technical Table Interim Funding Approach (OTTIFA);
- Post-secondary education;
- The Education Partnerships Program;
- Adult education; and,
- Education infrastructure.

In March 2026, CTCLL and ISC held an in-person strategic planning session to develop the workplan for 2026-27. The OBELT priority areas remain the same, with the addition of Jordan's Principle due to recent changes that have impacted the quality and access to education for First Nations students.

Special Education

Supported by the mandate of Resolution 20/16, the Ontario First Nations Special Education Working Group (OFNSEWG) serves as a vital technical advisory body, providing ISC's Ontario Region with critical recommendations for the high-cost special education needs-based process. This process is essential to advocating with First Nations to support learners with complex needs. For the 2025-26 fiscal year, 45 applications were submitted with a total funding demand of roughly \$24.2 million; however, the program had a significant funding shortfall of over \$14.25 million.

To address service gaps, Chiefs of Ontario has prioritized educator capacity building, including a \$60,767

investment in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Geneva Centre for Autism that saw 202 educators enroll in professional development courses focused on supporting autistic students. Another collaboration with Six Nations Polytechnic resulted in 51 teachers completing special education qualification training. These efforts were complemented by special education "lunch and learn" webinars focused on supporting students who are blind, low vision and deafblind. In November 2025, a Special Education Sharing Forum was convened in Toronto to strengthen professional capacity and establish robust networking channels for educators dedicated to First Nations student success.

Post-Secondary Education

Resolution 16/18 mandates the CTCLL to coordinate and facilitate engagement and review the ISC programs that support post-secondary education. This work led to the 2023 Chiefs of Ontario Post-Secondary Education Engagement Report, which includes 41 recommendations to improve outcomes for First Nation learners and was approved by Chiefs-in-Assembly (Resolution 23/11A).

With funding from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU), COO continues implement the report's recommendations. In 2025-26, COO finalized a Post-Secondary Costing Tool to better reflect the true costs of post-secondary education for First Nation learners and administrators. The tool:

- Incorporates direct student costs, including tuition and living expenses.
- Accounts for wrap-around supports, such as childcare, travel, connectivity and food security.

- Includes costs for First Nations and organizations required to support learners to succeed.
- Reflects diverse pathways for post-secondary, including Indigenous Institutes and trade schools.
- Is designed as an evergreen resource, updated regularly to reflect inflation and evolving needs.

This costing tool helps inform proposals for post-secondary regional models, policies and services for First Nations students in Ontario and strengthens advocacy efforts for increased funding for direct and in-direct student supports under the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

Last fiscal was the second year of the funding agreement with MCU and COO worked to support First Nations education transitions by conducting an environmental scan of existing intervention strategies and developing evidence-based resources to support transitions into, through, and beyond post-secondary education. Addressing recommendations from the 2023 Post Secondary Engagement Report, this work was informed by Ontario-wide First Nations engagement and focused on strengthening lifelong learning pathways grounded in student experiences, cultural identity and community leadership. Findings from the Supporting Education Transitions for First Nations Learners in Ontario report highlight innovative, community driven practices and are organized around four research themes: best practices and interventions, resource development, community and regional perspectives, and effective initiatives and strategies. The project will be finalized, with the toolkit being launched in spring 2026.



A key priority in 2025-26 has been strengthening relationships with Indigenous Institutes and the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) to better support First Nation learner pathways and transitions. This work focused on enhancing collaboration and engagement while ensuring Indigenous Institutes are meaningfully included in planning processes, data development and funding advocacy efforts. To increase ONECA's profile, they presented to CTCLL about their initiatives and the ways they support communities.

In February 2026, COO hosted a Post-Secondary Education Forum, bringing together people who support First Nation post-secondary education and learners. The one-day event included sharing information on scholarships and bursaries, innovative post-secondary programming, ISC program updates and engagement on the COO Transitions Project. Participants had positive feedback on the forum and expressed the need for an annual post-secondary focused event.

Languages

The COO Leadership Council mandates the Leadership Committee on Languages (LCOL) to guide all activities that support First Nation languages in Ontario. The LCOL meets bi-monthly to discuss language-related topics, share promising practices and promote language revitalization across communities and language families. Priority areas established by the LCOL include supporting and promoting immersion programs, strengthening the federal Indigenous Languages Act and creating a provincial stand-alone language organization to support language revitalization in Ontario.

LCOL is involved in the work led by the First Nation Lifelong Learning Table, working with the Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers to increase the number of First Nation Languages teachers, particularly within provincial schools. The goal is to create an accelerated pathway for First Nations language teachers certification so they can teach in provincial schools and receive compensation commensurate with their expertise and knowledge.

In March 2026, COO began work with the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages to support their language adequacy research project. COO is working with its consultants to host an Ontario region engagement session in May 2026. COO is also supporting the AFN's into data available to implement the First Nations funding formula for Canadian Heritage's Indigenous Languages Component program. The LCOL will complete surveys and identify the appropriate people to ensure that the Ontario region is represented in the AFN research project. The research is scheduled finish in December 2026.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

In the upcoming year, the Education Sector will:

- Implement the deliverables in the Ministry of Education Curriculum TPA.
- Participate in the independent review of the Indigenous Languages Act under the guidance of the LCOL.
- Collaboratively develop a framework and path forward for alternative accelerated pathways for the certification of First Nation Languages teachers.

- Publish two First Nation post-secondary tools: the COO Post-Secondary Costing Model and the COO Education Transitions for First Nations Learners in Ontario Toolkit.
- Develop an updated education agreement template to streamline and support First Nations in formalizing their own local agreements with provincial school boards as needed.
- Coordinate and implement a large education and languages forum that incorporates special education for 300 participants in Thunder Bay.
- Advocate for increased funding and the renewal of the Adult Education Program, the Post Secondary Student Support Program and the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program.
- Develop a draft interim funding approach model based on the provincial isolate school boards that OTTIFA will analyze.
- Publish two interactive data dashboards that allow First Nations to analyze aggregated provincial school data and aggregated First Nation Education data from Indigenous Services Canada in areas such as K-12 on-territory education, adult education and post-secondary education.



Environment Sector

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Ryan Bowie, Associate Director of Environment
Lillian Trapper, Environment Manager
Sylvia Plain, Policy Analyst
Abraham Francis, Policy Analyst

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Chiefs Committee on Environment

Chief Leela Thomas, Walpole Island First Nation
 Chief Veronica Smith, Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation
 Chief Allan Odawa Jr., Red Rock First Nation
 Chief Alana Endanawas, Sheshegwaning First Nation
 Chief R. Don Maracle, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte
 Chief Todd Cornelius, Oneida Nation of the Thames
 Chief Rodney Nahwegabow, White Fish River First Nation
 Chief Wilfred King, Gull Bay First Nation
 Chief Janelle Nahmabin, Aamjiwnaang First Nation
 Ogimaa-Kwe Margaret Sault, Mississaugas of Credit First Nation

Technical Committee on Environment

Lyndia Jones, Independent First Nations
 Jamie Restoule, Anishinabek Nation
 Suzanne Nicholas, Association of Iroquois & Allied Indians
 Monica Konrad, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
 Debra Jonathan, Six Nations of the Grand River
 Michael King, Grand Council Treaty #3

Additional Technicians/Committees

Advisory Committee on Climate Action and Environment, Assembly of First Nations

First Nations Nature Table, Assembly of First Nations
 Joint Committee on Climate Action, Assembly of First Nations
 Regional Water Coordinators, Assembly of First Nations
 Regional Climate Change Coordinators, Assembly of First Nations

Overview

First Nations are intertwined with mother earth, and we recognize our place within creation and give thanks for this sacred connection to the land, water, air and biodiversity. The Environment Sector's advances the environmental outcomes that stem from this relationship with the land. We look to the Chiefs-in-Assembly to help us prioritize our work with resolutions, which provide the guiding mandates to address through our activities.

Environment Sector Highlights

First Nations Clean Water Act (Bill C-61)

Bill C-61 died on the order paper after Parliament was prorogued in January 2025. Indigenous Services Minister Mandy Gull-Masty's most recent correspondence on March 9, 2026, stated the intention to introduce this legislation this spring, as announced by Prime Minister Mark Carney. The situation remains critical: 40 long-term drinking water advisories persist nationally, with seven new advisories added in Ontario this year alone. This lack of progress not only violates Canada's obligations under the 2021 class action settlement but also signals a failure to uphold Treaty rights and fiduciary responsibilities.

Impact Assessment Agency of Canada's Spotlight Series highlighted Ontario First Nations Environment Assessment Toolkit, (2nd Edition)



Assessment Agency of Canada as part of its "Spotlight Series" on October 9, 2025. The presentation focused on the Ontario First Nations Environmental Assessment Toolkit, (2nd edition), First Nations-led assessments and the challenges the Building Canada Act poses. The Environment Sector held several workshops to showcase the toolkit. The toolkit is hosted online on the Environment Sector website: <https://environment.chiefs-of-ontario.org/toolkits/environmental-assessment/>

First Nations Great Lakes Gathering: Water is Life

On October 21 and 22, 2025, the sector hosted a First Nations Great Lakes Gathering in Niagara Falls. This location was chosen for its connection to the 2008 Chiefs of Ontario Water Declaration.

The gathering brought together diverse voices, grounded in Traditional Knowledge, to define a path forward towards transformative change. "Water is Life" is a call to action that embodies our collective resilience and resistance as First Nations People. We carry an inherited responsibility to the water, to all of creation, and future generations. Together, united in ceremony, we can protect water and ensure future generations have clean water.



(GLFEI) Inaugural First Nation Gathering and 9th Annual First Nations Meeting with Executive Committee of the Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) on Great Lakes Water Quality & Ecosystem Health Meeting

The GLFEI gathering and COA Meeting occurred over two days, July 8-9, 2025, in the Mohawk Community Centre in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. The purpose was to advance First Nations’ leadership in freshwater protection through the GLFEI and COA. The meetings were attended by First Nations Leadership and representatives of the Canada Water Agency and Ontario’s Ministry for Environment, Conservation, and Parks. Central themes included Great Lakes ecosystem protection, impacts of climate change, jurisdictional complexity, underfunded infrastructure and the necessity of First Nations rights and knowledge in water governance.

10th Annual First Nations Meeting with the

Executive Committee of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Meeting

The COA Meeting occurred over two days, February 18-19, 2026, in the Ojibway community of Garden River First Nation near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. There were updates on COA progress and presentations. A major aspect of the meeting was to discuss First Nations concerns over the COA and the renewal process for the next agreement. The current COA ends this year and it still in force until the new agreement is reached. The Clean Water Agency and Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks presented the timeline of their proposed engagement strategy. Bill C-61 was affirmed and the role of First Nations voices will be reflected in the next COA.

Great Lakes Webinar Series

September 15, 2025: Great Lakes restoration and protection with Indigenous Guardians. Members of the Indigenous Guardians program in Chippewa of the Thames First Nation presented about the protection and restoration work they are doing in their community.

On November 24, 2025: Britney Bourdages, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne environmental project coordinator gave an overview of their projects related to areas of



concern named in the remedial action plan. Bourdages also shared work involving the use and application of eDNA in their research, surveys and monitoring activities.

February 2, 2026: Jeff Berthelette, community liaison specialist, Anishinabek/Ontario Fisheries Resource Centre; and Abraham Francis, senior policy analyst, Chiefs of Ontario Environment Sector, shared their experiences in working with data within the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

March 9, 2026: Zachary Smith, associate director, Chiefs of Ontario Research and Data Management Sector, explored the challenges, opportunities and best practices surrounding First Nations data ownership, control, access and possession.

Climate Action

The Environment Sector participated in the Assembly of First Nations’s Advisory Committee on Climate Action and Environment. As per COO Resolution #24/35S, the Chiefs Committee on Environment and the Environment Sector reviewed and provided input to a position paper presented at COP30, the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Brazil in November 2025.

You can see the position paper here: https://afn.bynder.com/m/7cbd22ce74b68c7b/original/COP30_Position_Paper_ENG.pdf

<https://afn.ca/environment/national-climate-strategy/>

The AFN held a workshop on its national climate action plan to further identify First Nations priorities and to develop a climate action toolkit for First Nations. More information about this is on the AFN website: <https://afn.ca/environment/national-climate-strategy/>

The Joint Committee on Climate Action provides a forum to advocate for First Nations on climate issues and actions with various federal government departments. The committee held its 25th meeting in March 2025 where the draft 2025 annual report was discussed. Several topics were covered, including: climate adaptation and emergency management, red tape reduction, the Major Projects Office, the clean electricity strategy, the critical mineral strategy, the federal government’s approach to consultation and climate mitigation priorities. See link for more information: <https://afn.ca/environment/environmental-protection-climate-action/joint-committee-on-climate-action/>

First Nations Nature Table

The Environment Sector attended a national conservation gathering hosted by the AFN in October 2025. Attendees shared information, networked and uplifted First Nation rights and responsibilities on conservation.

Environment and Climate Change Canada held its last First Nations Nature Table meeting in January 2026. At the meeting, the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan, species at risk and Indigenous engagement were discussed. Funding for nature renewal was also



discussed but federal representatives did not have any information on potential funding. AFN notified COO that the First Nations Nature Table sunset on March 31, 2026 with discontinued funding from the federal government.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

In the year ahead, the Environment Sector will:

- Participate in the 4th annual AFN Climate Gathering, to be held in Hamilton, Ontario.
- Facilitate First Nations input into the new Canada Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality



and Ecosystem Health

- Host the 2nd Annual Water Gathering in September 2026.
- Host Quarterly Lake wide Action and Management Plan Webinars

Health Sector

Tobi Mitchell, Director

Zachariah General, Associate Director
Linda Ogilvie, Public Health Officer
Frances Pine, Special Projects Officer
Sacha Bragg, Opioid Research Communications and Project Liaison
Alexxis Kydd, Policy Analyst
Megan Logan, Policy Analyst
Chelsea Toulouse, Policy Analyst
Charnele Sondezi, Senior Coordinator
Emily King, NIHB and Jordan's Principle Liaison
Brenda Owl, NIHB Navigator
Jennifer Shisheesh, NIHB Navigator
Tasha Toulouse, NIHB Navigator
Trudy Maness, NIHB Navigator
Natasha Saddleback, Coordinator

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Deputy Grand Chief Natasha Martin, Mushkegowuk Council
 Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
 Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Chiefs Committee on Health:

Chief R. Don Maracle, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte
 Northern Superior Regional Chief Melvin Hardy, Anishinabek Nation
 Chief Sherri Taylor, Ginoogaming First Nation
 Councillor Carole Greene, Six Nations of the Grand River

Health Coordination Unit:

Suzanne Nicholas, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
 Jamie Restoule, Anishinabek Nation
 Laura Stasiuk, Grand Council Treaty #3
 Lyndia Jones, Independent First Nations
 Ken Miller, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Bryan Herechuk, Six Nations of the Grand River

Opioid Research Steering Committee:

Emily King, Chiefs of Ontario
 Roseanne Sutherland, Chiefs of Ontario
 Suzanne Nicholas, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
 Katie Pine, Anishinabek Nation
 Tiffany Clifford, Grand Council Treaty #3
 Sarah Whorpole, Grand Council Treaty #3
 Sherry Copenace, Kenora Chiefs Advisor
 Yvonne Corbiere, Independent First Nations
 Crystal Burning, Six Nations of the Grand River
 Hanna Sewell, Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council

Circle of Live Experience Advisory Committee:

Amy Assinewai
 Ashley Smoke
 Audra Stonefish
 Cheryl Peltier
 Eileen Boissoneau
 Kimberley Pahpeguish
 Mandy Richards
 Rachel Blanchard
 Rachel Montour
 Roseann Marble
 John Laforme
 Johnny Moore

Ontario First Nations HIV Education Circle:

Lyndia Jones, Independent First Nations
 Shawnelle Blackbird-Riley, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Taylor Bluhm, Six Nations of the Grand River
 Laura Liberty, Anishinabek Nations
 Erin Pennanen, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Rene Bouchard, First Nations Person Living with HIV/AIDS

Ontario NIHB Table:

May Toulouse, Anishinabek Nation
 Teala Nadjiwon, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
 Laura Stasiuk, Grand Council Treaty #3
 Yvonne Corbiere, IFN
 Narene Barkman, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
 Abigail Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River

Jordans Principle Working Group:

Christian Hebert, Anishinabek Nation
 Marina Plain, Anishinabek Nation
 Suzanne Nicholas, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
 Autumn Windigo, Grand Council Treaty #3
 Kuylin Jackson, Independent First Nations
 Leanne Shimoda, Independent First Nations
 Kurtis Martin, Six Nations of the Grand River
 Samantha Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River

External Committees and Working Groups:

AFN Mental Wellness Committee
 Registered Nurses Association of Ontario Committee
 First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Implementation Team

Overview

The Ontario Chiefs Committee on Health (OCCOH) and the Health Coordination Unit (HCU) govern the Health Sector at Chiefs of Ontario (COO). The HCU is a technical and advisory body that provides options to Chiefs committee. The Health Sector's mandate is to protect and maintain First Nations' rights and jurisdiction over the well-being of our communities and to secure

resources for Leadership. The Health Sector provides coordination and technical support to the HCU and OCCOH.

Health Sector Highlights:

Opioid Research Project

COO, in partnership with the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network and ICES, continues to lead a First Nations-driven research initiative addressing the opioid crisis.

This work supports local decision-making, programs, and advocacy by providing timely, culturally grounded data and community-specific reports to First Nations. Findings are shared through presentations, community meetings, Leadership forums and through communications channels to ensure they are accessible and relevant.

Mental Health and Addictions

The Health Sector included continued to raise awareness, share knowledge and advance First Nations perspectives and priorities around mental health and substance use throughout the year. It did so by participating in key forums, gatherings, committees and working groups; and contributing to funding proposals, policy position papers, resolutions and briefing notes for Leadership. The mental health and addictions file lead maintained a presence at key forums and gatherings supporting First Nations voices and priorities around mental health and substance use in various settings and discussions.

Presentations, Conferences and Meetings in 2025-26:

- First Nations Health Managers Association

13th Annual National Conference: Understanding Opioid Use and the Toxic Drug Crisis Among First Nations in Ontario: Effective Supports and Strategies for First Nations Health Management

- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse Issues of Substance Conference: Understanding Opioid Use Among First Nations in Ontario
- Anishinabek Nation's 3rd Annual Mental Health, Addiction and Opioid Conference: Understanding Opioid Use Among First Nations in Ontario
- Independent First Nations: Planning for Community Health Emergencies: Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access Treatment in First Nations
- COO Annual Health Forum: Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- RNAO Mental Health and Substance Use Summit: Indigenous Mental Health Panel

- COO Community Wellness Forum: Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- Maamwi Gka-Wiiji Nokiimdimi Webinar: Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- IFN Health Directors Meeting: Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- AFN Mental Wellness Committee Annual In-Person Meeting
- First Nations Health Managers Association Annual Conference: Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- Anishinabek Nation Mental Health and Opioid Summit - Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario



- IFN Health Emergency Management Conference - Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs Mental Health and Homelessness Roundtable: Understanding Opioid Use, Related Harms and Access to Treatment Among First Nations Across Ontario
- Thunderbird Partnership Foundation National Mental Wellness Summit
- First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Implementation Team Annual In-Person Meeting Long Term and Continuing Care

Long Term and Continuing Care

First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada are currently working to develop a distinctions-based Long-Term Continuing Care Framework. This includes reforming the First Nations Inuit Home and Community Care and Assisted Living program.



Engagement with First Nations began in 2019 but post-engagement activities were stalled in late winter 2025. There are now opportunities to restart the process.

Assembly of First Nations Home and Community Care of Practice (CoP)

The primary purpose of the CoP is to strengthen First Nations-led home and community care by fostering connections, learning and advocacy among those working on the ground. It will serve as a national network for peer exchange, policy dialogue and capacity building. The group's scope includes knowledge sharing, systems navigation, advocacy support and the co-creation of tools and strategies that can be locally adapted.

Ontario First Nations HIV Education Circle

In 2025-26, Chiefs of Ontario transitioned into the contribution agreement holder for the Ontario First Nations HIV Education Circle, which was established in 1996 to advocate for and support First Nations people living with HIV/AIDS. The circle provides awareness and education through various activities involving engagement with First Nations youth and people living with HIV.

Public Health and Emergency Management

The COO public health advisor actively participates on the national communicable disease preventable working group with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Public Health Agency of Canada. These diseases include COVID, RSV, tuberculosis, influenza, measles, sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections and other blood-borne infections. The



public health advisor works to strengthen relationships with the federal and provincial governments as well as local public health agencies to improve public health for First Nations. The advisor also informs Leadership and technicians through communiques and newsletters related to public health issues. The public health advisor leads work on the newly established Public Health Information Sharing Working Group, which is made up of representatives from First Nations and the Ministry of Health. The advisor works closely with staff from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Ontario to strengthen relationships with the coroner's office and First Nations, with the goal of achieving equitable access to care. Lastly, the public health advisor attends Ministry of Health Sector meetings that prioritize evacuations in First Nations and attends weekly emergency evacuation calls organized by Emergency Management Ontario when an emergency has been declared in any First Nation in Ontario.

Health Human Resources Toolkit

This year marked the conclusion of the human health resources toolkit project. Four sector booklets and a project overview booklet with the raw survey data that

was obtained throughout the project were mailed all First Nations in Ontario. The toolkit's web portal was launched at the 2026 Health Forum; in keeping with OCAP principles, each First Nation will have two password holders access toolkit's data and resources. Toolkit and web portal training was done over three sessions at the 2026 Health Forum. These in-person trainings were complimented by two virtual sessions in March 2026; a pre-recorded training session will also be emailed to each First Nations designated password holders along with their credentials. Web portal updates will be shared when needed.

Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Navigators

NIHB navigators supported First Nations and their citizens navigating the NIHB program by working with federal government partners, service providers and other groups throughout 2025-26.

NIHB navigators worked on the following initiatives throughout the year:

- Identifying NIHB provider and client access issues in all benefit areas.
- Working with regional NIHB representatives to address operational issues experienced by First Nations members trying to access benefits.
- On-going participation with the AFN's national navigators network.
- Presenting to First Nations and health-care providers on the NIHB program and its benefit areas.
- Developing guides to simplify NIHB information for First Nations.

Ontario NIHB Table

As mandated by Resolution 21/25, Non-Insured Health Benefits Program Improvement, Health has been actively working on establishing and coordinating an Ontario NIHB table. In January 2026, the Health Sector coordinated a meeting between Scott Doidge, NIHB director general at ISC, and the Ontario Chiefs Committee on Health to discuss the importance of an Ontario-specific NIHB table. Chiefs committee members stressed that there must be significant changes to the NIHB program so that it meets the needs of First Nation citizens and improves individual health outcomes. During this meeting, increased access to critical services and products and the medical transportation benefit were highlighted as significant priorities. Health is planning more meetings on the medical transportation benefit, with the intention of improving operations in the Ontario region and addressing policy gaps. Health also intends to present draft terms of reference for the Ontario NIHB table to the Ontario Chiefs of Committee Health for review in spring 2026.

Health Sector staff also attended the AFN Joint Review Steering Committee meeting in October 2025 to provide recommendations for improving the joint-review process and advance First Nations' NIHB priorities. The recommendations provided were welcomed by the steering committee and Health is currently waiting to see if and how AFN and ISC incorporate these recommendations in the joint review process. If the recommendations are implemented, Health will update the Ontario Chiefs Committee on Health and will table a discussion to determine if COO will rejoin the joint-review process.

Jordan's Principle

Health remains active on the Jordan's Principle file and

has been collaborating with the Social and Education sectors to advocating for the reversal of the February 2025 Operational Bulletin which introduced several changes to the program and the services and products it covers. To support this advocacy, Ontario First Nations Leadership meet with ISC Minister Gull-Masty to discuss the bulletin and establish a collaborative partnership to improve Jordan's Principle in Ontario. Unfortunately, Minister Gull-Masty did not commit to a collaborative partnership nor the removal of the bulletin. COO continues to advocate for Jordan's Principle improvements and the reversal of bulletin which has negatively impacted First Nation families.

Health, Social and Education are currently working to establish a new Jordan's Principle advisory committee and seeking a First Nations-led process for Jordan's Principle reforms in Ontario.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

In the year ahead, the Health Sector plans to accomplish:

- Advance the mental health and substance use mapping project to identify service availability, gaps and regional mental health and substance use treatment needs
- Support the development of Resolution 25/24S: First Nations Strategy to Address the Drug Toxicity Crisis
- Advance priorities identified in Resolution 24/33S: Establishing a National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) Steering Committee
- Raise awareness on mental health and substance use issues affecting First Nations, including opioid

and toxic-drug education, and the best practices to building community capacity, reducing stigma and promoting prevention and harm reduction.

- Rebrand the Ontario First Nations HIV Education Circle by designing a new logo and increasing related communications.
- Organize an Ontario First Nations HIV Education Circle peer-education training session geared towards youth in November 2026.
- Host the 20th Annual Health Forum.
- Identify opportunities to assist First Nations concerned about dog overpopulation and the spread of rabies.
- Continue to support First Nations in developing pandemic and emergency plans through emergency management calls
- Host two NIHB navigator training sessions.
- Expand work on Opioids by conducting a comparative study on Opioid Agonist Therapy.
- Continue to share the findings of the Opioid Research Project at conferences and other forums.



Housing & Infrastructure Sector

Sam Abtahi, Director of Housing & Infrastructure

Rachel Arseneault, Senior Policy Analyst for Housing & Infrastructure

Ashley Thum, Junior Policy Analyst for Housing & Infrastructure

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder

Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Chiefs Committee on Housing & Infrastructure (CCOHI)

Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Mathew Hoppe, Anishinabek Nation

Todd Lewis, Anishinabek Nation

Mary Zoccole, Anishinabek Nation

Chief R. Don Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Charlie Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Amsey Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Frank French, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Sydney Lockwood, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Chief Vince Thompson, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Chief April Adams, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Chief Joann Swamp, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Charmaine Caldwell, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Jonathan Gregg, Independent First Nations

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Chief Duncan Michano Jr., Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Debi Boucher, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Michael McKay, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Erin Mellor, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Lauren King, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Daniel Michano, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Krystyn Ordyniec, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Councilor Helen Miller, Six Nations

Grand Chief Francis Kavanaugh, Grand Council Treaty #3

Deputy Grand Chief Cheyenne Vandermeer, Grand Council Treaty #3

Gary Allen, Grand Council Treaty #3

Hailey Krolyk, Grand Council Treaty #3

Chaston Mandamin, Grand Council Treaty #3

Glen Goodman, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation

Nathan Hill, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation

Drew Hill, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation

Jessica Lee, Ontario First Nations Young People's Council

Heidi Whetung, Woman's Initiatives Advisor / 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+

Technical Committee on Housing & Infrastructure

Mathew Hoppe, Anishinabek

Jamie Koistinen, Anishinabek Nation

Frank French, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Michael McKay, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Lauren King, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Gary Allen, Grand Council Treaty #3

Hailey Krolyk, Grand Council Treaty #3

Charmaine Caldwell, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Glen Goodman, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation

Nathan Hill, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation

First Nations Off-Reserve Housing and Homelessness Data Sovereignty Working Group

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Frank French, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Hailey Krolyk, Grand Council Treaty #3

Lauren King, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Jamie Koistinen, Anishinabek Nation

Overview

In August 2025, the Chiefs of Ontario Housing & Infrastructure Sector separated from the Policy and Communications Sector to become a dedicated sector to address the growing housing and infrastructure priorities.

Building on the previous work, the new sector leads work on an array of mandates, including the options under the Urban, Rural and Northern Housing Strategy, First Nations off-reserve housing data governance and data sovereignty as well as standing mandates and directions from the Chiefs Committee on Housing & Infrastructure.

Chiefs Committee on Housing & Infrastructure

The Chiefs Committee on Housing & Infrastructure (CCOHI) is chaired by Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige. CCOHI met seven times between July 2025 and February 2026.

This included a joint meeting with the Environment sector during the 2025 fall assembly. The Housing & Infrastructure Sector, under the guidance of the CCOHI, conducted an extensive review of existing mandates and priorities and convened two multisector strategy sessions in February 2026.

A landscape document was drafted during the February strategy sessions, incorporating overlapping mandates between Policy & Communications and the COO political office.

This landscape document was created with CCOHI engagement and input and will assist the Housing & Infrastructure Sector track current mandates and

identify future mandates.

Urban, Rural and Northern Housing Strategy: First Nations-Specific Allocations

In 2023, Canada advanced the Urban, Rural and Northern (URN) Indigenous Housing Strategy following Indigenous-led engagements. Canada announced distinctions-based allocations under the strategy in 2024.

COO hosted five engagement session in 2024 to collect feedback from Chiefs and technicians and hired Indigenous & Community Engagement (ICE) as the consultant to draft options for Leadership's consideration which were presented to First Nation Leadership at the 2024 Fall Chiefs Assembly. Through engagement and Chief's deliberations, it was determined that meaningful progress could only be achieved through a collective First Nations approach and for COO to bring the final options to the next assembly.

ICE and the Housing & Infrastructure Sector finalized the options, researching the feasibility of a dedicated First Nation off-Reserve housing centre (FNOHC) and developing a business plan to support the establishment and incorporation of the housing centre. The final options and the business plan were presented to First Nation Leadership at 2025 fall assembly. During the assembly, Chiefs-in-Assembly mandated the Housing & Infrastructure Sector to work towards establishing and incorporating the housing centre. This mandate included establishing criteria for the centre's project.

In January 2026, Housing & Infrastructure hired legal counsel to work with the sector on incorporating the

FNOHC and to provide legal guidance to the board on bylaws and next steps. The Housing & Infrastructure Sector also hired consultants in March 2026 to support the FNOHC's board of directors and COO Housing & Infrastructure. The FNOHC was incorporated in April 2026.

First Nations Housing & Homelessness Data Governance

Resolution 23/20A enhanced the mandates of COO and CCOHI to research and gather data on off-reserve First Nations housing and homelessness. As part of the First Nation Off-Reserve Housing and Homelessness Data Governance and Data Sovereignty project, Chiefs of Ontario signed letters of agreement with regional bodies to hire First Nations off-reserve housing and homelessness data sovereignty leads to serve on the First Nations Off-Reserve Housing and Homelessness Data Sovereignty Working Group.

The Housing & Infrastructure Sector began working with expert proponents to conduct legal research and collect data on off-reserve housing and homelessness. This included analyzing off-reserve population and core housing needs, creating a severity index for off-reserve homelessness and researching shovel-ready projects to address off-reserve housing priorities. The legal team will assess and research current data access and collection in conjunction with privacy laws and compliance with OCAP® principles as it relates to First Nation off-reserve housing and homelessness. This initiative will culminate in data sharing agreements that will be negotiated with authorities across the province with the support of the working group.

Justice Sector

Jackie Lombardi, Director of Justice

Sam Restoule, Policy Advisor

Michael Mommersteeg, Senior Policy Analyst

Makenzie Chan, Policy Analyst

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Heritage & Burials Portfolio Holder

Deputy Grand Council Chief Chris Plain, Anishinabek Nation



Chiefs Committee on Justice

Chief Rodney Nahwegahbow, Anishinabek Nation

Crystal Head Stevens, Anishinabek Nation

Chief Laurie Carr, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Sara Monture, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Chief Lynn Indian, Grand Council Treaty #3

Chief Janice Henderson, Grand Council Treaty #3

Beverly Williamson, Grand Council Treaty #3

Chief Wilfred King, Gull Bay First Nation

Randall Kahgee, Independent First Nations

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Chief Tesha Rourke, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Chief Lisa Francis-Benedict, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Cactus Sunday, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Deputy Grand Chief Mike Metatawabin, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Ursula Rodrique, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Virginia Sutherland, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Leidy Cano, Six Nations of the Grand River

Tim Bucci, Six Nations of the Grand River

Additional Technicians/Committees

Kee:Way (Heritage and Burials) Committee

Donna Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Miptoon (Councillor Anthony Chegahno), Independent First Nations

Niigaanibines (Elder Don Jones), Grand Council Treaty #3

Kevin Restoule, Anishinabek Nation

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Deputy Grand Chief Mike Metatawabin, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Virginia Sutherland, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Ursula Rodrique, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Luke Hunter, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Lonny Bomberry, Six Nations of the Grand River

Tanya Hill-Montour, Six Nations of the Grand River

Hanna Sewell, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Technical Committee on Rights Assertions

Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Teme-Augma Anishinabek

Chief Nikki van Oirschot, Caldwell First Nation

Chief Greg Sarazin, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation

Chief R. Don Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Chief Larry Roque, Wahnapiatae First Nation

Chief Duncan Michano, Pic River First Nation

Chief Wilfred King, Gull Bay First Nation

Lake Huron Regional Chief Scott McLeod, Anishinabek Nation

Barney Batise, Knowledge Keeper, Nishawbe Aski Nation

Luke Hunter, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Jason Laronde, Anishinabek Nation

Sara Monture, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Dan Morrissette, Grand Council Treaty #3

Lucas King, Grand Council Treaty #3

Sara Mainville, Grand Council Treaty #3

Cactus Cook-Sunday, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Clairissa McGrath, Six Nations of the Grand River

Sam Manitowabi, Robinson-Huron Waawiindamaagewin

Barret Dokis, Robinson-Huron Waawiindamaagewin

Jason Batise, Wabun Tribal Council

Debwewin Enkiitmajig Working Group on Indian Residential Schools and Related Institutions

Donna Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Kelsey Anger, Anishinabek Nation

Rhea Assinewe, Sagamok First Nation

Hillary Trudeau, Nisoonag Project

Debbie Richter, Munsee Delaware Nation

Raquel Hilliker, Munsee Delaware Nation

Darryl Boissoneau, APS

Lawrence P. Jeffries, Moose Cree First Nation

Catherine Cheechoo, Moose Cree First Nation

Gregory King, Beausoleil First Nation

Alexandra Syrette, Batchewana First Nation

Nathan DeGagne, Grand Council Treaty #3

Bobbie Loyie, Grand Council Treaty #3

Crystal Chiblow, Mississauga First Nation

Brandon Graham, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation

Janalee Jodouin, Wiikwogaming Project

Henrik Akerlund, Wiikwogaming Project

Autumn Bolvin, Wiikwogaming Project

Luke Hunter, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Tanya Forneri, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Trina Abitong, Nisoonag Partnership

Arnold Pelly, Grassy Narrows First Nation

Angela Mose, Agency One First Nation

Stacey Jack, Agency One First Nation

Overview

The Justice Sector's responsibilities are to coordinate the technical and political positions of First Nations Leadership on justice issues impacting First Nations in Ontario. The sector is deeply committed to building, maintaining and strengthening relationships and trust with First Nations and First Nations organizations as it work to fulfill our mandates, while growing and sustaining its operations.

Leading priorities for the Justice Sector throughout 2025-26 included addressing the lack of enforcement and prosecution of First Nations laws; advocating for enhanced community safety and equitable First Nations policing; advancing First Nations rights and jurisdiction in Ontario; supporting improved consultations and engagement processes; raising awareness of heritage and burials issues; Indian Residential Schools; and providing updates on the implementation of the United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA). The Justice Sector also monitors and responds to emerging legal and policy issues as they arise.

As part of its operations, the Justice Sector coordinates three committees and a working group. The Chiefs and Technicians Committee on Justice supports First Nations and regional organizations addressing and advancing First Nations justice and jurisdiction. It provides technical and political advice and recommendations and strategies to the Ontario Regional Chief, Leadership Council and Chiefs-in-Assembly on all matters related to First Nations justice issues.

The Kee:Way (Heritage & Burials) Committee is deeply committed to advancing its priorities and mandates to protect sacred and burial sites by supporting the respectful repatriation of Ancestors currently in the care of the Government of Ontario and other institutions and advocating for policy and legislative reform.

The Technical Committee on Rights Assertions began its operations in July 2022, as directed by Resolution 22/25A, and has been resolutely focused on developing and implementing multi-faceted advocacy strategies to ensure First Nations rights and territories are protected and respected across Ontario.



The Debwewin Enkiitmajig Working Group on Indian Residential Schools and Related Institutions is the newest addition to the Justice Sector. It is a group of regional representatives dedicated to advancing initiatives related to this sacred work, guiding and collaborating with the sector to ensure it fulfills its mandates in a good way.

Justice Sector Highlights:

Policing & Community Safety

Enforcement and Prosecution of First Nations Laws

In May 2024, and in accordance with COO Resolution 23/17S, Chiefs of Ontario commenced legal action against the Canada and Ontario over the discriminatory lack of enforcement and prosecution of First Nations laws. This year, we received statements of defence from both levels of government and provided timely updates to Leadership on the status of this litigation. We are trying resolve the issues with Canada and Ontario collaboratively while gathering and exchanging evidence in the case.

The Justice Sector schedules meetings to advance the mandates of the Tripartite Collaborative Technical Table on the Enforcement and Prosecution of First Nations Laws. The Justice Portfolio Holder and deputy ministers from the ministries of the Attorney General, Solicitor General and Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation have committed to collaborative discussion over a series of regular meetings, beginning in November 2025. The Justice Sector also co-hosted a regional symposium in February 2026 with the Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario and the Ontario Provincial Police Indigenous Policing Bureau to discuss the enforcement of First Nations laws and the Community Safety and Policing Act.

The First Nations Prosecution Pilot, a co-funded initiative by Canada and Ontario in response to COO Resolution 21/37, has been extended until March 2027. This pilot supports interested First Nations in retaining private lawyers to prosecute their laws. The Justice Sector is pushing for the pilot to be made permanent, improved, and expanded, and for the federal and provincial governments to take immediate steps to make Crown prosecutors available if requested by a First Nation.

Provincial Policing

Provincial policing remains a major focus for the Justice Sector. This includes advocating that enforcing First Nations laws as a legislated and mandatory police function, coordinating the collective priorities of First Nations policed under the Ontario First Nations Policing Agreement (OFNPA) and supporting policing issues experienced by First Nations across the region.

In addition to providing ongoing support for agreement negotiations and other collective issues for the 17 OFNPA-policed communities, Justice hosted several meetings with Chiefs and delegates, including in Ottawa in December 2025 and at Casino Rama in January 2026. Discussions focused on implementing recommendations identified in the mental health review of OFNPA officers and strategizing for the upcoming year.

Federal Policing Initiatives

The Justice Sector received an expanded mandate to increase advocacy for First Nations policing to be designated as an essential service and amendments to the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. In collaboration with legal counsel and COO's Government Relations Unit, Justice hosted various political and technical and a lobby day in October 2025 in Ottawa. This lobby day was supported by representatives from IPCO and First Nations Leadership and technicians from across the region. The Justice Sector also supported Ontario Regional Chief's testimony at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on this topic. As this file has moved between branches and personnel within Public Safety Canada, we have also been focused on providing briefings on our mandates and the policing priorities within the region to ensure this work remains an important issue for the federal government.

Consultation and Engagement Standards

The Justice Sector is mandated via Resolution 21/39 to develop potential solutions to the substandard consultation and accommodation practices of Canada

and Ontario, ensuring they are consistent with First Nations laws and Treaties, and require First Nations consent.

Over this fiscal, the Justice Sector has drafted resources to support First Nations engagement with government and industry proponents, such as template letters and protocols. We are currently reviewing ten draft resources to be finalized and distributed to Leadership.

Important conversations on how best to meet these mandates were also held over the year with the Chiefs Committee on Justice and Leadership Council. The committee discussed developing a solutions model, including toolkits and an information-sharing network, to respond to the widespread capacity constraints of communities, and further discussions were held with provincial-territorial organizations for regional feedback. Funding has been secured from the Government of Canada for this work and to retain legal and academic experts to support our approach.

Our sector continues to support First Nations as requested on consultation and engagement issues.

Heritage and Burials

Kee:Way Committee

This fiscal year, the Kee:Way Committee was focused on advocating for policy and legislative reform and providing guidance and technical advice on several repatriation initiatives in the Ontario region and beyond.

The Return of Ancestors Initiative with the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism and Archaeologist Brandy George continues to move

forward with the first group of Ancestors on track to be respectfully repatriated by the end of 2026. The ministry began contacting First Nations in November 2026 regarding the second group of Ancestors to be repatriated and discussions will be ongoing into 2026-27. Kee:Way and the Justice Sector continue to provide technical support and guidance as requested.

Kee:Way continued to meet with the Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) and Ontario Forensic Pathology Service (OFPS) to provide guidance on another ongoing repatriation initiative to help ensure that the Ancestors currently in the care of the OCC and OFPS are returned to the appropriate descendent First Nations. That process is expected to continue into 2026-27.

The Justice Sector supported Kee:Way's advocacy by establishing new relationships with institutions such as the Royal Ontario Museum, the University of Michigan NAGPRA Office and the Department of Canadian Heritage. The sector also coordinated a session on First Nations land-use planning at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario Annual Conference in Ottawa. Kee:Way has also been analyzing and responding to the many legal and policy changes that guide the protection of heritage in Ontario, including changes to the Ontario Heritage Act through Bill 5 and Ontario's launch of the multi-year Heritage Framework Transformation.

Indian Residential Schools

As mandated by resolutions 24/10A and 25/08A, the Justice Sector has been focused on working collaboratively with the Debwewin Enkiitmajig Working Group to advance this sacred work in a good way. To ensure a focused and strategic approach, we have

worked together to organize our priorities into four central pillars:

1. Supporting the implementation of the Final Report by the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor (OSI).
2. Strengthening the protection and governance of records.
3. Reforming funding systems.
4. Addressing and combating Indian Residential School denialism.

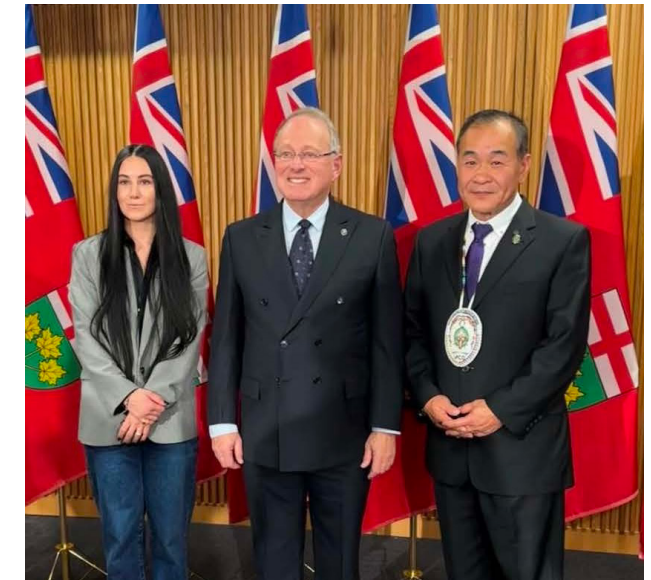
In February 2026, the working group, in collaboration with Anishinabek Nation, hosted a provincial in-person gathering in Mississauga. This gathering provided an important opportunity to assess progress, strengthen collaboration and develop a coordinated strategy to advance our mandates and the four pillars. It also served as a catalyst for continued advocacy efforts, including lobby days in Ottawa in April 2026 to engage government officials directly to ensure that IRS remains a priority.

Throughout the year, the Justice Sector also coordinated virtual meetings and ongoing communication with the working group. This has supported information sharing and has been critical in maintaining momentum to ensure continued progress on our mandates. Alongside policy and advocacy efforts, the Justice Sector has prioritized public education and awareness, launching a month-long social media campaign in September 2025 in collaboration with Kimberly Murray to raise awareness about the obligations of the OSI's Final Report and to mark the first-year anniversary of the report's release. This brought attention to the protection and

preservation of records and their importance in truth-telling and accountability.

In November 2025 at the Fall Chiefs Assembly, COO recognized Kimberly Murray for her important contributions as the former Special Interlocutor and her work supporting First Nations, Survivors and their families on their healing journeys. Her care and diligence to ensure the Final Report on Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites was done in a respectful way was acknowledged.

Additionally, the Justice Sector has been working diligently to advance Bill C-9: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code. This includes proposed amendments aimed at criminalizing Indian Residential School denialism, which is a growing and harmful issue that retraumatizes Survivors. It is a critical legal and political priority and the Justice Sector continues to advocate for legislative change.



Rights Assertions

Together with the Technical Committee on Rights Assertions, the Justice Sector advances its multi-faceted advocacy strategy opposing Métis rights assertions in First Nations Ancestral and Treaty territories, as mandated by dozens of resolutions. This included the launch of the second version of the Métis Rights Assertions Toolkit and an accompanying talking points package; analyzing and responding to records received through freedom-of-information and access-to-information requests; analyzing and responding to provincial and federal funding received by Indigenous organizations; launching the “Myth and Fact campaign” that received over 380,000 views across all social media platforms; and participation in the Chiefs of Ontario panel at the 2026 Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada (PAC) convention in Toronto. We are also focused on monitoring and responding to legal and legislative developments as they emerge.

The Technical Committee on Rights Assertions will continue to give the Justice Sector direction on this advocacy strategy to ensure First Nations rights and territories are recognized and respected.



First Nations Citizenship

Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 23/25S: Advancing First Nations Jurisdiction Over Citizenship in Response to Bill S-2 at the 2025 Fall Chiefs Assembly. This resolution mandates COO to advocate for amendments to the section 10 voting threshold, advocate for Canada to recognize First Nations' full authority over who is registered under federal law and for funding frameworks to adequately reflect the work needed to maintain band lists and membership laws.

In response to this resolution, the Justice Sector has initiated communication with the federal government detailing our mandate and the need to work with First Nations rights-holders to eliminate the section 10 voting double-majority threshold and to implement a framework for First Nations inherent jurisdiction over their citizenship. We are also supporting efforts for Ontario Regional Chief to appear before INAN on the study of Bill S-2 as we develop the strategic plan to implement these mandates.

United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA)

The Justice Sector supported interested First Nation Leadership and technicians as Canada continued implementing the United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA) action plan. Over the year, various materials were shared informing Leadership on the process of UNDA implementation. In addition, Justice hosted three virtual dialogue sessions on various topics related to the Act, including a session on the *Kebaowek v. CNL* court case, a session on the fourth annual progress report's publication and a session on the drafting process of

the fifth annual progress report. These sessions were accompanied by various legal and policy analysis and memos, along with presentations from legal counsel and the UNDA Implementation Secretariat.

Justice receives regular bilateral updates and information from the federal government to support information sharing with Leadership and to ensure First Nations are regularly updated on priorities and measures impacting their rights and interests and have the opportunity to provide feedback if interested.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

In the year ahead, the Justice Sector plans to accomplish:

In the year ahead, the Justice Sector will:

- Monitor the enforcement and prosecution litigation while advancing the collaborative table's tripartite work and the policing enhancement initiatives of the federal government.
- Support the implementation of the recommendations from the OFNPA Mental Health Review.
- Develop further resources, capacity supports, and networks to improve substandard consultation and engagement practices to better reflect the standards and expectations of First Nations.
- Maintain momentum on policy and legislative reform in the heritage and burials space and provide technical support to First Nations during

the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism's Heritage Framework Transformation.

- Expand relationships with all levels of governments, museums and other institutions to increase repatriation capacity for First Nations in the Ontario region.

- Support First Nations' healing journeys as we engage all levels of government to advance the four Indian Residential School priority pillars.

- Implement the ongoing advocacy strategy to support First Nations as they assert their inherent and Treaty rights over their Ancestral and Treaty territories.

- Advance advocacy aligned with our mandates related to First Nations' jurisdiction over their citizenship.
- Facilitate information sharing on the implementation progress of the UNDA action plan and provide ongoing support to interested First Nations.



Policy and Communications Sector

Chris Hoyos, Director of Policy and Communications
Hayley Lucas, Government Relations & Policy Manager
Isak Vaillancourt, Communications Manager
Declan Keogh, Strategic Advocacy Manager
Chris Beaver, Senior Media Advocacy Specialist
Kallie Diabo, Communications Officer
Charlotte Croft, Communications Officer
Tyler Gary, Communications Officer
Payton Mitchell, Jr. Policy Analyst
Kaitlin King, Mitacs Intern
Pavneet Kaur, Mitacs Intern

Overview

The Policy and Communications Sector supports a wide variety of initiatives, including policy, communications and government relations. The sector improves internal and external communications, streamlines policy and procedures, develops processes for intersectoral collaboration and ensures transparency and accountability to Ontario First Nations Leadership. Policy and Communications provides quality assurance and technical support on all internal and external communications and informational products. This includes designing and circulating high quality reports, videos, digital campaigns, graphics, newsletters, position papers, letters, briefings and policy statements.

This sector also coordinates with the Chief Operating Officer, Political Office, Leadership Council, and other sectors to plan and implement Chiefs of Ontario events such as Chiefs assemblies, workshops, strategy sessions and engagement sessions. The sector also provides

support and recommendations to the Chiefs of Ontario Secretariat and the Ontario Regional Chief's office on relationship building with First Nations, political-territorial organizations (PTOs), federal and provincial ministries and non-governmental organizations. The sector also acts as a liaison between the federal and provincial governments and First Nations in Ontario. In addition to its core responsibilities, the Policy and Communications Sector manages several priority files including mining, bills 5 and C-5, and emergency management.

Mining

In November 2023, Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 23/30S, Mining Encroachment in First Nations Traditional Homelands and Territories, which directed COO to review and assess possible legal mechanisms to address the lack of consultation with First Nations in the mining sector. This resolution also directed COO to coordinate a technical review and feasibility study focused on the legal mechanisms used in similar cases to the issue of the Mining Lands Administrative System (MLAS) online claim-staking tool and First Nations in Ontario. As the mining file requires oversight from various sectors, Policy and Communications was selected to manage the file, with additional support from Environment and Economic Development.

COO Policy and Communications established a Technical Working Group on Mining consisting of technicians from each PTO and unaffiliated and independent First Nations. The group meets monthly to discuss mining activities impacting lands and infringing on Aboriginal, inherent and Treaty rights. The invitation remains open to any

interested First Nation technician who wishes to join (interested parties may contact Jey Pakeerathan at Jey.Pakeerathan@coo.org).

In June 2024, COO presented a proposal to the Ministry of Mines asking that they increase the overall amount of funding that is annually allocated to the Aboriginal Participation Fund (now known as the Indigenous Participation Fund, or IPF) to at least \$30 million annually, while ensuring a distinctions-based approach to funding. Budget 2025 included an additional \$70 million to the IPF over four years. A meeting was held in January 2026 between ORC Benedict; Chief Shelley Moore-Frappier, Leadership Council mining portfolio holder; and the Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines, to discuss a funding proposal from Policy and Communications to obtain resources to hold a First Nations mining conference in early 2027. COO is awaiting for an answer from province on this proposal.

COO continues to monitor legislation and policy proposals—largely from the provincial government—where mining interests may be of particular interest and where First Nations' inherent and Treaty rights may be affected.



Emergency Management

Policy and Communications oversees the emergency management file and is actively working with ISC and the Ministry of Emergency Preparedness and Response (EMPR) on shifting from a bilateral agreement between Canada and Ontario to a multilateral framework approach including First Nations in emergency management. COO assists in planning and conducting meetings at the technical and Leadership levels to further this file. The current bilateral agreement is set to expire in March 2028, so completing this work is a priority. COO will continue to work with colleagues at both ISC and EMPR and will provide support to PTOs, independent First Nations, Leadership and technicians as needed.

Policy and Communications' director and junior analyst also support the AFN Chiefs Committee on Emergency Management and related technical committees and ensure regional Leadership are properly informed, providing recommendations as necessary, including on upcoming national engagement on the national risk profile.

Intergovernmental Affairs

Maintaining the Federal and Provincial Relationship

Policy and Communications is responsible for building relationships and networks with all levels of government and maintaining our ongoing relationship with Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation (IAFNER). This work includes tracking priority issues for the Chiefs of Ontario Secretariat; ensuring ongoing communication between the COO

directors and IAFNER staff; following up on priority issues brought forward by Ontario First Nations Leadership; and arranging meetings between First Nations and IAFNER representatives as requested. The sector also works to ensure information is shared to all internal and external partners in a timely manner so Chiefs of Ontario communications are effective.

Leadership Advocacy Strategy

In fall 2022, Policy and Communications developed a new Leadership Advocacy Strategy to create a more results-oriented advocacy process with the Ontario government on key priorities as identified by the Leadership Council. The Leadership Advocacy Strategy is an all-of-government approach, designed to strengthen the relationship between First Nations and the Provincial Crown by ensuring ongoing and focused discussions with Premier Doug Ford and Minister Greg Rickford, as well as relevant cabinet ministers when agenda items fall within their policy areas.

The Leadership Advocacy Strategy is currently postponed due to the spring 2025 provincial election and the number of legislative changes in response to threats from the United States. The Policy and Communications Sector is currently working with the Political Office and IAFNER to schedule the next Leadership Advocacy Strategy and are working with sector directors and the Ontario Regional Chief to finalize priorities and agenda items for a date to be confirmed in spring/summer 2026.

Pre-Budget Submissions

This year, COO composed both provincial and federal pre-budget submissions prior to budget announcements.

These submissions included key priorities from all sectors and included concise, actionable requests with financial figures. Policy and Communications will monitor provincial and federal budget announcements for 2026, cross-referencing our requests, and will compile a government relations and communications plan to further advocate for these asks to government.

Bill 5 and Bill C-5

The Chiefs of Ontario's Policy and Communications Sector has undertaken government relations and communications plans in response to Ontario's Bill 5, Protecting Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act; and Canada's Bill C-5, One Canadian Economy Act. These ongoing efforts have been executed to meet the mandates of the Leadership Council and the Chiefs-in-Assembly.



Bill 5

Alongside communications initiatives, the Government Relations Unit has forged alliances with like-minded organizations and groups such as Environmental Defense, Democracy Watch, the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO), and the New Democratic Party of Ontario (NDP) to bolster messaging.

Correspondence raising concerns with Bill 5 and the way it was passed were sent to Premier Ford, Minister Lecce, Minister Rickford and Minister McGregor. ADM-level technical meetings also took place with representatives from the ministries of Indigenous affairs, culture, environment and mines to gain clarity on aspects of the legislation and the regulations as they were drafted.

Regional Chief Benedict took part in the Standing Committee on the Interior to provide remarks and participated in question period to speak in opposition to Bill 5 in May 2025. This committee appearance was followed by an NDP-sponsored press conference at Queen's Park. The following week, on June 2, 2025, COO co-hosted a rally against Bill 5 at Queen's Park, where hundreds of First Nations leaders, community members and allies from across the region gathered in opposition to Bill 5, citing it as a direct threat to the lands, jurisdiction and sovereignty of First Nations. The rally was planned and led by Robinson Huron Waawiindamaagewin and was undertaken in partnership with COO, Anishinabek Nation, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Grand Council Treaty #3 and Independent First Nations.

After Bill 5 was passed in June 2025, COO has continued to carry out Resolution 25/11A and Resolution 25/12A by

monitoring and raising concerns regarding IAFNER and MCM's regulatory amendments. Detailed analyses on the proposed regulations were completed by COO for both the Special Economic Zones Act and the Ontario Heritage Act. COO has also been in contact with Ontario's Auditor General after receiving a legal opinion on Bill 5 and will continue to host discussions with their office on how we may best assist in requesting a special audit be undertaken.

Bill C-5

Bill C-5, One Canadian Economy Act, had its first reading on June 6, 2025, and received Royal Assent on June 26, 2025, and includes an Act to enact the Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act and the Building Canada Act.

After Bill C-5 was introduced, COO sent correspondence to Prime Minister Carney urging the Government of Canada to strengthen its commitment to engaging and consulting with First Nations on national-interest projects, particularly those involving infrastructure, energy and economic development that may impact First Nations territories.

COO also quickly mobilized and planned a rally in response to Bill C-5 at Parliament Hill in Ottawa on June 17, 2025. Following the rally, a press event with the NDP Members of Parliament was held inside Parliament. A formal opposition letter to Bill C-5 was sent on July 8, 2025, as directed by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. Prime Minister Carney also hosted a meeting between himself, his cabinet and First Nations in Gatineau, Que., on July 17, 2025. COO prepared speaking notes and key messaging

documents for all regional Leadership to refer to when attending.

Policy and Communications, with the assistance of the Justice, Economic Development and Environment sectors, continues to monitor so-called projects of national importance at the technical level that are announced under Bill C-5. As projects are announced, speaking points, key messaging, leave behinds and meetings with government officials are secured in conjunction with the Political Office's priorities.

Also in response to the resolutions passed by the Chiefs-in-Assembly rejecting both Bill 5 and C-5, a think tank on First Nations governance was created. The think tank is composed of First Nations lawyers and governance experts selected by the Leadership Council and assists with creating responses to the government that may better position First Nations to react to Bill 5 and C-5, and other future similar legislative announcements. The think tank met in November 2025, and produced three main recommendations for Leadership Council's consideration:

1. Develop and support First Nation-led consent-based frameworks and/or toolkits
2. Establish a First Nations law and regulatory standards registry
3. Strengthen advocacy structures and build a coordinated communications strategy

A draft report was brought to Leadership Council which included all discussion items and recommendations that the think tank put forward. COO will continue to push this file forward in the 2026-27 fiscal year.

Legislative Monitoring

The Policy and Communications Sector is beginning to explore best practices and mechanisms for compiling a monthly legislative monitoring and analysis report to be shared with COO staff, Leadership and technicians.

This year, Policy and Communications explored using Unveil Everything, an artificial intelligence tool, to assist in scraping government and media sources to document all new laws, regulations and government-related announcements or initiatives. Policy and Communications is now drafting best practices, internal guidelines and processes for compiling, monitoring and conveying this information and any concerns to Leadership on a monthly basis.

Communications

Media Relations and Statements

Policy and Communications advances the Chiefs of Ontario's internal and external communications, strengthening public awareness of issues important to First Nations Leadership. This includes drafting and issuing statements on priority issues and maintaining strong relationships with regional, provincial and national media.

The sector leads media engagement efforts to increase visibility of First Nations priorities from the Chiefs-in-Assembly. Activities include preparing press releases, organizing press conferences, coordinating radio and television interviews and supporting media outreach. The team also serves as the primary point of contact for media inquiries and participates in internal and external meetings to ensure key updates are accurate and

published in a timely manner.

The sector also coordinates joint statements and collaborative communications with PTOs, the governments of Ontario and Canada, and First Nations.

Campaign Development

The Policy and Communications Sector support all COO sectors by developing strategic communication plans that closely align with strategic advocacy and government relations plans and are also aligned with mandates from the Chiefs-in-Assembly. These plans are designed for high-priority initiatives and include key messages, media kits, press materials, social media strategies and coordinated outreach efforts to inform communities and influence decisionmakers.

Key campaigns this year focused on advocacy related to the First Nations child and family services reform in Ontario, reforming the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement, opioid use and treatment access among First Nations in Ontario, Independent Special Interlocutor Report obligations, Ontario Métis rights assertions, the First Nations Business Directory, and more.

Policy and Communications also develops tailored communication strategies for COO sectors. These strategies outline objectives, target audiences, messaging and tactics. They often include initiatives that encourage public engagement, such as petitions, contacting elected officials, attending, events and participating in letter-writing campaigns.

Website Management

The Policy and Communications Sector maintains

all Chiefs of Ontario websites, including the main website, Chiefs Meeting and the Education, Health, and Environment portals. These sites are regularly updated with news, sources, events and advocacy materials to keep Leadership and communities informed.

Social Media and Digital Strategy

The sector manages a growing digital presence across Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and BlueSky, reaching a combined audience of over 53,000 [HL1.1]followers. Through these platforms, the sector engages First Nations Leadership, partners, government representatives and the public. Content includes infographics, event promotions, news updates, photos and videos.

Product Development

The Policy and Communications Sector ensures that all communication products align with organizational priorities, messaging and brand standards. The team develops and oversees a wide range of materials, including newsletters, reports, advertisements, templates, videos and photography.

In addition, the team is responsible for the Advocate, the official magazine of the Chiefs of Ontario that is published twice a year. The Advocate is an important medium for communicating key priorities and emerging issues. The magazine features informative articles on economic development, educational opportunities, environmental and suitability initiatives health and social services, justice and advocacy, and youth programming. The publication aims to support First Nations in reaching a broader audience by sharing

narrative-driven community news and stories with readers across Ontario and beyond.

Strategic Advocacy Unit

The Strategic Advocacy Unit is the newest unit within Policy and Communications. The unit meets with each sector to discuss their annual workplans and priorities to find alignment with other projects and sectors.

A primary purpose of the unit is to help the Chiefs of Ontario and First Nations Leadership drive narratives, rather than respond to them. By driving the narrative on a given issue or file, rather than reacting to one, it gives the organization and Leadership more power and autonomy when dealing with governments, industry, or other relevant parties. Being in control means being informed. Being informed means having more tools at your disposal to achieve a particular goal.

A secondary purpose of the unit is to conduct in-depth research to elevate Chiefs of Ontario’s responses to the mandates it is given by Chiefs-in-Assembly and Leadership Council. By having a dedicated research team that can respond both to mandates and situations as they emerge helps the Chiefs of Ontario Secretariat and First Nations Leadership approach a given issue or situation from a more-informed place.

A third purpose of the unit is to foster strong, meaningful relationships with groups that can assist the Chiefs of Ontario and First Nations Leadership in their goals. These groups include academic institutions, journalists, civil society, advocates, and others. Bringing together diverse groups when needed helps Chiefs of Ontario leverage resources and knowledge that it may

not have access to internally. It also better acquaints these groups—which may not have much exposure or experience with First Nations—to First Nations and First Nations organizations. This serves both long- and short-term purposes. In the short-term, it can help First Nations better respond to issues that arise or bring needed expertise to various projects. In the long-term, it will bring more people in positions of relative power “on side” with First Nations. These relationships will strengthen over months and years and, ideally, build a coalition of partners who will be willing to take up the mantle with, and for, First Nations causes.

A fourth and interconnected purpose of the unit is to bring under-reported issues and stories to the fore. These can be serious issues geared towards accountability, such as land claims, rights assertions, policing, water, etc. They can also be more light-hearted issues that elevate First Nations’ cultures, ways of thinking and day-to-day lives. The idea behind this is to put more First Nations stories in front of more people.

This year was the first for the Strategic Advocacy Unit, which was formed in April 2025. In the first 12 months, the unit went from one full-time employee to two full-time employees and two full-time interns. The unit worked on several projects throughout the year, including:

COO 50th Anniversary Documentary: “We Had No Choice”

The Strategic Advocacy Unit was responsible for overseeing the documentary project commemorating COO’s 50th anniversary. This work included, but was not limited to, booking and conducting interviews, liaising with the documentary’s director, and keeping senior

COO staff informed of progress. We Had No Choice will premiere for Leadership at the June Annual Chiefs Assembly in the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

Opioids

The Strategic Advocacy Unit, in collaboration with all units within Policy and Communications, worked with the Health Sector to promote the release of the latest report looking at opioid-related harms for First Nations. The unit worked with external journalists to ensure maximum visibility and impact. The project was published in fall 2025 and led to several high-level meetings with senior bureaucrats and politicians.

Ad hoc requests and emergency issues

The Strategic Advocacy Unit worked on several smaller research projects throughout the year. While not an exhaustive list, these include:

- In-depth Bill 5 and C-5 research utilizing dozens of freedom-of-information requests
- In-depth research on the Métis Nation of Ontario utilizing public records and freedom-of-information requests
- Filing approximately one dozen legal arguments against provincial and federal ministries for withholding information

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

The Policy and Communications Sector will:

- Draft and undertake unit-specific work plans and goals that will assist in shifting advocacy from reactive to proactive, and that are aligned with each

other’s activities and outcomes.

- Continue to work directly with and support the Technical Working Group on Mining and draft political, communications and legal strategies related to the mining sector.
- Host the upcoming Annual Chiefs Assembly in Rama First Nation in June 2026 and the Fall Chiefs Assembly in Toronto in November 2026.
- Support COO sectors, acting as a liaison for information sharing, networking, meetings and supporting pressing and time sensitive matters.
- Continue to trial the AI tool for legislative monitoring and begin drafting mock legislative reports for feedback before producing a final product.
- Expand the existing provincial Leadership Advocacy Strategy and explore how this process can be replicated at the federal level.
- Coordinate and set meetings between various government officials such as senators and ministers, and COO sectors and First Nations Leadership as needed.
- Seek resources to begin exploring a pilot project, alongside IAFNER and the Ministry of Energy and Mines, to track consultations and engagements with First Nations on a public platform for all projects announced under Ontario’s 1P1P process.
- Respond to emergency issues as needed and/or identified by Leadership Council, PTOs, sector directors and/or the political office.

- Expand and strengthen media relations, public awareness, and communication efforts to elevate First Nations priorities through campaigns, media outreach, public engagement, and collaborative messaging with First Nations and PTOs.
- Enhance digital communications by updating COO websites, portals, and online resources, expanding social media initiatives, and increasing accessible access to timely information
- Complete collaborative project with NAN looking at airport infrastructure gaps and how they impact First Nations.
- Finalize and premiere the Chiefs of Ontario 50th anniversary.
- Conduct research on land sales in the north in collaboration with York University researchers. The research will focus on the rate of conversions to agricultural land, who owns the land, and how it impacts First Nations lands and rights.
- Continue to work on issues related to access-to-information legislation and how it impacts First Nations.
- Conduct and publish video and advocacy campaigns responding directly to several ongoing resolutions



Research and Data Management Sector

Carmen R. Jones, Director of Research and Data Management

Zachary Smith, Associate Director

Kahla Campbell, Associate Director

Sally Hare, Executive Assistant

Dr. Pamela Johnson, Senior Research and Policy Advisor

Roseanne Sutherland, Senior Lead

Cindy Owl, Surveys Lead

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Kayla Cardy, Research Analyst

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Rolanda Elijah, OCAP® Development Officer

Cal Stewart, Research and Policy Analyst

Emily Harding, Senior Coordinator

Marcel Benegas, Coordinator

Owen Thompson, Communications Relations Officer

Shannon Stone, Northwest Area Lead

Crystal Gionette, North Central Area Lead

Cohen Richardson, Remote Northwest Area Lead

Gaius Wesley, Remote Northeast Area Lead

Tess James, Central Area Lead

Cody Thomas, Southwest Area Lead

Tamara Maracle, Southeast Area Lead



Leadership Council Portfolio Holder

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN)

Overview

The Research and Data Management (RDM) Sector protects and advances First Nations' inherent right to self-determination and jurisdiction in research and data management and supports the well-being of First Nations through various research and data management initiatives.

The RDM sector is pleased to share some highlights of our progress in asserting First Nations data sovereignty; strengthening and expanding capacity in First Nations research and data management; and fostering a collective approach to research and data management within the Chiefs of Ontario Secretariat. We are also pleased to provide some highlights of work planned for 2026.

Research and Data Management Sector Highlights:

First Nation Data Table (FNDDT)

In June 2023 RDM submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation (IAFNER) and obtained support and funding to create a First Nations Data Table (FNDDT). The purpose of the FNDDT is to advance First Nations data sovereignty through First Nations data governance in the provincial data system and to develop a set of shared recommendations that enable a whole of government approach to First Nations data governance in the province's data systems.

In 2024, a solid foundation for this work was built including: endorsements of the FNDDT from First Nations Leadership and the Premier of Ontario; a memorandum of mutual understanding between COO and IAFNER; the establishment of FNDDT's membership with First Nations Leadership and provincial assistant deputy ministers; and the inaugural meeting of the FNDDT.

The RDM Data Strategy and Support Team supported FNDDT processes and activities including workshop development and facilitation. The first FNDDT workshop was developed and delivered to First Nations FNDDT members in January 2025. The second workshop was also to be delivered in January 2025 but was cancelled because of the upcoming provincial election. The Government of Ontario entered election/transition planning and no further meetings were held.

The project has not been formally cancelled by the provincial government; however, the FNDDT project has

been paused due to funding uncertainty. The plan going forward is to seek clarity on the provincial government's commitment to the project. If no funding is received for the project, it will be considered terminated due to a lack of funds. The Chiefs of Ontario is developing a strategy to follow up on the commitment of the provincial government on the First Nation Data Table.

FNDDT Committee Members

Elder Vera Pawis-Tabobondung, Wasauksing First Nation

Carmen R. Jones, Chiefs of Ontario

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN)

Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Temagami First Nation

Chief Laurie Carr, Hiawatha First Nation

Chief Adam Pawis, Shawanaga First Nation

Chief Mary Duckworth, Caldwell First Nation

Gary Allen, Grand Council Treaty #3

Sujitha Ratnasingham, ICES

First Nations Data Governance Strategy / Regional Information Governance Centre (RIGC) Project

Since 2020, RDM has been working with the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) on a national strategy, customized to meet regional priorities, needs and schedules, to advance First Nations data sovereignty. The strategy is rooted in community driven and Nation-based collaborative approaches and will chart the path necessary to further advance First Nations' self-determination.

A key activity in the strategy is to establish a First Nations Information Governance Centre in Ontario that

will serve the data needs of communities and Nations. It is a multi-phase project extending over several years. COO is the host organization for the development of the centre. For more information, please see <https://fnigc.ca/what-we-do/first-nations-data-governance-strategy/>.

In 2021 RDM assembled a First Nations Data Champion Advisory Committee (DCAC) to guide the development of the RIGC. In 2023, under the guidance of DCAC, RDM implemented several components of the strategy (Phase 1) including, but not limited to, developing a regional action plan, hiring a team to implement the action plan and facilitating discussions with DCAC members.

In 2024, the implementation team began developing a communications strategy to raise awareness of the project and lay the foundation for future collaboration with First Nations. The result was a coordinated, province-wide radio campaign, with ads in several First Nations languages; an informational video that outlines the key objectives of the RIGC project; and pamphlets and posters that were shared at events such as the ISC Joint Gathering, the 2024 Fall Chiefs Assembly, and the COO Health Forum.

During 2025-26 the implementation team recruited, onboarded and trained area leads to facilitate communication about the First Nations Regional Information Governance Centre project. The area leads are tasked with strengthening regional relationships while identifying community priorities, data needs and gaps. This approach ensures that project development is directly guided by First Nations voices, perspectives and input.

The area leads dedicate their time to go to First Nations to facilitate focus group sessions with Chief and Council as well as individuals who work with data. Following these sessions the area lead collaborates with the First Nation to finalize a report that will inform the regional final report.

The RIGC Project team has attended various Chiefs meetings not only with the Chiefs of Ontario, but also the Anishinabek Nation, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Mushkegowuk Tribal Council, Matawa Tribal Council, Nookiwin Tribal Council, Pwi-Di-Goo-Zing Ne-Yaa-Zhing Advisory Services, and Anishinaabeg of Kabapikotawangag Resource Council (AKRC). These sessions included presentations to Leadership, and/or information booths.

Data Champions Advisory Committee (DCAC) Members

Elder Vera Pawis-Tabobondung, Wasauksing First Nation

Chief Shelly Moore-Frappier, Teme Augama Anishinabek (Temagami First Nation), Chair

Larry Sault, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Gary Allen, Grand Council Treaty #3

Dr. Darrel Manitowabi, Northern Ontario School of Medicine

Dr. Emily Faries, Moose Cree First Nation

Dr. Christopher Mushquash, Lakehead University

Dr. Jennifer Walker, McMaster University

Cheyenne Sego, Sagamok Anishnawbek

First Nation Information Governance Centre

(FNIGC)

The RDM Associate Director sits on the FNIGC Board of Directors to represent the region and collaborate on initiatives with both regional and national relevance. As partners, the RDM Sector works closely with FNIGC on the implementation of the Regional Health Survey (RHS) and is now developing and implementing the Regional Social Survey (RSS). RDM also partners with FNIGC in the implementation of the First Nations Data Governance Strategy in Ontario. <https://fnigc.ca/about-fnigc/>

COO-ICES Interim Model

RDM continues to build out its interim model to First Nations data governance in Ontario. In 2023, a new 10-year data governance agreement was established with ICES, and additional First Nations data sets were transferred to ICES. This included data from RHS I, II and III, the First Nations Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey; and the First Nations Labour and Employment Development Survey, all of which are now under the protection of the COO-ICES Data Governance Agreement. Work continues to finalize a data-access protocol and an updated Indian Registry System file from Indigenous Services Canada was recently secured after a lengthy approval process.

First Nations Data Governance Committee – Lessons Learned Report

The First Nations Data Governance Committee provides the Chiefs of Ontario, Health Coordination Unit (HCU) and the Chiefs Committee on Health (CCOH) advice and recommendations on collecting, utilizing and handling requests for First Nation data in regional research and

surveillance projects. The FNDGC is a non-political technical body comprised of individuals with expertise in community-based health research that meets twice a year to review research proposals to ensure that they are OCAP® compliant and advance existing First Nations health research priorities. In 2025, a report was commissioned by RDM to examine current practices and provide recommendations on how to improve First Nations data sovereignty principles in Ontario. Currently, RDM is preparing a paper that will develop an interim approach for reviewing project proposals while the sector evaluates the report and examines new approaches to First Nations data management in Ontario.

OCAP® Education and Training

RDM is working towards a regionally focused OCAP® education and training program. This program will work to realize the aspirations, principles and priorities related to First Nations data sovereignty that have been articulated by communities, advanced by leadership and advocated by First Nations organizations in Ontario.

During the 2025-26 fiscal year, RDM advanced its regional strategy to strengthen First Nations capacity in Ontario by hiring a full-time OCAP® Development Officer, Rolanda Elijah. In the months that followed, project management principles and foundational documents were created to turn high-level data sovereignty goals into structured, actionable items with clear timelines, roles and deliverables. Early consultation with the RDM team and the Data Champions Advisory Committee has provided valuable feedback, with additional input

anticipated in 2026.

This work is focused bringing OCAP® principles into key sectors, including child wellbeing, education, health and band membership, while supporting a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach. COO's supplementary program is designed to complement on national OCAP® training offered by the First Nations Information Governance Centre, with a soft launch planned for fall 2026.

Relationship Building and Partnerships

RDM has developed strategic relationships to advance First Nations research interests and data management in Ontario. These include relationships with Indigenous Services Canada, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Coroner's Office of Ontario, the First Nations Information Governance Centre and ICES.

RDM also maintains ongoing research relationships with the University of Toronto, McMaster University, ICES' Indigenous Portfolio Team, University Health Network, Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, Dalla Lana School of Public Health's Population Health Analytics Laboratory, the University of Toronto's algorithmic bias in Canada project, and the National Collaborating Centre for Infectious Diseases, who partners on the Voices of Sovereignty podcast.

First Nation Regional Surveys

Regional Health Survey IV (RHS IV)

RDM, in partnership with FNIGC, completed data collection for the fourth Regional Health Survey in

June 2025. There were 22 participating communities at a collection rate of 58 per cent, an increase from the previous rate of 41 per cent. The surveys team is waiting for the data sets from FNIGC, who is working with partners to analyze the data. Once complete, there a report and the data will be transferred to ICES.



Regional Social Survey (RSS)

RDM, in partnership with FNIGC, reviewed research questions with an advisory committee and has submitted Ontario-specific questions related to this survey. Questions regarding early childhood, housing and employment were included. To promote the RSS, RDM has been at Chiefs assemblies and the wellness health conferences. The survey is anticipated to launch in late fall 2026.

COVID-19 First Nations Modelling Project

The COVID-19 modelling project was developed to support pandemic planning in First Nations. The project team consists of representatives from the Chiefs of Ontario and is supported by our academic partners at the University of Toronto and McMaster University. Work on the project has centered on training First Nations health directors on how to use the COVID-19 model,

and how it can support community health planning. In 2025, the project team held its final in-person learning session. In 2026, the project team will hold one more virtual session, focused on health directors from remote regions and will develop two papers (and academic and methods paper) which will summarize the engagements held with First Nations in Ontario.

Voices of Sovereignty Podcast

In 2024, RDM partnered with the National Collaborating Centre for Infectious Diseases to establish the Voices of Sovereignty podcast. Through engaging discussions, expert interviews and real-life examples, the podcast explored the challenges, opportunities and best practices surrounding First Nations data. Season one of the podcast finished in 2026 and had 11 episodes. Planning and storyboarding for season two will begin in 2026.

Intergenerational Impacts of Diabetes among First Nations Mothers and their Children

RDM is a co-investigator on a three-year study examining the intergenerational impacts of diabetes among First Nation mothers and children in Ontario. The project has developed a report that will be released in 2026.

Education and First Nations Languages Landscape Scan

RDM completed an environmental scan of the status of First Nations education and language data in Ontario. The scan looks to identify what education data is gathered on First Nations students in Ontario, who holds the data and how it is governed. Assessing the barriers and opportunities to advance OCAP® in the education

sector is also a priority. Once the report is finalized, it will be published on the RDM website.

Research and Data Management Within COO

COO Data Protection Policy

The Data Protection Policy provides guidance on how to safely and securely protect data at the Chiefs of Ontario. The policy includes information on the roles and responsibilities of Chiefs of Ontario staff; data assessment and classification; and procedural steps for data access, storage, retention, backup and transfer. The content of the policy is designed to reflect the input provided by directors and other key staff in interviews conducted by RDM in 2023. Those interviews outlined each sector's data management needs and concerns and called for clarity on how to safely and securely protect data. In 2025, a draft of the policy was developed and a review committee was established to study the document and consider its implementation. The policy will be presented for review and approval in 2026.

Chiefs Committee on Research and Data Management

In 2025, RDM drafted a terms of reference to establish a Chiefs Committee on Research and Data Management. The RDM Chiefs Committee will provide political and strategic oversight of RDM initiatives, offer guidance to ensure initiatives align with First Nations priorities and mandates, and provide recommendations and strategies to Leadership Council on matters related to First Nations research, information management, and data governance.

Currently, the draft terms of reference is under review and is expected to be approved in 2026.

Research and Data Management - Mandates

The mandate for RDM's activities comes from the resolutions issued by Chiefs-in-Assembly. These include:

- AOCC Resolution 06/47 – First Nations and Public Health;
- AOCC Resolution 09/33 – First Nation Cancer Surveillance;
- PC Motion – First Nations Health Information System with Priority in Cancer Surveillance;
- AOCC Resolution 14/08 – Amendment – First Nations and Public Health;
- AOCC Resolution 14/09 – First Nations Data Governance Models;
- AOCC Resolution 16/15 – First Nations Access to Data;
- AFN Resolution 21/2015 – Support for Continued Investment of First Nations Data and Information Governance;
- AFN Resolution 57/2016 Regional First Nations Information Government Centres;
- AOCC Resolution 17/18 – First Nations Data Governance;
- AOCC Resolution 21/27 First Nation Data Champion Team Advisory Committee;
- AOCC Resolution 23/24S Child Welfare First Nations Data Governance;

- AOCC Resolution 23/18S – First Nations Data Table.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

In the year ahead, the RDM Sector plans to:

Assert First Nations Data Sovereignty

- Advance OCAP® and First Nations data sovereignty through existing and new relationships with First Nations Leadership, communities, researchers and institutions.
- Develop new relationships that advance First Nations research and data interests. For example, connecting with the Coroner's Office of Ontario to create linkages to the Death Information System and align the Death Information System data with OCAP®.
- Formally establish the Chiefs Committee on Research and Data Management to provide political advocacy and advise on issues related to governance, sovereignty and the implementation of OCAP®.
- Continued development of an RDM research navigation program.

Build Capacity

- Support COO sectors through the development of research and data management policies, processes and procedures.
- Support First Nations by developing and sharing information and tools that strengthen and expand community skills and knowledge in research and

data.

- Analyze the findings and recommendations of the First Nations Data Governance Committee's report improving First Nations data sovereignty principles in Ontario and initiate discussions on how these principles should be applied.
- Continue developing the OCAP® education and training program and piloting it to COO staff.
- Host new training sessions for health directors on the COVID-19 Modelling Project
- Hosted RDM's second Powering Up Data Sovereignty conference in May 2026.

Continue Work on Surveys and Data Collection

- Prepare a report on the fourth Regional Health Survey for Leadership, communities, researchers and policymakers.
- Prepare for the Regional Social Survey by drafting Ontario-specific questions that will be beneficial for data use.
- In addition to these two surveys, RDM will continue strengthening the availability of First Nations data through other active and ongoing research studies (e.g. intergenerational diabetes, etc.).

Artificial intelligence

- Build capacity to assess artificial intelligence's potential risks and benefits to staff at COO and First Nations technicians and Leadership.
- Develop and publish an academic paper on the potential for First Nations data sovereignty as a tool

to counter harmful uses of artificial intelligence.

- Collaborate with the Algorithmic Bias in Canada project at the University of Toronto to host a workshop to build capacity among First Nations interested in knowing more about the ethics of artificial intelligence.
- Strengthen relationships with others working on the impacts of artificial intelligence on First Nations across the province.

Develop the Regional Information Governance Centre (RIGC) Project Report

- A report will be presented to Leadership outlining recommendations for the development of a First Nation Information Governance Centre in Ontario and the next steps to move forward.
- Continue to strengthen relationships with First Nations Leadership and communities, and ensure that First Nations voices, expertise and guidance are incorporated into the development of the RIGC.



Social Services Sector

Social Services Sector

Finn Simard, Director

Nicole Bakes, Associate Director

Amasena Delormier, Coordinator

Victoria Caravaggio, Policy Analyst

Anangons Johnson-Owl, Policy Analyst

Ifsia Zaman, Policy Analyst

Tyler Gary, Communications Coordinator

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Chiefs Committee on Social

Chief Carr, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Chief Carrie Attatise, Grand Council Treaty #3

Chief Linda McVicar, Grand Council Treaty #3

Councillor Dean Hill, Six Nations of the Grand River

Vacant, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Deputy Grand Chief Bobby Narcisse, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation

Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Social Services Coordination Unit

Arliss Skye, Six Nations of the Grand River

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Karen Foster, Grand Council Treaty #3

Lucas King, Grand Council Treaty #3

Nichole Kinzel, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Sydney Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Stan Cloud, Anishinabek Nation

Leanna Farr, Anishinabek Nation



Additional Committees

Early Learning and Child Care Round Table (ELCCRT)

Ariel Strength, Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council

Carolyn Doxtator, Anishinabek Nation

Debbie Ross, Mushkegowuk Council

Donna Lahache, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Geraldine King, Gull Bay First Nation

Katharine Brown, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Kathy Jones, Independent First Nations

Kristen Penner, Shooniyaa Wa-Biitong

Kristy Hankila, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Lani Sunday, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Megan Goold, Grand Council Treaty #3

Melanie Manitowabi, Kenjegin Teg

Polly Bobiwash, Anishinabek Nation

Sherry Lee Lickers, Six Nations of the Grand River

Shooniyaa Waabitong, Grand Council Treaty #3

Sydney Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Tammy Cayer-Dokis, Anishinabek Nation

Vance McPherson, Sagamok Anishnawbek

Wendy Arseneault, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Ontario Final Agreement Advisory Committee (OFA AC):

Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Sydney Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Arliss Skye, Six Nations of the Grand River

Karen Foster, Grand Council Treaty #3

Lucas King, Grand Council Treaty #3

Nichole Kinzel, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Asheley Wilson, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Lyric Allin, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Meaghan Daniel, Falconers LLP

David Schwartz, Falconers LLP

Erin McMurray, Falconers LLP

Michael Miller, Association of Native Child and Family Services

Agencies of Ontario

Stan Cloud, Anishinabek Nation

Leanna Farr, Anishinabek Nation

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Gary Innes, Mushkegowuk Council

James Cutfeet, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug

Finn Simard, Chiefs of Ontario

Nicole Bakes, Chiefs of Ontario

Ifsia Zaman, Chiefs of Ontario

Anangons Johnson-Owl, Chiefs of Ontario

Victoria Caravaggio, Chiefs of Ontario

Tyler Gary, Chiefs of Ontario

Amasena Delormier, Chiefs of Ontario

Jessie Stirling-Voss, Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP

Sinead Dearman, Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP

Joint Social Services Table (JSST)

Victoria Caravaggio, Chiefs of Ontario

Nicole Bakes, Chiefs of Ontario

Finn Simard, Chiefs of Ontario

Asheley Wilson, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Aurora Smith, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Cindi George, Anishinabek Nation

Dan Bruyere, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Karen Foster, Grand Council Treaty #3

Megan Goold, Grand Council Treaty #3

Nichole Kinzel, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Rebecca Logan, Six Nations of the Grand River

Samantha Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Stan Cloud, Union of Ontario Indians: Anishinabek Nation

Sydney Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Asheley Wilson, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Elizabeth Richer, Mamaweswen, The Northshore Tribal Council

Jessica Nadjiwon, Ontario Native Welfare Administrators

Association

JC Isaac, Stepping Stones

John Ense, M'Chigeeng First Nation

Kerri Commanda, Mamaweswen, The Northshore Tribal Council

Norma Albert, Stepping Stones

First Nations Technical Table (FNTT)

Asheley Wilson, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Arliss Skye, Six Nations of the Grand River

Aurora Smith, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Charity Neuert, Six Nations of the Grand River

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Karen Foster, Grand Council Treaty #3

Stan Cloud, Anishinabek Nation

Ronnie George, Anishinabek Nation

Noreen Conway, Anishinabek Nation

Greg Miller, Anishinabek Nation

Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Sydney Lockwood, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Geoff Stonefish, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Sara Monture, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Karen Foster, Grand Council Treaty #3

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Valerie Cree-Cook, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

1965 Indian Welfare Agreement Advisory Committee

Angela Trudeau, Chiefs of Ontario

Arliss Skye, Six Nations of the Grand River

Asheley Wilson, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

David Schwartz, Falconers LLP

Diane Maracle, Independent First Nations

Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Jessica Nadjiwon, Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association

Jessie Stirling, Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP

Julian Falconer, Falconers LLP

Karen Foster, Grand Council Treaty #3

Karen Innes, Mushkegowuk Council

Leanna Farr, Counsel for Anishinabek Nation

Maggie Wente, Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP

Meaghan Daniel, Falconers LLP

Megan Logan, Chiefs of Ontario

Michael Miller, Association of Native Child and Family Services

Agencies of Ontario

Michael Staruck, Chiefs of Ontario

Samantha Maracle, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Stan Cloud, Anishinabek Nation

Sydney Lockwood, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Theresa Ruth, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Tobi Mitchell, Chiefs of Ontario

Zachariah General, Chiefs of Ontario

Bryce Lansdell, JFK Law LLP

Gary Innes, Mushkegowuk Council

Amasena Delormier, Chiefs of Ontario

Finn Simard, Chiefs of Ontario Social

Nicole Bakes, Chiefs of Ontario Social

Victoria Caravaggio, Chiefs of Ontario

Sara Mainville, JFK Law LLP

Ifsia Zaman, Chiefs of Ontario

Tyler Gary, Chiefs of Ontario

Sinéad Dearman, Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP

Lyric Allin, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Nichole Kinzel, Nishnawbe Aski Nation

James Cutfeet, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug

Chief Marsha Smoke, Anishinabek Nation

Jordan's Principle Advisory Committee (JPAC):

The Jordan's Principle Advisory Committee is currently in development between COO's Social, Health and Education sectors.

The committee has not yet met, does not have a membership; its Terms of Reference are currently being discussed by Leadership Council and coordination units with the Social, Health and Education sectors.

Social Services Sector staff and Health Sector staff worked in collaboration on the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal-mandated mediation sessions between April 2025 and October 2025.

Assembly of First Nation Committees (AFN)

- Technical Working Group on Social Development
- National Expert Working Group on First Nations Early Learning and Child Care
- Jordan's Principle Operations Committee

Overview

The Social Services Sector at Chiefs of Ontario is governed by the Chiefs Committee on Social Services (CCOS) and the Social Sector Coordination Unit (SSCU), which is a technical and advisory body for the Chiefs

committee. The sector's mandate is to protect and maintain First Nations rights and jurisdiction over the social well-being of our communities and to secure resources for Leadership. The Social Services Sector provides coordination support and advocates for equitable services through equitable funding allocations.

The Social Sector provides coordination support for:

- Social Assistance
- Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)
- Child Wellbeing
- Child Youth and Family Wellbeing (CYFWB)
- Youth Justice
- First Nation Ontario Disability Support Program Delivery
- Transitional Support Fund (TSF)
- Administrative Funding
- Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income (GLBI)
- The Joint First Nations-Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Social Services Table (JSST) and its First Nations Caucus
- Jordan's Principle Long-Term Reform
- The 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement
- First Nation Child Family Services

Social Development Social Sector Highlights:

First Nations Child and Family Services Reform, Ontario Final Agreement

In December 2025, Chiefs of Ontario attended the

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) hearing for cross examinations regarding a motion to approve the Ontario Final Agreement. COO's representatives were examined successfully and the expert witness report submitted by the Caring Society was discredited. The CHRT oral submissions were concluded on February 26-27, 2026. This milestone marks a significant step toward reforming the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program and ensuring long-term equity for First Nations children and families across the province.

COO held a series of virtual information sessions between November and December 2025. These sessions covered planning reporting requirements, as well as capital planning under the OFA. COO hosted in-person planning sessions between January to March 2026 in Sudbury, Toronto and Fort Frances to ensure First Nations and FNCFS Agencies can start collaborating on the child and community wellbeing plan and obtaining support from ISC.

COO, NAN, and ISC are working on pre-implementation activities to ensure the successful launch of the final agreement. This includes cultural humility training, capital planning, alternative dispute resolution and data secretariat activities.



On March 30, 2026, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal released its summary ruling approving the Final Agreement on Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program in Ontario. COO also held a press conference in Toronto to share this information with all First Nations in Ontario.

First Nations Technical Table

The First Nations Technical Table (FNTT) was established to enable First Nations representing each of the provincial-territorial organizations, independent First Nations and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to build a collaborative working relationship and gain valuable insight into the challenges associated with various First Nations policies and programs. Issues the technical table was focused in 2025-26 included:

- Youth Justice Policies: FNTT and MCCSS have discussed at length reducing overrepresentation of First Nation youth in the justice system by developing more culturally relevant, community-based and restorative approaches to justice.
- Identity-Based Data: MCCSS has looked to the FNTT for guidance on reforming how identity-based data is collected by non-Indigenous children’s aid societies to ensure data equity.
- Administrative Penalties: MCCSS has established monetary penalties for licensed out-of-home care settings. FNTT is looking to implement similar or adjacent accountability measures for non-Indigenous and Indigenous children’s aid societies to ensure they are held responsible to First Nations.

- Adoption Service Delivery Standards: FNTT has worked with MCCSS to establish culturally appropriate services for First Nations children and uphold First Nation’s rights to participate in decisions affecting their children.

This list does not represent everything the FNTT worked on this last year.

1965 Trilateral Workplan

In July 2025, pursuant to the trilateral agreement on the reform of the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement, Chiefs of Ontario, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and Canada developed a workplan that outlines the approach, priorities and processes for engaging Ontario in the next phase of reform.

The workplan reflects input from regional Leadership and technical advisory bodies and has been revised to incorporate feedback to the greatest extent possible. COO and NAN collaborated closely throughout the revision process and are aligned in their efforts to advance reform. Leadership Council must give final



approval on the workplan before COO, NAN, and Canada can initiate outreach to Ontario.

The workplan was shared with Ontario in January 2025, inviting them to join preliminary conversations around reform. Letters outlining the need for Ontario to come to the table have been sent by ISC Minister Mandy Gull-Masty, Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict and Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.

Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income

Leadership Council approved Senate submissions on Bill S-206, which will be drafted by the Social Services Sector and the Women’s Initiatives Sector.

Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Conference 2025

The 2025 ELCC Conference was held in Toronto in October. The conference focused primarily on sharing information and networking, featuring workshops offering valuable insights and opportunities for collaboration. The conference was open to frontline workers, managers and supervisors working with Ontario First Nations.

Joint Social Services Table

The Joint Social Services Table (JSST), formed in 2017 by the Chiefs-in-Assembly via Resolution 26/17, is a forum for ongoing dialogue between the Ministry of Children Community and Social Services and First Nations on matters related to income assistance and income security. It recognizes the need to collaborate with First Nations in the true spirit of reconciliation and the inherent right of self-governance, while addressing the unique challenges faced by First Nation. In addition to the First Nations caucus and the table itself, there are three main sub-working groups:

- First Nation ODSP Delivery Working Group
- Transitional Support Fund Working Group
- Administrative Funding Working Group

In the last year, the JSST and First Nations representatives successfully supported two First Nations with ODSP implementation and made plans for two more sites, to be announced in the 2026-27 fiscal year. Chiefs-in-Assembly approved a new term of reference for the JSST in 2025-26. The JSST also co-developed a new Terms of Reference and developed a robust work plan with MCCSS for the 2026/2027 fiscal year.



In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

First Nations ODSP Delivery Implementation of 2 Additional Sites

- In the upcoming fiscal year, two additional First Nations ODSP sites will be announced bring the total to four sites. COO Social Services will support and onboard them throughout this process. The sector will also investigate, in collaboration with MCCSS, opportunities to provide information sessions on First Nations ODSP delivery.

Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income (GLBI)

- Social will submit COO’s technical submission on guaranteed liveable basic income to the Canadian Senate and determine next steps for advocacy.

ELCC Gathering 2026

- COO Social Services will plan and coordinate a gathering for early learning and childcare front-line workers, educators, managers and supervisors working on or for First Nations in Ontario to network and engage in learning opportunities.

Softwind Launch in April 2026

- This is a new platform for First Nation ELCC educators to network, learn and access resources. There is community social network spaces, contact information, micromodules and a resource library.

Ontario Reform Implementation Committee (ORIC)

- Leadership Council to set up the roles and responsibilities for at-large members and an evaluation matrix for the 20 at-large applicants

for the reform implementation committee. COO has identified a third party to take on the role of evaluating the applicants.



Additional goals:

- Assist First Nations with the reporting requirements identified in the Ontario Final Agreement, and ensure they receive their prevention, First Nation representative services, capital and post-majority support services funding.
- Advance a resolution on developing a First Nation ODSP software to promote data sovereignty.
- Make progress on the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement reform.
- Create a substantive equality report and establish a needs-based formula for early learning and childcare.
- Continue advocating for First Nations to have inherent jurisdiction over their child welfare services and emphasize prevention, substantive equality and the best interests and needs of First Nations children youth and young adults.
- Confirm the terms of reference for the Jordan’s Principle advisory committee.

Women's Initiatives Sector

Rebecca Timms, Director
Sarah Whelan, Senior Policy Analyst
Kate Poehlmann, Research Lead
Katharine Tippeneskum, Coordinator
Charlotte Croft, Communications Coordinator

First Nations Women's Council

Knowledge Keeper Donna Debassige, Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory
Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
Sydney Lockwood, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
Betsy Kechege, Anishinabek Nation
Tracy Robinson, Anishinabek Nation
Brandie Fong, Anishinabek Nation
Lyndia Jones, Independent First Nations
Sandra Montour, Six Nations of the Grand River
Chief Sarah Diabo, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
Chief Lisa Francis-Benedict, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Leadership Council Portfolio Holder/Alternates

Women's Initiatives does not currently have a Leadership Council portfolio holder.

Overview

The First Nations Women's Council (FNWC) and the First Nations 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council guide the work of the Women's Initiatives Sector.

The FNWC is a governance body that supports the collective work of Ontario First Nations in advancing community safety, wellbeing and empowerment,

particularly for First Nations women, families, 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ people and other vulnerable community members.

The 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council provides governance and strategic direction to restore balance within communities and Leadership through the revitalizing traditional roles and responsibilities, and ways of being, seeing, knowing and relating. The council's work is grounded in cultural continuity, belonging and dismantling colonial structures.

Women's Initiatives provides coordination, technical expertise and policy support to both the FNWC and the 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council, as well as to Ontario First Nations representatives to the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council and the Assembly of First Nations 2SLGBTQIA+ Council.

The sector's work is grounded in the 231 Calls for Justice from the 2019 Final Report of the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ People, which are recognized as legal imperatives. Guided by Chiefs-in-Assembly Resolution 29/19, the sector continues advances an Ontario First Nations-specific approach to implementing the Calls for Justice through coordinated advocacy, policy development and community-informed initiatives.

The Women's Initiatives Sector positions governance, policy and community-informed approaches as interconnected systems that are required to advance the Calls for Justice. Sustained investment in First Nations-led governance infrastructure remains critical to achieving long-term, measurable outcomes.

Women's Initiatives Sector Highlights

Culturally Relevant Victim Services

The sector is overseeing the development of learning modules for the First Nations Intimate Partner Violence Toolkit: Safety Assessment, Risk Management, and Safety Planning. The toolkit is a culturally relevant and trauma-informed resource to support front-line professionals who work with First Nations people who have experienced intimate partner violence. The assessment factors were developed with the insights of 274 front-line professionals who work with First Nations people who have experienced violence. The toolkit is inclusive of 2S/LGBTQQIA+ identities and utilizes language that affirms relationships beyond heterosexual partnerships.

The National Inquiry highlights the importance of self-determined and Indigenous-led solutions and services. The First Nations Intimate Partner Violence Toolkit was developed in response to the need for First Nations-specific victim services resources

Revitalizing Traditional Governance Roles of Two Spirit+ Community Leaders

This past year, Women's Initiatives has provided technical support and coordination to support the establishment of the 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council, in response to Chiefs-in-Assembly Resolution 24/37S. The council has developed its terms of reference outlining its purpose, mandate and accountability structure. A council member has also been appointed as the Ontario First Nations representative to the Assembly of First Nations 2SLGBTQI+ Council. The council's mandate is to provide



guidance to inform the decision-making processes of Chiefs of Ontario and the Chiefs-in-Assembly through a Two Spirit-, Two Heart-, LGBTQQIAPD+-lens. The council will advocate for supports, initiatives, engagements, activities, processes, research and strategic policies which advance the rights, inclusion and belonging of Two Spirit, Two Heart and LGBTQQIAPD+ relatives. The council will also consult with 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ kin across Ontario to ensure that community-identified priorities are consistently reflected in the council's priorities and work.

Continued Membership and Participation on Ontario's Indigenous Women's Advisory Council

Over the past year, the sector has remained a member of Ontario's Indigenous Women's Advisory Council (IWAC). IWAC provides perspectives and guidance to the associate minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

The major project undertaken by IWAC members last year was developing a new framework to evaluate the Ontario governments' response to the National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls,

and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People. The sector was involved with developing performance metrics and aided with the overall shaping of the framework, which has been delivered to the ministry.

As a member of IWAC, the sector has continuously used provincial-level forums to advocate for the provision of long-term, sustainable and flexible governmental funding streams that support advocacy work from a rights-holder perspective.

Quad-Council Governance Meetings

Together with the Knowledge Keepers and Youth Sector, the Women's Initiatives supported two gatherings of COO's four governance councils: Knowledge Keepers, Women's, 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+, and the Ontario First Nations Young People's Council. The councils came together in Toronto and Ottawa to discuss joint priorities and to strengthen mutual support. Joint priorities that were identified include rejecting false claims to Indigeneity, affirming inherent rights and upholding the dignity of Nation-specific names, language and protocols.

Report Card on Implementation of the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice

The sector published a report card on the progress implementing the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ People. The report serves as a lobbying tool for Ontario First Nations Leadership and technicians to advance the implementation of the Calls for Justice.

In federal and provincial arenas, the report can aid in

lobbying and advocacy efforts by highlighting areas where governments must make further progress. The report highlights the historical precedence of many of the Calls for Justice to provide leverage and assist in negotiations and discussions. The report also showcases the work of the Chiefs of Ontario Secretariat in advancing the Calls for Justice to highlight avenues for First Nations and political-territorial organizations to connect with, collaborate and guide Chiefs of Ontario on shared priorities.

In the Year Ahead – Moving Forward:

Fourth MMIWG2S+ Family Gathering

In May, the Sector hosted the fourth MMIWG2S+ Family Gathering. The gathering is focused on peer-to-peer support and healing through sharing circles and will provide culturally grounded artistic workshops to those who attend. Twenty-five families were supported to attend the gathering, thanks to the redistribution of funds raised through the Who Is She campaign.



Launching the Victim Services Toolkit and Training Modules for Providers

In the coming year, the sector will launch virtual training modules and distribute the First Nations Intimate Partner Violence Toolkit for service providers.

Two Spirit Learning Series – Volume II

Together with the 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council, the sector is producing the second volume of the Two Spirit Learning Series. The series will include four virtual events—two open to allies and 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ relatives, and two exclusively for 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ people. The sessions are spaces of learning, sharing, connecting and strengthening the relational fabric supporting 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ kin. The series will conclude with a virtual townhall session for open dialogue and networking for 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ relatives and will provide an opportunity for community-level solutions, concerns and priorities to be raised to the 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council.



Strengthening Traditional Governance

The sector will continue to provide technical support and coordination to the First Nations Women’s Council and 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ Council, as well as the Ontario First Nations representatives to the Assembly of First Nations Women’s Council and 2SLGBTQIA+ Council. This involves supporting council attendance at assemblies and ensuring opportunities are available for the councils advise the Chiefs-in-Assembly as they advance resolutions. The sector will also continue connecting the councils to other COO sectors to work across and break down siloes because women’s and 2S/LGBTQQIAPD+ perspectives are valid and valuable in all of the work at the Chiefs of Ontario.

Youth and Knowledge Keepers Sector

Angela Trudeau, Director
Charlotte Croft, Communications Officer
Katharine Tippeneskum, Coordinator

Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council

Carter Carpenter, Co-Chair, Independent First Nations
Hanna Sewell, Co-Chair, Association of Iroquois and Allied Nations
Ramon Kataquapit, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Summer Wabasse, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Kieran Davis, Grand Council Treaty #3
Kyra Willoughby, Independent First Nations

Knowledge Keepers Council

Barney Batiste, Co-Chair, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Theresa Fiddler, Co-Chair, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Donna Debassige, Anishinabek Nation
Vera Pawis-Tabobodung, Anishinabek Nation
Patricia Oakes, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
Mike Kanentakeron Mitchell, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
Olive Elm, Association of Iroquois and Allied Nations
Harvey Bell, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians
Don Jones Niigaaniibines, Grand Council Treaty #3
Dave Root, Independent First Nations
Norma General-Lickers, Six Nations of the Grand River

Overview

Throughout the 2025-26 reporting period, the Chiefs of Ontario Knowledge Keepers and Youth Sector provided strategic guidance, cultural grounding and intergenerational leadership for the Chiefs of Ontario.



The sector’s council representatives contributed to Chiefs of Ontario committee and council work, advancing advocacy, policy coordination and collective responses to issues affecting First Nations in Ontario, while strengthening alignment with broader Leadership discussions and regional priorities.

The sector was actively engaged in cross-council and committee spaces, including discussions related to the Chiefs of Ontario Leadership Council and the quad-council process. These spaces supported coordination among representative bodies, created opportunities to elevate youth and Knowledge Keepers’ perspectives and helped identify shared priorities to guide collective work.

Committee and Council Participation

The Knowledge Keepers and Youth Sector maintains an important presence on the committees, councils, and leadership tables that shape Chiefs of Ontario's advocacy and policy direction. Through this participation, the sector ensured that the informed perspectives, intergenerational priorities, and culturally

grounded approaches of Knowledge Keeper and youth informed key decisions in policy areas and emerging organizational priorities.

The Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council (OFNYPC), as the official youth voice for the 133 First Nations in Ontario, remained central to this work. OFNYPC advanced youth priorities in support of Ontario Chiefs and engaged with Leadership on issues with long-term impacts on First Nations youth, rights and futures.

Bill 5 and Bill C-5 Advocacy

The Knowledge Keepers and Youth Sector stood alongside Ontario Leadership in collective advocacy on Ontario’s Bill 5 and the federal Bill C-5. Chiefs of Ontario denounced Bill 5 at Queen’s Park in early June 2025 and later denounced Bill C-5, hosting a rally in opposition to legislation that would fast-track major projects without meaningful First Nations consultation on Parliament Hill in Ottawa later in June.



These advocacy efforts reflected the sector’s broader commitment to protecting lands, rights, jurisdiction and environmental responsibilities. Rally activities and related public mobilization reinforced ongoing calls for governments to respect First Nations Leadership, uphold consultation obligations and reject legislative measures that undermine First Nations rights and decision-making authority.

Quad-Council Priorities

A quad-council meeting in Ottawa in January 2026 formally brought four councils of Chiefs of Ontario together to share perspectives, strengthen coordination, and identify key priority areas to guide collective work. The Knowledge Keepers, OFNYPC, Women's Council and the Keepers of the Circle meeting created space for alignment and collaboration between the councils and reinforced the importance of coordinated action on shared Chiefs of Ontario priorities.

For the Knowledge Keepers and Youth Sector, participation in this process helped ensure that both cultural knowledge and youth perspectives were reflected in planning. The discussion of key priority areas also provided a stronger foundation for ongoing collaboration with Leadership and other representative councils over the coming year.

Inaugural Knowledge Keepers and Leadership Council Meeting

An important milestone during last year was the inaugural meeting between the Knowledge Keepers and the Leadership Council. This meeting marked a significant step towards deeper coordination between traditional knowledge holders and political leadership and established a stronger foundation to support Chiefs of Ontario leadership in priority areas.

The meeting also reflected a shared commitment to ensuring that strategic advocacy remains culturally grounded and informed by First Nations knowledge systems. By building a stronger relationship between Knowledge Keepers and Leadership, the sector is helping to support more coordinated, values-based responses to the issues facing First Nations in Ontario.

Symposium Planning

Knowledge Keepers also expressed strong interest in hosting an Indigenous culture and governance symposium for Ontario First Nations leaders this year, pending funding. This proposed gathering would create an important space for leaders to engage in dialogue on culture, governance, knowledge sharing and help ensure First Nations Leadership approaches are rooted

in Indigenous laws, teachings and responsibilities.

If it moves forward, the symposium would advance culturally grounded governance dialogue at a time when First Nations continue to respond to complex political, legal and jurisdictional challenges. It would also offer a meaningful opportunity to align Leadership priorities with the wisdom and guidance of Knowledge Keepers and spiritual support from across Ontario.

OFNYPC Priorities and Governance Work

The Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council continued to focus on strengthening its governance and representation. This included efforts to fill vacant seats, prioritizing updates to its terms of reference, and advancing a new, more robust resolution to better address a range of emerging matters affecting First Nations youth across Ontario. These efforts help ensure that OFNYPC remains well-positioned to represent youth voices effectively and consistently across Chiefs of Ontario processes. Strengthening council composition and governance tools will support clearer accountability, stronger continuity, and a more responsive youth mandate in the year ahead.

A Successful Year of the Knowledge Keepers and OFNYPC

The accomplishments of the Knowledge Keepers and the Youth Sector over the reporting period demonstrate the growing strength of intergenerational leadership within Chiefs of Ontario. From participating in councils, committees, and key political discussions to advocating for Bill 5 and Bill C-5 to advancing governance priorities within OFNYPC, the sector continued to

ensure that Leadership discussions are grounded in culture, community priorities and the voices of future generations.

This work was further strengthened through joint participation in discussions on cultural humility training under the Ontario Final Agreement and related implementation planning. Public materials on the Ontario Final Agreement indicate that cultural humility training is part of the broader reform work supporting implementation readiness, alongside capital planning, alternative dispute mechanisms, and data supports. Chiefs of Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation continue to play a role in this reform process.

As the sector looks ahead, its achievements position it to continue supporting Ontario First Nations Leadership through culturally grounded guidance, stronger youth representation and collaborative priority setting. Whether through leadership engagement, policy advocacy, participation in training, or the proposed Indigenous culture and governance symposium, the Knowledge Keepers and Youth Sector remains well placed to advance the collective priorities of First Nations in Ontario in a principled, forward-looking manner, rooted in First Nations laws, teachings, and responsibilities.



Map of First Nations in Ontario

Political Territorial Organizations

- Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI)
- Grand Council Treaty #3 (GCT #3)
- Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN)
- Anishinabek Nation (AN)
- Independent First Nations (IFN) and Non-affiliated

For a detailed map, please visit <https://chiefs-of-ontario.org/map/>.



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