

## Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area: Summary of ISC response to Information Request (original submitted Nov.20<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

In response to the Regional Assessment Working Group's Information Request for Federal Authorities issued on September 25th, 2025, Indigenous Services Canada prepared a submission covering the following priority areas identified by the Working Group:

- Projects and Initiatives relevant for the Ring of Fire Area
- Priority topics identified by the Working Group – Information and Gaps
- Community wellbeing, Education, Training and Employment
- Homelands and Reservations, and Housing
- Education and literacy
- Food Security and Nutrition

ISC's submission, summarized below, supports the Working Group in gathering detailed information to better understand the projects and initiatives currently underway in the Ring of Fire area and to help develop an inventory aligned with its assessment priorities. The submission outlines ISC's programs available to Indigenous communities in the assessment area and explain how these initiatives aim to address systemic gaps and promote self-determination through flexible, community-led approaches.

Education programs span early childhood to post-secondary, including core funding for K–12, special education, adult learning, and culturally grounded initiatives. Post-secondary strategies provide financial support and partnerships to improve access and success, particularly for remote communities, while employment programs like the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy offer job skills and work experience for youth.

Economic development programs help First Nations and Inuit communities build capacity for planning and business development, enabling participation in emerging opportunities. Through providing services, lessons have been learned such as the importance of partnerships, transparency, and adaptability, while acknowledging persistent challenges like funding shortfalls, infrastructure limitations, and service gaps in remote areas.

ISC provides targeted and ongoing funding streams for housing construction, renovations, and climate-resilient upgrades, as well as capacity-building programs for housing managers. This helps address housing challenges in the region which include overcrowding, long waitlists, and homes in need of repair, which impact community wellbeing. Community infrastructure programs such as the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program and the First Nations Infrastructure Fund also support housing as well as essential services like water systems, roads, and schools.

Further, the submission outlines existing mechanisms for expanding reserve lands, including Additions to Reserve and tools like the First Nations Commercial and Industrial

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Development Act, which enable economic projects on reserve lands. Best practices emphasize building local land management capacity through programs like the Reserve Land and Environment Management Program and the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management, which promote self-determination and sustainable development while supporting cultural and economic activities.

ISC's submission to the Working Group also outlines both the Indigenous-led research initiatives funded through ISC's health portfolio, and the primary care and public health programs and services delivered by ISC that may relate to potential projects' impacts.

ISC funds numerous community-based environmental health studies through programs such as the First Nations Environmental Contaminants Program (FNECP), the Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program (CCHAP), and the Baseline Assessment Program for Health and the Environment (BAPHE). The projects funded under these programs examine issues such as contaminants in country foods, mercury exposure, water quality, climate change impacts, and broader determinants of health and wellbeing in First Nations communities. Guided by OCAP<sup>®</sup> principles, project findings inform communities and reflect ongoing concerns related to environmental contaminants, food security, climate change, and chronic disease risks in the region. A list of relevant projects conducted in the Regional Assessment area is included in the full response.

ISC's submission also describes a broad suite of ISC's public health initiatives and health service programs. Collectively, these programs support community health, social wellbeing, and access to primary care across the region as well as identify key data sources for community health, for example, the First Nations Regional Health Survey, and the First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study.