



Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
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Media Release
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Throne speech promises are empty for Alberta on-reserve Shelters

Indian Affairs and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) served notice of significantly cuts funding to Alberta's on-reserve shelters this month without giving them any warning or reason.

"They cut the equivalent of a full-time counsellor position. Our shelter is already stretched to the point of breaking," remarked Janet Gladue, Executive Director of the Bigstone Cree Nation Women's Emergency Shelter in Wabasca, "I don't know how we can continue to help all the women and children who need us."

Three on-reserve shelters in Alberta were told that their budgets have been reduced by \$40,000-\$60,000 commencing April of this year. To make matters worse, one of the shelter directors was only given a few days to look at this reduced budget agreement, sign it and return it, or she was told she wouldn't get any funding for this April.

"Too often, their stories have been ones of sorrow" read Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada referring to Canada's Aboriginal people in the recent throne speech. And she's right. And yet a week later, INAC is making abrupt cuts that will prevent shelters from helping Aboriginal families.

The shelter directors who have been contacted have chosen not to sign the reduced budget agreements without some kind of real explanation for the cuts and a plan for how shelters are supposed to continue providing these essential services in the on-reserve communities.

The only explanation officially received by the shelters from INAC was in a March 11, 2010 letter that states that INAC's "Alberta region has been advised by the national office that the regional funding allocation to deliver the family violence shelter program for fiscal year 2010/11 was adjusted to reflect available resources."

After contacting MP's and federal Ministers, ACWS was informed last evening that the funding cuts will not be implemented this year and discussion would occur with the shelters to give more preparation time. While more breathing room is a step in the right direction, ACWS is calling upon the federal government to maintain its commitment to the Family Violence Prevention Program for First Nations and to continue to implement the recommendations in the Johnston Report (July 31, 2006). On Reserve Shelters are no longer funded at the same level as provincial shelters – which ACWS believes is a discriminatory practice. The federal funding formula needs to be adjusted so that shelter funding is predictable, sufficient and sustainable.

Background:

The Alberta Council of Women's shelters supported the five on-reserve shelters in Alberta in a long battle for funding parity with provincially funded shelters. In 2007, Minister Bev Oda promised on behalf of INAC, a five-year investment of 56 million dollars (53.45 million going directly to on-reserve shelters) for all on reserve shelters in Canada.

On-reserve shelters in Alberta then signed a funding agreement in 2007 based on the Cabinet Decisions of October 31, 2006 representing the Enhancement of Family Violence Prevention Program for First Nations. This five-year agreement (we're 3 years in) has an annual renewal – it was during this annual renewal that shelters were informed that their budgets were being dramatically slashed. Part of this agreement also included a review in 2009/2010 which is currently underway but not yet completed. The recent Speech from the Throne committed to supporting Canadian's aspirations to live in a safe and secure country. The speech also stated that the federal government would take additional action to address murdered and missing Aboriginal women. On-reserve shelters provide a critical role in preventing the deaths of First Nations women living in terror and too often killed by family violence.

Additional quotes from on-reserve shelter directors:

"Working Alone legislation is difficult enough to adhere to, and losing this funding will have devastating consequences on our shelter." Sandra Ermineskin, Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society

"We have a full house right now and are dipping into petty cash just to get the groceries." Sandra Ermineskin, Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society

"There was no explanation given – and then they just left the meeting." Sandra Ermineskin, Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society, referring to a recent meeting with INAC

"They should be ashamed of themselves." Mary Simpson, Mikisew Cree First Nation – Paspew House

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