



An Open Letter to the Prime Minister, Premiers and National Aboriginal Leadership:

The Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Canada are calling all Governments and National Aboriginal Organizations to provide for meaningful inclusion of the issues and challenges facing urban Aboriginal Peoples in your efforts to ensure that all Aboriginal Peoples achieve a better quality of life.

The First Ministers' Meeting on Aboriginal issues is visioning a new way for governments to relate to Aboriginal Peoples and your efforts are welcome. However, in order for this vision to be fully realized, you must begin to address the needs and interests of Aboriginal Peoples living in urban communities in a meaningful and equitable way.

Half of the Aboriginal population in Canada lives in urban communities, half of the Aboriginal population does not graduate from high school and half of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25.

Canada is creating a permanent underclass that needs specific services and interventions. Yet nothing in the First Ministers' Meeting Agenda specifically addresses these people.

The 117 Aboriginal Friendship Centres in Canada have been working to improve the quality of life for urban Aboriginal Peoples for more than 50 years. We are the primary service provider to Aboriginal Peoples living in urban communities. Last year alone, the 117 Friendship Centres in Canada provided services to over 750,000 clients through 900 separate programs and services.

Les questions d'éducation, de logement, de santé, de relations et de possibilités économiques pour les Autochtones que vous prévoyez discuter au cours de la rencontre des premiers ministres sont les mêmes que les Centres d'amitié du Canada traitent quotidiennement.

Friendship Centres should not be ignored any longer. No other organization has the experience, or capacity, in service delivery to Aboriginal people who live in urban areas, that Friendship Centres have.

With due care, we call for:

- An Action Plan to support the social, cultural and economic well-being of Aboriginal people living in urban areas;
- An active role for Friendship Centres in the development of policies, programs and services for Aboriginal people who live in urban areas;
- The establishment of a Service Delivery Accord to define the relationship of Friendship Centres with the Federal and Provincial/Territorial Governments.

At the start of his mandate the Prime Minister asked that his legacy be measured by how well he addressed the Aboriginal file. This judgement, on balance, should be based on whether or not solutions are found that significantly alleviate the number of Aboriginal people living in poverty, in our cities and towns.

Clearly there is much work to do. Our sleeves are rolled up -- we need all of your support.

In Friendship,

The Friendship Centres of Canada