

Mr. John Aldag, MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Aldag

Pursuant to House of Commons Standing Order 109, it is my pleasure to provide you with a copy, in both official languages, of the Government Response to the recommendation of the Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, entitled: *Food Security In Northern And Isolated Communities: Ensuring Equitable Access to Adequate and Healthy Food for All*, which was tabled in the House of Commons on September 27, 2023.

The Government of Canada appreciates the thoughtful work of the Committee and the witnesses who shared their time and knowledge to strengthen our understanding of the longstanding issue of food insecurity in northern and isolated communities. The Government of Canada welcomes the Committee's advice on how policies and programs can better support Indigenous people and Northerners to strengthen food security and food sovereignty.

Supporting self-determination and strengthening food security in isolated Indigenous and northern communities is part of broader Government of Canada commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, closing longstanding gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and supporting healthy, safe, and prosperous northern and isolated communities. Food insecurity is a multifaceted issue caused by compounding and interdependent factors, such as the legacy of colonialism, health and socio-economic inequalities and climate change, which are in and of themselves complex challenges for Canada. This issue spans multiple policy areas, as demonstrated by the number of departments and agencies who contributed to this Government Response, and addressing it will require continued collaboration, coordination and action.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Government Response to the recommendations of the Report.

Sincerely,



Dan Vandal, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Northern Affairs

Enclosure

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE ELEVENTH REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS, ENTITLED: *FOOD SECURITY IN NORTHERN AND
ISOLATED COMMUNITIES: ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND HEALTHY FOOD
FOR ALL***

The Government of Canada (the Government) is pleased to respond to the Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (the Committee) entitled: *Food Security in Northern and Isolated Communities: Ensuring Equitable Access to Adequate and Healthy Food for All* (the Report).

The Government extends its sincere gratitude to the members of the Committee, and the organizations and individuals who appeared before it, for a thoughtful and thorough examination of the complex and persistent issue of food security in northern and isolated communities. The Government supports the broad goal of ensuring equitable access to adequate and healthy food for all and appreciates the comprehensive recommendations developed by the Committee to strengthen northern food security and food sovereignty. The Government is working in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, academics, the private sector, and non-profit and community organizations, to effectively address the wider-ranging challenges detailed in the Report.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed health and socio-economic inequalities in Canadian society and gaps in the social safety net. In Canada's isolated Indigenous and northern communities, the pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of marginalized populations, the fragility of long and complex supply chains, and the importance of strong local food systems and community-led initiatives for community resilience.

The Government is committed to working with Indigenous and northern partners to address food insecurity in isolated and northern communities. The Response was informed by and aligns with existing priorities and commitments, including those laid out in: Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework; *Food Policy for Canada*; *Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy*; the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*; the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy*; *2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan*.

The following federal departments and agencies were implicated, directly or indirectly, in the Report and collaborated to produce the Response: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC); the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA); Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC); Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor); Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC); Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC); Indigenous Services Canada (ISC); Infrastructure Canada (INFC); and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

RECOMMENDATION 1

That Environment and Climate Change Canada expand and ensure consistent, adequate, and long-term funding for Indigenous-led programs to manage protected areas, test water quality and monitor development and changes to the climate, such as the Indigenous Guardians Pilot.

The Government supports recommendation 1.

The Committee report pointed to the connections between respect for Indigenous economic, social and cultural rights and upholding Indigenous land stewardship over their traditional territories.

The goal of the combined measures advanced by ECCC in the federal action plan to implement the United Nations Declaration Act in response to proposals and priorities of Indigenous partners is to: enhance Indigenous peoples' roles and responsibilities in decision-making; uphold Indigenous leadership in conservation and self-determined climate action; and respond to Article 29 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Indigenous

peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources).

Specifically, the Action Plan measures are: a) advance an Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda, including distinctions-based strategies, that vests the resources and authorities necessary for Indigenous peoples to fully exercise their right to self-determination on climate; b) support Indigenous leadership in conservation through initiatives such as Indigenous Guardians, Indigenous Partnerships Initiative and Indigenous-Led Area Based Conservation that will provide capacity support until 2026, as well as the Project Finance for Permanence; c) build on important work that has already occurred, to recognize, elevate, and incorporate Indigenous science into ECCC scientific inquiry by continuing to stand up the new Indigenous Science Division; d) create a Canada Water Agency and advance the modernization of the Canada Water Act to reflect Canada's freshwater reality, including climate change and Indigenous rights; and, e) monitor the implementation of the 2022-26 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy and in developing a new strategy for 2026, through their engagement in the Minister's Sustainable Development Advisory Council as well as other consultative methods.

Notably, ECCC will engage Indigenous organizations and communities in conservation and restoration of its freshwater resources, including by implementing key water agreements, and will support Indigenous community and organization capacity development projects.

ECCC will also continue to transform its approach to terrestrial species at risk conservation through ongoing implementation of the Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada, including through partnerships with Indigenous peoples.

Since the Indigenous Guardians Pilot funding announced in 2017, and subsequent investments through Enhanced Nature Legacy in Budget 2021, a total of over \$81 million has been allocated to approximately 233 Indigenous Guardians Initiatives on a distinctions basis. Additionally, in December 2022, the establishment and launch of the First Nations National Guardians Network was announced at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montreal.

ECCC works with Indigenous partners, provinces and territories, and other government departments to conduct research and monitoring to inform decision-making regarding contaminants in ecosystems and traditionally harvested foods.

The Government of Canada has a legislated mandate to monitor freshwater resources to assess aquatic ecosystem health. Working closely with Provinces and Territories, ECCC monitors freshwater quality on federal lands, transboundary watersheds, and inland waters.

On First Nations lands, responsibility for safe drinking water is shared between First Nation communities and the Government of Canada. First Nations are the managers and operators of their water and wastewater systems and are responsible for issuing or rescinding drinking water advisories, generally based on the advice of an environmental public health officer.

ISC provides advice and financial support to First Nations communities for their public water and wastewater systems, and ensures that drinking water quality monitoring programs are in place. ISC assists communities in monitoring drinking water quality in all water systems at tap, which includes providing advice and guidance about drinking water safety and wastewater disposal, and reviewing infrastructure project proposals from a public health perspective.

To reinforce these efforts, Budget 2021 also announced \$125.2 million over four years, beginning in 2022-23, and \$31.3 million on-going thereafter to continue to support First Nations communities' reliable access to clean water and help ensure the safe delivery of health and social services on reserve.

ECCC also monitors priority contaminant trends and wildlife health in ecosystems, including in northern and arctic environments, the oil sands region of northeastern Alberta, the Great Lakes, Lake Winnipeg and other large lakes, as well as the St. Lawrence and Mackenzie rivers to support initiatives addressing food safety and security, and the maintenance of traditional ways

of life. This work leverages ongoing collaborations with Indigenous partners under the Northern Contaminants Program and the Climate Change Action Plan that monitor contamination in species, among other examples.

Under Budget 2018, the Target 1 Challenge initiative – a federal investment in projects that support or add to Canada’s protected and conserved areas across the country – received up to \$175 million for the planning and establishment of conserved areas. The program provides funding until 2024. Of the 68 projects funded under the initiative to date, 52 are Indigenous-led. In Budget 2021, the federal government provided an additional \$166 million until March 2026 for the Indigenous-Led Area-Based Conservation (ILABC) fund, to support planning and establishment of conserved areas where Indigenous people play the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems. Budget 2021’s investment of \$2.3 billion over 5 years to ECCC, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada represents a renewed commitment to protecting nature. This investment will continue to support Indigenous Guardians activities and will provide funding for the planning and establishment of Indigenous-led area-based conservation.

For the Government of Canada, supporting self-determined climate action is critical to advancing Canada’s reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, as is the leadership of Indigenous Peoples to achieve the foundational transformations required to address and mitigate the consequences of climate change. *The Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change* has provided over \$900M in investments to support Indigenous-led projects on adaptation planning, food security, clean energy, health, infrastructure, climate monitoring, and more.

Through Canada’s 2020 and 2023 investments of \$1.4 billion in the Nature-Smart Climate Solutions Fund (NSCSF), a ten-year fund to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 5-7 megatons annually through conservation, restoration and enhanced land management of wetlands, peatlands, and grasslands to store and capture carbon, up to \$76.9 million has been set aside for Indigenous-led Natural Climate Solutions, to provide targeted support to Indigenous Nations, communities and organizations to engage as leaders in natural climate solutions.

With the additional investments made in March 2021 through Budget 2021, Canada’s Climate Plan notably includes funding that will improve food security in the North (\$163.4M over 3 years), including in Inuit Nunangat, and support First Nations and Inuit as they manage the health impacts of climate change, such as the impacts of extreme weather events, and mental health impacts of climate change on youth (\$22.7 million over five years).

In June 2021, the passage of the *Canadian Net Zero Emissions Accountability Act* established legal requirements for the consideration of Indigenous Knowledge in the ministerial appointments to the advisory body, as well as providing Indigenous Peoples with an opportunity to make submissions.

In July 2021, Canada submitted its enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is the first in the world to include dedicated, distinctions-based and Indigenous-led annexes.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency enable the creation of new meat and traditional food processing facilities in the North supporting local harvesters; and that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada work to increase animal production and create training programs for animal husbandry and butchering in the North.

The Government approves in principle this recommendation while acknowledging that agriculture and food regulations are both areas of joint federal and provincial-territorial (PT) responsibility, with implications for Indigenous partners, especially related to traditional food.

For its part, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regulates foods, plants and animals that move inter-provincially, are exported internationally, or are imported, including traditional foods like wild game animals, marine mammals, wild birds, fish, berries, and plants.

The CFIA offers guidance, such as its Toolkit for Businesses included on its website, and technical support to help stakeholders understand federal requirements, including the creation or expansion of meat, and other food processing facilities.

To develop effective policies and strategies to safeguard Canada's food, plants and animals, the Agency is committed to understanding the perspectives of Canadians and Indigenous Peoples in Canada impacted by its regulatory activities. The CFIA welcomes opportunities to engage with northern communities about federal regulatory requirements, policies, and programming, and to assess barriers and food security-related impacts of federal regulations pertaining to food safety, and plant and animal health.

Through the June 2023 Action Plan to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, the Government of Canada has made the following commitment:

Through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, federal departments will co-develop legislative and policy options for decision makers with Inuit Treaty Organizations to create a framework for the processing and sale of Inuit country or traditional foods within Inuit Nunangat, as well as support the expansion of domestic and international trade of these foods. [UNDA Action Plan, Chapter 3: APM 12]

The meat production and processing sectors in the North are limited. In terms of support, there is the recently implemented Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP) a five-year, \$3.5 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the agriculture and agri-food sector. As part of the Sustainable CAP, \$2.5 billion in funding is allocated towards cost-shared programming within PT jurisdictions. While the federal government contributes 60% of PT cost-shared programming, PTs are responsible for designing and delivering programs tailored to meet regional needs. Examples of cost-shared northern initiatives include: Nunavut's Harvesting Infrastructure Program, which provides support for the construction or renovation of community freezers, traditional sharing activities and country food markets, and initiatives to increase food security and local food capacity; and the Northwest Territories Building Sector Capacity Program that provides infrastructure investments and services to increase sector capacity, assistance for individuals and businesses in the agricultural sector to advance their competencies through a variety of training and educational programs, and support for community-based initiatives to increase food security and local food capacity. ISC supports initiatives around developing traditional food processing skills and infrastructure through the Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program. Due to the close link between climate change and food security in the North, this program has supported several organizations in building or planning to build new infrastructure including food processing plants. Budget 2021 announced \$22.7 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, to support First Nations and Inuit as they manage the health impacts of climate change, such as access to country food, impacts of extreme weather events, and mental health impacts of climate change on youth.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to launch a full external evaluation of the Nutrition North Canada program; that the program's mandate be changed to improve food security outcomes in northern and isolated communities; and that, throughout this process, the Department consider, in co-development with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners:

- **Ways to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and Northerners have direct input into how the subsidy is used in their communities, including which food items should be subsidized;**

- **Expanding the Harvesters Support Grant or establishing additional measures to increase access to traditional foods;**
- **Conducting a gender-based analysis plus of the program’s benefits, with a particular focus on the distribution of benefits between low and high income households and different household compositions;**
- **Establishing processes and new evaluation measures to ensure that Nutrition North Canada is transparent and accountable, and that it focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and families;**
- **Adding a social programming component to Nutrition North Canada;**
- **Making the Nutrition North Canada retail subsidy available to agricultural producers as well as community cooperatives, non-profits and community organizations, such as food banks, which provide food and services in some remote and isolated communities;**
- **Providing the subsidy to more than one store per community, wherever possible;**
- **Exploring the possibility of expanding eligibility criteria to include remote and isolated communities that may not lack year-round road or marine access, but where the proportion of household income spent on food and rates of food insecurity are disproportionately high;**
- **Expanding the list of eligible items to include non-food items sold in participating stores and used for hunting, fishing, and gathering; and**
- **Decreasing the administrative burden required to join the program.**

The Government of Canada supports in principle this recommendation and is committed to working with all partners to maximize the impact of the Nutrition North Canada program and to improve food security outcomes in northern and isolated communities. Ending poverty and hunger are core objectives of Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. In the 2020 Speech from the Throne, the Government pledged to continue to work with Indigenous partners to address food insecurity. The Government’s commitment to addressing food insecurity is outlined in ministerial mandate letters. The Minister of Northern Affairs, along with the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, are mandated to support the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to address food insecurity in Canada, including through co-developed programs and by continuing to work directly with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation partners.

Northern food insecurity cannot be solved by one department or program alone. Nutrition North Canada is part of a continuum of programs and policies across Government brought together by the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework to reduce socio-economic gaps and improve food security among Indigenous Peoples in isolated Northern communities.

Budget 2021 invested \$163.4M over 3 years in Nutrition North Canada “to support food security in isolated northern communities, including Inuit communities.” The Committee’s recommendations, as well as extensive engagement with Indigenous partners, informed the policy trajectory of the Program in designing Budget 2021 investments. With the exception of the launch of the external evaluation of Nutrition North Canada, the Committee’s recommendations have been implemented alongside co-development efforts with Indigenous and northern partners. As the Program is supporting a research Program in lieu of an external evaluation, the Government of Canada is supporting in principle Recommendation 3.

As a first step, and in January 2022, CIRNAC reaffirmed its commitment to addressing food insecurity by expanding Nutrition North Canada’s mandate to food security, replacing the old mandate of northern economic development. This update is directly informed by the recommendation of the Committee for the Program’s mandate be changed to improve food

security outcomes in northern and isolated communities.

The launch of the Harvesters Support Grant in April 2020 is the result of an engagement process conducted throughout 2016 and 2017 to canvass the views of Northerners on how to make Nutrition North Canada work better for them. Feedback emphasized the importance of traditional and country foods to northern food systems and Budget 2019 provided \$8 million per year to 108 isolated, northern communities to support hunting, harvesting, and food sharing activities through this new programming. As Indigenous communities are the experts in hunting and the keepers of the land, this distinctions-based Grant was co-developed with Indigenous and northern partners to ensure that its design is tailored to the unique realities and needs of isolated communities. The Harvesters Support Grant reaffirms the importance of traditional foods and harvesting to the physical, cultural, social, and spiritual well-being of northern and isolated communities. It acknowledges and supports the entirety of the harvesting cycle, from training (by elders), food collection to food preparation and preservation, full use of byproducts (e.g., hides and furs) as well as the celebration of the harvest and successful harvesters. Indigenous partners have praised Nutrition North Canada's support for harvesting activities and the Harvesters Support Grant's governance model for strengthening self-determination in food security. The Grant had an impressive first 2 years, supporting over 15,000 hunters/harvesters, over 410 community hunts/harvests, and over 717 community food sharing initiatives.

Through Budget 2021 investments, and in line with the Committee's recommendation of increasing access to traditional foods, Nutrition North Canada expanded the Harvesters Support Grant by \$36 million over 3 years while introducing additional supports for storage capacity, gardening activities, and traditional decision making mechanisms in a total of 112 eligible communities. In line with the Committee's recommendation to expand the Grant, this expansion was motivated by the feedback of recipient organizations delivering this Grant funding to eligible communities. Many have cited the need for deeper investments in small storage infrastructure and organizational capacity, which paved the way for a revision of the Grant's terms and conditions in close collaboration with Indigenous partners.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nutrition North Canada worked closely with Indigenous partners and national and regional food banks to support the delivery of surplus, donated food to northern communities through AAFC's Surplus Food Rescue Program. Through the implementation of the Harvesters Support Grant and engagement with Indigenous partners during the pandemic, Nutrition North Canada recognized the important contributions of community food organizations and initiatives to local food systems and the social safety nets in isolated communities. To that end, in August 2022 and through Budget 2021 investments, the Program launched the Community Food Programs Fund, a new component under the Grant to support the social safety networks that ensure everyone is fed. With an additional investment of \$60.9 million over 3 years, the aforementioned Fund provides supports for local food programs, including school lunch, elders meal programs, and cooking circles. Additionally, this new component encourages partnerships with food banks and non-profits, the creation of a bulk-buying clubs, and the development of food security initiatives to expand sharing networks and ensure everyone in isolated communities has access to food, chiefly low-income and lone-parent households, women, children, elders, among others.

To maximize local control and Indigenous peoples' right to self-determine their food systems, funding from the Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund flows directly to recipient organizations such as First Nations organizations (e.g. Tribal Councils), self-government and land-claim organizations and independent communities. This funding is not competition-based and all eligible communities have an equal opportunity to access these Grant supports. Additionally, in respecting the spirit and intent behind land-claim and self-government agreements, this funding's terms and conditions for agreement holders include any activities in keeping with their own regional food security strategies. For example, the four Land Claim Organizations in Inuit Nunangat may fund any activities listed in the Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy and its associated implementation plan. The Strategy can be regarded as the foundational document for their Grant spending and the Grant is the first such recognition of the Strategy.

Through flexible investments and minimal reporting requirements, these initiatives seek to restore the status of hunters in isolated communities, promote cultural revitalization and pride in the land, encourage the inter-generational transfer of traditional knowledge and practice, increase local food infrastructure, as well as support community food programs that expand sharing networks and ensure the needs of the most marginalized are met. Additionally, these initiatives are mindful of the administrative capacity constraints in Indigenous organizations and isolated communities and dedicate funds, through the Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund, to increase the human capacity of recipient organizations as eligible expenditures include salaries and encourage the hiring of food security coordinators residing in isolated communities.

The subsidy is the single largest component of the Nutrition North Canada program budget. In April 2020, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Program's subsidy received a one-time \$25 million top-up in the 2020-2021 fiscal year to support higher subsidy rates for nutritious foods and pandemic necessities in all eligible communities. In parallel, pandemic relief funding was rapidly distributed to Indigenous communities, including food security and harvesting supports. Over \$1.8 billion was delivered by ISC through the Indigenous Community Support Fund which supported, among other activities, measures to address food insecurity, such as support for the purchase, transportation and distribution of food, and access to traditional foods through hunting and fishing in the event of outbreaks. Additionally, \$380 million was delivered by AAFC to support emergency food programs, while the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) provided direct financial support to families. These investments, in combination with the higher subsidy rates, resulted in 30% increase in the volume of subsidized food shipped to eligible communities in 2020-2021, or an additional 10 million kilograms, as compared to the previous year.

While the subsidy has been successful in lowering the prices of perishable foods and essential non-food items (than they otherwise would be without the subsidy) and increasing the volume of eligible foods being shipped to eligible communities, the Government shares in the desire to optimize Nutrition North Canada in order to improve food security outcomes in isolated Indigenous and northern communities. In August 2022, and through Budget 2021 investments, Minister Vandal announced the expansion of the Program's subsidy to local food producers, food banks, and non-profits that service eligible communities. The objective of this expansion to new recipient categories is to increase the food supply and food options in eligible communities and removing barriers to access for low-income households through the availability of food at no cost. To date, Nutrition North Canada has onboarded three food banks onto the Subsidy, with over 40,000 kilograms of shipped of donated and surplus food to eligible communities in less than a year since the expansion was announced.

While there are no restrictions on the number of stores in a community that can receive the retail subsidy, the Government recognizes that the application and claims process can be onerous for smaller retailers and constitutes a barrier-to-entry. The August 2022 announcement included a commitment to reduce the reporting burden for small, local retailers and administrative exemptions for locally-owned retailers claiming less than \$30,000 in subsidy amounts per year. The objective of these changes is to support and encourage local community businesses to participate and benefit from the subsidy and local residents will have increased access to more affordable nutritious foods and essential items.

Through conversations with Indigenous partners and isolated communities, Nutrition North Canada is currently encouraging small, local retailers to apply to the Program and is dedicating administrative supports to these small-business on a case-to-case basis and a manner that responds to their unique needs and capacities. In the meantime, the Program is working with a number of locally owned retailers in northern Ontario, northern Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories to onboard them onto the subsidy.

The main driver behind these recent expansions is the feedback from Northerners. The Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board gives Indigenous Peoples and Northerners a direct voice in the program. The Board is composed of Inuit and First Nations membership. In addition to the Advisory Board, the program regularly consults the Indigenous Working Group and the

Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee Food Security Working Group. Nutrition North Canada also continues to work closely with Indigenous partners, communities and recipient organizations of the Harvesters Support Grant & Community Food Programs Fund to collaborate on how to improve the subsidy, eligible food list and grant programs. Input on how to better orient the program is collected throughout these meetings and by way of community visits, public engagement meetings in isolated communities, discussions with local governments, as well as the Program's working relationships with community organizations and key stakeholders.

In 2019, Nutrition North Canada added a subsidy for surface transportation in addition to a shipped by air subsidy on eligible non-perishable staples and family-friendly items such as macaroni, flour and diapers. The surface subsidy seeks to incentivize registered recipients to use the most optimal transportation route to ensure prices remain cost-effective for northern households. Additionally, heeding the advice of Program partners of ensuring women and girls are supported, the Program also added feminine hygiene products to the eligibility list to ensure these products remain accessible and affordable. The Indigenous Working Group is committed to exploring options to further adjust the food eligibility list by adding food items that support northern households to a higher subsidy category. As well, the Indigenous Working Group seeks to make recommendations to the Program on what items should be added to the Subsidy moving forward.

With the expansion of the subsidy to food banks, CIRNAC approved a flat subsidy rate to these non-profit recipients that applies on all items shipped to eligible communities and in partnership with the representative Indigenous organization or government. For example, in the Island Lake region of northern Manitoba, the 4 Island Lake communities developed a list of desired food items to be shipped by food banks to support northern households. Harvest Manitoba (the first food bank registered with Nutrition North Canada) works directly with the Island Lake Tribal Council and receives a subsidy on all items shipped to the Island Lake region in correspondence to the list provided. Items such as Klik and soup mixes – staples for harvesting trips and the cooking of traditional foods – receive the food bank subsidy and are made available to eligible communities at no-cost and as requested by community members. This marks a shift from the current health and nutrition focus of the subsidy program in order to first assist northern households with access to their basic needs and staple items. This frees up the household income of the most marginalized groups to be spent on fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious items. Notably, items used for hunting, fishing, and gathering are already eligible expenses under the Harvesters Support Grant.

The Government supports in principle the objective behind the Committee's recommendation of launching an external evaluation of Nutrition North Canada. The Government remains committed to evidence-based policy making and to working with Indigenous partners to understand the Program's current impacts and shortcomings and to explore how the program can be modified and improved to meet a food security objective. Since it replaced the Food Mail program in 2011, Nutrition North Canada has been the subject of numerous evaluations, audits, consultations, and studies, including: the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development entitled, *From Food Mail to Nutrition North Canada* (2011); the 2014 Fall Report of the Auditor General on Nutrition North Canada; a study of Northern food retailing (2014); Nutrition North Canada Engagement (2016); a horizontal evaluation of Nutrition North Canada (2019); and the 2021 Report of the Auditor General, *Protecting Canada's Food System*, examining Nutrition North Canada's spending of the \$25 million pandemic support injection. Another horizontal evaluation of the Program is underway for 2024-2025.

As evidenced above, Nutrition North Canada has taken actions to address recommendations from past audits, evaluations and consultations as well as ongoing feedback from the Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, Indigenous partners and Northerners. A number of enhancements have been made to the retail subsidy, in consultation with Indigenous partners and Northerners, including: an updated Performance Measurement Strategy; budget increases; modifications to the list of eligible communities; augmentations to the subsidy rates; modifications to the list of eligible items; addition of a surface transportation subsidy; the expansion of the subsidy to new recipient categories; and the streamlining of reporting

requirements for small, locally-owned retailers.

Yet the Government recognizes that there remains a need to examine the impact of Nutrition North Canada in relation to those who need it the most. A current impediment to effective evidence-based policy making is the lack of sufficient data (e.g. population, income, food security, etc.) in isolated communities. To that end, the Government of Canada is supporting the newly launched Nutrition North Canada Research Grant. Launched in August 2022, the Research Grant supports Indigenous-led research, in partnership with academic organizations, that fills critical data gaps and increases the evidence base with respect to food access inequality, the dynamics of existing federal food access programs, and food insecurity among Indigenous Peoples in isolated communities. This research component follows a distinctions-based Gender-Based-Analysis Plus approach as it aims to address knowledge gaps pertaining to the impact of the retail subsidy on women, lone parent and low-income households among others, as recommended by Committee. It seeks to generate critical insights on the experiences of marginalized groups such as women, lone-parent households, youth, elders, and differently abled individuals navigating the Program and propose solutions to address any systemic or design barriers. In 2022-2023, Nutrition North Canada funded 5 Indigenous-led research projects at \$250,000 each over 2 years to generate new knowledge on food security and food access inequality in isolated northern communities. The Grant represents a phased approach through which a partnership of academia and remote communities (and their respective Governments) is first tasked to fill in critical data gaps to increase the evidence-base for Policy-making. Following this, the next phase of the Grant tasks the partnerships with examining the subsidy and making improvements to better address food security.

Currently, the Program is actively engaged with a number of academic critics (including one who is partnering with Indigenous governments in their research) of Nutrition North Canada in their examination of the Program's subsidy performance and other food security issues. In addition to regular conversations with these academics, Nutrition North Canada supplies key Program data for in-depth analysis to support these research efforts. These studies, along with the efforts underway through the newly launched Indigenous-led Research Grant, will produce nuanced recommendations and generate insights regarding policy options that can improve subsidy performance. In turn, the Program will engage with key partners to implement recommendations generated by these studies to ensure the compliance of registered recipients, the passthrough of the Program's subsidy, the enforcement of financial penalties in case of non-compliance, as well as increasing the food supply in northern and isolated communities so residents have access to broader options, encouraging healthy competition.

Additionally, the Program partnered with the PHAC Applied Research Division in the Centre for Surveillance and Applied Research to develop evidence-based guidelines on effective, acceptable, equitable, and feasible distinctions-based interventions that could reduce or prevent household food insecurity among Indigenous people in isolated and northern communities in Canada. This Guidelines Project includes membership from federal partners, academics, and community leaders. These initiatives are expected to inform the enhancement and/or redesign of the retail subsidy component of the Program to support equitable access to market (store-bought) food, as part of a continuum of programs and policies to reduce food insecurity among Indigenous Peoples in isolated communities.

Furthermore, CIRNAC acknowledges that there has long been a disconnect between performance measures for Program and feedback from community members, Indigenous and northern partners, and academics. Program performance measures, largely based on administrative data reported by recipients, such as kilograms of eligible food shipped and the cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket, show year over year increases in the shipment of nutritious food to isolated communities and year over year stability in food prices, respectively. At the same time, community members, Indigenous and northern partners, and academics continue to raise concerns that nutritious food remains unaffordable for most and the prevalence of food insecurity in eligible communities continues to be several times higher than the prevalence of food insecurity in the rest of Canada. CIRNAC acknowledges that this disconnect between program performance measures and the lived experiences of Northerners has fed continued apprehension about the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of

the Program's retail subsidy, and is actively working with Indigenous and northern partners to improve program evaluation and, ultimately, outcomes.

- In 2021, CIRNAC co-developed a new program indicator to better measure food affordability across different family compositions. This work is part of a larger process CIRNAC is undertaking to review and revise program performance measures. This indicator takes into account income and family composition to measure the percentage of median after-tax income required to purchase sufficient nutritious food. The indicator uses the Revised Northern Food Basket as a proxy for the cost of nutritious food, calculated annually by the Program based on data from retailers. Median income data, by economic family, is provided through the most recent census data. The Economic Family statistical unit is defined by Statistics Canada as “a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship,” and includes four categories: couple economic families without children or other relatives; couple economic families with children; lone-parent economic families; and, persons aged 15 years and over not in economic families. The Economic Family statistical unit takes into account the composition of the group of people sharing a dwelling, which can be multigenerational and include extended family, and how the income is shared to provide for all the members. A key strength of analysis based on the economic family is that it provides more granular information to support monitor the program impact of the Program's subsidy in addressing food insecurity on food affordability, especially for those most in need or most vulnerable such as families with children and lone parent families. women and children.
- CIRNAC committed to working with Indigenous partners to co-develop indicators for the Harvesters Support Grant. In the Fall and Winter of 2022-2023, Nutrition North Canada held two co-development workshops with Program partners, with a total attendance of over 40 participants, to co-develop performance indicators for the Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund that reflect the isolated communities' definition of success, with food sovereignty as an ultimate Program outcome. Through this exercise, CIRNAC recognized that what constitutes successful programming should be dictated by the people Nutrition North Canada serves and that reporting questions should be designed in collaboration with Indigenous partners. Feedback from these workshops is being finalized and will be reflected in the latest iteration of Nutrition North Canada Performance Information Profile.
- There is a difference between food price data (such as the Revised Northern Food Basket or other basket measures), affordability (food prices in the context of family size and disposable income), food security (reliable and culturally appropriate food access as part of overall cost of living and quality of life), and food sovereignty (self-determination in achieving food security). There are data gaps all along the spectrum that need to be addressed to better understand the current food insecurity realities in isolated Indigenous and northern communities served by Nutrition North Canada, if and how the retail subsidy is contributing to improving food access and food security, and what enhancements could improve program efficiency and efficacy. Through the aforementioned Research initiatives, CIRNAC is actively seeking ways to address these data gaps in order to inform program evaluation and enhancements moving forward.

Finally, community eligibility criteria developed by the program are meant to be fair and accessible. The Program's current mandate is to serve isolated, northern communities that experience isolation for a minimum of four weeks at a time, outside fall freeze-up and spring thaw seasons. Isolation status is reviewed annually and communities that are affected by specific transportation, geographical, and other factors including natural and man-made disasters may become eligible for the program. For example, community eligibility criteria was expanded in 2016 to include 37 communities in the provincial North. Since 2021, the program added nine new communities in the Northwest Territories, Ontario, and Alberta to the Program as their seasonal surface transportation has been eroded by climate change and now fit the definition of “isolated” for program purposes. While the Program's mandate remains focused

on isolated communities in the meantime, Nutrition North Canada is committed to carrying out annual reviews of surface isolation and adding new communities as they meet the Program's eligibility criteria. The Program strives to be responsive to the evolving needs of isolated and northern communities while staying within budget and maximizing impact.

As outlined above, Nutrition North Canada has taken concrete and meaningful steps at addressing the Committee's recommendations, with many of the recommended programming well underway. The Committee emphasized that food sovereignty is a requirement to achieving food security. The Government concurs, and the Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund reinforce Indigenous peoples' right to design and develop their self-determined food systems in order to seed food sovereignty. Combined with the recent expansion of the subsidy and the launch of the Research Program, current Nutrition North Canada programming seeks to increase the food supply in isolated communities, reduce reliance on the South, increase access to traditional foods, support community-led food security initiatives, and expand the evidence-base to drive meaningful and effective policy making in direct collaboration with Indigenous partners.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that northern food insecurity is a complex problem rooted in poverty which cannot be solved by the Nutrition North Canada program alone, work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to explore economic development opportunities and options such as income supplements or other social assistance programs to alleviate household poverty and increase the income levels of food-insecure households in the North; and that any new measure be indexed to the cost of living, population growth and inflation in the North.

The Government of Canada supports in principle this recommendation. The Government recognizes that while food prices, availability, and access are challenges that contribute to household food insecurity, poverty is a key factor.

The Government of Canada is working with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to support economic development and increase income security, with the understanding that these communities and their organizations are best placed to know and understand the distinct needs and priorities of their citizens and members. Additionally, provinces and territories play a key role in the area of income security (e.g., income assistance), which is a shared area of responsibility. As such, the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of working with the provinces and territories to find solutions to common challenges.

At a meeting of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee on April 21, 2022, the Inuit Nunangat Policy was endorsed by the Prime Minister and President Obed of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, alongside federal Cabinet ministers and the elected Inuit leadership from the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Makivik Corporation, and the Nunatsiavut Government and is now a government policy in effect. The purpose of this policy is to promote prosperity and support community and individual wellbeing throughout Inuit Nunangat with the goal of socio-economic and cultural equity between Inuit and other Canadians. It is intended to be transformational and to improve the creation and implementation of federal programs, policies, and initiatives in Inuit Nunangat that promote economic development and self-reliance in the region, as well as support new and existing Inuit-owned businesses across Inuit Nunangat. In the future, therefore, the development and delivery of economic development opportunities and options for Inuit and/or to apply in Inuit Nunangat will be guided by the Inuit Nunangat Policy.

Another example is the work of AAFC. In June 2021, AAFC worked with the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council to deliver regional outreach sessions with Indigenous partners, including a session focused on Northern Canada. These sessions were intended to solicit perspectives from Indigenous partners involved in agriculture and agri-food operations on thematic areas such as barriers to and opportunities for training, capacity, and the creation of an ongoing Indigenous engagement forum.

The Government of Canada also recognizes the importance of reducing poverty in all its forms. That is why it released *Opportunity for All, Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy* in 2018. The Strategy offers a bold vision for Canada as a world leader in the eradication of poverty and is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty. Opportunity for All sets ambitious and concrete poverty reduction targets based on Canada's Official Poverty Line: a 20 percent reduction in poverty by 2020 and a 50 percent reduction in poverty by 2030, which, relative to 2015 levels, will lead to the lowest poverty rate in Canada's history.

According to the Northern Market Basket Measure, Canada's official measure for Poverty as part of the Poverty Reduction Act, 20.2% of the population living in the territories, or approximately 24,200 people, were below the poverty line in 2021, up from 18.1% in 2020. The poverty rate for Yukon was 7.7% (about 3,100 people), that for the Northwest Territories was 15.0% (about 6,400 people), while the preliminary poverty rate for Nunavut was 39.7% (about 14,600 people). In comparison, according to the 2018-base year Market Basket Measure, it was estimated that 7.4% of the population in the provinces was living in poverty in 2021.

The Government is making significant progress towards meeting its goal of reducing poverty by 50 percent by 2030. According to the latest data from Canadian Income Survey in 2021, the poverty rate in Canada followed an overall downward trend since 2015, going from 14.5% in 2015 to 7.4% in 2021, allowing the Government to have met its interim poverty reduction target. While the COVID-19 pandemic put unprecedented pressure on Canadian households, the poverty rate in 2021 remained well below the pre-pandemic in 2019 (10.3%). This underscores the progress being made towards the Government's goal to cut poverty in half by 2030. Given economic developments such as high inflation and widespread cost of living/affordability challenges in recent years, the impacts of recent economic events on progress toward the poverty reduction target are still being assessed.

In addition, as part of its Strategy, the Government of Canada is working with National Indigenous Organizations and others to co-develop indicators of poverty and well-being from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis perspectives. These indicators will help to better measure poverty among Indigenous populations in Canada in a way that is culturally appropriate.

As the Committee's report indicates, economic development and social programming are both necessary to reduce poverty and food insecurity. The Government of Canada supports the economic development of Indigenous people and Northerners in a number of ways.

Through the AgriDiversity Program, AAFC will continue to help under-represented groups in Canadian agriculture, including youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities, to fully participate in the sector by helping these groups address the key issues, and barriers they often face for sector participation. The program will help to strengthen the sector and build its capacity by:

- helping diverse groups to better develop their skills to take on a greater leadership role;
- building the entrepreneurial capacity and business skills of under-represented groups;
- facilitating the sharing of industry experience, best practices and knowledge to help under-represented groups to manage transformation and adapt to changes in business operations; and
- strengthening the sector by incorporating the views of a greater diversity of industry players.

The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program launched in 2019 is a co-developed, distinctions-based framework designed to support First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Urban/Non-affiliated Indigenous people to improve their skills and reduce the skills and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The ISET Program provides \$408.2 million in annual funding to over 115 Indigenous service providers across the country to provide a full suite of skills training and wraparound services that enable clients to pursue their

own specific education and employment goals. This funding is complemented by CIRNAC's Harvesters Support Grant in isolated communities, whereby Grant funds can help purchase the tools and equipment of trained small engine mechanics and certified hunters so they can pursue employment opportunities that enhance food security outcomes in their communities.

The Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency's (CanNor) Northern Isolated Community Initiatives (NICI), announced in 2019, supports projects for local and Indigenous food production systems and aims to support economic development opportunities throughout northern food systems and to improve food security. As of November 2023, CanNor had approved approximately \$10.8 million in grants and contributions funding to 50 food system projects across the territories through NICI.

CanNor, through its suite of economic development programs, will continue to support northern and Indigenous communities to create a strong, diversified and sustainable economy that creates jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Social programs, a responsibility across all three orders of government, also play an important role in reducing poverty and food insecurity. Social assistance programming falls under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, with the exception of social assistance for First Nations living on-reserve. For First Nations living on-reserve, income assistance is based on the applicable rates in a given province of residence or Yukon Territory. In 2018-20, Indigenous Services Canada's Income Assistance Program completed a First Nations-led engagement to look at how the program can be more responsive to the needs of First Nation individuals and families. Findings from the engagement have been used to begin conversations with Indigenous partners on next steps in Income Assistance reform.

In addition, the Government of Canada delivers a number of programs that benefit Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples and Northerners. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) provides tax-free monthly payments to families raising children. In the 2023-24 benefit year, the maximum annual CCB amount is \$7,437 per child under age six and \$6,275 per child age six through 17. The Canada Workers Benefit provides a supplement to labour market earnings, to help low-income workers receive more income and encourage more people to join and stay in the workforce. For seniors in Canada, the Old Age Security (OAS) program plays a significant role in providing income security. OAS recipients who receive little to no income, other than this pension, are eligible for additional assistance through the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

To ensure that all eligible families receive the benefits to which they are entitled, the Government has provided funding to improve access to the CCB and other benefits, to expand outreach efforts to Indigenous communities, and to conduct pilot outreach activities for urban Indigenous communities. Since 2016, Service Canada has conducted more than 2,400 visits to over 650 Indigenous communities, resulting in more than 25,000 service requests and increased access to federal benefits. Between 2016–2020, the Indigenous Outreach Program resulted in an increase of approximately 8,000 OAS recipients and over 6,500 Canada Pension Plan recipients on-reserve.

In addition to measures that provide income to individuals and families, the Government of Canada is investing in measures that will help to reduce poverty and food insecurity in part by reducing household expenses, leaving people with more money for food and other necessities. For instance, as announced in Budget 2021, the Government of Canada is working with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners to build a Canada-wide, community-based child care system.

Parks Canada, particularly through Land Claim Agreements and Indigenous Impact and Benefit Agreements, is committed to economic development at a local level. This typically includes a focus on Indigenous employment, priority on local contracting, and general support for local tourism operators. The positive economic impact on communities situated close to a National Park, National Historic Site, or a National Marine Conservation Area is significant.

Through CIRNAC, Nutrition North Canada's subsidy expansions help promote economic development in isolated communities by extending subsidy benefits to small, locally-owned

retailers and local food producers which enhances the economic viability of small businesses in isolated communities. Additionally, the Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund provide funding support for the hiring of local food coordinators in isolated communities to manage the delivery of Grant funding, coordinate food security initiatives, and conduct community engagements related to local food security needs. Finally, the growing partnerships between food banks and Indigenous partners can help create jobs in isolated communities for managing and distributing donated foods.

Furthermore, Nutrition North Canada is partnering with Indigenous organizations and other key stakeholders to develop credit and banking options in support of buying clubs in isolated communities. As the majority of the population of the 125 communities (estimated around 100,000 residents) Nutrition North Canada serves do not have access to formal banking options, residents rely mainly on northern retailers to provide banking services – often extremely expensive and limited.

The Government will continue to work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners and to explore potential economic development opportunities and ways to address household poverty.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, recognizing that food sovereignty is a precondition to food security, enable Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to make their own decisions with respect to their food systems, including by:

- **Focusing on the North’s existing and well-established food systems;**
- **Providing long-term, sustainable funding and resources to support community-based projects, and to strengthen food production and processing capacity at the community level;**
- **Exploring innovative technologies to support local food production, processing, transport and storage; and**
- **Establishing new co-developed mechanisms and governance models to address gaps in existing policies and programs.**

The Government supports in principle recommendation 5. The Government of Canada is committed to working with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to strengthen local food systems and food economies to support self-determination in food security. The recently launched Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund are examples of current supports for northern food-systems.

In 2016, Nutrition North Canada initiated a broad public engagement to hear from Indigenous Peoples and Northerners, community groups, provincial/territorial and municipal government members, registered retailers and suppliers, and other interested parties on how to improve the program. During the engagement, participants stressed the importance of country/traditional food to their physical, cultural, social, and spiritual well-being, expressed a continued preference for country/traditional food as the mainstay of their diet, supplemented with market foods, and asked for federal support for harvesting and food sharing to increase access to country/traditional food. Through the 2016 engagement, the need to find innovative ways to support locally produced foods as a way to lessen dependence on costly market foods and build community food sovereignty was also identified.

The Government of Canada committed \$62.6 million over five years through the 2018 Fall Economic Statement, starting in 2019-20, with \$10.4 million ongoing, to help support several enhancements to the Nutrition North Canada program in direct response to the 2016 engagement, including \$8 million per year to introduce the Harvesters Support Grant to help lower the high costs associated with traditional hunting, harvesting, and food sharing activities. The Grant was launched in April 2020 and in its first year supported over 5,600 hunters and harvesters, over 135 community hunts/harvests, and over 120 community food sharing

initiatives. In its second year of deployment, these numbers increased to 15,000 hunters and harvesters, over 410 community hunts/harvests, and over 717 community food sharing initiatives.

Through Budget 2021, the Government of Canada committed \$163.4 million over three years, starting in 2021–2022, to Nutrition North Canada to work with Indigenous partner to expand the program towards food security. The Program completed a widespread co-development process, including consultation with Harvesters Support Grant recipient governments and organizations, the Indigenous Working Group, the Inuit Food Security Working Group, and the Program's Advisory Board, to determine where best to target this new funding to help improve food security in the North through strengthening local food systems and food economies. Among the list of enhancements mentioned under Recommendation 3, Nutrition North Canada signed three and five year Grant agreements with Indigenous governments and organizations to deliver the Harvesters Support Grant and the newly launched Community Food Programs Fund, which provide funding support for small infrastructure and increased storage capacity in isolated communities (e.g. the purchase of community freezers, refrigeration, sea-cans, yurts, and building storage space); backyard gardens and animal husbandry; as well as classes and equipment for food preparation and preservation.

Furthermore, in 2022, the Program extended the subsidy program to include local food producers as a way of stimulating in-community and northern food production efforts. Currently, Program officials are engaging with local greenhouses and small farms, as well as working with Yukon Agriculture to redirect farm produce to the North, first to the Northwest Territories then into Nunavut through the creation of innovative partnerships.

From 2022-2023 to date, Nutrition North Canada signed harmonized Harvesters Support Grant and Community Food Programs Fund agreements with 24 partners representing 112 eligible communities across 3 territories and northern regions of 6 provinces for a total of \$112 million over 2 years. The working relationships established since the deployment of the Harvesters Support Grant and during the co-development of Budget 2021 investments have provided the Program with a nuanced understanding of food security challenges in remote communities and nurtured strong partnerships between CIRNAC and Indigenous governments and organizations. To date, Nutrition North Canada continues to adopt an ongoing co-development approach to inform program and policy review and development. CIRNAC will continue to move forward together with Indigenous partners to ensure that Indigenous people are in control of their own destiny and making decisions about their communities. Nutrition North Canada's approach demonstrates flexibilities in both policy and process and supports Canada's commitments to honouring modern treaties, and to furthering nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous Peoples founded on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

In addition to CIRNAC, a number of other departments deliver programs to support Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty. CanNor's Northern Isolated Community Initiatives (NICI), announced in 2019, aims to support economic development opportunities throughout northern food systems and to improve food security. NICI supports community-led projects such as community freezers, greenhouses, local food production, and skills training for local and Indigenous food producers. As of November 2023, CanNor had approved approximately \$10.8 million in grants and contributions funding to 50 food system projects across the territories through NICI.

Through Nutrition North Canada, ISC and PHAC fund and support culturally appropriate retail and community-based nutrition education activities in all eligible isolated northern communities to complement the retail subsidy component administered by CIRNAC. For instance, Nutrition North Canada Nutrition Education Initiatives aim to increase knowledge of healthy eating and developing skills in selecting and preparing healthy store-bought and traditional or country foods and building on existing community-based activities.

ISC provides other on-going funding for community-based healthy living and healthy child development programming and services in First Nations and Inuit communities, that promote healthy eating and food skills, and improve access to healthy foods, including both store-bought and traditional or country foods. Communities decide which activities to undertake based on

their local needs and priorities, ultimately supporting community development and self-determination.

In addition, ISC supports northern food security through the delivery of the Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program. This program, taking a holistic approach to health and climate change adaptation and community resilience building, supports food security initiatives due to the close linkage between climate change and food security. Food security initiatives supported in the past focus on: teaching traditional hunting and survival skills, and bringing youth onto the land with elders for cultural and practical skills development; developing local food security strategies taking into account anticipated climate impacts; and developing food security solutions, such as training in food processing or assessments on building food processing plants in communities, as a response to climate change impacts already felt. Budget 2021 announced \$22.7 million over five years, beginning in 2021-22, to support First Nations and Inuit as they manage the health impacts of climate change, such as access to country food, impacts of extreme weather events, and mental health impacts of climate change on youth.

The 2020 Fall Economic Statement allocated \$25.9 million to ISC to support engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partners for the co-development of distinctions-based infrastructure plans to fulfill the Government's mandate to close the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities by 2030. The development of long-term distinctions based infrastructures plans between the Government and Canada's Indigenous partners will contribute to addressing food insecurity across Canada's northern and isolated communities.

Recognizing that northern and Indigenous food systems have unique realities, AAFC works with multiple partners to coordinate efforts and identify how it can best support Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty. For example, AAFC's Science and Technology Branch supports departmental researchers to build relationships, engage, and co-develop research projects with Indigenous partners that focus on supporting community-identified priorities in agricultural science. AAFC also hosts the Interdepartmental Indigenous Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Cluster, working with a number of federal departments and agencies to increase and expand coordinated support for Indigenous aspirations, and innovation in research and environmental stewardship, inclusive of food systems. Lastly, AAFC is partnering with the community of Makkovik (Nunatsiavut/northern Labrador) on a 5-year co-developed food systems research project (started in April 2021) to develop community-scale composting and vegetable gardens in Makkovik, in addition to undertaking research collaborations to investigate low-cost strategies to augment production of field and root crops in northern climates.

Infrastructure Canada (INFC) recognizes that supporting locally driven infrastructure priorities is key to addressing the persistent infrastructure deficit across Canada's northern and remote communities. Launched in 2017, INFC's Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program's includes \$2 billion over 10 years for the *Rural and Northern Communities Infrastructure Stream* to support a broad range of infrastructure projects that can reduce barriers to improved food security. These include road, air, and marine infrastructure projects, and projects that increase access to more efficient or reliable energy sources that are critical to strengthening food production and processing capacity at the community level.

CONCLUSION

The Government commends the members of the Committee, and the organizations and individuals who appeared before it, for their insight and commitment to achieving meaningful progress on food security in northern and isolated communities.

The Committee Report and the ongoing work of a number of federal departments and agencies detailed in this Response highlight the scope, complexity and urgency of food insecurity in northern and isolated communities, as well as Government's commitment to continue to work with Indigenous people and Northerners to close socio-economic gaps and to strengthen northern food security and food sovereignty.