



Appendix III

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 and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) has served notice of significant funding cuts to Alberta's on-reserve shelters. Some of the shelters have been told that their budgets will be reduced by \$40,000-\$60,000.

"They will be cutting 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."

Originally the cuts were supposed to be effective next month (shelters were told over the last few weeks), but INAC contacted ACWS just last night and told them the cuts would be delayed for one year because they acknowledged they hadn't given shelters enough time.

While acknowledging their error and giving more time is a step in the right direction, ACWS is calling upon the federal government to maintain its 5-year 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.

"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 few weeks later, we're learning about federal government cuts that will prevent shelters from providing the essential service of helping Aboriginal families.

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 – this annual renewal is where shelters are being told that their budgets are being dramatically slashed. Part of this agreement also included a review in 2009/2010 which is currently underway. 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 to 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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