The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index

Stronger Nations, Stronger Canada

The National Indigenous Economic Development Board



Bridge in Pangnirtung (2010)
By: Elisapee Ishulutaq, Inuit, Pangnirtung

Acknowledgement

The cover artwork, *Bridge on Pangnirtung*, was created by the late Elisapee Ishulutaq (1925–2018), a celebrated printmaker and graphic artist who lived in Panniqtuuq (Pangnirtung), NU. This artwork is reproduced with permission from the artist's estate.

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Message from the Chair of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board



Dawn Madahbee Leach, Chairperson NIEDB

On behalf of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB), I am pleased to present the ***2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index: Stronger Nations, Stronger Canada.***

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index is an updated iteration of the landmark *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities* that was released in 2019 in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Living Standards. Developed independently by the NIEDB, the 2026 iteration serves as a modernized benchmarking tool for analyzing the closure of the infrastructure gap between northern and remote Indigenous communities, their non-Indigenous neighbours, and southern Canada across seven socio-economic indicators (broadband, transportation, energy, health, education, water and housing). Through examination of the index's findings and existing policies and approaches to Indigenous infrastructure development, the NIEDB has developed strategic recommendations for implementation by the public and private sectors that advance a vision of **Indigenous-led development practices that are rooted in self-determination, reflect community needs, and support opportunities for Indigenous economic growth.**

The NIEDB strongly believes that infrastructure is a key enabling factor for Indigenous economic prosperity. While Canada fast-tracks major project development, northern and remote Indigenous communities continue to lack the foundational infrastructure needed to participate in the economic opportunities generated by the Build Canada Strong agenda and to support broader socio-economic well-being. The NIEDB remains committed to advancing recommendations aimed at closing these critical gaps and holding Canada to account for their implementation. This index serves as an accountability mechanism and a critical source of data-driven evidence to ensure Indigenous economic polices are reflective of northern and remote realities and effective in closing the divide.

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index provides a quick snapshot into the lived realities of northern and remote Indigenous communities that is often not understood by southern Canada and not considered in centralized decision-making processes. As a reader, I encourage you to look beyond the numbers presented; this data represents impacts on Indigenous Peoples' everyday lives. Individuals are without clean water for drinking, preparing food or bathing. Families are getting sick due to overcrowded homes and unsafe living conditions. Youth are forced to decide between graduating high school or staying with their families. Elders are unable to access critical health services within their communities, forcing them to undertake costly, challenging, and sometimes unsafe travel to receive care . Understanding these realities is essential for both public and private sector stakeholders and is the foundation upon which meaningful change is built.

I would like to thank the NIEDB's Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee for their expertise and diligence in the development of this index, and for the Committee's Chair, Michael Bonshor, for his leadership throughout the conception, development and publication process. I would also like to thank the NIEDB's Secretariat team for their work and dedication to the creation and release of this report.

In solidarity,



Dawn Madahbee Leach
Chairperson
National Indigenous Economic Development Board

Message from the Chair of the Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee

On behalf of the NIEDB Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee, I am proud to present the ***2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index: Stronger Nations, Stronger Canada.***



Michael Bonshor, Chair Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index is being released amid an economic and political climate marked by major project urgency and increased focus on northern security that presents significant development and economic growth opportunities. However, the evidence found in this report signifies that the current policies and approaches are ineffective and that structural changes are needed to move from stagnation to meaningful and equitable progress.

The NIEDB's recommendations are grounded in a data-informed understanding that meaningful progress requires long-term, coordinated, and decentralized approaches rooted in Indigenous self-determination. Indigenous Peoples possess the lived understanding of their community's needs and the unique considerations for northern and remote development. The public and private sector must recognize the strength in Indigenous innovation, the economic security in co-development approaches, and the right to self-determination through the implementation of the recommendations presented in this index.

As Canada continues to advance its Build Canada Strong agenda, it is missing out on the critical opportunity to **build *stronger* through Indigenous-led development**. This index presents compelling evidence for moving beyond the status quo in infrastructure development. Not only is Indigenous-driven project development a moral imperative as northern and remote Indigenous Peoples continue to face inadequate socio-economic conditions, but engaging in co-development from the earliest stages of projects on Indigenous territories is also a sound business strategy supports project success. I encourage public and private sector proponents to read the index and critically engage with the evidence of stagnant process, and give due consideration to the recommendations put forward for driving tangible change.

I would like to thank the members of the Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee – Dawn Madahbee Leach, Dr. Marie Delorme, Althea Wishloff and Crystal Martin – for their unwavering commitment to supporting the socio-economic well-being of northern and remote communities. I would also like to thank Victoria LaBillois, the former NIEDB Vice-Chair and member of the Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee, who provided invaluable guidance throughout the writing of this report.

Sincerely,

Michael Bonshor
Chair, Indigenous Economic Data and Research Committee, NIEDB

The National Indigenous Economic Development Board

Established in 1990, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB) is the only federally appointed advisory body dedicated exclusively to advancing Indigenous economic development in Canada. Composed of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis leaders from across the country, the Board provides strategic policy advice to the federal government, monitors progress on Indigenous economic inclusion, and champions initiatives that foster Indigenous prosperity, self-determination, and reconciliation.

The NIEDB's 2024–2027 Strategic Plan outlines a bold vision: to build a strong and enduring foundation for Indigenous economic inclusion by addressing systemic barriers, promoting Indigenous-led innovation, and ensuring equitable access to infrastructure and opportunity. *The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* aligns with priority area three of the strategic plan: to participate in the production of Indigenous-led data and research, and; to collect, analyze, and disseminate on key economic indicators. This report serves to advance policy reform and mobilize private and public sector efforts to close the infrastructure gap between northern and remote Indigenous communities and the rest of Canada through data-driven, evidence-based analyses.

Information about the NIEDB can be found at: www.niedb-cndea.ca

NIEDB members at the time of publication:

Dawn Madahbee Leach Chairperson Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation General Manager, Waubetek Business Development Corp.	**Dr. Marie Delorme** Member-at-large Métis, Manitoba Métis Federation Chief Executive Officer, Imagination Group Inc.	**Michael Bonshor** Member Dzawad'enuuxw First Nation of Kingcome Inlet President and CEO, Visions First Nations Financial Services/Ki'mola Indigenous Capital
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Jordan Baptiste Member Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Partner and President, Creative Fire		

Executive Summary

> *"We're not just stakeholders – we're rights holders. Infrastructure must reflect our priorities, our values and our leadership."*
>
> Chief Sharleen Gale,
> Chair of the First Nations Major Projects Coalition
> First Nations Major Project Summit, 2025

In 2019, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB), in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS), released the first-ever *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities*, a groundbreaking tool designed to measure the adequacy of infrastructure across 236 remote communities using 13 indicators spanning broadband, transportation, energy, health care, education, water, and housing. The findings were unequivocal: remote Indigenous communities faced severe and systemic infrastructure deficits, scoring far below both remote non-Indigenous communities and urban centres, with Inuit communities and those in Nunavut experiencing the most acute gaps. *The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index*: *Stronger Nations, Stronger Canada,* builds on this foundational work with updated data, refined indicators, and alignment with the NIEDB's 2024–2027 Strategic Plan, which emphasizes economic inclusion, reconciliation, and Indigenous-led development.

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index is a critical document because infrastructure is the foundation of economic development. Without reliable transportation, broadband, energy, water, housing, health care, and education systems, Indigenous communities cannot fully participate in Canada's economy, attract investment, or support population growth. *The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* provides the evidence base needed to guide federal policy, track progress, and hold governments accountable for closing long-standing gaps.

Key Definitions

Indigenous: For the purposes of this index, a community is considered Indigenous if over 50% of the population self-identified as Indigenous in the 2021 Census of Population.

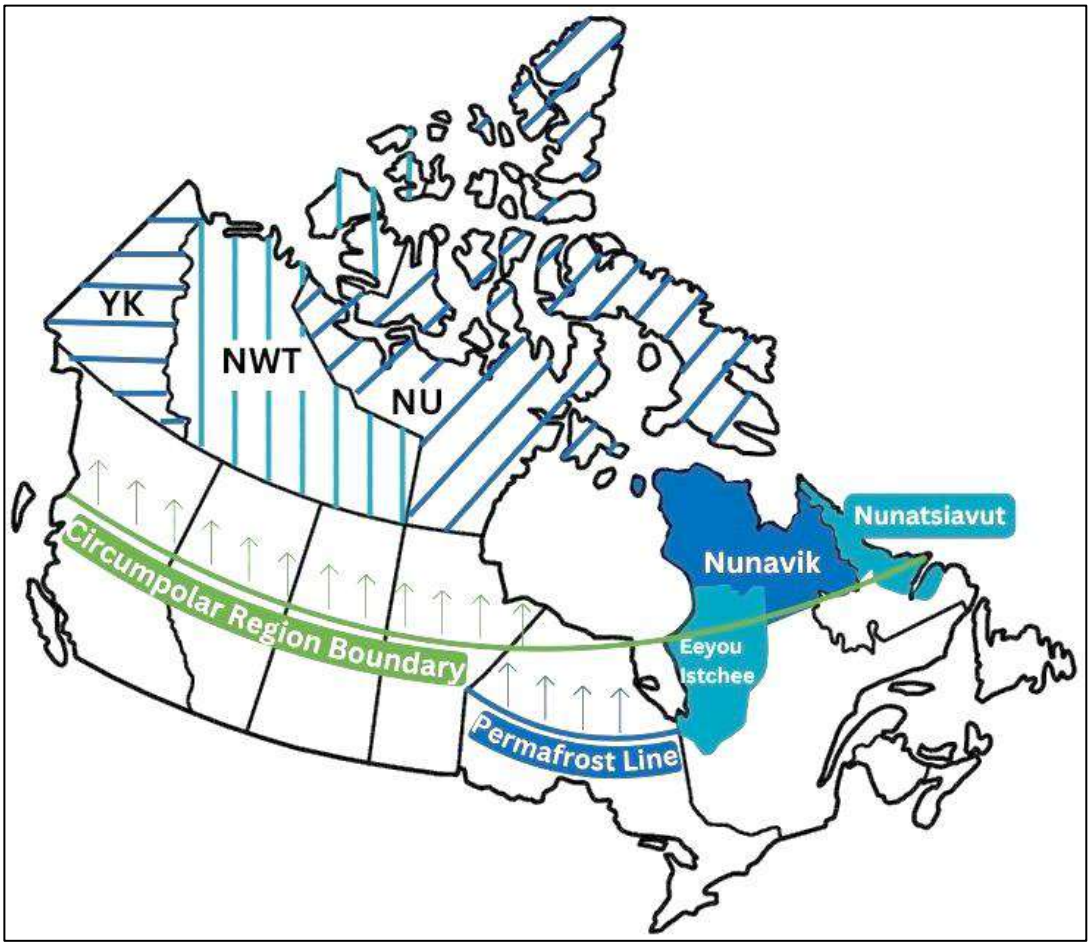
First Nations, Inuit and Métis: The Indigenous communities assessed in this index are disaggregated into First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities by determining the heritage group with the largest population in each community.

Northern Communities: Along with communities in the regions of Nunatsiavut, Nunavik and Eeyou Istchee, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon (inclusive of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region), this index considered a community to be northern if located north of the Circumpolar region boundary (slightly below for Manitoba), and those above the permafrost line of the Canadian shield boundary in Ontario.

Remote Communities: Signal49 Research uses "remote" as a broader term to refer to communities "that are geographically isolated from major service centres or supply chains."[1]

Southern Communities: This index utilizes Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) for southern comparisons. CMAs are formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre, with a total population of at least 100,000, based on data from the Census of Population, and a high degree of integration between the municipalities and the population centre core.[2]

Map of Assessed Northern Regions



This map illustrates the approximate boundaries of the northern regions included in the assessment of infrastructure in Indigenous communities. Boundary and Settlement Region lines are included for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered exact.

For maps with more precise boundary information, please refer to Annex A.

[1] Hussain and Belliveau, *Closing Community Infrastructure Gaps: Indigenous-Driven Solutions*, 5.
[2] Statistics Canada, "Census metropolitan area (CMA) and census agglomeration (CA)."

Key Findings

High-Impact Findings Across Domains

Across all seven infrastructure categories, the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* reveals a consistent pattern: Indigenous communities continue to face deep, systemic, and persistent infrastructure inequities, even when compared to non-Indigenous communities in the same northern and remote regions.

- Indigenous communities score **30–60% lower** than non-Indigenous northern communities across most indicators.
- **Geography does not explain the gap**, non-Indigenous communities in the same regions have significantly stronger infrastructure.
- Infrastructure conditions have stagnated or improved only marginally since 2019, despite their central role in economic development.
- Where progress exists (in clean energy projects, modular housing, virtual education), it is tied to targeted investment and Indigenous-led innovation.

Most Severe Deficit

Housing – Severe and Worsening for Inuit Communities

- Northern and remote Indigenous communities: 0.20
- Inuit communities: 0.12
- Non-Indigenous northern and remote communities: 0.80
- CMAs: 0.96

This was the lowest scoring indicator on average for northern and remote Indigenous communities and the largest gap observed with non-Indigenous northern and remote communities (-0.60), and CMAs (-.76). Housing shortages, overcrowding, and deteriorating homes undermine health, workforce participation, and community stability. Bottom line: Housing is one of the most acute and visible infrastructure crises, especially in Inuit regions.

A Close Second

Energy Infrastructure

- Northern and remote Indigenous communities: 0.38
- Non-Indigenous northern and remote communities: 0.67
- CMAs: 0.90

This is the second lowest scored indicator across all seven infrastructure categories. It reflects limited access to reliable, affordable, and clean energy, conditions that directly restrict industrial development,

increase operating costs, and limit participation in the clean-energy transition. Bottom line: Energy is one of the deepest infrastructure gaps and one of the most significant barriers to Indigenous economic growth.

Broadband Connectivity

A Significant Socio-Economic Barrier

- Northern and remote Indigenous communities: 0.52
- Non-Indigenous northern and remote communities: 0.98
- CMAs: 1.00

This gap is enormous and has profound economic consequences. Poor connectivity blocks access to remote work, digital skills, e-commerce, telehealth, financial services, and participation in emerging sectors like AI and clean tech. Bottom line: In the digital economy, lack of broadband is a direct barrier to economic sovereignty.

Sector by Sector High-Impact Results

Broadband: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.52 vs. 0.98 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 1.00 for CMAs. Lack of reliable internet excludes Indigenous communities from the digital economy, remote work, e-commerce, AI opportunities, and education.

Transportation: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.55 vs. 0.75 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 0.91 for CMAs. Poor transportation access raises costs, limits labour mobility, and blocks participation in regional supply chains.

Energy: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.38 vs. 0.67 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 0.90 for CMAs. Limited access to reliable, clean energy raises operating costs and restricts industrial development.

Health: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.49 vs. 0.83 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 1.00 for CMAs. Some communities have no on-site health services, creating serious risks and undermining workforce stability.

Education: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.61 vs 0.82 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 1.00 for CMAs. Secondary and post-secondary education gaps directly constrain labour force readiness and long-term economic mobility.

Water: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.68 vs. 0.89 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 0.98 for CMAs. Reoccurring advisories and outdated systems pose health risks and undermine community confidence and economic planning.

Housing: Northern and remote Indigenous communities scored 0.20 vs. 0.80 for northern non-Indigenous communities, and 0.96 for CMAs. Overcrowding, deteriorating homes, and insufficient supply limit workforce participation, increase health risks, and constrain economic growth.

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index shows that Indigenous communities continue to operate with infrastructure conditions far below national standards, limiting their ability to participate fully in Canada's economy and undermining progress toward reconciliation and shared prosperity. The gaps are not inevitable, they reflect decades of underinvestment, not geography.

Where targeted investments have been made in clean energy, modular housing, virtual education, meaningful progress is visible. Sustained, distinctions-based, Indigenous-led investment is essential to closing these gaps and unlocking the full economic potential of Indigenous communities.

Root Causes of Northern and Remote Indigenous Infrastructure Deficits

The findings throughout this report reinforce that the infrastructure gap is not the result of geography or remoteness, but of long-standing structural, policy, and governance failures that continue to shape outcomes today. As demonstrated in the *Historical Context* section, generations of colonial policy created a foundation of inadequate, low-standard infrastructure, "housing, water systems and facilities that continue to plague Indigenous communities as infrastructure deteriorates and falls behind modern standards." These legacies remain embedded in federal systems, producing fragmented programs, short-term funding cycles, and jurisdictional confusion that impede progress.

Often times, decisions about community needs remain in external hands, removed from the daily realties and understandings of community needs and key logistical considerations to ensure effective infrastructure development, such as high construction costs, short-building seasons, and climate-related challenges. The disconnect between the lived realities of Northern and remote Indigenous communities and the federal government that shapes these realities through policy was demonstrated by the March 30th comment by Prime Minister Carney, stating he could "outlast" a Grassy Narrows community member who suffers from mercury poisoning. The community has been dealing with the dumping of mercury in their river by the Dryden Mill for 55-years, affecting community members' health and daily access to clean drinking water, sustenance and economic opportunities through the commercial fishing industry.[3] Comments like these can result in decisions that unintentionally reinforce inequities or reflect discriminatory assumptions about Indigenous communities' needs, priorities, or legitimacy. In addition to substantive policy decisions being made without sufficient cultural, community, or lived understanding of Indigenous Peoples' best interests, overlapping federal–provincial jurisdictions and poor intergovernmental coordination further complicate policy and program implementation, resulting in delays.

The *Policy Landscape* section further illustrates how federal approaches, while evolving, remain inconsistent, siloed, and insufficiently aligned with Indigenous priorities. Despite commitments to UNDRIP implementation, devolution, and distinctions-based funding, Indigenous communities continue to navigate "fragmented and paternalistic federal approaches to Indigenous policy," with multiple departments administering disconnected programs that fail to reflect the true cost of northern construction, climate pressures, or population growth. The Standing Committee on Indigenous and

[3] Staniforth, "Grassy Narrows leadership seeks mill closure, Carney apology."

Northern Affairs' findings of "unsatisfactory progress on more than half of the Auditor General's recommendations" underscore the persistence of systemic barriers.

The *Results* section provides quantitative evidence of how these structural issues manifest across all seven infrastructure domains. Housing infrastructure remains the lowest-scoring indicator (0.20), revealing the cumulative effects of overcrowding, deteriorating units, and insufficient capital investment. Broadband connectivity shows a similarly stark divide, with northern and remote Indigenous communities scoring 0.52 compared to 0.98 for non-Indigenous northern communities, demonstrating how policy choices (not geography) determine access to the digital economy. Energy remains a critical gap, with northern and remote Indigenous communities scoring 0.38 and Inuit communities near zero with 0.02, reflecting decades of underinvestment in grid connections and renewable systems. These patterns are consistent across transportation, water, health, and education, where stagnation or marginal improvements since 2019 point to systemic barriers rather than meaningful progress.

The *Data Challenges* section highlights another root cause: the absence of reliable, distinctions-based, Indigenous-governed data. Inconsistent reporting, suppressed Census data, and the lack of comprehensive Métis and Inuit infrastructure datasets limit the ability to allocate funding proportionately or track progress. As the report notes, "significant data gaps…underscore the need to work collaboratively with communities, while upholding Indigenous data sovereignty, to ensure that data is accurate, reliable, accessible, and reflective of infrastructure realities." Without accurate data, federal systems default to outdated formulas and reactive funding models that perpetuate inequities.

Finally, the *Infrastructure Needs* section demonstrates how these systemic issues translate into daily lived realities: unsafe winter roads, chronic water shortages, failing diesel systems, health centre closures, teacher vacancies, and overcrowded homes. These case studies show that infrastructure deficits are not abstract—they directly threaten health, safety, and economic participation. They also reveal how interconnected the deficits are: a community facing unreliable power cannot operate a health centre; a community without all-season roads cannot reliably receive construction materials; a community without broadband cannot deliver virtual education or telehealth.

Taken together, the evidence across the report confirms that the root causes of the infrastructure gap are structural, systemic, and interdependent. They stem from colonial policy, chronic underfunding, jurisdictional fragmentation, insufficient data, and the exclusion of Indigenous governance from decision-making. As the *National Indigenous Economic Strategy* emphasizes, achieving parity requires transforming these systems through Indigenous-led planning, modernized funding models, and recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction across all infrastructure domains. The persistence of the gap since 2019 demonstrates that incremental adjustments are not enough—systemic reform is required, grounded in Indigenous rights, Indigenous innovation, and long-term, predictable, distinctions-based investment.

Introduction

Infrastructure as a Foundation for Economic Inclusion

Infrastructure is the backbone of economic development and community well-being, and as stated by Signal49 Research, closure of the gap is inextricably tied to Canada's prosperity. Signal49 Research's report, *Closing Community Infrastructure Gaps*, also finds that Indigenous infrastructure gaps "create considerable economic and service delivery challenges and shape long-term planning, public investment and inter-governmental coordination."[4]

For Indigenous communities across Canada, particularly those in northern and remote regions, adequate infrastructure is not merely a matter of convenience, but a prerequisite for equity, opportunity, and self-determination. The infrastructure gaps across the seven categories that are assessed within this report are interconnected to one another and inextricably tied to community economic development, employment and entrepreneurship.

The NIEDB recognizes that closing the infrastructure gap is essential to closing the prosperity gap – without reliable infrastructure, Indigenous communities cannot fully participate in Canada's economy or realize their development potential. This report serves to benchmark and track progress towards closing the infrastructure gap and hold Canada to account for advancing economic reconciliation.

Persistent Inequities and the Need for Measurement

Despite decades of advocacy, Indigenous communities continue to face severe infrastructure deficits. However, a lack of available data and reporting prevents full comprehension of the extent of the gap across all distinctions groups.

Below is a summary of existing reporting on the Indigenous infrastructure gap, which revealed several emerging themes across all distinctions groups:

- Infrastructure deficits are deeply tied to governance, jurisdiction, and historical underinvestment.
- Remote and northern communities face higher costs, climate pressures, and logistical barriers that are not reflected in current funding formulas.
- Indigenous-led planning and long-term, predictable funding are essential to closing the gap.
- Gaps in available data—particularly for infrastructure in Métis communities—limits the ability to allocate funding proportionately and track progress.
- Infrastructure is not only a technical domain but a foundation for economic participation, cultural continuity, and self-determination.

[4] Hussain and Belliveau, *Closing Community Infrastructure Gaps*, 3-4.

First Nations

+The landmark 2023 report *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030*, co-developed by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Indigenous Services Canada, estimates a **$349.2 billion investment** is needed to bring First Nations infrastructure up to par with the rest of Canada. This includes housing, water systems, schools, health care facilities, and digital connectivity. The report also warns that delaying action until 2040 could increase costs to $527 billion, leaving another generation without critical infrastructure.[5] Further, the *Benefits for All Canadians* study by the Assembly of First Nations and the Conference Board of Canada (now known as Signal49 Research) shows that closing the infrastructure gap could generate $635 billion in economic output and create 338,261 full-time jobs per year, with 31,448 held by First Nations peoples, making it not just a moral imperative, but an economic one.[6]

> *"Reconciliation in our country must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing these social health and economic gaps. These include the basics: clean water, housing, child welfare, policing, and infrastructure to be successful."*
>
> National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, Assembly of First Nations

The First Nations Financial Management Board's RoadMap project further highlights that First Nations face structural barriers in infrastructure development that are not encountered by other levels of government. These include inequitable funding formulas, limited fiscal powers, and fragmented program delivery. The report argues that without systemic reform and equitable access to capital, First Nations will continue to face delays and cost escalations that widen the infrastructure gap over time.

Recent AFN budget submissions reinforce these findings, calling for long-term, distinctions-based investments grounded in substantive equality and First Nations jurisdiction. They emphasize that infrastructure is not only a technical requirement but a matter of rights, reconciliation, and community well-being.[7] Together, these sources demonstrate the scale and urgency of First Nations infrastructure needs and the importance of predictable, rights-based funding models.

[5] Assembly of First Nations, "Closing the Infrastructure Gap."
[6] Conference Board of Canada, *Benefits for All Canadians (Part 2): Long-term Socio-economic impacts of Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030*, 7.
[7] Assembly of First Nations, "Investment Priorities."

Inuit

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's (ITK) *10-Year Costing & Analysis of Infrastructure in Inuit Nunangat* cites a **$75.1 billion infrastructure gap** across Inuit Nunangat spanning housing, transportation, energy systems, water and wastewater, broadband, health facilities, and education infrastructure. ITK emphasizes that these deficits are structural barriers to economic participation, climate resilience, and Inuit self-determination, and that infrastructureis foundational to Arctic sovereignty and community well-being.[8]

> *"When it comes to project reviews, the focus has been on what types of nation-building projects are Inuit interested in building... and then, how can we make good on those projects by implementing them."*
>
> President Natan Obed, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Regional evidence reinforces these findings. Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated's *Nunavut's Infrastructure Gap* report highlights long-standing deficits in housing, transportation, and community facilities,[9] while ITK's *Infrastructure Midterm Review* identifies persistent challenges faced by the four Inuit Land Claim Organizations such as insufficient long-term investment, limited capacity, and the need for Inuit-governed funding mechanisms.[10]

Métis

Métis communities across their historic Métis Nation Homeland, which encompasses the Prairie provinces and parts of Ontario, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories[11], continue to face significant infrastructure deficits, particularly in housing, transportation, water and wastewater systems, broadband, and community facilities. While a Métis-specific infrastructure gap cost analysis hasn't been conducted, the Métis National Council's (MNC) Federal Budget submissions provide a window into the extent of the infrastructure gap faced across the Métis Nation. The *Fall 2025 Pre-Budget Submission* calls for $330 million for Métis community primary health

> *"Métis representation is key to shaping Canada's future and advancing Nation-to-Nation, Inuit-Crown, and Government-to-Government relationships, based on a foundation of respect, true partnership, and recognition of rights."*
>
> President Victoria Pruden, Métis National Council

[8] Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *10-Year Costing & Analysis of Infrastructure in Inuit Nunangat*, 3.
[9] Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, "Nunavut's Infrastructure Gap."
[10] Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Infrastructure Midterm Review*, 2.
[11] Métis National Council, "Frequently Asked Questions."

care centres and a combined $3.6 billion for mental health, long-term care, homecare and palliative care programs.[12] Additionally, the *Federal Budget Submission for 2025* called for $1 billion to address the housing needs of the Métis Nation and $5.7 billion to support Métis-led elementary and secondary education;[13] and the *Federal Budget Submission for 2024* highlighted the need for $962.9 million to construct educational and cultural community infrastructure.[14]

Together, these proposals reflect a shift toward a Nation-to-Nation fiscal relationship in which Métis governments receive direct, predictable funding aligned with their own priorities. They also underscore the need for distinctions-based data and investment approaches, as Métis communities remain under-represented in national infrastructure assessments. Further, the absence of a comprehensive, Métis-specific infrastructure assessment highlights a critical data gap that limits the ability to allocate funding proportionately or track progress over time.

While there remains a need for a Métis infrastructure gap analysis, MNC's *The Status of the Métis Economy in Canada* report provides a data-based assessment of the Métis economy in Canada – highlighting key areas for intervention to help enable economic growth. With evidence demonstrating a large Métis economy with untapped growth opportunities, this report serves as an informing document for policy leaders, building the business case for addressing barriers to economic growth – a task inclusive of closing the infrastructure gap. For example, MNC's report found that the Métis have a higher rate of individuals without post-secondary education and while educational attainment is improving, the non-Indigenous populations' rate is increasing at a quicker rate – a socio-economic gap directly tied to the availability of post-secondary education in communities.

Some of the other key findings include:

- The Métis economy produced $21.0 billion in GDP in 2015 – surpassing the combined economies of Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Nunavut.
- Construction is the largest industry for the Métis economy.
- Total Métis business revenue grew 11.5% between 2015 and 2020, surpassing the 6.7% overall growth of Canadian businesses while facing growth limiting challenges.[15]

[12] Métis National Council, *Fall 2025 Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance*, 7.
[13] Métis National Council, *Federal Budget Submission for 2025*, 8,10.
[14] Métis National Council, *Building Capacity to Deliver for our Citizens: Federal Budget Submission for 2024*, 11.
[15] Métis National Council, *The Status of the Métis Economy in Canada*, 2-4.

The Indigenous Infrastructure Index as a Strategic Tool

In 2019, the NIEDB, in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS), released the first *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities.* This pioneering report provided a composite measure of infrastructure adequacy across 236 remote communities, using 13 indicators spanning seven infrastructure categories, including broadband, transportation, energy, health care, education, water, and housing. The findings were stark: remote Indigenous communities scored significantly lower than both remote non-Indigenous communities and urban centres, with Inuit communities and those in Nunavut facing the most severe deficits.

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index builds upon this foundational work, offering an updated and expanded assessment of infrastructure conditions in Indigenous communities. This new edition incorporates more recent data, updated indicators, reflects evolving policy contexts, and aligns with the NIEDB's 2024- 2027 Strategic Plan, which emphasizes economic inclusion, reconciliation, and Indigenous-led development.

Key enhancements in the 2026 iteration include:

- **Updated metrics** that reflect technological advancements, national infrastructure standards and community priorities
- **Comparisons between with the 2024 *National Indigenous Economic Progress Report*,** and the ***National Indigenous Economic Strategy*** allowing for analysis of infrastructure, income, employment, and education, across Indigenous-led data-reports.
- **Led by Indigenous perspectives,** the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* is fully Indigenous led, developed, reviewed and analyzed entirely by the National Indigenous Economic Development Board to bring true lived experience and Indigenous perspectives to this version of the report.

The persistent infrastructure gap remains one of the most pressing barriers to Indigenous economic development. By quantifying this gap and tracking progress over time, the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* serves as both a diagnostic tool and a call to action. It empowers policymakers, Indigenous leaders, and community advocates with the evidence needed to prioritize investments, shape policy, and hold governments accountable.

As we look ahead to 2030 and the federal commitment to close the infrastructure gap for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* offers a timely and critical update. It reaffirms the NIEDB's commitment to evidence-based advocacy and to the vision of a Canada where Indigenous communities enjoy infrastructure parity, economic opportunity, and full participation in the prosperity of the nation.

Historical Context

The infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities is not a recent phenomenon. It is the result of generations of systemic underinvestment, colonial policy, and jurisdictional neglect. From the *Indian Act*'s paternalistic control over land and resources to decades of federal programs that failed to meet basic standards, Indigenous Peoples have long been denied equitable access to the infrastructure that supports health, education, housing, and economic development.[16]

The historical evolution of infrastructure in Indigenous communities reflects shifting federal priorities rather than Indigenous needs or self-determined planning. Early federal investments were designed primarily to support administrative control, such as the construction of residential schools, government agent offices, and limited transportation links, rather than community well-being.[17] Housing, water systems, and community facilities were built to minimal standards, often without long-term maintenance funding, resulting in chronic deterioration and unsafe living conditions.[18]

By the mid-20th century, federal infrastructure programs expanded, but they remained fragmented, underfunded, and delivered through short-term project funding cycles that did not account for population growth, climate realities, or the true cost of construction in northern and remote regions.[19] According to CIRNAC's Northern, Strategic Infrastructure Assessment, southern Indigenous communities, while still facing significant inequities, benefited from comparatively greater access to transportation corridors, construction materials, skilled labour, and provincial service networks. Northern and remote communities, by contrast, were left with aging diesel power plants, seasonal roads, and water systems vulnerable to permafrost thaw, flooding, and extreme weather.[20]

The 2019 *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities* revealed the first comprehensive and data-driven picture of the severe infrastructure gaps facing remote Indigenous communities in Canada. Using 13 indicators across seven infrastructure categories, the 2019 index found that remote Indigenous communities scored an average of just 0.45—less than half the 0.97 benchmark set by southern Canadian cities—and significantly below remote non-Indigenous communities, even when controlling for community size. Inuit communities faced the deepest deficits, followed by First Nations and then Métis communities. The analysis showed major shortfalls in both economic infrastructure (especially transportation and energy access) and quality-of-life infrastructure (notably housing, health care, and education). These findings established clear evidence of systemic underinvestment, highlighted that remoteness alone does not explain the disparities, and set the foundation for ongoing monitoring,

[16] Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.
[17] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*.
[18] Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 2: Housing in First Nations Communities,* 15.
[19] Indigenous Services Canada, "Appearance before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer's Report on the Research and Comparative Analysis on the Estimates of the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs and the Department of Indigenous Services (May 17, 2023)."
[20] Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, *Northern Strategic Infrastructure Assessment* (various years).

indicator refinement, and future longitudinal tracking of infrastructure conditions in Indigenous communities.

In northern and remote communities, these disparities are compounded by geographic isolation, climate challenges, and high construction costs. The legacy of boil water advisories, overcrowded housing, and deteriorating schools is not just a technical failure, it is a breach of human rights.

Recent decades have seen important shifts. Modern treaties, self-government agreements, and distinctions-based funding models have begun to reframe infrastructure as an expression of Indigenous jurisdiction and community vision. Climate change has further accelerated the urgency of investment, as northern and remote communities face rapid environmental changes that threaten roads, runways, water systems, and energy security. [21] Despite these advances, the cumulative effects of historical underinvestment continue to shape today's infrastructure landscape, with northern and remote Indigenous communities experiencing the deepest and most persistent gaps.

[21] Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, *Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*, 18.

Policy Landscape

Federal Approach to Indigenous Policy

Federal policy has begun to reflect these priorities. The passage of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA)* in 2021 affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to determine their own development paths. Signal49 Research's report on *Closing Community Infrastructure Gaps* highlights the sustainable, economic value in decision-making rooted in community priorities, local realities and cultural values, and found that "when Indigenous communities lead planning, financing, and service delivery, infrastructure investments are more likely to be maintained, adapted over time, and integrated with broader economic goals."[22]

The right to self-determination has been increasingly prioritized by the federal government and advanced through devolution – the transferring of control over federal programs and services to Indigenous governments and organizations. Devolution allows Indigenous Peoples to advance programs and investments informed by local needs – ensuring critical gaps are no longer overlooked in federal prioritization and investment activities.

As summarized in Indigenous Services Canada's *Annual Report to Parliament 2025,* some key advancements in the transferring of the department's responsibilities, as they relate to infrastructure, includes:

- As of March 2025, the Government of Canada signed 11 regional education agreements which allow for greater First Nation control over the design and delivery of education systems and provide a pathway for a future transfer of control.
- At the time the annual report was published, the Government reported engagement in six Health Transformation projects which aim to transfer control over the design, delivery and management of community health programs and services to First Nations organizations.
- Budgets 2017 and 2021 committed $108.89 million (until 2025-2026) to support the transfer of housing and infrastructure services to First Nations-led organizations – such as the historic service delivery transfer agreement signed between the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada and the Atlantic First Nations Water Authority.
- In the 2024-25 fiscal year, the Government of Canada approved 67 additions to reserves which expands a First Nations' reserve land base and therefore enables the control and decision-making over those lands.[23]

The Government of Nunavut has recently made important strides in this area and will be able to make needs-informed decisions over public lands and resources, such as deciding over critical infrastructure developments, once control is officially transferred from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations

[22] Hussain and Belliveau, *Closing Community Infrastructure Gaps*, 4.
[23] Indigenous Services Canada, "Annual Report to Parliament 2025."

and Northern Affairs Canada on April 1, 2027. The federal government has gradually transferred jurisdiction over health, education, social services, housing and airports to the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut since the 1960s – Nunavut is the last territory of the three to have control over public lands and resources transferred.

Canada has one of the world's most educated workforces. However, while the NIEDB's 2024 National Indigenous Economic Progress Report (IEPR) found that high-school completion rates have improved for all Indigenous identity groups except Inuit between 2006 and 2021, persistent gaps remain, particularly for those residing in remote location – serving as a persistent barrier to Indigenous participation in the workforce and in building the national economy.

The proven success of Indigenous-led education serves to exemplify devolution as a strategic priority for the federal government to address this sustained gap. As championed on the NIEDB's website, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey's Indigenous-led, community-first, culturally-informed approach to education in Nova Scotia has achieved a 94% First Nation graduation rate, an average attendance rate of 91%, and more than 600 First Nations students enrolled in post-secondary education.[24] Similarly, in the 17 years since the Innu has led the Newfoundland and Labrador school Board, graduation rates in two Innu communities increased from 30 students in four decades, to 150 just since 2009.[25]

As will be discussed throughout this report, northern and remote Indigenous communities face a significant gap in access to education, often having to leave their community to graduate high school or attend post-secondary institutions, serving as a significant barrier to educational attainment. The NIEDB's 2024 *National Indigenous Economic Progress Report* shows lower educational attainment for Indigenous people in more remote areas, with post-secondary completion falling from 54.7% in accessible areas to 27.0% in very remote areas, and high school completion lower in rural areas (67%) than in CMAs (80%). The report also referenced an open-ended University of Alberta survey, which found that 15.7% of self-identified Indigenous students cited a lack of social support as a barrier to their post-secondary success, 6.6% cited racism, and 5.6% reported a lack of Indigenous representation—challenges partly linked to leaving their communities to study in colonial institutions and the resulting loss of cultural and family support systems. Further statistics show that 45% of Indigenous post-secondary students report experiencing racism, isolation, and the marginalization of Indigenous student knowledge, and that students whose family supports are out-of-province are 1.32 times more likely per semester to drop out.[26]

With adequate funding and prioritized investments in the infrastructure and capacity-building needed to support the transfer of responsibility, devolution represents a compelling opportunity for the federal government to scale proven, effective approaches to narrowing the socio-economic gaps faced by Indigenous Peoples.

However, successful devolution requires strategic planning and capacity-building efforts to ensure a community or organization is prepared to effectively make decisions and deliver programs and services that address community needs. For example, to prepare for the increase in human resources required to

[24] National Indigenous Economic Development Board, "Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey: Empowering Youth, Strengthening a Nation."
[25] Smellie, "Innu kids learn from their own as the First Nation takes control of schooling."
[26] National Indigenous Economic Development Board, *2024 National Indigenous Economic Progress Report,* 116, 124.

take control over lands and resources, the Nunavut Government, the Government of Canada and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. have launched several programs aimed at increasing Inuit employment.[27] Devolution must remain a long-term federal priority that is continuously and sufficiently invested in and carefully planned to ensure the required supports and resources are in place for a successful transfer.

Another indication of improved federal prioritization of Indigenous rights and well-being are the multi-billion-dollar allocations for Indigenous housing, water systems, and broadband expansion included in the 2023 and 2024 Federal Budgets—critical areas identified in both the NIES and the AFN's *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030* report. However, Indigenous Services Canada's *Annual Report to Parliament 2024* provides evidence of the fragmented nature of federal infrastructure programming. While the report documents progress in areas such as water advisories and broadband expansion, it also highlights persistent challenges in coordination, long-term planning, and distinctions-based funding. The report notes that remote and northern communities continue to experience the slowest progress due to high construction costs, climate impacts, and limited local capacity—reinforcing the need for a whole-of-government approach.[28]

Despite this progress, policy fragmentation remains a challenge. Infrastructure funding is dispersed across multiple federal departments and regional development agencies, such as Indigenous Services Canada, Infrastructure Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, each with its own criteria, timelines, and reporting requirements. Indigenous communities often face administrative burdens and delays in accessing funds, particularly in remote regions where needs are most acute.

Additionally, federal funding remains insufficient and unevenly distributed. Many communities report that funding formulas do not reflect actual needs, especially in remote regions where costs are higher. The federal budget's large national infrastructure envelopes focus on economic growth, energy security, and northern transportation, but they do not include dedicated distinctions-based allocations for First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities. Instead, Indigenous peoples are positioned as potential participants in broader nation-building projects rather than as recipients of targeted infrastructure investment.

The Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs released a *Follow-Up on Programs for First Nations* report which finds that despite an 84% increase in Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) spending, the department made unsatisfactory progress on more than half of the Auditor General's recommendations across health, drinking water, emergency management, and socio-economic programs. The Auditor General identified four persistent systemic barriers: lack of sustained management attention, unclear service levels, insufficient community capacity, and a passive, siloed federal approach that forces First Nations to navigate fragmented, application-heavy funding systems. Witnesses emphasized that these barriers have spanned governments and generations, and that meaningful progress requires a shift toward coordinated, needs-based, multi-year funding and stronger First Nations–led capacity. The report calls for ISC to implement all outstanding audit recommendations by 2027, introduce annual public reporting, and co-develop measurable plans with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

[27] Wat, "Nunavut has 1 year left before devolution comes into effect. Is the territory ready?"
[28] Indigenous Services Canada, "Annual Report to Parliament 2024."

Across specific sectors, the report highlights ongoing gaps in health workforce shortages, oral health inequities, unsafe drinking water systems, and inadequate emergency management capacity. For example, ISC still cannot meet its target staffing levels in remote communities, long-term drinking water advisories persist due to operator shortages and aging systems, and emergency management remains reactive and under-resourced. The Committee stresses that chronic underfunding, fragmented program design, and administrative burdens disproportionately harm smaller and more remote First Nations, reinforcing inequities. It recommends new legislation on First Nations drinking water by 2026 and improved multilateral emergency management agreements.[29]

For Indigenous peoples, this means that while some measures, like renewed water-system funding, expanded housing commitments, increased Canada Infrastructure Bank targets, and northern transportation investments, may indirectly benefit their communities, the budget does not directly address the structural infrastructure gaps that drive higher costs of living, limit economic participation, and constrain self-determination.

The absence of distinctions-based allocations reinforces long-standing concerns that federal funding formulas do not reflect the realities of remote construction costs, climate conditions, or the scale of unmet needs. As a result, Indigenous communities remain reliant on fragmented programs and competitive funding streams rather than a coordinated, rights-based infrastructure strategy that aligns with their priorities.

In addition to constraining Indigenous economic prosperity—such as through limited access to workforce-preparation opportunities, insufficient connectivity to support trade, and inadequate broadband access to digital markets and sectors, as will be discussed throughout this report—the shortcomings of the current federal approach to Indigenous funding and programming have measurable impacts on the physical and mental well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples continue to experience poorer health outcomes than the non-Indigenous population, including higher rates of chronic and infectious diseases, poorer mental health, and significantly lower life expectancy. These disparities are closely linked to federal policy areas such as inadequate access to health care and substandard housing, with geographic remoteness compounding these challenges and further exacerbating negative health and well-being outcomes.[30] It is a moral imperative for the federal government to adjust its approach to Indigenous policy to ensure efforts and investments properly address the issues perpetuating socio-economic disparities and diminished health and well-being, rather than further entrenching them.

Recent scholarship points to the need for new governance models. An article titled "New Models of Shared Rule Can Secure Better Infrastructure in Indigenous Communities" argues that collaborative governance between federal, provincial/territorial, and Indigenous governments can overcome jurisdictional fragmentation and improve infrastructure outcomes. The article highlights examples where shared rule—rather than delegated authority—has enabled more efficient planning, reduced duplication, and strengthened Indigenous decision-making in major projects.

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[29] House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, *2025 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Follow-Up on Programs for First Nations*.
[30] Canadian Public Health Association, "First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples Health."

Indigenous Services Canada recently commissioned an internal study conducted by the Strategic Policy and Research Directorate to assess the link between infrastructure investment and community well-being. *The Associations Between Infrastructure Investments by Indigenous Services Canada and Socio -Economic Conditions in First Nations Communities* used a mixed-methods approach combining administrative infrastructure investment data with socio-economic indicators drawn from the Community Well-Being Index, census data, and other federal datasets. The analysis focused on First Nations communities over a multi-year period and examined how investments in housing, water, education, and connectivity correlated with outcomes in income, employment, education attainment, and housing quality. The study found consistent positive associations between targeted infrastructure investments and improvements in socio-economic conditions, particularly in communities that received sustained or multi-sectoral funding. These findings reinforce the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index's* core premise: that infrastructure is not merely a technical asset, but a strategic lever for equity, prosperity, and reconciliation.

The research supports the *National Indigenous Economic Strategy's* Calls to Economic Prosperity, especially those under the Infrastructure and Finance Pathways, and offers a strong foundation for future tracking by the National Indigenous Prosperity Institute. It also highlights the need for long-term, Indigenous-led infrastructure planning and investment models that reflect community priorities and governance.

Federal Investment Priorities

Bill C-5, The One Canadian Economy Act

Quickly after the 2025 election, the Mark Carney government demonstrated that infrastructure development is a strong federal priority by introducing and passing Bill C-5, *The One Canadian Economy Act,* inclusive of the *Build Canada Act* and the *Free Trade and Labour Mobility Act. The Build Canada Act* aspect of Bill C-5 allows for major projects determined to be of national interest by the Major Projects Office (MPO) – such as ports, railways, energy corridors, critical mineral developments and clean energy initiatives – to be expedited through streamlined federal approval processes.

> *"The Red River Métis are ready, willing, and able to play a significant role in these activities."*
>
> President David Chartrand,
> Manitoba Métis Federation,
> in reference to Bill C-5 June 25, 2024,
> MMF Bi-Weekly Newsletter

Within this era of fast tracking major project development, the federal government committed to working in close partnership with Indigenous Peoples through the MPO, and respecting Indigenous rights under section 35 of the *Constitution Act* of 1982, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and modern treaties.[31] The MPO committed $40 million over three years for Indigenous

[31] Canada, "One Canadian Economy Act."

capacity-building initiatives to enable early and consistent engagement on major projects, and an Indigenous Advisory Council was formed to support the work of the MPO by providing expert advice for the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and interests in major project development.[32]

Proposed projects advanced to the MPO for national interest consideration that will have positive impacts on the communities assessed in this index are discussed in the section, *Looking Ahead: Future Infrastructure Impacts.*

In response to Bill C-5, the NIEDB submitted a formal recommendation letter to the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, reinforcing the importance of the legislation and offering strategic guidance. The Board welcomed the bill's intent and emphasized that infrastructure is not merely a technical challenge, it is a matter of economic justice, reconciliation, and Indigenous rights.

The Board's letter highlighted that infrastructure investments must be guided by Indigenous priorities and governance, and that the bill's framework should be designed to support long-term, community-led planning rather than short-term, project-based funding. It also stressed the need for alignment with the 107 Calls to Economic Prosperity outlined in the NIES, and encouraged the government to adopt a whole-of-government approach to infrastructure delivery.

Federal prioritization of major project development presents an opportunity to advance Indigenous-led infrastructure projects that jointly address community-level infrastructure gaps and contribute to national economic priorities if Indigenous communities are properly consulted at the onset of any proposed development, are approached as equitable partners, and are sufficiently supported through capacity-building initiatives. *The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* serves as a monitoring mechanism to track equitable development, directly supporting the goals of Bill C-5 by providing a standardized, community-informed tool to measure infrastructure outcomes across Indigenous communities.

Defence and Arctic Sovereignty

Federal investment in Arctic defence and dual-use infrastructure is expanding rapidly, with recent commitments such as the proposed $1-billion Arctic Infrastructure Fund and the federal government's $35-billion plan to modernize Canada's northern military presence. Beyond base-specific upgrades and NORAD modernization, these investments include improvements to civilian infrastructure, such as airport upgrades in Rankin Inlet and Inuvik, the extension of the Mackenzie Valley Highway, and the development of the Grays Bay port and road, to strengthen both national security and northern community connectivity. Through engagements with CanNor, CIRNAC, and the Privy Council Office, the NIEDB emphasized that these defence-driven investments represent a critical opportunity to leverage dual-use infrastructure to close the infrastructure gap and expand Indigenous economic development, provided Indigenous communities are equitably consulted, included, and supported. This is especially important given that the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* shows northern Indigenous communities falling significantly behind both southern communities and their non-Indigenous neighbours in the quality and quantity of critical infrastructure. Increased federal presence in the North must therefore be paired with

[32] Canada, "Partnering with Indigenous Peoples."

strategic planning to ensure community services, such as housing and health systems, are strengthened rather than strained.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development's April 2026 study on Arctic sovereignty reinforces this approach, highlighting the inseparable relationship between northern infrastructure, economic security, and conventional security. The Committee echoes the Nunavut Arctic Sovereignty and Security Strategy's call for a people-centred Arctic policy and urges that Indigenous Peoples be central actors in Arctic foreign policy, infrastructure delivery, resource stewardship, and regional decision-making. This aligns with the Board's discussion with the Defence Investment Agency (DIA), which confirmed that defence procurement is shifting from a narrow focus on equipment purchases toward co-developed, dual-use infrastructure, including northern roads, training facilities, and community-serving assets, that build both sovereignty and local capacity. Together, these developments demonstrate how defence policy, procurement, and investment strategies can serve as vehicles for reconciliation, skills development, and Indigenous business participation — while directly addressing the deep northern infrastructure deficits identified in the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index*.

Canada Strong Fund

To support the advancement of major projects across Canada, the federal government announced in late April 2026 its intention to establish the country's first sovereign wealth fund. With an initial capitalization of $25 billion, the fund will allow Canadians, along with private-sector and international partners, to invest and share in its returns. The fund will not be restricted to projects designated as being of national interest under the *Build Canada Act*; instead, it will support a broad range of initiatives spanning clean and traditional energy, critical minerals, agriculture, and infrastructure.[33]

Build Communities Strong Fund

As well as prioritizing investment in major national interest and defence-related projects, the federal government has committed $51 billion through the Build Communities Strong Fund to address community infrastructure gaps across Canada. Of this funding, $27.8 billion is for local infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, water and sewer systems; $6 billion is dedicated to regionally significant projects such as building retrofits, and; the remaining $17.2 billion is to be matched by the provinces and territories and used for housing, post-secondary and health infrastructure.

Of significance, provinces and territories are required to allocate 20% of their funding to rural, northern and Indigenous communities, and 10% of the $6 billion stream must go to Indigenous-led projects – presenting a substantial opportunity to leverage dedicated funding to address community-informed infrastructure needs.[34]

[33] Zimonjic, "Carney announces creation of Canada's first national sovereign wealth fund."
[34] Lord, "PM breaks down Ottawa's $51B infrastructure plan: 'The next 25, 30 years is going to be a great time to be in the trades'."

Some of the announced projects under this fund include $108 million to Iqaluit for major expansion of the community's water infrastructure, such as utilidor improvements and trucked water services needed to add up to 2,500 new housing units, and $20 million to Hay River for a new water treatment plant.[35]

The Canada Infrastructure Bank (Indigenous Community Infrastructure Initiative)

The Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) plays an increasingly important role in advancing Indigenous-led infrastructure by providing financing, advisory support, and equity-participation tools tailored to the needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Through its dedicated Indigenous investment target and the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Initiative (ICII), the CIB supports community-driven projects in areas such as clean energy, broadband, housing-enabling infrastructure, and community facilities. ICII is designed to help Indigenous communities overcome long-standing barriers to capital access by offering flexible, low-cost financing and project development support for infrastructure that improves quality of life and supports long-term economic growth. Together with the Indigenous Equity Initiative, which enables communities to acquire ownership stakes in major projects, these tools help shift Indigenous partners from stakeholders to co-owners of infrastructure assets. The CIB's approach aligns with federal commitments to economic reconciliation and demonstrates how targeted, partnership-based financing can accelerate infrastructure development and strengthen Indigenous economic prosperity.

The National Indigenous Economic Strategy

The policy environment surrounding Indigenous infrastructure has evolved significantly in recent years, shaped by landmark legislation, federal commitments, and Indigenous-led frameworks. Central to this shift is the *National Indigenous Economic Strategy* (NIES), launched in 2021 by a coalition of Indigenous organizations, including the NIEDB. The Strategy outlines **107 Calls to Economic Prosperity across four Strategic Pathways: People, Lands, Infrastructure, and Finance**. It positions infrastructure not as a standalone issue, but as a foundational enabler of Indigenous self-determination, economic inclusion, and cultural resurgence.

The Infrastructure Pathway of the NIES calls for Indigenous-led planning, equitable investment, and culturally appropriate design. It emphasizes that infrastructure must support not only economic activity but also health, education, housing, and connectivity. The Strategy advocates for long-term, predictable funding models and the removal of jurisdictional barriers that prevent communities from exercising full control over infrastructure development.[36]

The NIEDB supports the full implementation of the *National Indigenous Economic Strategy* and recommends that future infrastructure policy be guided by its principles. This includes aligning federal programs with Indigenous priorities, streamlining funding mechanisms, and embedding Indigenous governance in all stages of infrastructure planning and delivery.

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[35] Windeyer, "Ottawa announces millions for Northern projects as it rolls out national infrastructure plan."
[36] Canadian Association of Native Development Officers et al., *National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada 2022: Pathways to Socioeconomic Parity for Indigenous Peoples*.

Presently, through the First Nations University, the National Indigenous Economic Prosperity institute is monitoring government and industry progress and implementation of the NIES' Calls to Economic Prosperity. This represents an empowerment and accountability tool aimed at fostering Indigenous economic parity in Canada. It will serve as an important catalyst for change, promoting innovative solutions and fostering economic resilience within Indigenous communities.

The below matrix analyzes the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index's* core indicators to the NIES priorities, demonstrating how infrastructure assessment can drive policy alignment, investment targeting, and community empowerment.

Connecting the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index's* indicators to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity and NIEDB Recommendations

Indicators	Calls to Action	Recommendations	Strategic Purpose
Housing	#43, #44, #45	Expand culturally safe housing initiatives and increase capital investment in Indigenous-led housing projects	Ensure culturally safe, sustainable, and community-led housing development
Water & Wastewater	#46, #47	Improve water infrastructure through Indigenous governance and targeted funding for clean water access	Advance Indigenous water governance and access to clean, reliable systems
Energy	#48, #49	Support renewable energy projects and Indigenous ownership of energy assets	Promote renewable energy and Indigenous control of energy infrastructure
Connectivity	#50, #51	Invest in broadband expansion and digital literacy programs for remote communities	Expand broadband and digital infrastructure for inclusion and innovation
Transportation	#52, #53	Upgrade transportation networks to enhance mobility and economic access in remote regions	Improve mobility, trade access, and emergency response in remote regions
Health Infrastructure	#54, #55	Fund Indigenous-designed health facilities and integrate cultural practices into care models	Strengthen Indigenous health systems and culturally appropriate care facilities
Education Infrastructure	#56, #57	Build and renovate schools with Indigenous leadership and curriculum integration	Enhance learning environments and lifelong education access

Methodology

Index Focus

The focus of the index is to quantify the difference in infrastructure between Indigenous and non-Indigenous remote communities in Canada's North, and analyze the gap with southern Canada. For southern comparisons, this index analyzes 32 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) across Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia – with total average scores nearing 1.00. The figures outlined in the 2019 *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities* will be used as a benchmark in monitoring progress. A distinctions-based and a provincial/territorial analysis will also be applied.

Formula

The formula for the index constitutes an arithmetic mean, wherein the value of 1 represents the highest value that can be ascribed to a community. An arithmetic mean is calculated by adding each of the values and dividing this sum by the total number of values, thus giving the 'average' value of any case.

Weighting

The basic index can be broken down into four levels. The highest three levels of infrastructure in the index have been termed: the overall index, the sub-indices (Economic Infrastructure and Quality of Life Infrastructure), and the components (broadband, transportation, energy, health care, education, water, and housing). In order to develop components indicative of the real state of community infrastructure, several of these components were further disaggregated to create sub-components. Specifically, these are: transportation (comprised of roads, air transportation and water transportation), education (comprised of school and college), and water (comprised of treatment, distribution, and quality). Within each component, each sub-component is equally weighted. Similarly, each component is equally weighted within its respective sub-index. The sub-indices are then equally weighted. This weighting scheme was created to ensure that each of the two main categories of infrastructure (Economic Infrastructure and Quality of Life Infrastructure) would receive equal weighting.

This index analyzes the unweighted average scores of communities – which provides a more accurate depiction of the reality in the average community.

Selection of Communities

The basic unit for the index is the community in remote areas. Determination on whether a community was considered Indigenous is based on over 50% of the population identifying as Indigenous according to 2021 Census data. Indigenous communities are then disaggregated into First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities by determining the heritage group with the largest population in each community.

For the communities in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, data was provided from an NIEDB report published in 2014 entitled *"Study on Addressing the Infrastructure Needs of Northern Aboriginal Communities"*.

A second method of data selection was used to select communities in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. In these provinces, the border for the Circumpolar region was used to define the northern region. This is the area north of approximately 55 degrees latitude. This boundary was chosen because it is an international standard of what constitutes northern. As permafrost is linked to a variety of infrastructure challenges, the region considered northern in Manitoba was extended slightly below the boundary of the Circumpolar region to include areas outside of the region that experience permafrost.

Only a small portion of Ontario is included in the Circumpolar Region, thus producing an inadequate sample of communities. The boundary of the Canadian shield was adopted with a focus on communities above the permafrost line. Again, certain communities were excluded at times, due to unavailability of publicly accessible data.

Using these boundaries, additional communities were selected – equating to a total of 236 communities used in the 2019 *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities.*

Due to the complexities presented by colonially-imposed land boundaries as discussed in the *Data Challenges* section of this report, communities that were previously divided by Census land divisions and analyzed accordingly in the 2019 index were considered one community for the purpose of data-gathering and scoring within this iteration. Therefore, this index analyzed a total of 225 northern and remote communities – 15 in the Yukon, 30 in the Northwest Territories, 24 in Nunavut, 11 in British Columbia, 37 in Alberta, 26 in Saskatchewan, 24 in Manitoba, 30 in Ontario, 23 in Quebec and 5 in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Selection of Indicators

Adjustments have been made to the indicators used in the 2019 *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities* to ensure they reflect changes to infrastructure and service delivery standards and realities. Additionally, some indicators were modified to ensure that scores could be assigned confidently, using the most accurate and reliable data available. These changes demonstrate a persistent challenge related to the lack of available, detailed and regularly updated Indigenous data, which will be further discussed in the *Data Challenges* section of this report.

Variations from the 2019 indicators include:

Connectivity: simplified definition and modernized approach to reflect national standards and ensure data accuracy.

Road Transportation: Includes seasonal road access within the region (ice roads), which provide vital services and supplies to northern remote Indigenous communities for short time periods within the winter months.

Air Transportation: Includes local airports that do not provide scheduled passenger services to reflect the value in charted or cargo flights, and combines all domestic scheduled passenger flights into one score to ensure data and score accuracy.

Energy: Expanded indicator to reflect the modern switch to renewable/clean energy and to capture delivery method (grid vs off-grid).

K-12 Education: Includes online high school programming with in-community supports to reflect modern initiatives to increase graduation rates and keep youth in community.

Post Secondary and Adult Education: Expanded to capture the value in adult education and skills training, and to include online education options with in-community supports.

Water Distribution: Expanded to account for mixed methods and other direct/indirect methods of delivery beyond trucked and piped.

2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index Indicators

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index assess 13 indicators, across 7 types of infrastructure: (All indicators and sub-indices are weighted equally):

Connectivity	➢ Access dependent on satellite backbone ➢ Access to terrestrial infrastructure providing speeds <5/1 Mbps ➢ Access to terrestrial infrastructure providing speeds <50/10 Mbps ➢ Access to terrestrial infrastructure providing 50/10 Mbps speeds	
Transportation (Roads, ports/harbors, airports)	➢ Roads	➢ Local roads only ➢ Seasonal regional road access (ice roads) ➢ Connected to the Canadian National Roads Network (all-season regional access)
	➢ Air	➢ No airport ➢ Local airport supporting chartered and / or cargo flights (no scheduled airline services available) ➢ Scheduled domestic flights ➢ International airport
	➢ Water	➢ No port or harbour ➢ Harbour or shallow water port with limited supporting infrastructure ➢ Deep water port with supporting infrastructure
Energy	➢ Off-grid fossil fuel power ➢ Fossil fuel power delivered through grid ➢ Off-grid renewable / clean energy ➢ Renewable / clean energy delivered through grid	

Health Care	➢ No hospital or community health care centre on-site (or equivalent) ➢ Community health centre or equivalent on-site ➢ Hospital on-site	
Education	➢ K-12 education	➢ No school in the community (students are bussed to a nearby location) ➢ Up to junior / middle school only available in the community (K-6/9), but include up to grade 11 (youth cannot graduate with high school diploma in community) ➢ High school education available online, with in-community supports (i.e. education facilitator, learning centre/classroom in school, technology, tutors, etc.) ➢ High school available in the community (K-12)
	➢ Post-Secondary and adult education	➢ No post-secondary or adult education programs available in community ➢ Skills training, adult education, upgrading and/or GED programs offered ➢ Post-Secondary access / satellite centre in community (can include in person, blended, and online supported learning) ➢ Post-Secondary campus in community
Water (Water treatment, water distribution and water quality)	➢ Water treatment	➢ No sewage / wastewater treatment and raw discharge into a water body ➢ Limited treatment via sewage lagoon or wetland ➢ Sewage treatment via sewage treatment plant
	➢ Distribution	➢ Indirect access (water is manually delivered via trucks or standpipes

		➢ Mixed method (community uses both direct and indirect methods ➢ Direct access (water is delivered directly via pipe system)
	➢ Quality	➢ Do not consume ➢ Boil water advisory ➢ No water advisory
Housing (Housing quantity and housing quality)	➢ Quantity	➢ Extremely inadequate; 6.66% or more houses have more than one person per room ➢ Very inadequate; 4.76-6.65& houses have more than one person per room ➢ Inadequate; 2.86-4.75% houses have more than one person per room ➢ Adequate; 2.85% or fewer houses have more than one person per room
	➢ Quality	➢ Extremely inadequate; 22.76% or more houses in need of major repairs ➢ Very inadequate; 16.26-22.75% houses in need of major repair ➢ Inadequate; 9.76-16.25% houses in need of major repair ➢ Adequate; 9.75% or fewer houses in need of major repair

These indicators are then further aggregated to form two sub-indices:

Economic Infrastructure
Connectivity, transportation and energy

Quality of Life Infrastructure
Health care, education, water and housing

Values are assigned from 0-1 for each category, creating a numerical score for each indicator in each community, which could be used to calculate scores across the seven types of infrastructure, two sub-indices and the overall index.

Results

The results of the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* build on the foundation established by the *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities* (2019), which first demonstrated the scale of infrastructure disparities across remote Indigenous communities. This updated iteration incorporates new data sources, expanded indicators, and distinctions-based analysis to provide a more comprehensive and current assessment of infrastructure conditions across First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.



"Infrastructure isn't just about roads and buildings — it's about dignity, safety, and opportunity for our families. We need solutions that reflect who we are."

Audrey Poitras, President,
Métis Nation of Alberta

It is important to note that changes to the connectivity, road, airport, energy, K-12 education, adult/post-secondary education and water distribution indicators will affect direct score comparisons between iterations. However, score analysis will be complemented by a qualitative review of trends observed to ensure the data captured can inform policies and program investments from the public and private sector. Further, data collection concluded in early 2026; accordingly, scores reflect the existing infrastructure at that time.

Provincial and Territorial Results

Yukon

Total Average Scores 2026[37]

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
First Nations	0.64	0.55	0.72
Non-Indigenous	0.76	0.68	0.83
CMAs (all)	0.96	0.99	0.94

Total Scores

There are six First Nations communities in the Yukon that are assessed in this index, with an average total index score of 0.64. Nine non-Indigenous communities were assessed, scoring an average total score of

[37] Note: All averages are unweighted.

0.76. The least populated of the First Nations communities, Burwash Landing and Old Crow, scored the lowest with 0.48 and 0.35, respectively – the same trend as was seen in 2019. Whitehorse scored the highest across the non-Indigenous communities, again achieving scores of 1.00 across all indicators. While there are no CMAs assessed in Yukon to compare to, the total average score of all 32 CMAs is 0.96.

The total population across the First Nations communities increased by 186 – from 1,733 to 1,919 – while the average percent of the community population that self-identifies as Indigenous decreased by .2 percentage points. Similarly, the total population across the non-Indigenous communities increased from 28,874 to 33,015 – an increase of 4,141 – and the average percent self-identifying as Indigenous increased from 32.7 to 36.9.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.55 across the Quality of Life Sub-Index (housing, water, education and health care), and the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.68. In comparison, the southern CMAs scored a Quality of Life Sub-Index average of 0.99.

In 2019, the lowest score in this sub-index for First Nations communities was the housing indicator with a 0.36. Despite an increase in population, First Nations communities saw a 0.11 rise in the average housing score – which can be attributed to improved overcrowding scores. The total average housing quality scores, however, declined, with all communities scoring a 0.00, indicating that 22.76% or more houses are in need of major repairs. In opposition, the average housing score across the non-Indigenous communities decreased from 0.69 to 0.65 – with housing quality remaining at 0.41, and housing quantity declining by 0.07.

Other observations include:

- All First Nations communities rely on sewage lagoons/wetlands and indirect or mixed direct/indirect clean water delivery methods – scoring a 0.61 under the total water indicator. Non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.78 under the total water indicator, with two communities utilizing a sewage treatment facility and six communities receiving clean drinking water through a direct delivery system. Neither the First Nations communities nor the non-Indigenous communities had any water advisories listed at the time of data collection.
- The First Nations communities scored 0.70 under the total education indicator – with five of the six communities having schools up to grade 12 and a post-secondary satellite/access centre available in community. The non-Indigenous communities scored slightly lower under this indicator with an average of 0.69 – with seven of the nine communities having in-community secondary schools and access to post-secondary education (six through satellite/access centres, and one in-community campus).
- The health score has remained the same since 2019 for both the First Nations and non-Indigenous communities – five of the six First Nations communities continue to have access to a health centre or equivalent (scoring a total average of 0.42), and there remain three hospitals across the non-Indigenous communities – an average score of 0.61.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

In comparison to the 0.94 average scored by the CMAs, the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.72 under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index (energy, transportation and connectivity), and the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.83. The lowest score for both groups was transportation infrastructure – with neither seeing improvements since 2019. Old Crow is the only First Nations community in Yukon of those assessed without access to the Canadian National Roads Network, but is also the only community to have scheduled domestic passenger airline services available.

Old Crow is also the only First Nations community of the six assessed to not have access to terrestrial broadband infrastructure providing 50/10 Mbps speeds – remaining dependant on satellite backbone. All of the non-Indigenous communities have access to terrestrial broadband infrastructure provided 50/10 Mbps speeds – achieving scores of 1.00.

No improvements were observed under the energy indicator for the First Nations or non-Indigenous communities – with average scores of 0.72 and 0.78, respectively. Two of the six First Nations communities and two of the nine non-Indigenous communities remain reliant on fossil fuels.

Northwest Territories

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
Indigenous[38]	0.47	0.44	0.49
➢ **First Nations**	0.48	0.43	0.52
➢ **Inuit**	0.42	0.48	0.35
Non-Indigenous	0.80	0.77	0.82
CMAs (all)	0.96	0.99	0.94

Total Scores

There are six Inuit communities and 21 First Nations communities in the Northwest Territories that are assessed within this index, averaging total scores of 0.42 and 0.48, respectively. The two most populated communities within their respective distinction groups—Inuvik and Fort Smith—achieved the highest overall average scores at 0.72, mirroring the trend observed in 2019. In comparison, the three non-Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories assessed in this index received a total average score of 0.80 – a comparable gap to the Inuit and First Nations total scores as was seen in 2019. With no CMAs

[38] Note: The total average Indigenous score is calculated by summing the scores of all applicable distinction groups and dividing by the total number of Indigenous communities in the province or territory. The total average is not calculated by averaging the distinction-group averages. Due to rounding, the scores for the distinction groups may not sum exactly to the total Indigenous averages. Similarly, total scores may not equal exactly to the sum of the sub-index scores.

assessed within the Northwest Territories, the averages of all CMAs will be utilized – scoring a total index average of 0.96.

The Inuit and First Nations communities saw slight decreases in total population from 5,495 to 5,456 and 11,801 to 11,558, respectively. In opposition, the total population across the three non-Indigenous communities increased from 23,875 to 24,586. The percent of these populations that self-identify as Indigenous remained relatively unchanged between the 2016 and 2021 Census of Population.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The Inuit communities scored an average of 0.48 and the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.43 across the Quality of Life Sub-Index, covering housing, water, education and health care. The three non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.77 while the CMAs scored a 0.99.

The housing indicator—covering both quality and quantity—received the lowest score within this sub-index for Inuit, First Nations, and non-Indigenous communities. The average housing score for the Inuit communities was 0.22 in comparison to the 0.34 scored in 2019, a 0.12 decrease. The three non-Indigenous communities also saw a 0.12 decline in the housing score, going from an average of 0.73 to 0.61. In opposition, the First Nations communities saw a 0.09 increase in the average housing score from 0.18 to 0.27.

Other observations include:

- Under the total water indicator, covering treatment, distribution and quality, the Inuit, First Nations, and non-Indigenous communities recorded respective average scores of 0.56, 0.52, and 0.72. Relatively no changes were observed across all three groups since 2019 – all communities (Inuit, First Nations and non-Indigenous) continue to utilize sewage lagoon/wetland wastewater systems; almost all of the Inuit and First Nations communities rely on indirect clean water distribution systems; and the First Nation community of Colville Lake remains under a boil water advisory at the time of data collection – as was captured in the 2019 index – while there continues to be no water advisories issued in the Inuit and non-Indigenous communities assessed.
- The average health care scores for the Inuit and non-Indigenous communities remain unchanged since 2019 at 0.58 and 0.83. While the First Nations communities saw a slight increase in the average health care score from 0.43 to 0.48 – this can be attributed to variations in how health centres are conceptualized and the associated difficulties in interpreting the services they offer, as will be explored in the *Data Challenges* section.
- While primary and secondary school availability has remained relatively unchanged for the First Nations and Inuit communities (five of the six Inuit communities have schools inclusive of grade 12, and 16 of the 21 First Nations communities do), there was a decrease in adult and post-secondary education due to the closure of the Aurora College community learning centres – representing average total education scores of 0.45 and 0.53, respectively. In comparison, all three of the non-Indigenous communities continue to have access to grade 12 education in community schools and in-community post-secondary education through one campus and two satellite/access centres, for a total average score of 0.89.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

For the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index (energy, transportation and connectivity), Inuit communities scored an average of 0.35**,** the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.52, and the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.82. The southern CMAs scored an average of 0.94.

Energy was the lowest average scored indicator under this sub-index across all three groups. Inuit communities scored the lowest at 0.00 with continued dependence on off-grid fossil fuels, showing no improvement since 2019. First Nations communities scored an average of 0.13, with 15 communities relying on off-grid fossil fuels, five communities receiving fossil-fuel energy through a grid, and only one community being connected to a grid providing majority renewable/clean sourced energy – an improvement of one additional community being connected to the grid since 2019. In comparison, two of the three non-Indigenous communities receive renewable/clean energy through a grid – scoring a total average of 0.67.

Other observations include:

- Half of the six Inuit communities have access to terrestrial broadband infrastructure offering 50/10 Mbps speeds, while the other three are satellite dependant; 17 of the 21 First Nations communities have access to terrestrial broadband infrastructure offering 50/10 Mbps speeds with the remaining four satellite dependant, and; all three of the non-Indigenous communities have access to terrestrial broadband infrastructure providing 50/10 Mbps speeds. This data represents average score of 0.50, 0.81 and 1.00.
- Inuit community access to the Canadian National Roads network has remained unchanged since 2019 – Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk remain the only Inuit communities of the six assessed that have all-season access, correlating to a total road transportation average score of 0.45. Since 2019, the First Nation community of Whatì received all-season access to the network with the opening of the Tłı̨chǫ All-Season Highway 9 – while access for the 20 remaining communities remained unchanged – bringing the average road transportation score to 0.84. In comparison, all of the non-Indigenous communities have access to the network, scoring an average of 0.89.
- All six of the Inuit communities have access to an airport, with five providing scheduled domestic passenger services; 17 of the 21 First Nations communities have access to airports, with 10 offering scheduled domestic passenger flights and the remainder providing cargo/private services, and; all non-Indigenous communities have access to scheduled domestic passenger services. The average air transportation scores for the Inuit, First Nations and non-Indigenous communities are 0.61, 0.43 and 0.67, respectively.

Nunavut

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
Inuit	0.32	0.49	0.14
CMAs (all)	0.96	0.99	0.94

Total Scores

There are 24 Inuit communities in Nunavut that are assessed in this index, with no non-Indigenous communities or CMAs to compare to within the territory. The 24 communities averaged a total score of 0.32, and the most populated community, Iqaluit, scored the highest with 0.51 – a trend consistent with the 2019 index. All of the CMAs scored a total average of 0.96

Since 2019, the total population across the 24 communities has increased slightly from 34,800 to 35,615, and the average percent of the population that self-identifies as Indigenous has remained at 92.5.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The communities scored an average of 0.49 under the Quality of Life Sub-Index (housing, water, education and health care) in comparison to the 0.99 average scored by all of the southern CMAs. The lowest average score was under the housing indicator with 0.06, a decrease of 0.02 since 2019, demonstrating an increase in overcrowding and homes in need of major repairs.

Other observations include:

- Since 2019, the boil water advisory in Sanikiluaq has worsened to a do not consume advisory, and three additional boil water advisories have been issued, at the time of data gathering. Further, the majority of communities continue to rely on indirect clean drinking water delivery methods, such as water trucks, and 22 of the 24 communities still use sewage treatment plants as opposed to wastewater treatment facilities – representing a total water average score of 0.52.
- No new hospitals opened since 2019, resulting in an average health care score of 0.52. Iqaluit remains the only community to operate a hospital, with all 23 remaining communities operating a health centre or equivalent.
- All communities have high schools in community and either a post-secondary campus or satellite/access centre – achieving the highest average score under the quality of Life Sub-Index with 0.86.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

The 24 communities averaged a 0.14 score under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index (energy, transportation, and connectivity), a significant gap with the average CMA score of 0.94. The energy and connectivity indicators received the lowest scores at 0.00 – showing unchanged reliance on off-grid fossil fuels and satellite broadband connectivity.

The communities scored an average of 0.41 for air, water and road transportation infrastructure – with all communities continuing to have access to scheduled passenger flights and harbours/ports, but no access to the Canadian National Roads Network.

British Columbia

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
First Nations	0.61	0.57	0.65
Non-Indigenous	0.96	0.99	0.93
CMAs (BC)	0.99	0.97	1.00

Total Scores

There are eight First Nations and three non-Indigenous communities in northern and remote British Columbia that are assessed in this index, with total average scores of 0.61 and 0.96, respectively. For southern comparisons, four CMAs within British Columbia were analyzed, with a total average score of 0.99.

The First Nations communities saw a decline in total population from 1,865 to 1,824 since 2019, and a decrease in average percent of the population that self-identifies as Indigenous from 96.3 to 94.6. In opposition, the three non-Indigenous communities experienced an increase in total population from 34,836 to 36,090, and an increase in average percent of the population that self-identifies as Indigenous from 16.3 to 18.5.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.57 under the Quality of Life Sub-Index, encompassing the house, water, education and health care indicators. In comparison, the northern non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.99 – achieving scores of 1.00 across all indicators except for water. The CMAs in British Columbia scored an average of 0.97.

The lowest scored indicator under this Sub-Index for the First Nations communities was education, with an average of 0.27. Two of the eight First Nations communities have in-community schools inclusive of grade 12 and the Dease Lake Northern Lights College Access Centre remains the only community source of post-secondary education, while each of the non-Indigenous communities have secondary schools and post-secondary institutions in community.

Positively, all First Nations communities now receive clean drinking water through direct delivery methods, an improvement since 2019 when only seven of the eight communities had this infrastructure – closing the water distribution infrastructure gap with the non-Indigenous communities. No other changes have been made under the water and wastewater indicator for First Nations communities since 2019 – there continues to be no water advisories, at the time of data collection, and only two of the eight communities

have sewage treatment plants rather than lagoons. Across all three water sub-indicators, the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.87 in comparison to the 0.94 scored by the non-Indigenous communities.

As well, the First Nations communities saw improvements in house overcrowding and major repairs needed since 2019, increasing the total average from 0.46 to 0.63. Housing scores for the non-Indigenous communities has remain consistent since 2019 at 1.00.

Further observed, each of the First Nations communities have health centres or equivalent services offered on-site (scores of 0.50), while each of the non-Indigenous communities have hospitals (scores of 1.00).

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

The First Nations communities scored a total average of 0.65 across under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index (energy, transportation and connectivity), while the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.93 and the CMAs scored 1.00s.

The First Nations communities scored the lowest under the connectivity indicator with an average of 0.46 – representing only one community having access to terrestrial broadband infrastructure providing speeds of 50/10 Mbps, and three satellite dependent. In comparison, all three of the non-Indigenous communities receive broadband speeds of 50/10 Mbps through terrestrial infrastructure, achieving scores of 1.00.

Other observations include:

- All of the First Nations communities are connected to an energy grid, with seven of the eight being majority renewable/clean energy sources – equating an average score of 0.96. Comparatively, all of the non-Indigenous communities are connected to a renewable/clean energy grid with scores of 1.00.
- All First Nations and non-Indigenous communities have access to the Canadian National Roads Network. However, none of the First Nations communities have airports providing scheduled passenger services while two of the three non-Indigenous communities have access to scheduled passenger flights within Canada. This information equates to total transportation scores of 0.52 for the First Nations communities, and 0.78 for the non-Indigenous communities.

Alberta

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
Indigenous	0.55	0.48	0.62
➢ **First Nations**	0.56	0.46	0.65
➢ **Métis**	0.53	0.52	0.53
Non-Indigenous	0.80	0.91	0.69
CMAs (AB)	0.87	0.96	0.78

Total Scores

In Alberta, there are seven Métis, 18 First Nations and 12 non-Indigenous northern and remote communities assessed within this index, with total average scores of 0.53, 0.56 and 0.80, respectively. Two CMAs in Alberta were also assessed as southern comparisons, with total scored of 0.87.

Since 2019, the Métis communities saw a decrease in total population from 4,146 to 3,859, as well as a decline in the average percent of the community that self-identifies as Indigenous from 95.5 to 94.3. Similarly, the First Nations communities experienced a decline in total population from 13,986 to 13,401, as well as a decrease in the average percent of the population that self-identifies as Indigenous from 96.2 to 92.5. In contrast, the non-Indigenous communities had an increase total population from 153,289 to 158,624, yet saw a decline of 0.2 percentage points of the average percent of the population that self-identifies as Indigenous from 15.5 to 15.3.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The Métis, First Nations and non-Indigenous northern and remote communities scored averages of 0.52, 0.46 and 0.91, respectively, across the Quality of Life Sub-Index (housing, water, education and health care). The CMAs scored totals of 0.96.

For the Métis and First Nations communities, the housing indicator average score improved since 2019, but is the lowest scoring indicator under the sub-index. The Métis communities scored an average of 0.33, a 0.11 increase since 2019 – with improvements in overcrowding, but worsening housing conditions. The First Nations communities saw a 0.5 increase in the average housing score from 0.10 to 0.15 – similarly experiencing less overcrowding, but more homes needing major repairs. These housing quantity changes may be in part due to the declines in population.

In opposition, the non-Indigenous communities' total average housing score decreased since 2019 from 0.96 to 0.92 – driven by declines in both housing quality and quantity, with the latter contributing more substantially, aligning with the increase in total population.

Other observations include:

- The total average water scores – encompassing treatment, distribution and quality – has remained relatively unchanged for all communities outside of adjustments due to this index's new inclusion of mixed water distribution methods. However, Tall Cree 173 has been put under a boil water advisory since 2019, attributing to the First Nations communities' total average score of 0.71. The Métis communities scored an average of 0.86 and the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.92 - with the only sub 1.00 scores found in the six communities that use lagoon or wetland sewage treatment systems.
- The Métis, First Nations and non-Indigenous communities scored total education averages of 0.48, 0.49 and 0.86, respectively. Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement remains the only community of the seven to have in-person grade 12 education in the community, while 10 of the 18 First Nations communities and all non-Indigenous communities do. Post-secondary education availability has remained relatively unchanged – there are post-secondary campuses and access centres in four Métis communities, five First Nations communities, and eight of the 12 non-Indigenous communities.
- There have been no changes in health care infrastructure in the Métis and non-Indigenous communities since 2019 – with average scores of 0.43 and 0.92, respectively. Six of the seven Métis communities have health centres or equivalent services, and there are hospitals in all but two of the 12 non-Indigenous communities. The First Nations communities' average score increased significantly since 2019 to 0.47 – but this can be attributed to variations in how health centres are conceptualized and documented, as will be explored in the *Data Challenges* section. There is one hospital across the 18 First Nations communities and 15 health centres or equivalent services – leaving the two communities not serviced.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

The Métis, First Nations and non-Indigenous northern and remote communities scored averages of 0.53, 0.65 and 0.69, respectively, under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index, encompassing energy, transportation and connectivity. The CMAs scored a total average of 0.78.

Both the Métis and non-Indigenous communities scored their lowest averages of 0.33 under the energy indicator – signifying that all communities are connected to the grid but receive energy majority sourced by fossil fuels. The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.63 for energy, with all but one community being disconnected from the grid but receiving majority of energy from renewable/clean sources. The remaining community is off-grid and fossil fuel reliant, scoring a 0.00.

Other observations include:

- The non-Indigenous communities received scores of 1.00 under the connectivity indicator, with access to speeds of 50/10 Mbps through terrestrial infrastructure. The Métis communities averaged a score of 0.76, with only two communities reaching terrestrial infrastructure speeds of 50/10 Mbps, and the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.82, with eight communities reaching those speeds.

- Transportation was the lowest average scored indicator for the First Nations communities at 0.51, with no improvements since 2019 – no communities are serviced by scheduled passenger airline services, and Fox Lake 162 remains the only community disconnected from the Canadian National Roads Network. The Métis communities scored an average of 0.50 for transportation – unchanged since 2019 with no airports and all communities connected to the Canadian National Roads Network. The non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.73, also unchanged since 2019, with all communities connected to the Canadian National Roads Network and four communities having access to scheduled domestic passenger flights.

Saskatchewan

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
Indigenous	0.54	0.52	0.55
➢ **First Nations**	0.51	0.49	0.53
➢ **Métis**	0.60	0.58	0.61
Non-Indigenous	0.73	0.84	0.61
CMAs (SK)	0.88	0.98	0.78

Total Scores

There are nine Métis, 16 First Nations and one non-Indigenous northern and remote communities in Saskatchewan that are assessed in this index, scoring total averages of 0.60, 0.51 and 0.73, respectively. Notably, the highest scoring First Nation community and Métis communities scored higher than the one non-Indigenous community with 0.74 and 0.78. In comparison, the two southern CMAs in Saskatchewan that were assessed scored a total average of 0.88.

The non-Indigenous community and the First Nations communities saw a decline in both total population and the average percent of community population that self-identify as Indigenous since 2019. Between the 2016 and 2021 Census' of Population, the one non-Indigenous community, the Town of Creighton, decreased in population from 1,402 to 1,254, and average percent self-identifying as Indigenous from 17.9 to 16.7. For the First Nations communities, the decline in population was significant from 19,043 to 14,736, with the average percent of a community's population that self-identifies as Indigenous dropping from 91.1 to 88.9.

In opposition, the nine Métis communities experienced an increase in total population from 7,278 to 7,559 since 2019. For calculating the average percent of community population that self-identifies as Indigenous, this information, as well as information to calculate the housing score, was suppressed for Michel Village for the 2021 Census of Population, as required by the *Statistics Act.* Excluding Michel Village from the 2019 calculations to create a direct comparison, there was an increase from 90.2% to 93.6%.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

Across the Quality of Life Sub-Index, encompassing housing, water, education and health care, the Métis and First Nations communities averaged scores of 0.58 and 0.49, respectively, while the non-Indigenous community scored an average of 0.84. The CMAs scored an average of 0.98.

The Métis communities scored the lowest under the health care indicator with an average of 0.39, with slight improvement from the 2019 score of 0.33 – with the difference attributable to the reclassification of a health center as a hospital within this index, rather than new infrastructure. Three of the nine communities have health centres or equivalent services on-site, two have hospitals, while the remaining four have no health care services offered. The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.41 under the health care indicator, with improvements since 2019 associated with recategorization – 13 of the 16 communities have health centres or equivalent services on-site. The one non-Indigenous community continues to offer services through a health center, scoring a 0.50 – the community's lowest score across this sub-index.

The First Nations communities scored the lowest under the housing indicator with an average of 0.25. While the lowest, this indicator saw improvement from the 2019 score of 0.13 – with evidence of improvement in overcrowding and homes in need of major repairs, noting the 4,307 decreases in population. The Métis communities saw a slight improvement in housing scores since 2019, excluding Michel Village for comparability, from an average score of 0.46 to 0.48 across quality and quantity. The one non-Indigenous community maintained the 2019 score of 0.84.

Other observations include:

- The Métis communities saw a slight increase in average water score from 0.85 to 0.87 with the lifting of the boil water advisory in Michel Village – all communities continue to receive clean drinking water through direct methods, and seven communities utilize sewage lagoons while two have sewage treatment plants. The decrease in average water score from 0.82 to 0.78 across the First Nations communities can be associated with the new inclusion of mixed water distribution methods within this index; it remains that three communities have sewage treatment plants while 13 utilize sewage lagoons, and while the four boil water advisories recorded in the 2019 index have been lifted, two others have been issued at the time of data collection. The one non-Indigenous community scored a 1.00 under the water indicator, as it had in 2019.
- The Métis and First Nations communities scored averages of 0.61 and 0.51, respectively, under the education indicator – with the majority of communities having schools that offer grade 12 education, and several communities having post-secondary campuses or access centres on-site, or offering adult education. The non-Indigenous community continues to have grade 12 education and a post-secondary campus on-site, scoring a 1.00.

Economic infrastructure Sub-Index

Under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index (energy, transportation and connectivity), the Métis communities and the non-Indigenous community scored averages of 0.61, and the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.53. Comparatively, the CMAs each scored 0.78.

Energy was the lowest scored indicator across all three groups. All Métis communities and the non-Indigenous community received scores of 0.33 with majority fossil-fuel generated energy delivered through a grid. The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.25 – all communities rely primarily on fossil-fuel energy, while 12 of the 16 are served through a grid.

Other observations include:

- As was observed in 2019, all Métis communities are connected to the Canadian National Roads Network, and none have access to scheduled passenger airlines services – scoring an average of 0.59. 14 of the First Nations communities are connected to the Canadian National Roads Network with the remaining two having access via winter roads, and five of the ten community airports offer scheduled domestic passenger flights – scoring a total average of 0.63. The non-Indigenous community scored a 0.50 across transportation – with no community airport but connection to the Canadian national Roads Network.
- Under the connectivity indicator, the Métis and First Nations communities scored averages of 0.89 and 0.69, respectively. All nine Métis communities have broadband connectivity through terrestrial infrastructure with six having access to speeds of 50/10 Mbps. Three First Nations communities have terrestrial infrastructure offering speeds of 50/10 Mbps, while one community remains satellite dependent. The one non-Indigenous community scored a 1.00 with terrestrial infrastructure providing speeds of 50/10 Mbps.

Manitoba

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
First Nations	0.52	0.54	0.49
Non-Indigenous	0.92	0.90	0.92
CMA (MB)	0.98	0.96	1.00

Total Scores

In Manitoba, there are 20 First Nations and four non-Indigenous northern and remote communities assessed within this index, and one southern CMA. The First Nations communities scored a total average of 0.52 across all indicators, and the non-Indigenous communities scored a 0.92 in comparison to the 0.98 scored by the CMA.

The 2021 Census of Population suppressed or otherwise withheld the population totals, the number of individuals identifying as Indigenous, the number of dwellings requiring major repairs, and the number of homes with three or more persons per room for four of the First Nations communities examined. To maintain comparability, this information for the four communities will be excluded from the 2019 score calculations as well.

With the adjustments, the First Nations communities saw an increase in total population from 25,006 to 26,672, as well as an increase in the average percent of the community that self-identifies as Indigenous from 92.9 to 95.6. The non-Indigenous communities experienced a decline in total population from 31,294 to 24,658, yet an increase in the average percent of the community that self-Identifies as Indigenous from 39.5 to 43.5.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The First Nations communities scored a total average of 0.54 across the Quality of Life Sub-Index (housing, water, education and health care), and the non-Indigenous communities scored a total average of 0.90. The CMA scored a 0.96.

Both the First Nations and the non-Indigenous communities scored the lowest under the housing indicator. While the non-Indigenous communities saw improvement from 0.63 to 0.71 across housing quality and quantity, the First Nations communities saw a decrease from 0.18 to 0.14 since 2019. It is worthy to note that the changes in population may contribute to the corelating changes in overcrowding experienced.

Other observations include:

- The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.64 under the education indicator while the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.88. 17 of the 20 First Nations communities have schools offering education inclusive of grade 12, including the new kindergarten to grade 12 school in Wasagamack that was completed in 2020. The remaining three communities operate facilities up to middle school education. There are no post-secondary campuses located in the First Nations communities; however, satellite/access centres can be found in nine, and adult education offered in four. In comparison, each non-Indigenous community has a school with grade 12 education, and post-secondary education is offered through two campuses and an access centre.
- The total average water score remains unchanged for the non-Indigenous communities at 1.00. The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.78 - with six boil water advisories (some new and others in place since the 2019 index), and relatively unchanged water distribution and sewage treatment scores, recognizing adjustments to account for the new inclusion of mixed water distribution methods in score calculations. 13 of the 20 communities have sewage treatment plants while the remaining rely on sewage lagoons, and all communities utilize either direct or mixed water distribution methods.
- The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.53 under the health care indicator, with one hospital in the town of Lynn Lake, and the remaining communities having health centres or equivalent services on-site. While a 0.15 increase in score since 2019, this can be attributed to a

more inclusive understanding of what constitutes a health centre, and the related challenges in available information as will be discussed in the *Data Challenges* section. The non-Indigenous communities scored a 1.00 under this indicator, with each community having a hospital on-site.

Economic Infrastructure

The First Nations communities scored a total average of 0.49 across the energy, transportation and connectivity indicators under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index, while the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.92, and the CMA scored a 1.00.

The First Nations communities scored the lowest under connectivity with a 0.40 average – with nine communities reliant on satellite, and only four of the remaining 11 communities with terrestrial infrastructure having access to speeds of 50/10 Mbps. The non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.92, with all communities utilizing territorial infrastructure and three of the four communities having access to speeds of 50/10 Mbps.

Other observations include:

- While all the non-Indigenous communities are connected to an energy grid providing majority clean/renewable power, reaching scores of 1.00, only nine of the First Nations communities are connected to a renewable/clean energy grid. The remaining communities utilize fossil-fuel energy systems, with the majority delivered off-grid, equating to an average score of 0.48.
- The First Nations communities scored a total average of 0.58 for transportation – with 11 communities operating airports with scheduled domestic flights and seven communities having all-season connection to the Canadian National Roads Network while Shamattawa 1 remains completely disconnected from the network. In comparison, all the non-Indigenous communities have all-season access to the Canadian National Roads Network and airports operating scheduled domestic passenger flights, equating to total scores of 0.84.

Ontario

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
First Nations	0.53	0.45	0.60
Non-Indigenous	0.89	0.86	0.91
CMAs (ON)	0.98	0.99	0.95

Total Scores

26 First Nations and four non-Indigenous northern and remote communities in Ontario were assessed within this index, scoring total averages of 0.53 and 0.89, respectively. For a southern comparison, 15 CMAs in Ontario were assessed, with a total average score of 0.98.

The 2021 Census of Population suppressed or otherwise made unavailable the data of Muskrat Dam Lake, and therefore this analysis has excluded this community from the 2019 population count, Indigenous identity average and housing scores to maintain comparability between iterations.

Between the 2016 and 2021 Census of Population, the total population across the First Nations communities increased from 16,388 to 17,538, with a decrease in the average percent of a community that self-identifies as Indigenous from 98.7 to 97.8. Similarly, the non-Indigenous communities' total population increased from 10,933 to 11,530, but also increased in the average percent of a community that self-identifies as Indigenous from 25.4 to 31.1.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

Under the Quality of Life Sub-Index, the First Nations communities scored an average of 0.45, whereas the non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.86, and the CMAs scored an average of 0.99.

For the First Nations and non-Indigenous communities, housing was the lowest scored indicator in this sub-index. However, while the non-Indigenous communities experienced a score increase from 0.71 to 0.84 since 2019, the First Nations communities' scores worsened from 0.09 to 0.03, despite both experiencing similar sized population increases. In this index, all but two of the First Nations communities scored 0.00 in both housing quality and quantity – indicating that 22.76% or more of the community houses are in need of majority repairs and 6.66% more of the community houses have more than one person per room.

Other observations include:

- The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.73 under the water indicator – there were 14 boil water advisories issued at the time of data collection, with some new and others remaining from the 12 identified in 2019; 12 communities utilizing direct water distribution systems while the remaining utilize mixed methods, and; 12 communities operating sewage treatment plants while the 14 others utilize sewage lagoons. The non-Indigenous communities scored 1.00 across all water indicators.
- While Moosonee remains the only First Nations community of those assessed to have a post-secondary campus, there are satellite/access centres in two other communities, and all but one of the remaining communities offer adult education programs. Further, only three communities have in-community schools providing grade 12 education and 21 offer in-community supports for youth to attain high schools diplomas through virtual education. This information equates to a total average education score of 0.53. In comparison, the four non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.71 with two in-community post-secondary campuses, and three in-community schools with grade 12 education.
- The First Nations communities saw a slight decrease in average score under the health care indicator since 2019 from 0.54 to 0.50, with the notable loss of the Neskantaga First Nation Health Centre, as will be discussed in the I*nfrastructure Needs* section. The non-Indigenous communities upheld the 2019 average score of 0.88.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

The First Nations and non-Indigenous communities scored averages of 0.60 and 0.91, respectively, under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index. In comparison, the southern CMAs in Ontario scored an average of 0.95.

Of the energy, transportation and connectivity indicators, First Nations communities saw the most improvement in energy. As will be discussed in the *Looking Ahead: Future Infrastructure Impacts* section, the Wataynikaneyap Power project connected 14 of the First Nations communities to the Ontario grid. In total, 18 communities are connected to a grid providing renewable/clean energy, while the remaining eight communities are powered by off-grid fossil-fuel energy, achieving a total average score of 0.69. All the non-Indigenous communities are connected to a grid powered by majority renewable/clean sources with scores of 1.00.

Other observations include:

- The First Nations communities scored the lowest under connectivity for this sub-index with an average of 0.48 – only one of the communities receive speeds of 50/10 Mbps through terrestrial broadband infrastructure, and six are satellite dependent. All the non-Indigenous communities have terrestrial broadband infrastructure, with three of the four communities accessing speeds of 50/10 Mbps.
- The First Nations communities scored an average of 0.62 under the transportation indicator. Only four of the 26 communities have all-season access to the Canadian National Roads Network, while one community only has local roads with no access to other communities, and all but two communities have airports offering scheduled domestic passenger flights. The non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.80, with all communities connected to the Canadian National Roads Network and three of the four airports providing scheduled domestic passenger flights.

Quebec

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
Indigenous	0.49	0.54	0.46
➢ **First Nations**	0.69	0.58	0.79
➢ **Inuit**	0.35	0.52	0.18
CMAs (QC)	0.98	0.99	0.96

Total Scores

In Quebec, there are 14 Inuit communities in Nunavik and nine Cree communities in the traditional territory of Eeyou Istchee that are assessed in this index. While no northern and remote non-Indigenous communities were analyzed, six southern CMAs were assessed with total average score of 0.98. The Inuit

communities in Nunavik scored a total average of 0.35, and the Cree communities of Eeyou Istchee scored an average of 0.69.

Both territories experienced an increase in total population since 2019, with the Inuit communities increasing from 13,188 to 14,083, and the Cree communities increasing from 17,141 to 17,885. Further, while the average percent of the population across the 14 Inuit communities that self-identify as Indigenous remained at 94.2 since the 2019 index, the average percent of the Cree communities' population increased from 95.9 to 96.2.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

The Inuit communities scored a total average of 0.52 under the Quality of Life Sub-Index (housing, water, education and health care), while the Cree communities scored an average of 0.58. In comparison, the CMAs scored a total average of 0.99 under this sub-index.

Both the Inuit communities and the Cree communities scored significantly lower under the housing indicator in comparison to the other three Quality of Life indicators. The Inuit communities scored similarly between iterations with an average of 0.13 in comparison to the 0.12 scored in 2019, while the Cree communities saw an improvement, increasing from an average of 0.00 to 0.11 despite an increase in population. Improvements were observed for both overcrowding and homes in need of major repairs – however eight of the nine Cree communities still scored a 0.00 for quantity and six scored a 0.00 for quality.

Other observations include:

- The Inuit and Cree communities scored similarly under the education indicator with averages of 0.87 and 0.86, respectively. All of the Inuit and Cree communities have schools offering grade 12 education and in-community centres/supports for post-secondary education attainment in partnership with institutions. There are three vocational institutions offering accredited programs in Nunavik, and one in Eeyou Istchee, accounting for the score difference.
- The Inuit communities scored an average of 0.50 under the water indicator with no changes since 2019 except for two new boil water advisories – the remaining 12 communities have no water advisories. All but one community remains reliant on indirect water distributions systems, and all communities continue to use sewage lagoons. The Cree communities scored an average of 0.79, with improvement seen in water distribution infrastructure since 2019 – only one community remains without a direct system. All communities remain without boil water advisories at the time of data collection, and Eastmain is still the only community to utilize a sewage treatment plant rather than a lagoon.
- Neither the Inuit communities nor the Cree communities saw any changes to health care scores since 2019, with averages of 0.57 and 0.56, respectively. All communities have health centres or equivalent services offered on-site, while Chisasibi in Eeyou-Istchee and Puvirnituq and Kuujjuaq in Nunavik remain the only communities with hospitals.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

The Inuit communities scored a total average of 0.18 across the energy, transportation and connectivity indicators under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index. Of significant difference, the Cree communities scored an average of 0.79, and the CMAs scored 0.96.

Energy, quickly followed by connectivity, were the lowest scored indicators for the Inuit communities with averages of 0.07 and 0.09, respectively. All but two of the Inuit communities rely on off-grid fossil-fuel energy, and only four communities have terrestrial infrastructure, although offering speeds less than 5/1 Mbps – the remaining communities are satellite dependent.

In opposition, energy followed by connectivity were the highest scored indicators for the Cree communities with averages of 0.93 and 0.85, respectively. All but one community is connected to a majority renewable/clean sourced energy grid, and all communities have terrestrial broadband infrastructure, with seven of the nine communities able to access speeds of 50/10 Mbps.

For transportation, neither the Inuit nor the Cree communities saw changes since the 2019 index. The Inuit communities scored a total average of 0.39 – no communities are connected to the Canadian National Roads Network, all communities have airports with scheduled domestic passenger flight services, and all applicable communities have a harbour or shallow water port. The Cree communities scored a total average of 0.61 – all but one community is connected to the Canadian National Roads Network, six of the nine communities have airports offering scheduled domestic passenger flights, and four of the five applicable communities have harbours or shallow ports.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Quality of Life	Economic Infra.
Inuit	0.37	0.50	0.24
CMAs (all)	0.96	0.99	0.94

Total Scores

There are five Inuit communities in Nunatsiavut, Newfoundland and Labrador, that are assessed in this index, but no northern and remote non-Indigenous communities or CMAs. For comparison, all 32 CMAs assessed in this index will be utilized, with a total average score of 0.96.

The five Inuit communities scored an average of 0.37 and since 2019 has experienced an increase in both total population, from 2,558 to 2,680, and an increase in the average percent of a community that self-identifies as Indigenous, from 91.2 to 93.0.

Quality of Life Sub-Index

Under the Quality of Life Sub-Index encompassing housing, water, education and health care, the Inuit communities scored a total average of 0.50, while the CMAs scored an average of 0.99.

Housing was the lowest scored indicator under this Sub-Index with an average of 0.30, 0.03 points higher than the 2019 average – with the increase associated with improvements in housing quantity, despite the population increase. The average score for housing quality, in opposition, decreased from 0.13 to 0.07.

Water and health care have remained unchanged since 2019. With an average score of 0.64, the boil water advisory in Rigolet remains the only advisory in place at the time of data collection, and all communities have direct clean water distribution systems in place, but no sewage lagoons or treatment plants. Further, all communities continue to have health centres or equivalent services offered on-site, representing scores of 0.50.

In 2026, the communities scored a total average of 0.57 for education – all communities have schools inclusive of grade 12 education, and two offer adult education programs.

Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index

Under the Economic Infrastructure Sub-Index (energy, transportation and connectivity), the Inuit communities scored a total average of 0.24, and the CMAs scored an average of 0.94.

The energy score has remained unchanged since 2019 at 0.00 – with all communities disconnected from a grid and reliant on fossil-fuel energy. Similarly, transportation infrastructure has remained unchanged, with a total average score of 0.39 – all communities have an airport providing scheduled domestic passenger airline services and a harbour or shallow water port, and none are connected to the Canadian National Roads Network.

Under the connectivity indicator, all communities scored a 0.33 – with terrestrial broadband infrastructure providing speeds less than 5/1 Mbps.

Indicator-Based Results and Implications

Connectivity

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous[39]	0.52	-0.46	-0.48
➢ **First Nations**	0.64	-0.34	-0.36
➢ **Inuit**	0.12	-0.86	-0.88
➢ **Métis**	0.84	-0.14	-0.16
Non-Indigenous	0.98	N/A	-0.02
CMAs	1.00	0.02	N/A

In total, northern and remote Indigenous communities across all distinctions-groups and regions scored an average of 0.52 under the connectivity indicator, while non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.98 – demonstrating a *significant* gap in community infrastructure capable of meeting the national broadband standard of 50/10 Mbps speeds. In comparison, the CMAs scored an average of 1.00 – with all achieving the national standard. Although indicator adjustments since the 2019 index prevent direct score comparison, it is evident that the infrastructure gap remains relatively unchanged and Inuit communities continue to score the lowest.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Connectivity Infrastructure Gap

While northern and remote location increases the complexity of broadband infrastructure, the above scores demonstrate that achieving the national standard of broadband infrastructure and speeds in these regions *is* possible and reveals where attention and funding has been prioritized – Indigenous communities deserve the equal intent, prioritization and focused investment to address location-based challenges and receive access to reliable broadband connectivity. Without equitable broadband, they are effectively excluded from the digital economy that now underpins nearly every sector.

This gap has profound economic consequences. Lack of reliable internet restricts access to modern education, digital skills training, e-commerce, remote work, telehealth, financial services, and participation in emerging sectors such as clean technology and AI. It limits the ability of Indigenous entrepreneurs to reach markets, prevents communities from attracting investment, and undermines the development of data-driven economic planning. In a digital age, connectivity is not a convenience, it is a prerequisite for economic sovereignty and full participation in Canada's economy.

[39] Note: For precision due to rounding, total scores for each indicator are calculated by the sum of the scores of all communities under that indicator divided by the total number of communities. For example, the First Nations' total average connectivity score was calculated by adding and averaging together the connectivity scores of each individual First Nations community across all provinces and territories.

An analysis on *Remoteness, Broadband Availability, and Socio-Economic Outcomes in First Nations and Inuit Communities* by Indigenous Services Canada found that while remoteness and internet availability are related, they are not equivalent; First Nations and Inuit communities are disproportionately characterized by both higher levels of remoteness and lower internet availability – with associations of lower socio-economic well-being scores. Only 20 out of 748 First Nations communities studied in the Assembly First Nations' *Closing the Infrastructure Gap* by 2030 report had all three elements of fibre backbone, representing an estimated $3.3 billion digital infrastructure gap,[40] This index's findings reinforce the Assembly of First Nations' assessment.

As will be discussed in the section *Looking Ahead: Future Infrastructure Impacts*, there has been significant investment in northern connectivity through the Canada Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) Broadband Fund, with numerous projects funded to benefit the communities assessed within this index. If the public and private sectors remain dedicated to the realization of these projects and advancing further initiatives, there is significant potential for real progress towards closing the connectivity gap. The next iteration of this index will quantify whether this momentum translates into meaningful progress.

Transportation

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous	0.55	-0.20	-0.36
➢ **First Nations**	0.60	-0.15	-0.31
➢ **Inuit**	0.42	-0.33	-0.49
➢ **Métis**	0.55	-0.20	-0.36
Non-Indigenous	0.75	N/A	-0.16
CMAs	0.91	0.16	N/A

For air, water and road transportation infrastructure, northern and remote Indigenous communities in total scored an average of 0.55, while the northern and remote non-Indigenous communities scored a total average of 0.75, and CMAs scored 0.91.

For all distinctions groups and non-Indigenous communities across all regions, there has been minimal to no changes to road, water and air transportation infrastructure since the 2019 index – suggesting that transportation development has generally not been a federal investment priority area. While there has been *some* new infrastructure, such as the Tłı̨chǫ All-Season Highway, score changes since 2019 can largely be attributed to indicator adjustments.

[40] Assembly of First Nations, *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030: A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Investment Needs of First Nations in Canada,* 17.

Inuit communities face the largest infrastructure gap with their non-Indigenous northern and remote counterparts and southern CMAs, largely attributed to disconnection from the Canadian National Roads Network – only two communities of the 49 assessed have all-season access to the network, while one community only has winter road access to a highway system. The overall connectivity gap faced by the Métis communities is associated with no airports offering scheduled passenger flights – all communities are connected to the Canadian National Roads Network, and none are assessed for harbour or port infrastructure. For First Nations, the gap can be connected to all three indicators; the largest being under the airport sub-indicator.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Transportation Infrastructure Gap

These scores reflect a persistent and systemic infrastructure deficit that directly constrains Indigenous economic development. Limited transportation access restricts the movement of goods, raises the cost of doing business, reduces labour mobility, and undermines the ability of communities to attract investment or participate in regional and national supply chains. In practical terms, poor transportation infrastructure translates into fewer jobs, higher costs, and diminished economic sovereignty.

Beyond the impacts on economic development, insufficient transportation infrastructure has day-to-day consequences. Northern and remote communities depend on flights, winter roads and marine transport for access beyond the community and for the delivery of essential goods and services. Many northern and remote Indigenous communities only have access to one or two methods of transportation. Independently relied upon, each transportation method presents challenges and limitations that prevent reliable, accessible, and all-season use. A combination of transportation infrastructure must be available in each community to ensure year-road, uninterrupted access.

While this index positively scores communities that have scheduled passenger airline services, this method of transportation remains inaccessible for most with irregular flights, highly expensive plane tickets, and indirect flight paths that can extend regional travel over 24 hours. Cargo flights for the delivery of essential goods are also extremely costly.[41] These realities highlight that strong infrastructure scores in northern and remote communities do not necessarily translate into service parity with southern communities and reinforce the need for multiple available methods of transportation.

The Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities' report, *Northern, Rural and Remote Air Travel: A Critical Lifeline*, highlights how post-pandemic conditions, high operating costs, labour shortages, and aging or inadequate aviation infrastructure have severely constrained air travel in northern, rural, and remote communities. Witnesses emphasized that air travel in these regions functions as an essential service, yet remains burdened by high fuel prices, volatile supply chains, user-pay funding models, and insufficient federal subsidies. These pressures have reduced flight frequency, increased fares, and undermined reliability, leaving many communities at 30–50% of pre-pandemic service levels. The report stresses that without targeted federal intervention—particularly in infrastructure investment,

[41] Lang, "N.W.T. finishes fuel, cargo resupplies – but not without delays and cancellations."

regulatory reform, and cost-sharing—air travel will remain unaffordable and unreliable for the communities that depend on it.[42]

Further, the *2025 Nishnawbe Aski Nation Aviation Needs Assessment* co-developed by the Northwestern Ontario Aviation Council highlights that many of the existing airports servicing northern and remote Indigenous communities in Ontario fall below Transport Canada's standards. The repairs and upgrades needed represents an estimated $1.5 billion infrastructure gap – *in just northern Ontario alone*. These findings demonstrate that while a community may have access to an airport, the quality of infrastructure can have significant effects on the airport's ability to support service needs – such as Medevac aircrafts being unable to land due to runway conditions, risking the life of the patient.[43]

Regarding road infrastructure, many northern and remote Indigenous communities depend on winter roads to provide annual access beyond the community for medical transportation and the delivery of essential goods and services – including building supplies and labour needed for critical infrastructure projects. Deliveries via winter roads are costly, and the access period is limited – a challenge that is being further exacerbated by a warming climate, which continues to shorten the winter road season.[44] Further, as will be exemplified in the *Infrastructure Needs* section, winter roads can be dangerous.

Coastal northern and remote communities often utilize barges for annual summer deliveries of essential supplies, such as groceries and fuel, as well as to facilitate trade and economic development. However, not every community has the infrastructure to receive these shipments. For the communities that do, low water levels, rough weather and ice leads to delayed or cancelled deliveries; increasing the already high costs of goods due to use of alternative delivery methods, or requiring communities to wait for the next year's delivery.[45]

The reduced supply and high costs of essential goods in the North, driven by limited transportation access, contributes to the food insecurity experienced. ITK's *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy* describes food insecurity as including the inability to afford a balanced diet, worrying about where your next meal will come from, missing meals, or not eating for days. The experience of food insecurity across Inuit Nunangat is high. While data is limited, the report cited that in 2017, 76% of Inuit aged 15 and over living in Inuit Nunangat experienced food insecurity, while 32.4% reported very low food security. As emphasized within ITK's report, food security is a human right, and Canada has a responsibility to ensure all citizens have access to affordable and adequate food.[46] Closing the transportation gap is a key effort that must be taken in alignment with this responsibility.

As discussed in the *Policy Landscape* section, the current government has prioritized investment in dual-use infrastructure in the north, inclusive of transportation infrastructure, presenting the opportunity to work with Indigenous communities to begin addressing the persistent gap observed within this report.

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[42] Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, *Northern, Rural and Remote Air Travel: A Critical Lifeline*.
[43] Northern Ontario Aviation Council, *Nishnawbe Aski Nation Needs Assessment*: *Ministry of Transportation Remote Northern Airports*, 6, 21.
[44] Petz, "Remote First Nations urgently need all-season road in face of climate change."
[45] Lang, "N.W.T. finishes fuel, cargo resupplies."
[46] Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy.*

Energy

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous	0.38	-0.29	-0.52
➢ **First Nations**	0.53	-0.14	-0.37
➢ **Inuit**	0.02	-0.65	-0.88
➢ **Métis**	0.33	-0.34	-0.57
Non-Indigenous	0.67	N/A	-0.23
CMAs	0.90	0.23	N/A

This index recorded that around 45% of the Indigenous communities assessed are connected to an energy grid, over half of which are majority-sourced renewable/clean energy grids. In comparison, around 92% of the non-Indigenous communities assessed are connected to an energy grid; just under 61% of which are majority renewable/clean energy sourced. All southern CMAs are connected to a grid; 84% of which are renewable/clean energy powered.

This iteration's differentiation between majority fossil-fuel and renewable/clean energy sourced grids provides a basis moving forward to track the federal government's progress towards reaching the net-zero electricity grid target and holding to account the closure of the significant gap that remains. In total, all Indigenous groups scored an average of 0.38 – with Inuit receiving the lowest scores – and the northern and remote non-Indigenous communities received an average score of 0.67. In comparison, all CMAs scored an average of 0.90. A score of 0.38 signals that Indigenous communities are operating with less than half the energy infrastructure capacity of urban Canada, an imbalance that limits everything from business development to housing construction and participation in emerging clean-energy economies.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Energy Infrastructure Gap

The above disparities reveal a fundamental inequity in access to the basic energy infrastructure required for modern economic participation. Without reliable, affordable, and clean energy, Indigenous communities face higher operating costs, limited industrial development, and barriers to attracting investment, conditions that directly suppress economic growth and self-determination.

Unreliable energy also poses significant health and well-being concerns for residents, with the consistent and long-term inability to cook, power essential medical devices, run community services such as schools and health centres, and heat homes, a particularly worrisome effect during the harsh arctic season. The use of fossil fuels also contaminates the air and directly conflicts with Indigenous peoples' connection and responsibility to the land.

Under the section *Looking Ahead: Future Infrastructure Impacts*, numerous energy projects in the northern and remote Indigenous communities assessed in this index are discussed, showcasing a

promising increased focus on achieving Canada's 2035 target for a net-zero electricity grid, effectively closing the remaining gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Health Care

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous	0.49	-0.34	-0.51
➢ **First Nations**	0.48	-0.35	-0.52
➢ **Inuit**	0.54	-0.29	-0.46
➢ **Métis**	0.41	-0.42	-0.59
Non-Indigenous	0.83	N/A	-0.17
CMAs	1.00	0.17	N/A

Since 2019, there has been a slight increase in the total average score for health care infrastructure in northern and remote Indigenous communities from 0.39 to 0.49. However, as will be discussed further in the *Data Challenges* section, these changes can largely be attributed to different conceptions of what is considered a health centre – a multi-use community building versus a stand-alone medical facility. This also reflects the dominance of western-centric definitions of health and well-being, which fail to capture Indigenous conceptions of holistic care and community wellness.

This index recorded that 13 of the 189 northern and remote Indigenous communities assessed have no health services offered on-site, representing around 7%, while the health care in the remaining Indigenous communities vary in the type of services offered, availability of health care professionals, and infrastructure reliability.

In comparison, only one of the 36 northern and remote non-Indigenous communities assessed have no health care services provided in-community (around 3%), with the majority of communities having hospitals on-site – represented by a total average score of 0.83. Further, all CMAs have a local hospital, achieving scores of 1.00.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Health Care Infrastructure Gap

There has and continues to be a lack of focus on aligning the standard and reliability of health care services offered in non-Indigenous communities in northern and southern Canada with those in Inuit, Métis and First Nations communities. Many Indigenous communities lack the foundational health infrastructure required to support population health, workforce stability, and long-term economic development. Further, remote communities without fulsome local health care services face a significant health and safety risk without the ability to quickly access care outside of the community.

A common barrier to comprehensive in-community health care services in northern and remote Indigenous communities is lack of staffing. The remote and northern locations of communities create

challenges for the recruitment and retention of health care personnel, often requiring nurses and doctors to be flown-in for only short durations.[47] Certain services are often unable to be offered due to insufficient staffing numbers with some health care facilities having to temporarily shut down due to extended periods of time with no staff.

However, as exemplified by the above numbers – non-Indigenous communities in northern locations have the staffing and funding to operate hospital services in community; demonstrating that the geographic barrier disproportionately affects neighboring Indigenous communities, especially for Métis communities. Federal leadership is urgently needed to improve hiring, retention, and long-term resourcing of health care workers in northern and remote Indigenous communities. Without equitable access to health services, Indigenous communities face reduced economic participation, higher social costs, and diminished capacity to pursue self-determined development.

Health care service gaps in northern and remote communities are also often inextricably linked to other infrastructure gaps, requiring critical consideration of cumulative impacts and integrated planning. With limited health care services offered in community, many northern and remote Indigenous people must travel to other communities or southern hubs to receive health care, which can be extremely expensive, dangerous, and time-consuming with limited transportation infrastructure. Accessibility serves as a significant barrier to Indigenous access to health care, leading to higher rates of later stage diagnosis, poorer health outcomes and higher mortality rates.[48] In a 2024 survey by Statistics Canada, roughly 18% of First Nations people living off reserve, 16% of Métis and 40% of Inuit reported travelling outside their community to access health care services. Among those who needed to access health care services outside their communities, 55% of First Nations people living off reserve and 63% of Métis reported travelling less than 500 km, while more than half of the Inuit respondents reported travelling over 1,500 km.[49]

Virtual health care and mental health services have been increasingly adopted across Canada to address barriers to access. Nunavut has been deploying telehealth services to its communities for over a decade with practitioner-patient communication technology and an at-home virtual chronic disease management program. However, as is the case for many northern and remote communities, insufficient internet and cell connectivity prevents communities that need it the most from utilizing these innovative solutions.[50]

Mobile health units are also a strategic investment pathway for in-community primary health care access that is Indigenous-led and delivered, ensuring care is timely, reliable, and culturally appropriate. Bringing health care to patients removes distance-based barriers to accessing necessary care, improves trust between patients and health care providers, and enables personalized care.[51] Further, a mobile unit can help address the staffing challenges faced by many northern and remote Indigenous communities with one dedicated team providing regular, coordinated care to multiple communities.

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[47] National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, *Access to Health Services as a Social Determinant of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Health*, 3.
[48] *Ibid*, 4-5.
[49] Statistics Canada, *Health care access and experiences among Indigenous people, 2024*.
[50] Canada Institute for Health Information, *The Expansion of Health care in Canada: New Data and Information*, 29.
[51] Tabobondung, "Wasauksing, Magnetawan, Henvey Inlet, Shawanaga launch mobile health clinic to tackle 'cultural and social barriers'."

Education

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous	0.61	-0.21	-0.39
➢ **First Nations**	0.54	-0.28	-0.46
➢ **Inuit**	0.79	-0.03	-0.21
➢ **Métis**	0.55	-0.27	-0.45
Non-Indigenous	0.82	N/A	-0.18
CMAs	1.00	0.18	N/A

This iteration of the index saw the additional analysis of in-community supported virtual grade 12 education, adult education, skills training or post-secondary education that is increasingly being utilized to address the education gap faced in northern and remote communities. For both primary/secondary education and adult/post-secondary education, the score changes observed can largely be attributed to these adjustments. The lack of new physical infrastructure since 2019, however, signals that education—like health care – has not been a federal investment priority.

While the new virtual inclusions to the education indicator makes direct score comparisons to the 2019 index challenging, this iteration serves as the basis for which innovative progress to increase education availability in northern and remote communities can be tracked for future iterations. Virtual delivery is emerging as one of the few scalable solutions to chronic staffing shortages and infrastructure gaps.

Similarly to what was observed for health care infrastructure, staffing shortages disproportionately affect the education available in northern and remote Indigenous communities. This index recorded that 128 of the 189 Indigenous communities assessed have grade 12 education taught in community schools, representing roughly 68% of the communities, and 14 communities (around 7%) have no community schools or in-community supported virtual education offered. However, for northern and remote non-Indigenous communities, 33 of the 36 communities assessed have grade 12 education taught within their community schools (around 92%), and only one community doesn't have a school on-site. It is important to note that the one non-Indigenous community without on-site schooling utilizes the grade 12 inclusive school of a neighboring First Nations community – grade 12 education remains available to the community members. In comparison, all of the southern CMAs have grade 12 education offered in a local school, each achieving scores of 1.00.

A distinctions-based analysis shows that First Nations communities have the highest rate of communities without local schooling (10%), followed by Métis communities with one of 16 communities (6%). A notable success is that all Inuit communities assessed have community schools, with all but one offering grade 12 education, a meaningful achievement given the extreme remoteness of many Inuit regions.

For adult/post-secondary education, the availability of post-secondary education institutions and satellite/access centres has largely remained the same since 2019, except for the closure of the Auora College community learning centres in 2025. There are 22 Indigenous communities with post-secondary campuses on-site, and 63 with satellite/access centres. Further, around a third of the remaining communities have adult education/skills training available. In comparison, all but nine of the 36 northern and remote non-Indigenous communities assessed have post-secondary campuses or access centres located on-site, and all of the southern CMAs have post-secondary campuses.

These realities are reflected in the total average education scores: 0.61 for northern and remote Indigenous communities and 0.82 for non-Indigenous communities, with CMAs again scoring 1.00.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Education Infrastructure Gap

A score of 0.61 indicates that Indigenous communities are operating with significantly fewer pathways to higher education and skills development, key drivers of economic mobility, workforce readiness, and long-term prosperity.

While the recruitment and retention of teaching staff is a significant challenge faced in delivering secondary education in northern and remote communities, the above scores reveal that Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by this challenge. Greater focus and investment are needed to train and support teachers in northern and remote schools, including with the provision of an adequate housing supply.

Along with insufficient human resources, the gap in community schooling is often associated with low community population. While population size does call into question the feasibility and cost justification of operating a school, the data reveals that this is not *always* a direct correlation and disproportionately affects the development of schools in Indigenous communities. While just under half of the Indigenous communities without community schools have population sizes less than 100; the average population size is around 198, the largest being 703. Non-Indigenous communities of the same size have in community schools offering grade 12 education, the lowest being 239. Further, the 2021 Census of Population demonstrated that the Indigenous youth population is large and growing; young people aged 15 to 24 make up 17% of the Indigenous population – a larger proportion than the non-Indigenous population – and this percentage is projected to increase in the coming decades.[52]

Many of the existing education infrastructure in northern and remote Indigenous communities are deteriorating – with over 40% of First Nations schools requiring major repairs or full replacement – and many lack modern amenities such as gymnasiums, science labs and reliable internet access. The AFN identified high construction and maintenance costs in northern and remote communities as a major barrier contributing to this gap. Signal49 Research found that closing the education infrastructure gap would directly and indirectly generate billions in national economic output and support thousands of jobs

[52] Anderson, "Chapter 4: Indigenous Youth in Canada," 3.

– building a strong business case for increased, long-term investment and attention towards the construction and maintenance of northern and remote Indigenous educational facilities.[53]

Virtual education is increasingly being utilized to address the gap in community schools, effectively keeping Indigenous youth in their communities, a common barrier to the attainment of a high school diploma, and expanding the career opportunities available through virtual post-secondary education and skills training. To capitalize on these innovative approaches, high-speed, reliable broadband connectivity is necessary, as well as designated spaces within the community for supported studying.

Water

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous	0.68	-0.21	-0.30
➢ **First Nations**	0.71	-0.18	-0.27
➢ **Inuit**	0.53	-0.36	-0.45
➢ **Métis**	0.86	-0.03	-0.12
Non-Indigenous	0.89	N/A	-0.09
CMAs	0.98	0.09	N/A

For water advisories, Indigenous communities scored a total average of 0.92, a slight decrease from the 0.94 scored in 2019. Northern and remote non-Indigenous communities scored 1.00 in both iterations, and the southern CMAs saw an improvement from an average of 0.92 to 0.95. While some of the advisories in northern and remote Indigenous communities were lifted since the previous iteration, they were replaced and outnumbered by new advisories.

This index adjusted the water distribution indicator to account for mixed delivery methods, making direct comparisons to the 2019 iteration challenging. However, through data collection, it can be concluded there have been minimal infrastructure improvements since 2019 – with a 2026 total northern and remote Indigenous average score of 0.52. While there exists various northern-specific barriers to utilizing piping systems to deliver clean drinking water directly, the non-Indigenous northern and remote communities assessed within this index scored an average of 0.90 – with the majority of communities having a piped water distribution system. Comparatively, all the CMAs have direct water distribution systems, scoring a total of 1.00.

There have also been minimal changes in sewage treatment scoring, from a total Indigenous average of 0.61 in 2019, to a 0.60 – a decrease that can be attributed to mixed information found on sewage treatment classifications rather than physical infrastructure changes. The majority of Indigenous communities continue to use sewage lagoons, risking leakage and poor air quality. For comparison, the

[53] Hussain and LeBlanc, *Mamawmatawa Holistic Education Centre: An Indigenous-Led Model for Education Infrastructure Development.*

northern and remote non-Indigenous communities scored an average of 0.76, and southern CMAs scored 1.00s.

Across all three sub-indicators, this data represents total average scores of 0.98, 0.89 and 0.68 for CMAs, northern and remote non-Indigenous communities, and northern and remote Indigenous communities, respectively.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Water Infrastructure Gap

For assessing water quality, this iteration expanded beyond the long-term advisories tracked by Indigenous Services Canada to capture the full reality of drinking-water safety, revealing that progress remains fragile and uneven. Federal investments in lifting advisories are important, but without upgrading aging and inadequate water systems, communities will continue to cycle through re occurring short-term advisories, undermining health, safety, and economic stability.

The lack of progress observed in water distribution and sewage treatment methods and the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in northern and remote Canada indicates insufficient prioritization, investment and dedication to improve the water infrastructure in Indigenous communities. The lack of measurable improvement cannot be solely attributed to geographic challenges – Indigenous communities are disproportionately exposed to health risks that would be unacceptable elsewhere in Canada, including their non-Indigenous neighbours.

However, some location-based challenges are important to consider when interpreting the index scores and to inform strategic planning to ensure sustainable servicing. For example, in Nunatsiavut, Labrador, rocky terrain combined with high costs constrains the feasibility of sewage treatment plants in remote communities, all which received a score of 0.00 for sewage treatment method in this index.[54]

For water distribution, this index applies a score of 1.00 for direct delivery through a piped system which is most commonly through an underground network for southern communities. For communities facing harsh arctic climates, insulated above-ground or buried utilidors equipped with active freeze-protection measures, including continuous heated water circulation, are required to account for persistent frost and frozen ground.[55]

Utilidor water distribution systems are also costly. A 2019 feasibility study on the installation of utilidors in Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik – with a population of less than 1,000 – estimated the cost to be $170 million. With inflation, the Kativik Regional Government estimated that in 2025, this project would have cost around $300 million. The Quebec Indigenous Affairs Minister states that funding for all services in Nunavik amounts to roughly $800 million annually, with a per capita funding approach rather than a needs-based approach for distribution.[56]

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[54] Sikumiut Environmental Management Ltd., *Nunatsiavut Regional Impact Document: ITK National Position Document on Canada-Wide Strategy for Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent, 9.*
[55] Government of Northwest Territories, *Good Engineering Practice for Northern Water and Sewer Systems*, 2nd ed.
[56] Wat, "Leaders across Nunavik want utilidors for water. Experts say it's not easy."

Permafrost also makes it difficult and labour intensive to dig low enough to install the utilidors and avoid risk of freezing – explaining why Kuujjuarapik, which is built on sand, is the only community in Nunavik to have a utilidor system and score a 1.00 under this sub-indicator. Above ground utilidors are possible but require insulated and heated pipes built on hills and bedrock – likely requiring blasting – which is costly and complex with individual community geological considerations.[57]

Due to the above challenges, the majority of northern and remote Indigenous communities rely fully or in part on indirect water delivery methods. Most communities across Inuit Nunangat—the Inuit homeland in Canada that includes the land claims regions of Nunavut, Northern Quebec, Northern Labrador, and the northern region of the Northwest Territories[58]—rely on trucked water systems, in which drinking water is delivered from treatment plants to household storage tanks.[59] Of the 49 communities across Inuit Nunangat that were examined for this index, only nine received scores of 1.00 (including all five communities in Northern Labrador), indicating a direct water delivery method, and two received scores of 0.50 for a mixed system of indirect and direct water delivery methods. The remaining 38 communities rely on indirect water delivery methods, such as the water truck to cistern system – equating to a total average score of 0.20.

However, trucked water systems pose operational, financial, and practical challenges that affect water quality and contribute to ongoing shortages—highlighting the need for dedicated human and financial resources to strengthen the reliability of this essential system. Challenges include:

- Risk of compromising water quality during transportation, as monitoring is only required at the point where treated water leaves the plant—not in delivery trucks, household storage tanks, or at the tap.
- Operation and maintenance of water trucks, sewage systems, plumbing and water storage tanks.
- Lack of data to thoroughly understand community access to clean drinking water.
- Reoccurring breakdowns of water trucks and inadequate repairability.
- Lack of water truck drivers and system operators.
- Difficulties receiving mechanical assistance and supplies.
- Insufficient amount of water in the storage tank to serve households with many residents.[60]

Direct water delivery systems in northern regions are possible with the proper investment, time and focus dedicated to combating the geographic challenges faced – as is given to the non-Indigenous communities. As stated by the Kativik Regional Government, other avenues must be explored while the complexities of utilidors is navigated – such as focusing on growing the workforce, exploring private-public partnerships, and improving the water truck delivery system.[61]

[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit Nunangat Map."
[59] Cassivi, et al., "Domestic access to water in a decentralized truck-to-cistern system: a case study in the Northern Village of Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik (Canada)."
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] Wat, "Leaders want utilidors."

Housing

Total Average Scores 2026

Community	Total Scores	Gap with Non-Indigenous Communities	Gap with CMAs
Indigenous	0.20	-0.60	-0.76
➢ **First Nations**	0.20	-0.60	-0.76
➢ **Inuit**	0.12	-0.68	-0.84
➢ **Métis**	0.41	-0.39	-0.55
Non-Indigenous	0.80	N/A	-0.16
CMAs	0.96	0.16	N/A

This iteration of the index saw a slight increase in housing scores since 2019 for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous northern and remote communities. With those communities with housing information suppressed from the 2021 Census of Population excluded from the 2019 scores for comparability, the total average housing score of northern and remote Indigenous communities raised from 0.17 to 0.20. In opposition, the non-Indigenous northern and remote communities and southern CMAs saw decreases from 0.81 to 0.80, and 0.98 to 0.96, respectively.

The increase in the total average northern and remote Indigenous housing score is largely attributed to improvements in housing quality with an average score increase from 0.09 to 0.14, in comparison to the score increase from 0.24 to 0.25 for housing quantity. Canada's increased investment and focus on housing development, such as through the launch of Build Canada Homes, and focus on innovative housing development, like modular homes, presents an opportunity for the issue of overcrowding to be addressed alongside the improvements observed in major repairs.

In comparison, the housing quality score of northern and remote non-Indigenous communities increased from 0.69 to 0.72, and housing quantity scores decreased from 0.92 to 0.87. Further, the CMA housing quality score remains unchanged at 1.00, whereas the average housing quantity score decreased from 0.96 to 0.92.

A distinctions- and regional-based analysis highlights gaps in housing development prioritization and where further investment is needed:

- Inuit communities scored the lowest in total average housing scores in comparison to the other distinctions groups with 0.12, followed by the First Nations communities with 0.20, and Métis with 0.41.
- Inuit communities also saw a decline since the 2019 average score of 0.15, whereas the First Nations and Métis communities increased in average scores from 0.15 and 0.33, respectively.
- Further, the lowest provincial/territorial average housing scores for northern and remote Indigenous communities were observed in Nunavut, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec.

It is important to note that population changes may affect housing availability and the related challenges of overcrowding and quicker deteriorating home, and the scores outlined above must be reacted to considering this. Total population scores are discussed below, and the previous sub-section on provincial/territorial results provides notes of potential correlations.

Beyond the Numbers: Implications of the Housing Gap

Experiences of overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions are exacerbated by cold climates and remote locations – around 96% of the northern and remote communities assessed within this index have 2.86% or more homes with more than one person per room and/or have 9.76% or more homes in need of major repairs. Affirming these findings, an Indigenous Services Canada analysis (found a strong correlation between level of remoteness and Indigenous housing conditions with crowding disparities between First Nation and Inuit communities and non-Indigenous communities widening as remoteness increases. Although the report did not find that housing conditions worsen consistently with increased remoteness, First Nations and Inuit communities in remote areas still experience poorer housing conditions than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Overcrowding and inadequate housing conditions pose significant risks to health, increasing the spread of illness and leaving residents vulnerable to winter conditions and other environmental threats due to unreliable infrastructure. Further, access to safe and comfortable housing is essential for mental well-being and supports positive educational and career outcomes.

With only seasonal access to many communities via winter roads or during summer barge deliveries, housing development is limited to short periods of time spanning multiple years, which often misaligns with federal funding cycles. Critical planning and intergovernmental coordination are needed to ensure construction readiness and maximize the development time frame. These methods of delivery also greatly increase the already high cost of development and housing maintenance in the North.

Further, as discussed in relation to water infrastructure, the arctic climate requires careful construction considerations to ensure the safety and reliability of the homes being built, with factors such as permafrost contributing to the quicker deterioration of homes.

The 2025 article *Reframing Indigenous Housing Policy in Northern Canada* argues that while federal commitments—such as the $4.3 billion allocated in 2022—represent progress, current policy frameworks do not adequately reflect the realities of northern construction, climate change, or Inuit governance. The article calls for a shift toward Indigenous-designed housing systems that integrate cultural, climate, and community-driven priorities.[62]

[62] Christensen et al., "Reframing Indigenous housing policy in northern Canada."

Population

While the total population of northern and remote Indigenous communities stayed relatively the same since 2019, from 174,371 to 174,785, excluding those communities without 2021 Census of Population data for comparability, the non-Indigenous northern and remote communities saw a slight increase from 284,503 to 289,757. With population changes broken down provincially and territorially in the previous sub-section, correlating trends can be observed between the population changes between Indigenous communities and their non-Indigenous counterparts.

As seen for the Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Alberta, a decrease in the Indigenous community population size is seen alongside an increase in the non-Indigenous community population size. For the Northwest Territories and British Columbia, this population increase in non-Indigenous communities includes an increase in the average percent of the community that self-identifies as Indigenous, which *may* signify Indigenous community members moving to neighboring non-Indigenous communities, driven by the infrastructure and services offered.

As additional context, each CMA experienced a population increase resulting in a total increase from 24,518,602 to 26,179,077, with a total increase in the average percent of the population that self-identifies as Indigenous from 4.3 to 4.5.

Data Challenges

While the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* provides a foundation for measuring gaps, assessing progress and informing policy, significant data limitations and overlooked complexities prevent a comprehensive understanding of the infrastructure realities facing Indigenous northern and remote communities. This section discusses the data challenges faced in developing this index – we encourage all readers to thoroughly read this section in compliment to score analysis.

Lack of Available Data

While indicators were adjusted to align with information available in reliable databases, ensuring accuracy and replicability, such resources do not exist for the majority of the indicators, requiring different approaches for data collection and score application. For example, as new wastewater treatment infrastructure projects are large-scale initiatives that are often publicly reported on, it can be assumed that the infrastructure the community had and was scored on in 2019 has remained the same unless evidence shows otherwise on news pages, community webpages and media, construction company websites, public calls for project procurement bids or government sites. While these public resources were searched extensively, score confidence cannot be the same as those based on information from a reliable, up-to-date, single-source database. This challenge highlights the significant data gaps that exist and underscores the need to work collaboratively with communities—while upholding Indigenous data sovereignty—to ensure that data is accurate, reliable, accessible, and reflective of infrastructure realities across all distinctions-groups. Such data is essential for informing investments and developing effective strategies to close the infrastructure gap.

Further, this index utilizes the Census of Population to determine housing quality and quantity, as well as population size and the percent of the community's population that self-identifies as Indigenous. In the 2021 Census, some communities' information is suppressed by Statistics Canada to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act or* is otherwise unavailable for the specific reference period. In these cases, the affected communities have been excluded from the 2019 calculations for the relevant indicators to ensure comparability, though this necessarily reduces insight into community, regional and distinctions-based realities. Where possible, qualitative analysis has been added to the score assessments to help offset these gaps.

Although the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* provides a comprehensive assessment of major infrastructure categories, it does not capture every element that contributes to a community's economic and social well-being. Many smaller but essential components, such as sidewalks, street lighting, signage, safe pedestrian corridors, and maintained community fields, were not assessed, yet they play an important role in mobility, safety, local commerce, and quality of life. These everyday pieces of infrastructure shape how residents move through their community, support small businesses and tourism, and influence whether public spaces feel safe and accessible. Their absence from available datasets highlights the broader data gaps that continue to limit a full understanding of infrastructure conditions in Indigenous communities.

Health Care

The 2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index applies a score for health care infrastructure based on whether the community has a health center or equivalent service on-site, or a hospital. There are many important considerations that determine the availability and scope of health services in a community that are unable to be captured in the index's quantitative assessment due to infrequent and insufficient data.

The range of health services available can vary across communities that operate a health center, nursing station or other health spaces, all which would receive the same score under the current index definition. Differences in the frequency of doctor or nurse visits, staffing capacity, equipment available, programs offered, and accessibility of external hospitals and other health care facilities are key factors in the health and wellness of community members.

Many Indigenous health departments also organize and host community gatherings and events, such as beading workshops, feasts and Elder teachings; services not considered a typical function of a health center from a western perspective. As discussed in the NIEDB's *2024 National Indigenous Economic Progress Report*, Indigenous conceptions of wellness tend to focus on the collective, an understanding typically excluded from Western approaches that often guide policy, such as the Community Well-Being Index.[63] The First Nations Health Authority describes the First Nation perspective of health and wellness as involving a balance of mental, spiritual, physical and emotional health; supported by the values of respect, wisdom, responsibility and relationships, and; the critical importance of land, family, community and Nations in fostering a healthy experience.[64] The social programs and events administered by Indigenous health departments are important aspects of individual and community health and well-being that are difficult to capture in a quantitative assessment with the limited data available.

Information on the types of services offered through community health infrastructure is often limited, and when available, is typically drawn from community webpages or news sources, which may be outdated or based on inference. To maintain accuracy and uphold confidence in the index, these important aspects of Indigenous wellness must be excluded from consideration in score calculations, underscoring the need for a reliable data source that regularly reports on Indigenous-defined community health services. As a result of insufficient data, the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* took a more inclusive approach to data-gathering by recognizing various forms of community-based health infrastructure, effectively increasing the total average score since 2019.

[63] National Indigenous Economic Development Board, *National Indigenous Economic Progress Report*, 82.
[64] First Nations Health Authority, "First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness."

Water Quality

Water quality is assessed based on the presence of a boil water or do not consume advisory. The Government of Canada maintains publicly available lists of long-term advisories (those in place longer than 1 year) and short-term advisories (those in place for less than 1 year) issued on Indigenous Services Canada funded systems in First Nations communities.[6566] With few to no other reliable and regularly updated data sources on Indigenous water advisories, the *2026 Northern Indigenous Infrastructure Index* largely relied on these federal resources supplemented by news sites and community pages.

An April 2024 article on CBC Lite states that Indigenous Services Canada only funds public water systems with at least five household connections. Due to the high cost of building pipe connections to homes, many communities rely on smaller systems with fewer connections, or individual well or cistern systems, excluding their water quality status from the federal water advisory lists.[67]

The above information, along with inconsistencies between the two long-term advisory resources maintained by Indigenous Services Canada, the map of lifted and active long-term advisories and the list of active long-term water advisories, the absence of Métis and Inuit data from the federal resources, and the many contextual nuances of water advisories created notable data gaps. As a result, supplemental data sources and analyst judgement were required to complete the scoring of communities.

It must be noted that many communities face frequent water advisories that may not be captured in scoring depending on the timing of data capturing and when an advisory is in place, and whether this information is otherwise available on community media pages or news sites. These frequent, short-term disruptions to safe water consumption equally demonstrates a community's need for upgraded water infrastructure as a long-term water advisory does. A non-exhaustive list of communities requiring new or upgraded water infrastructure have been included in the section *Infrastructure Needs* in an attempt to address this gap in data collection.

Legal Boundaries of Communities

The specific location of community infrastructure in relation to the legal land boundaries, such as those imposed by the reserve system, as well as the existence of several legal land parcels that make up one community, presented complex challenges for data collection and score application.

In the 2019 *Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities*, services were considered on-site if offered within the legal boundaries of a community, or if the services were offered just outside of the legal boundary and clearly designated for that community.[68] To ensure a level of consistency between iterations for comparison purposes, the 2019 definition of on-site was upheld. Therefore, some communities that are serviced by schools, health centres and airports, for example, scored 0.00 in the index due to the inability to satisfy the above criteria for being considered on-site.

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[65] Indigenous Services Canada, "About drinking water advisories."
[66] Indigenous Services Canada, "Map of lifted and active drinking water advisories."
[67] Lambert, "For First Nations in Alberta, drought only compounds existing water issues."
[68] Johnston and Sharpe, *An Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities,* 13.

However, community context and identity were taken into consideration when analyzing the location of infrastructure in relation to the legal boundaries, leading to certain cases where infrastructure was considered to service the community despite not following the 2019 definition. For example, there may be several legally separate community boundaries that are located near each other and share services. This iteration counted these services under all communities that utilize them if they were governed or otherwise considered by community members to be one in the same. Meaning, the legal divisions are a colonial imposition and do not reflect the members' understanding of community. Similarly, this iteration considered the multiple reserve-system land parcels for a First Nation as a single community, which were previously scored separately in the 2019 index.

Indigenous understandings of community are diverse and context specific, frequently differing from Western conceptions rooted in colonially imposed land division systems that shape Census data and other datasets. The challenges outlined above demonstrate the importance of upholding data-sovereignty and prioritizing Indigenous-led data collection to ensure important cultural and community contexts are captured.

Infrastructure Needs

Residents in northern and remote communities face nuanced challenges related to infrastructure development and service delivery due to harsh climate conditions and community accessibility. These realities are important to understand when analyzing the index results and the recommendations that follow. Addressing the infrastructure gap in northern and remote Indigenous communities necessitates careful consideration and coordinated planning to achieve sustainable, long-term development that delivers reliable, high quality services to community members.

This section outlines specific infrastructure needs in the communities included in the index, as identified through data collection. The below information serves as calls to action as well as case studies to demonstrate the infrastructure challenges unique to northern and remote areas, often inextricably connected to the other indicators.[69]

Community Analysis: Neskantaga First Nation, Ontario

Neskantaga First Nation's winter road, which provides vital regional access and supply restock during the winter season for this fly-in community, includes a dangerous 3 km lake crossing which has taken the life of a community member after falling through the ice. Neskantaga has been calling on government to support the construction of a bridge over the lake, increasing safety and reliability of their only regional access route.[70]

With limited and unsafe options for travelling outside of the community, it is especially concerning that Neskantaga First Nation had to permanently close their health centre in May 2025 due to the discovery of fuel in the groundwater below the facility from the power-generating diesel tank. Community members previously served by a multi-service facility – including an emergency department, exam rooms, dental care, public health, radiography and a pharmacy – now rely on a converted duplex within minimal services, calling on Indigenous Services Canada for a new facility.[71][72] Community members must travel to Thunder Bay to receive the health care that they can't receive at home. However, with delayed medical transportation under the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program, community members wait years to receive care or are burdened with the high costs and dangerous travel. Health care remains an inaccessible service for Neskantaga community members, who are calling for a new medical centre and improvements to the NIHB to reduce delays and improve patient co-ordination.[73]

While navigating how to protect the health of community members with limited health care services, Neskantaga First Nation must do so under a 31-year boil water advisory – the longest in Canada. These conditions—as well as mold affected homes, an inadequate water treatment plant, limited

[69]The information presented reflects conditions as of early 2026 and does not capture subsequent progress made on community infrastructure needs.
[70] Allen, "Climate change threatens winter roads connecting northern Ontario's remote communities."
[71] Thompson, "Community in crisis: The closure of Neskantaga First Nation's health centre compounding state of emergency — that's about to get worse."
[72] Prokopchuk, "'Our health matters too': Neskantaga health care workers, leadership, grapple with nursing station closure."
[73] Law. "Amid year-long state of emergency, Neskantaga First Nation calls for health-care intervention."

telecommunications services, a dilapidated airport, and a small, aging K–8 school—were noted by the Ontario Ombudsman during a visit to the community, who urged the provincial and federal governments to take immediate action."[74]

Energy

Around just over half of the northern and remote Indigenous communities assessed in this index are not connected to an energy grid – which can present reliability challenges. Inconsistent and insufficient power is a significant concern for the health and well-being of community members – requiring the temporary closure of schools and health services and leaving community members without warm meals and heated homes during northern Canadian harsh winter climates.

The community of Summer Beaver in Ontario has been experiencing unreliable power connectivity, with a state of emergency in place since 2020 due to issues with the community's diesel generating system. Due to reoccurring power outages in February 2026 that led to pipes freezing in 30% of the community's homes and only one operating generator powering the community of 355, a second state of emergency was issued. Along with freezing pipes, the power outages deteriorate the condition of household appliances, increase the risk of house fires, risk the health of community members who require reliable access to power for medical devices, and limits the delivery of essential services. The remoteness of the community also presents challenges, with a limited window of time to transport the power generating systems for repairs while the winter road is opened.[75]

Health Care

As discussed, many health centres in northern and remote Indigenous communities regularly experience staffing shortages, which affects what services they can offer and how reliably they can provide them.

Pelly Crossing in the Yukon consistently experiences reduced services and health centre closures due to staffing challenges. In August 2025, the community health centre operated at reduced capacity with one nurse available, and an Emergency Medical Services paramedic to assist the nurse in urgent situations after clinic hours. The Pelly Crossing health centre closed for a day and a half the previous winter due to no nursing staff, and for several weeks in the spring. In July 2025, the Ross River health centre in Yukon had reduced services for most of the month and was without a nurse for more than a week due to staffing shortages.[76]

Pimicikamak Cree Nation in Manitoba declared a state of emergency in March 2024 due to a nursing shortage in the community with only four nurses running a health centre meant to be staffed by 13, and a community population of 6,000 that realistically requires 24 nurses. This shortage left the health centre to run on an emergency only basis, and the nurses experiencing burnout and sleep deprivation, with some working 24-hour shifts. Pimicikamak Cree Nation's Chief called on all levels of government to help address

[74] Law, "Ontario ombudsman calls out 'unacceptable' living conditions in Neskantaga First Nation."
[75] Law, "This remote First Nation is using 1 generator to power the whole community - again."
[76] CBC News, "Reduced service at health centre in Pelly Crossing, Yukon, this week because of staffing."

this crisis. The nurses fall under the jurisdiction of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Indigenous Services Canada, while physicians would be the jurisdiction of the province.[77]

"For people that don't know Cross Lake, where we're located, we are an isolated community and we don't have the other services," said Helga Hamilton, the health director for the community, "we have just the nursing station here, that's it. We don't have any access to any other form of health care."[78]

Similarly, Red Sucker Lake First Nation in Manitoba suffers from a staffing shortage at their community nursing station. Although the community has a newer health facility equipped with advanced clinical technology, including X-ray and dialysis machines, residents are often unable to benefit from these services because only two full-time nurses are available—far short of the four full-time nurses needed to meet the community's care requirements. Further, with the isolated location of the community, there are only three weeks of the year during which critical medical supplies can be delivered via winter road, and it can take 16-24 hours for a medivac to arrive.[79]

Despite the challenges faced, communities remain committed to ensuring the mental, physical and spiritual health and well-being of its members. The four staff members of the Halfway River First Nation's Health Department exemplify this resiliency, working through staffing and resource challenges to deliver programs and services to community members, and facilitate external access to health care to the best of their ability. The health department schedules health care appointments and purchased a 15-passenger van and bus for weekly trips to take community members to health care appointments, to run health-related errands, and purchase fresh groceries. The staff also coordinates in-person and virtual workshops on topics such as healthy eating, mental wellness, drug and alcohol awareness; facilitates community visits from health care professionals; builds connections between community programs and residential treatment centres, and; provides post treatment support.[80]

However, this perseverance should not be misconstrued as diminishing the urgent need for improved infrastructure, resources, and staffing to ensure community members receive comprehensive and dependable health care services.

Education

As was initially discussed in the *Indicator-Based Results and Implications* sub-section, northern and remote Indigenous communities commonly face teacher vacancies due to lack of available and affordable housing for the teaching staff, and an overall challenge of attracting teachers to the north. As of September 2025, there were around 20 teacher vacancies across the Northwest Territories, and 25 vacancies were left unfilled the school year prior.[81]

At the Chief Julian Yendo School in Wrigley, NWT, students from kindergarten to grade 5 were finally able to return to school for the year in December 2025 following a months-long teacher vacancy. The Dehcho

[77] Axelrod, "Nurse shortage prompts state of emergency in Pimicikamak Cree Nation."
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] CBC News Manitoba, "More health-care support needed in Red Sucker Lake First Nation."
[80] Halfway River First Nation, "Health Department."
[81] St-Pierre, "Teacher vacancy leaves 14 elementary students out of school in Wrigley, N.W.T."

Divisional Education Council were able to secure a home for a teacher from a local housing authority on November 1st, allowing for the vacancy to finally be filled.[82] Prior to the vacancy being filled, the school principal, Mr. Boadi, who also teaches grades 6-9, had been delivering the affected younger students learning packages to their homes. Since Principal Boadi started at the school in 2021, there has never been a substitute teacher available, and the previous kindergarten to grade 5 teacher had to live with him due to no other housing available.[83]

As well as the challenges experienced in providing elementary and secondary education, the Northwest Territories is facing a significant setback in adult and post-secondary education. In January 2025, Aurora College closed all 19 of it's community learning centres in the Northwest Territories due to low enrolment rates making programs too expensive to operate in person. The community learning centres provided residents who would otherwise have to leave their community and travel southwards with the in-person support, resources and dedicated infrastructure for accessing academic upgrading, training and accredited courses. Many of these learning centres were located in communities included in the index, bringing down their scores under the Adult Education/Post-Secondary indicator. The Northwest Territories' Department of Education is implementing short- and medium-term plans to support access to adult education and training opportunities while working with communities to facilitate community-based, Indigenous-led solutions and to determine alternative uses of the Aurora College facilities.[84]

After becoming certified by the First Nations School Association in June 2019 with the ability to issues high school and adult graduation diplomas[85] – enabling an education score increase from 0.00 to 0.67 – the Blueberry Community School in Blueberry River First Nation, British Columbia, burned down. The school was a key building in the community – hosting gatherings, funerals, Head Start programs, cultural events, as well as providing education to all ages. Due to the insufficient supply of water in the community and no agreement with the City of Fort St. John for firefighting services due to distance, the building could not be saved – showing why enhanced infrastructure is required across all indicators.[86]

Water Treatment and Distribution

As discussed, climate and geographic factors present challenges for the construction and maintenance of water infrastructure in northern communities, affecting the availability of clean drinking water for community members when difficulties arise. Paired with underfunding and understaffing, these water disruptions can become chronic, risking the physical and mental well-being of community members.

Puvnirtuq, Nunavik, is one community that faces reoccurring and prolonged loss of access to clean drinking water, showcasing the challenges with water truck delivery systems largely depended upon in the North. In May 2025, the community issued a state of emergency after the water pipe between the pumping station and the water treatment plant froze and broke, putting further strain on an already severely under resourced water truck delivery system. The community's three water trucks, all in need of

[82] St-Pierre, "Kids returning to school in Wrigley, N.W.T., after months-long teacher vacancy."
[83] St-Pierre, "Teacher vacancy leaves 14 elementary students out of school."
[84] CBC News, "N.W.T. releases partial plan for adult learning, after closure of community learning centres."
[85] Blueberry River First Nation, "Education."
[86] Blueberry River First Nation, "Press Release January 17th 2025."

repair, had to travel on damaging roads in severe weather conditions to a pumping station 30 minutes outside of Puvirnituq to collect and then delivery water to over 2100 residents. Some homes went weeks without running water, utilizing melted snow for dishes and plumbing. Water shortages are a persistent occurrence for the community – with frequent closures of the hospital, schools and community centre - due to the harsh arctic climate and "chronic underfunding of resilient water supply infrastructure," as called out by Kativik Regional Government officials.[8788]

In 2021, the water truck system in Clyde River, Nunavut, experienced severe pressure to delivery clean drinking water to the 1,200 residents when the water treatment facility and pump became non-operational following a power outage. The community relied on two water trucks to draw water directly from the lake and deliver to homes to be boiled before consumption. With an insufficient number of trucks for the population size, the operators became overworked, homes went four to seven days between deliveries, residents had to utilize melted snow for water, and the school and health centre had to close.[89]

Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, is another northern and remote Indigenous community that faces persistent water shortages, with some households running out of water every other day. While the community has trained new operators, they are awaiting territorial funding for a new garage to store additional water trucks in to protect them from the elements, which was approved in 2021. The community's population continues to grow, putting increasing strain on the water system. While the population has increased by almost 800 since 2010, the number of water trucks has remained the same. As is the case for many other communities, utilidors remains a costly solution with connecting one subdivision in Cambridge Bay to the waterline estimated to cost around $7.5 million.[90]

A case study examining the truck-to-cistern water system in Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik, demonstrates the daily experiences of northern and remote communities and the challenges faced in reliable delivery of clean drinking water. The study highlighted overall mistrust with the safety of the drinking water. 37% of households reported that they do not consume the water directly from the tap, citing the taste of chlorine; fears of germs, contaminants or chemicals; and concerns with plumbing maintenance. 80% of households that consumed tap water reported boiling the water first, and 63% of households used home water filtrations, some in conjunction with boiling the water.

The survey also revealed routine experiences of water shortages. Almost half of the surveyed households reported having water delivered 5 or 6 times a week, despite daily scheduled services. Over 10% of households reported that the quantity of water was insufficient to meet daily needs, and 33% reported experiencing a water shortage at least once during the week prior to the survey. Water shortages required surveyed households to reduce laundry frequency, shorten shower times, reusing water for hand washing and/or bathing, and to collect water from additional sources.

[87] Fennario, "Pipe Dreams: The water crisis in Nunavik."
[88] CBC, "State of emergency ends in Puvirnituq, Que., as water flows again."
[89] Lochead, "Clyde River's water crisis resolved, SAO says."
[90] Pressman, "Cambridge Bay's population has outgrown its sewer, water services."

In line with the community stories described, the surveyed households in Kangiqsualujjuaq commonly cited the need for more water trucks with higher capacities and more frequent deliveries as approaches for improving water quantity in their households. More than half of the households favoured implementation of a piped water system, while others worried about the loss of work for water truck drivers.[91] However, as discussed in the *Indicator-Based Results and Implications* sub-section, utilidors are largely an unfeasible approach given costs and permafrost. In the interim, the highly depended upon water truck delivery systems utilized across northern and remote Indigenous communities must be properly funded and resourced to ensure consistent, reliable, and sufficient clean drinking wate r to end the reoccurring story of unsafe water and frequent shortages.

[91] Cassivi et al., "Domestic access to water in a decentralized truck-to-cistern system," 799-805.

Looking Ahead: Future Infrastructure Impacts

Although the scores in this index show that infrastructure progress in northern and remote Indigenous communities has been limited, this does not capture the full picture. Some of the most meaningful advancements underway are Indigenous-led innovations that have the potential to transform future outcomes. These projects (many of which are still in development) demonstrate how Indigenous communities are designing, governing, and implementing infrastructure solutions that respond directly to local realities, cultural priorities, and long-term economic goals. They also highlight a critical shift: progress is increasingly being driven from within communities rather than imposed from outside, resulting in infrastructure that is more sustainable, resilient, and aligned with Indigenous visions of prosperity. This section highlights key initiatives that showcase this momentum – innovation that may not yet move index scores but are laying the groundwork for measurable improvements in the next iteration and redefining what effective, community-driven infrastructure development looks like in Canada.[92]

Broadband

Launched in 2019, the CRTC Broadband Fund supports projects that bring reliable Internet and mobile services to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, with the objective of closing the connectivity gap. In 2024, an Indigenous funding stream was created under the Broadband Fund dedicated to capacity-building and supporting Indigenous-owned networks. The CRTC also introduced a requirement for project proponents to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities and provide proof of community consent.[93]

Through the Broadband Fund, 70 projects have been selected to receive funding totalling around $769 million to assist in improving connectivity for over 320 communities. Of these 70 projects, several contribute directly to closing the connectivity gap for the northern and remote Indigenous communities assessed in this index:

- $157.9 million in total to Kativik Regional Government to increase fibre transport capacity for 10 Inuit communities in Nunavik.
- $10.6 million to Keewaytinook Okimakanak for satellite projects across six First Nation communities in Northern Ontario.
- $9.7 million to Broadband Communications North Inc. to enable access to download/upload spends of 10/1 Mbps with unlimited data to eight communities in Manitoba, five of which are First Nation communities assessed in this index (Barren Lands, God's River, Lac Brochet, Pukatawagan and Shamattawa).

[92] The information presented is current to early 2026. Advancements to existing projects and any projects announced afterward are not included in this list.
[93] Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, "CRTC improves Broadband Fund to help connect Canadians fast."

- $2.5 million to TELUS Mobility to enable access to download/upload speeds of 25/10 Mbps with up to 500 GB of fata, and LTE-A with up to unlimited data in the First Nation community of Tallcree 173/173A, Alberta.
- $15.1 million in total to ATG Arrow Technology Group Limited Partnership to enable access to download/upload speeds from 50/20 Mbps to 1,000/100 Mbps with unlimited data in the First Nation communities of John D'Or Prairie and Fox Lake, Alberta.
- $11.9 million to Rogers Communications Canada Inc. to enable access to the Universal Mobile Telecommunications system, LTE and 5G to nine communities in British Columbia, including the First Nation communities of Dease Lake and Iskut.
- $13.8 million to Rogers Communications Canada Inc. and Shaw Cablesystems G.P. to increase network transport capacity for seven communities in British Columbia, including West Moberly First Nations.
- $65.6 million in total to Northwestel Inc. to enable access to download/upload speeds of 50/10 Mbps and unlimited data to 30 communities in Yukon, including the First Nation communities of Old Crow, Burwash Landing, Carcross, Carmacks, Pelly Crossing and Ross River.
- $27.8 million in total to Northwestel Inc. to enable access to download/upload speeds of 50/10 Mbps and unlimited data to 26 communities in the Northwest Territories, 23 of which are assessed in this index.
- $271.9 million to the Government of Canada to build a fibre transport network for four Nunavut communities.
- $26.8 million to SSi Micro Ltd. to increase satellite transport capacity in all 25 communities in Nunavut.[94]

Despite seven years of the CRTC Broadband Fund and recent improvements, the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous communities (and between northern regions and southern Canada) remains substantial. With fewer than four years remaining until 2030, greater federal prioritization and investment is paramount to meeting the 50/10 connectivity target.[95]

Transportation

Since 2019, several major projects have been proposed to improve transportation access for remote and Northern Indigenous communities, providing reliable year-round connections to essential services, economic opportunities, and critical resources.

In February 2020, the Cree Nation and the Quebec Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Cree-Quebec Sustainable Infrastructure Program, creating La Grande Alliance, to increase collaboration and study how to better connect, develop and protect the territory.[96] Several proposed

[94] Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, "Broadband Fund: Projects selected for funding."
[95] Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 2: Connectivity in Rural and Remote Areas*, 25.
[96] La Grande Alliance, homepage for La Grande Alliance.

transportation projects came from La Grande Alliance that address gaps faced by the communities in Eeyou-Istchee that are assessed in this index:

- Upgrades to the access roads linking the Cree communities of Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji and Nemaska. While these communities currently have access to the National Road Network, upgrades are essential to ensuring the reliability of community access to key services and resources.
- New access road to Mistissini.
- Study into an airport for Mistissini.
- New road to Whapmagoostui, which currently only has local roads with no all-season or seasonal road access outside of the community.
- New harbour in Whapmagoostui.[97]

Currently in the planning stage, the Marten Falls Community Access Road is a proposed all-season road that would connect the community to the provincial highway network, enabling year-round access and fostering greater economic activity. At present, the community only has seasonal access to the highway system through a winter road.[98]

In October 2025, Webequie First Nation and the Province of Ontario signed a Community Partnership Agreement, with $39.5 million provided to support the construction of the Webequie Supply Road. The funding will also be used to support community mental health initiatives, a new sports facility, and upgrades to the First Nations' airport, which was severely damaged in a fire and currently is the only all-season access point for the community.[99] The Webequie Supply Road will link the community's airport with the McFaulds Lake area of the Ring of Fire, improving the movement of people and goods while supporting economic development, job creation, and training opportunities.[100]

A separate project from the two led by Webequie First Nation and Marten Falls First Nation, the Northern Road Link project proposes to construct an all-season, multi-use road connecting the Marten Falls Community Access Road and the Webequie Supply Road. The linking of these roads would connect the mineral deposits in the McFaulds Lake area in the Ring of Fire to the highway network through the Marten Falls Community Access Road and provide an opportunity to connect Webequie First Nation to the highway network.[101]

It is critical to note that the development of the Ring of Fire and it's designation as a special economic zone under the provincial Bill 5, allowing legal and regulatory exemptions, has been criticized by several First Nations.[102]

[97] Systra, "La Grande Alliance Feasibility Study Phase 1: Transportation Infrastructure."
[98] Marten Falls First Nation Community Access Road, "About."
[99] Law, "Ontario government signs agreement with Webequie First Nation for road to Ring of Fire."
[100] Webequie Supply Road, "The Project."
[101] Northern Road Link, "Project Purpose."
[102] Law, "Ontario government signs agreement."

Some other developments related to transportation infrastructure in northern and remote Indigenous communities since 2019 include:

- Manitoba's 2024 Budget committed to building an airport on Wasagamack First Nation after 60 years of advocacy from the community.[103]
- Construction on the Qikiqtarjuaq Deep Sea Port is expected to start in 2026. This project is designed to support Nunavut's arctic fishing fleet, stimulating job creation, greater economic activity and regional development.[104]
- The Mackenzie Valley Highway in the Northwest Territories was selected to undergo a consultation process for national interest designation in June 2026. The final leg of construction could begin in 2028[105], connecting the Indigenous communities of Wrigley, Tulita and Norman Wells.[106] Of significance for this index, this project would provide all-season road access to the First Nation community of Tulita, which currently only has seasonal access to the highway system by winter road.
- Construction is underway on the Wollaston Lake Road project – an all-season road that will connect Hatchet Lake Denesuline Nation and Wollaton Lake, two communities that currently rely on winter roads.[107]
- In March 2026, the federal government reveal a $35-billion proposal to modernize and expand Canada's military presence in the north, which also includes improvements to civilian infrastructure such as to the Rankin Inlet and Inuvik airports; and commitments to major road construction projects to be approved by the MPO.[108]

Energy

Canada set a goal to reach universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all by 2030, and a net-zero electricity grid by 2035. Indigenous, rural, remote and northern communities' transition to clean energy is supported through Wah-ila-toos under the Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities program, the Indigenous Off-Diesel Initiative, and the Northern REACHE program.[109][110]

Significant progress has been made toward this goal, with numerous Indigenous-led initiatives underway to reduce dependence on off-grid diesel across remote and Northern Indigenous communities:

Nunavut

- In February 2020, the Canada Infrastructure bank signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the planning and development of the proposed Kivalliq-Hydo Fibre Link, connecting Manitoba's electricity grid and communications network to the to the Kivalliq communities of Arviat, Whale

[103] CBC News, "Decades-long fight over: Airport on Wasagamack First Nation promised in Manitoba budget."
[104] CBCL, "2024 Project Profile: Qikiqtarjuaq Deep Sea Port."
[105] Rabinovitch, "Ottawa starts process to name 3 projects as in national interest."
[106] Hashmi, "N.W.T. officials provide update on major infrastructure projects, and some rising costs."
[107] MBC News, "Wollaston Lake all-season road project receives federal funding."
[108] Brewster, "Carney announces $35B for defence, infrastructure in Canada's North."
[109] Economic and Social Development Canada, "Sustainable Development Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy."
[110] Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Northern REACHE Program."

Cove, Rankin Inlet, Chesterfield Inlet, and Baker Lake. This project will deliver hydroelectricity energy to the diesel-dependant communities, as well as provide broadband connectivity for the first time.[111][112] All five of the communities scored 0 in both the broadband and energy indicators in this index, representing reliance on off-grid fossil fuel energy and satellite backbone.

- A study is ongoing for a hybrid renewable generation system in the remote diesel microgrid of Arviat, Nunavut, as well as capacity building initiatives within the community to support project delivery. The study will result in the first large scale power generation project in the territory with community ownership.[113]
- In November 2025, the Iqaluit Nukkiksautiit Hydroelectric project was referred to the MPO. This project is Nunavut's first 100% Inuit-owned hydro energy project and will replace Iqaluit's reliance on off-grid diesel energy.[114]

Nunatsiavut

- As of August 2022, solar panels have been installed in all five Nunatsiavut communities, seasonally reducing the region's reliance on fossil fuel power.[115] As context, Nain, Hopedale, Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet all utilize off-grid fossil fuel energy, scoring 0.00's under the energy indicator of this index.
- In the Inuit community of Nain, two wind turbines and a battery energy storage system will be integrated with the community's existing diesel microgrid. With the goal of being operational in 2027, this project will displace at least half of the fossil fuel used by the community annually and serve as a blueprint to reduce reliance on fossil fuels across the province.[116]
- In November 2025, the Nunatsiavut Government received federal funding to continue its work in identifying locations for a potential tidal energy facility near Rigolet.[117]

Nunavik

- In October 2025, the Government of Canada announced funding to support the Innavik Remote Hydro Project. This Inuit-owned project is Canada's largest off-grid hydropower facility, replacing reliance on diesel fuel for almost all Inukjuak's energy needs.[118] The operationalization of this facility brought Inukjuak's energy score from 0.00 in 2019, to 0.67 in 2026.

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[111] Canada Infrastructure Bank, "Canada Infrastructure Bank Signs Memorandum of Understanding For The Proposed Kivalliq Hydo-Fibre Link Project."
[112] Government of Nunavut, *Nunavut's Nation-Building Priorities*, 10.
[113] Natural Resources Canada, "Arviat Clean Energy Microgrid FEED Study."
[114] Prime Minister of Canada, "Prime Minister Carney announces second tranche of nation-building projects referred to the Major Projects Office."
[115] Atter, "Solar panels installed in all Nunatsiavut towns as Inuit government eyes energy independence."
[116] Logan, "Nain microgrid project lays the foundation for Labrador to get of diesel."
[117] Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Canada supports the Nunatsiavut Government's leadership in Inuit-led, community-based clean energy initiatives."
[118] Natural Resources Canada, "Government of Canada contributes to major clean energy projects in Indigenous communities in Quebec."

- Tarquti Energy, Saputik Landholding Corporation and leaders from Kangirsuk are developing a community energy plan, exploring solutions to reduce diesel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in the Inuit community.[119]
- Tarquti Energy, in collaboration with Puvirnituq Cooperative, plans to build and operate three wind turbines on the territory of Puvirnituq, which will be fully owned by the Inuit community.[120] The community currently relies on off-grid fossil fuels, scoring a 0 under the energy indicator in this index.

Northwest Territories

- The Dél̨ı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government is exploring the feasibility of a small-scale hydro power project to reduce reliance on diesel fuel and ensure affordable electricity for residents.[121] The First Nation community currently relies on an off-grid fossil fuel system, scoring a 0 under the energy indicator for this index iteration.
- Partnering with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Łútsël K'é Dene First Nation, Deninu Kų́ę́ First Nation, Northwest Territory Métis Nation and Salt River First Nation, the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) proposes to connect the South Slave's Taltson Hydro Plant and to the North Slave's Snare Hydro System. If funding can be secured, the GNWT estimates grid operation by 2033,[122] providing 11 communities with reliable, renewable energy.[123]

Ontario

- The Wataynikaneyap Transmission Project, led by 24 First Nation communities, connected 16 remote Indigenous communities to the provincial clean energy grid.[124] 14 of the connected communities are assessed in this index, achieving scores of 1 under the energy indicator.

[119] Natural Resources Canada, "Kangirsuk Wind and Hydro Project."
[120] Kativik Environmental Quality Commission, "Deployment of three wind turbines on the territory in the Northern Village of Puvirnituq."
[121] Hashmi, "Dél̨ı̨nę government exploring hydro potential on Great Bear River in N.W.T."
[122] Williams, "Taltson hydro expansion will cost up to $3 billion, minister says."
[123] Government of Northwest Territories, "Taltson Hydro Expansion Project."
[124] Ontario Newsroom, "Construction Complete on Largest Indigenous-led Energy Project in Ontario's History."

Health

The Government of Canada announced $400 million over five years beginning in 2026-27 to maintain access to high-quality primary care services for First Nations in rural and remote on-reserve communities – presenting the opportunity for the federal government to invest in health infrastructure and the recruitment and retainment of health care professionals to improve the availability of health care services in Northern and remote Indigenous communities.[125]

Some developments related to health infrastructure in northern and remote Indigenous communities since 2019 include:

- Construction is underway for a new health campus in Moosonee, Ontario, which is expected to be completed by 2030.[126] Moosonee is currently serviced by a health centre and a 76 year old, 37 bed hospital in the neighbouring community of Moose Factory,[127] which is accessible by ice road. Replacing the oldest, un-renovated hospital in Canada, the culturally appropriate health campus in Moosonee will include a hospital and a 32-bed Long-Term Care Lodge.[128]
- Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, located in Nelson House, Manitoba, will be opening a new health facility by 2028, offering health, dental pharmacy and emergency services as well as cultural program. The nursing station that currently services the community is understaffed with limited services available, often requiring community members to travel over an hour for health care.[129] In July 2024, the community had to declare a state of emergency after staffing shortages forced the facility to close for non-emergency services in September 2023, a similar story to those described in the *Infrastructure Needs* section.[130]

Education

Advancements in access to education for youth and adults in northern and remote Indigenous communities since 2019 include:

- In October 2025, Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Nation in Ontario received $894,305 in provincial funding to build a modular training centre in the community. Featuring seven multi-purpose rooms for training, workshops, events and meetings, this new centre will assist Indigenous job seekers in gaining relevant skills and strengthen the expertise of Indigenous workers.[131]
- Construction is underway for a primary/secondary school in Burwash Landing, Yukon, with students expected to begin attending in fall 2026. With culturally focused curriculum, this new school will include a steam room, language classrooms, a large gym and a large commercial kitchen for traditional cooking. Currently, students from Burwash Landing attend school outside

[125] Canada, *Spring Economic Update 2026*, 106.
[126] Rutherford, "Foundation forming for new James Bay hospital after one year of construction."
[127] CBC News, "New Moosonee hospital to replace 74 year old facility in Moose Factory."
[128] Ontario Newsroom, "Ontario Building New Hospital in Moosonee."
[129] Nicholls, "From crossroads to a path forward: Coming health facility in Nelson House means a transition for First Nation's wellness centre."
[130] CBC News, "State of emergency declared due to nursing shortage in northern Manitoba Cree Nation."
[131] Goater, "Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Nation receiving just under $900,000 to build a modular training centre."

of the community, scoring a 0 under the primary/secondary school indicator for this index.[132] After completion, this project will bring the community's score to a 1 for the next iteration.

- In summer 2025, the Eeyou Istchee College of Science and Technology opened in Chisasibi, Northern Quebec – offering professional development programs as well as courses to accumulate credits towards other post-secondary institutions.[133]
- Construction is set to begin in summer 2026 the Sabtuan Learning Centre in the Eeyou Istchee community of Chisasibi in northern Quebec. The centre will offer hands-on training programs across sectors such as trades, technology, and health care, and feature an elders' room and spaces or intergenerational learning and cultural connection. Serving as a community learning hub to support lifelong learning, the Cree School Board aims to have similar adult learning centres in all communities in iiyiyiu aschii, the territory of the James Bay Cree.[134]
- In October 2025, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, the school board of Nunavik, released a report outlining support for the creation of a culturally rooted post-secondary institution in Nunavik expressed through consultations with the 14 Nunavik communities. Kativik Ilisarniliriniq and Makivvik will work together to develop a legal and institutional framework.[135]

Water Treatment and Distribution

In December 2025, the Federal Court made a landmark ruling, confirming that water services are not discretionary government programs, but that Canada has a legal obligation to provide safe drinking water to First Nation peoples living on reserve. In *Shamattawa First Nation v. Canada,* the Justice ruled that Canada breached its legal duties and neglected to meet basic standards of care by failing to provide safe water to communities living under long-term water advisories, violating First Nations' Charter rights.

As captured in the index scoring, Shamattawa First Nation is under a boil-water advisory and has been since 2018, with community members facing illness, some very serious. It was brought forward in court how federal workers in Shamattawa were flown in bottled water that was not made available to community members. Further, experts testified that water access on reserves is comparable to conditions in refugee camps, and that average water use in some communities is less than 15 litres per person a day in comparison to the Canadian average of 220 litres.

In regard to a federal promise to implement clean water legislation by December 2022, Prime Minister Carney committed to re-introducing the proposed *First Nations Clean Water Act* in Spring 2026 at the December 2025 Assembly of First Nations Special Assembly. The proposed act died on the Order Paper when Parliament was prorogued and dissolved ahead of the 2025 federal election and has yet to be introduced in this new session.[136]

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[132] CBC News, "Construction set to begin on new school in Burwash Landing, Yukon."
[133] Blacksmith, "New college in Northern Quebec offers culturally rooted education for Cree students."
[134] Cree School Board, "A New Chapter in Adult Learning in iiyiyiu aschii: Sabtuan Learning Centre Coming to Chisasibi."
[135] Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, "Kativik Ilisarniliriniq Publishes a Landmark Report on Nunavummiut's Vision of Post-Secondary Education in Their Region."
[136] Pugliese, "Federal Court: Canada legally obligated to ensure safe housing, clean water on reserve."

While this landmark decision and the prospect of clean drinking water legislation are significant, these advances only concern First Nation; the water crisis facing Inuit and Métis communities are unaddressed.

Some key on-the-ground developments related to water quality in northern and remote Indigenous communities since 2019 include:

- Work is ongoing by Indigenous Service Canada to lift the boil water advisories in several northern and remote Indigenous communities, including Shamattawa First Nation, MB; Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, MB, with a projected lift date of Fall 2027; Bearskin Lake, ON, with one of the community's advisories expected to be lifted in Summer 2026; Marten Falls, ON; Muskrat Dam Lake, ON; Fort Severn, ON; Neskantaga First Nation, ON; North Spirit Lake, ON; Sandy Lake, ON; Nibinamik First Nation, ON; Mishkeegogamang First Nation, ON, and; Slate Falls Nation, ON.[137]
- A procurement contract was awarded in September 2023 for the construction of a new water treatment plant in Sachs Harbour, NWT after receiving $3.7 million in funding in 2021 to address reoccurring boil water advisories.[138]
- Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, received $2.8 million in funding for updates to their water treatment plant, as well wastewater management system.[139]
- Construction of a new water treatment plant and water tanks for Grise Fiord, NU, by majority Inuit-owned contractor, Salumaq Environmental Contracting Ltd.[140]
- In 2022, the Governments of Canada and Nunavut committed over $3.6 million to studies supporting capacity upgrades to the Rankin Inlet Wastewater Treatment Facility, new water treatment facilities in Arctic Bay, Grise Fiord, Rankin Inlet, and Sanikiluaq, and the planning and design work for rehabilitating and expanding Arviat's wastewater treatment facility.[141] By May 2024, the study and planning phases for the four new water treatment facilities were completed, with design and construction ready to proceed.[142]
- In May 2024, the Government of Canada announced $2 million in funding to develop proposals for upgrading the drinking water treatment facilities in Clyde River, Coral Harbour, and Igloolik.[143]
- As of 2020, all communities in the Northwest Territories have modern water treatment plants with filtration systems, operated by local residents employed by the community government.[144]

[137] Indigenous Services Canada, "Active long-term drinking water advisories."
[138] OpenNWT, "Sachs Harbour Water Treatment Plant Project."
[139] Environment, Science & Engineering Magazine, "Four water treatment plant upgrades funded across Canada."
[140] Government of Nunavut, "Infrastructure Plan for Grise Fiord."
[141] Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, "Canada and Nunavut invest in water and wastewater treatment for northern communities."
[142] Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, "Supporting water treatment infrastructure in Nunavut."
[143] *Ibid.*
[144] Water Canada, "All Communities in NWT Now Have Modern Water Treatment Plants."

Housing

The Federal Court released a second landmark decision in December 2025 on a First Nations housing class-action case launched by St. Theresa Point and Sandy Lake First Nations - on behalf of themselves and other affected communities – ruling that Canada has violated First Nations Charter rights and owes a legal duty to provide adequate housing to the class as a whole.

Evidence and testimony brought forward demonstrates the living conditions faced by First Nations since the forced imposition of the reserve system, including extreme overcrowding requiring household members to sleep in shifts; mould and pest infestations; no running water, sewage systems or heat; poor construction with improper building materials, and; illnesses and deaths.

The court will now determine where Canada failed its legal duties for each First Nation and what must be done to rectify.[145]

While a key advancement, it is important to note that this ruling only concerns First Nations housing; Inuit and Métis communities also face issues of overcrowding and homes in need of major repairs – in fact, Inuit communities scored the lowest total average housing scores across the communities assessed within this index.

Another key development related to housing in northern and remote Indigenous communities is the federal funding announcement in February 2025 to support the construction of a modular housing facility in Arviat, Nunavut.[146] A project of the Sakku Investments Corporation, the development arm of Kivalliq Inuit Association, the factory is expected to be complete by spring 2026 and produce around 40 housing units a year for communities across the Kivalliq region, constructed to withstand the northern climate. The factory is also expected to create 40 full-time jobs within the community, with training plans to promote Inuit employment.[147]

Launched in September 2025, Build Canada Homes is a Crown corporation with the mandate to build affordable housing across Canda, fast and efficiently through modern construction methods. As of February 5, 2026, Build Canada Homes has advanced six projects, although none in Indigenous communities, and four major partnerships, including a tripartite agreement with Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated.[148] Through partnerships with Indigenous organizations and governments, this initiative has the potential to produce more Indigenous-led housing projects such as the one described above, while taking into consideration the cultural, climate and geographic specificities in northern and remote communities.

As another development in the push towards modular housing, in March 2026, three modular homes built in Regina by Herauf Modular Solutions were delivered to St. Theresa Point First Nation in Manitoba, which

[145] Pugliese, "Federal Court: Canada legally obligated."
[146] Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, "Minister Anandasangaree announces funding for Nunavut housing construction."
[147] CBC News, "Modular home factory in Arviat, Nunavut, to be complete by spring."
[148] Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, "The Government of Canada Introduces the *Build Canada Homes Act*."

will be used as transitional housing for youth.[149] This First Nation community scored a total housing score of 0.00 within this index – indicating overcrowding and major repairs needed.

Taken together, these projects demonstrate that Indigenous-led innovation is not only reshaping the infrastructure landscape in northern and remote communities - it is redefining what effective, sustainable, and community-driven development looks like in Canada. These initiatives show that when Indigenous governments, organizations, and knowledge holders lead the design and delivery of infrastructure, the results are more resilient, more culturally grounded, and more responsive to local needs. They also reveal a broader shift underway: progress is increasingly being driven by Indigenous vision, governance, and technical expertise rather than external intervention. While many of these innovations are still emerging and therefore not yet reflected in index scores, they are laying the foundation for transformative improvements in future iterations. Ultimately, Indigenous-led infrastructure development is proving to be a powerful catalyst for economic growth, self-determination, and long-term community well-being.

[149] Favek, "Housing convoy set to travel to northern Indigenous community."

Recommendations

The NIEDB has a long history of advising the federal government on Indigenous economic priorities, including infrastructure needs, and many of its previous recommendations remain highly relevant to today's infrastructure challenges. Building on that foundation, the Board is reaffirming its earlier guidance and introducing new recommendations informed by the findings of this report.

Reforming Federal Indigenous Policy

1. **The Government of Canada undertake the necessary structural reform of its Indigenous policy and funding frameworks by adopting coordinated, distinctions- and needs-based approaches grounded in Indigenous self-determination and federal accountability.**

The current federal approach to Indigenous policy and funding, marked by fragmentation, siloed decision-making and paternalistic practices, has proven ineffective in closing the persistent infrastructure gap. A fundamental systemic reform is the basis upon which meaningful progress can occur.

Funding models must be distinctions-based and needs-based, with multi-year block funding that supports long-term Indigenous-led planning. Current federal funding streams often fail to account for regional and community-specific contexts and needs. Programs such as the Build Communities Strong Fund do not distribute funds on an equitable basis, leaving Northern communities, which experience higher costs and more complex construction challenges, less adequately resourced to address needs than their Southern counterparts. Combined with short-term funding arrangements, this limits the effectiveness of investments and undermines sustained progress toward community priorities.

The federal government must also improve coordination to streamline funding, reduce administrative burdens, and enhance program coherency. As well, Indigenous-led planning and delivery must be central to federal government's approach to Indigenous policy, with early involvement of Indigenous leadership in infrastructure planning, delivery and evaluation, alongside continued efforts to advance devolution with commitments of adequate planning, resources and long-term investment.

The 2026 Indigenous Infrastructure Index serves as a valuable tool for tracking conditions, identifying gaps and informing investments in support of an accountable and effective federal policy and funding framework.

2. Immediately embed early and meaningful Indigenous inclusion in all Northern infrastructure development.

The unique barriers experienced by northern and remote Indigenous communities, such as harsh Arctic climates and seasonal community access, require long-term, Indigenous-led strategic planning and investments for sustainable and culturally-relevant development that will effectively address long-standing socio-economic gaps.

Responsive development requires early engagement with Indigenous leadership to account for winter road seasons, sealift schedules, and short-building seasons, which, if not properly considered, can result in undue delays to the delivery of essential community infrastructure. Early feasibility and environmental assessments are also required to ensure infrastructure is suitable for Arctic considerations, especially for newer development initiatives such as modular, prefabricated, and 3D-printed housing.

Further, given the growing public and private sector interest in the North, it is critical that communities are adequately supported to alleviate the pressures associated with increased industry presence. With a particular national focus on defence development in the North, community-led strategic planning is essential to incorporate dual-use functionality into development to ensure that increased activity does not place undue strain on local services and infrastructure.

Community engagement on dual-use functionality must be a required component for all northern development and recognized as a strategic opportunity to address infrastructure gaps. For example, any roads built for the purpose of project development can be expanded to connect communities to the Canadian National Road Network. Connectivity is a longstanding barrier to economic development and access to essential health and social services for northern and remote communities. Limited community access also reduces the reliability of supply and increases the cost of essential goods, contributing to the food insecurity experienced. Efforts to address the connectivity gap must be prioritized in project planning.

Indigenous Peoples must also be equitably included in the new economic opportunities presented by increased northern investments through employment and contracting commitments incorporated into project agreements, with accountability measures in place to ensure compliance.

Public and private sector efforts to ensure Indigenous inclusion in all northern development also involves pursing project bundling opportunities; establishing an Indigenous-led National Indigenous Infrastructure Strategy to guide development; supporting training and mentorship opportunities, and; supporting the establishment and work of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit-led procurement authorities and integrating them into development planning.

Operationalizing Community Infrastructure

3. **Strengthen local education and training pathways and support workforce recruitment and retention in the health, education and utilities sectors.**

As this report demonstrates, closing the infrastructure gap requires more than building physical assets; communities must also have the workforce needed to deliver the services those assets support. In particular, the health care, education and utilities sectors face chronic staffing shortages in Northern and remote communities. Recruitment is hindered by challenges in attracting workers from southern regions, while retention is strained by inadequate housing, heavy workloads and insufficient resources. Building a sustainable workforce also requires creating pathways for residents to train and work within their communities. This includes permanent federal support for education and expanded access to virtual learning opportunities.

4. **Prioritize investment under the CRTC Broadband Fund and improve the effectiveness of spending to close the digital divide, including through support for existing Canadian and Indigenous-led solutions.**

While innovative approaches such as virtual education and telehealth have expanded access to services in remote communities, the persistent digital divide continues to limit their effectiveness in Northern and remote Indigenous communities. Reliable, high-speed broadband infrastructure is a foundational requirement for accessing these services and addressing longstanding socio-economic disparities. As a result, closing the digital divide must remain a key priority.

Closing the Data Gap

5. **Greater public and private sector investment in Indigenous data governance to address critical gaps.**

As highlighted throughout this report, significant gaps persist in the availability of comprehensive and accurate data on Indigenous community infrastructure, limiting a full understanding of existing conditions needed to inform policy and drive meaningful progress in addressing longstanding infrastructure gaps. Robust, up-to-date, community-driven data on Indigenous socioeconomic conditions and infrastructure ensures that policy and funding decisions made by external actors reflect Indigenous realities and community needs, while enabling Indigenous communities to undertake informed planning and development.

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Annex A: Northern Regions Maps



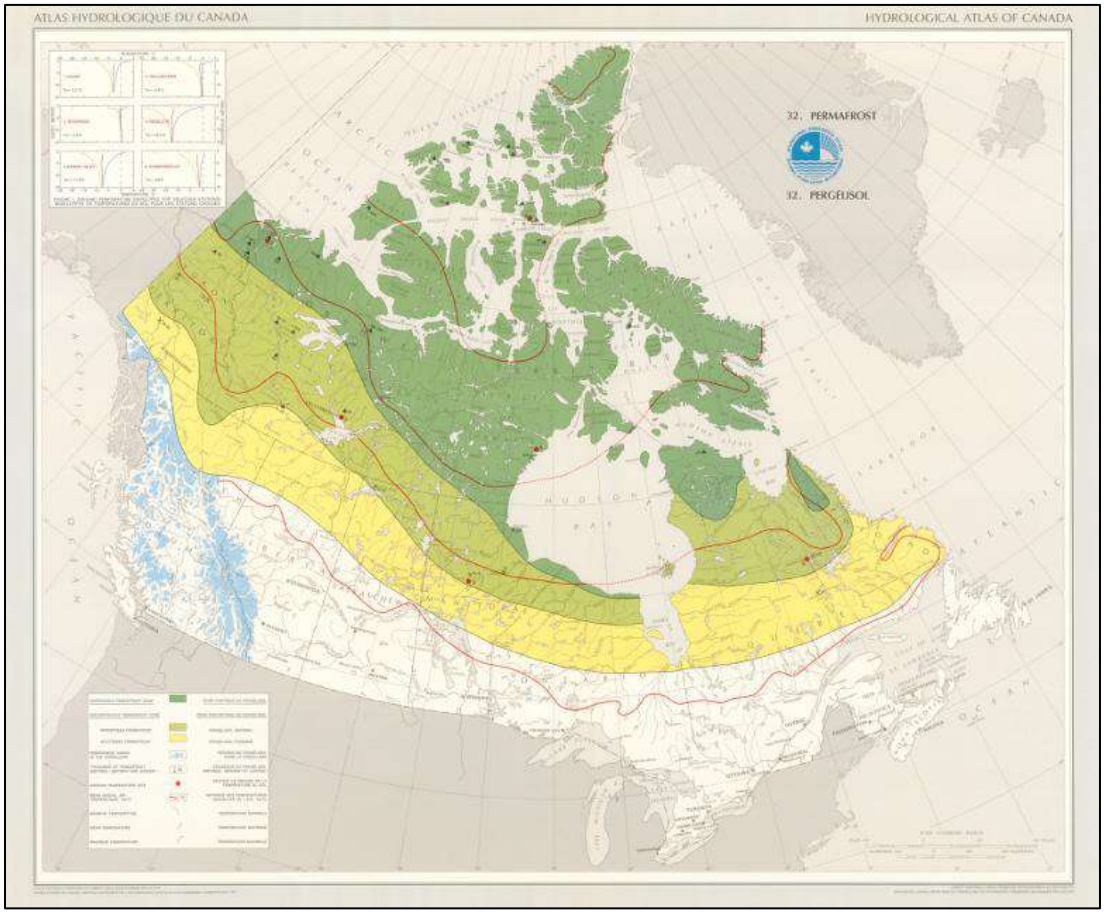
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