



∴ ontario library association

OLA & FOPL:

Ontario Invests \$3.75M in First Nations Public Libraries

April 12, 2024

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) and Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) has learnt that the Ontario Government, through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, will be investing an additional \$3.75 million in First Nations Public Libraries over the next three years (\$1.25 million per year) to support increases to both the First Nation Salary Supplement and the Public Libraries Operating Grant. Further details regarding this funding will be communicated at a later date.

OLA and FOPL welcome this substantial investment, which will help ensure the ongoing stability of Ontario's 39 First Nations public libraries. Public libraries on reserve are accessible gathering places and information sharing resources for First Nations communities, many of which are remote or face systemic social and economic challenges. These public libraries are deeply important to maintaining a sense of community and to minimizing social isolation, preserving collective memory and revitalizing Indigenous languages, and providing access to skills training and broadband connectivity.

Since 2021, OLA and FOPL have prioritized advocacy for increased provincial funding to support public libraries on reserve. As outlined in our joint [2024 Pre-Budget Submission](#), public libraries on reserve have been chronically underfunded. The municipal tax revenue used to support most public libraries does not exist for public libraries in First Nations communities. Instead, libraries on reserve in Ontario are primarily funded through the provincial First Nations Salary Supplement (FNSS), which provides on average \$15,000/year to each existing First Nations public library. "Enhanced funding from the Ontario Government is critical support that will ensure that these important local hubs and their dedicated staff can continue serve their communities and demonstrates Ontario's continued leadership among all Canadian provinces in recognizing and supporting their important work," said Dina Stevens, Executive Director, FOPL.

Libraries on reserve are often dependent on their Band Councils and one-time grants or donations to develop their collections, deliver programs and provide technology resources. Many operate with only one staff person who is expected to perform multiple functions. OLA and FOPL, thus, celebrate this much needed enhanced funding from the provincial government which will provide staff with a living wage and increase staffing levels so that they can meet their communities' needs for library services.

"This commitment underscores our shared dedication to empowering communities through education and literacy. As we celebrate this much needed support, let us also recognize the imperative for increased support to all of Ontario's public libraries to flourish, fostering equitable access to information and opportunity for all," said Michelle Arbuckle, Executive Director, OLA.

OLA and FOPL remain energized to continue our collective advocacy work to ensure that all libraries across the province are adequately supported to serve their communities. We are deeply grateful for all our members who have supported our advocacy and government relations efforts, and the collective impact of these efforts in building and strengthening a strong coalition of library champions throughout the Ontario Legislature and Government. Whether participating in our lobbying days at Queen's Park or responding to our call to engage with local MPPs, library professionals from across Ontario have contributed to this momentous outcome in this year's budget.

Moving forward, OLA and FOPL will work with our strategic partner, Counsel Public Affairs (CPA), to refine our government relations strategy, ensuring continued progress toward our other sector priorities.