



Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc.

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MKO Responds to Manitoba Budget 2026: Welcomes Commitment to Youth Healing Lodge and Northern Fire Response, Calls for Urgent Action on Addictions, Cost of Living, and Infrastructure Gaps

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB - Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO) acknowledges several important commitments in 2026 Manitoba Provincial Budget that support northern First Nations, including the advancement of the first-of-its-kind Youth Healing Lodge in Thompson, increased health supports and new efforts to strengthen emergency fire response capacity in the North.

The province's commitment to move forward with the Youth Healing Lodge, developed in collaboration with MKO, is a meaningful step towards providing culturally grounded healing and support for First Nations youth. MKO also welcomes the provincial government's plan to expand wildfire training in partnership with northern First Nations and the proposed creation of a new forest fire headquarters in Thompson, recognizing the increasing threat of wildfires across the region.

However, MKO remains deeply concerned that Budget 2026 does not address the urgent addictions and homelessness crisis unfolding in Thompson and across northern First Nations.

There is no committed funding for the Wellbriety Centre in this budget, despite the centre supporting nearly 200 people daily with addictions care, hot meals, and a safe place to shelter. And a future commitment to provide transitional housing support for more than 40 people. MKO continues to stress that northern, First Nations-led addictions supports must be part of any serious provincial strategy.

While the budget includes major investments in Winnipeg, such as \$5.6 million for a supervised consumption site and \$24.4 million for transitional housing at Webb Place, there are no parallel commitments for the North, where the need is equally urgent.

MKO is also concerned about the lack of targeted affordability measures for northern residents. Although the budget highlights free youth transit and the removal of PST on groceries, First Nations citizens in the North continue to face rising food and goods costs driven by increasing fuel prices and the lack of commitment to all-season transportation routes.

Key Gaps Identified by MKO

- No new investments in northern infrastructure, energy security for First Nations, or all-season roads, despite rising costs, ongoing supply challenges and increased emergency evacuations.

- No committed funding for expanding the First Nations Safety Officer program, even as our Nations face increasing drug-related crime.
- No operational funding for the Wellbriety Centre to support addictions and transitional housing initiatives in the North.

Grand Chief Garrison Settee stated:

“MKO welcomes the province’s commitment to the Youth Healing Lodge in Thompson and the steps taken to strengthen the northern wildfire response. However, our people are facing a growing addictions crisis, rising costs of living, and infrastructure challenges that make life in the North difficult. We need equitable investments that recognize the unique needs of northern First Nations and ensure our citizens are not left behind.”

MKO is unwavering in its commitment to securing the investments and supports our northern First Nations deserve.

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Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO) is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 26 First Nation communities in Manitoba’s North since 1981. The MKO represents more than 72,000 First Nations people.

