

**First  
Ministers  
Conference**

Ottawa, March 8-9, 1984

**Conférence  
des  
premiers ministres**

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THE REVIEW OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC  
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO THE ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLES OF CANADA

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The Government of Canada proposes to review social, cultural and economic programs and services to aboriginal peoples, together with representatives of the aboriginal peoples of Canada and with provincial and territorial governments. Governments provide a variety of programs and services to aboriginal peoples such as housing and community infrastructure, education and training, health, justice-related services, culture, economic development and social services.

The responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments for the provision of social, cultural and economic programs and services to aboriginal peoples are not clear. The federal government has a special relationship with aboriginal peoples, and a constitutional obligation to pay for all governmental programs and services, federal or provincial, respecting Indians whether they are on or off reserves. Some accept shared or full responsibility for off-reserve Indians, non-status Indians, Métis and Inuit. The aboriginal groups have their own views concerning federal and provincial responsibilities. They are also interested in retaining authority for design and delivery of programs and services to their peoples, as well as funding for aboriginal government structures.

**PROPOSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA FOR  
THE REVIEW OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC  
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO THE ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLES OF CANADA**

The federal government has recognized and affirmed its special relationship with Indian and Inuit peoples, including the Indian and Inuit Claims Settlements. It has taken the view that the Constitution does not give it sole responsibility for services to aboriginal peoples; aboriginal peoples are entitled to look to provinces for the provision of programs and services in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

**Tabled by  
The Prime Minister of Canada**

The federal, provincial and territorial governments as well as the aboriginal associations agree that these uncertainties need to be removed. The matter is critical to the well-being of the aboriginal peoples and real progress will come about only if First Ministers determine that the issues must be resolved.

Accordingly, I would ask agreement to initiate a collaborative review of all aspects of social, cultural and economic programs and services to aboriginal

**Canada**

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The Government of Canada proposes to review social, cultural and economic programs and services to aboriginal peoples, together with representatives of the aboriginal peoples of Canada and with provincial and territorial governments. Governments provide a variety of programs and services to aboriginal peoples such as housing and community infrastructure, education and training, health, justice-related services, culture, economic development and social services.

The responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments for the provision of social, cultural and economic programs and services to aboriginal peoples are not adequately defined or coordinated. A variety of views has been expressed on this issue. For example, some provinces contend that the Constitution places an obligation on the federal government to pay for all governmental programs and services, federal or provincial, respecting Indians whether they are on or off reserves. Some accept shared or full responsibility for off-reserve Indians, non-status Indians, Métis and Inuit. The aboriginal groups have their own views concerning federal and provincial responsibilities. They are also interested in obtaining authority for design and delivery of programs and services to their peoples, as well as funding for aboriginal government structures.

The federal government has recognized and affirmed its special relationship with Indian and Inuit people, including its responsibility under treaties and land claims settlements. It has taken the view that the Constitution does not give it sole responsibility for services to aboriginal peoples; aboriginal peoples are entitled to look to provinces for the provision of programs and services in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

The federal, provincial and territorial governments as well as the aboriginal associations agree that these uncertainties need to be removed. The matter is critical to the well-being of the aboriginal peoples and real progress will come about only if First Ministers determine that the issue must be resolved.

Accordingly, I would seek agreement to initiate a collaborative review of all aspects of social, cultural and economic programs and services to aboriginal

peoples. I am requesting that Senator Austin lead this review with representatives of the aboriginal peoples and provincial and territorial governments within the context of the meetings of Federal-Provincial Ministers on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters and report back for the next meeting of First Ministers. I would suggest that the agenda of the next conference include proposals on the programs and services issue in the light of the findings of the review. This will allow First Ministers to give direction for a final phase of the review which would focus on means of implementing solutions.

The five objectives of the review would be:

1. Clarification of federal and provincial responsibilities for programs and services provided to the aboriginal peoples of Canada, having regard to the existing and potential roles of aboriginal governments;
2. Enhanced participation of the aboriginal peoples of Canada in the area of programs and services, including their increased involvement in the design and delivery of programs and services, taking into account the special social, cultural and economic needs of the aboriginal peoples of Canada;
3. Assessment of financial provisions, including consideration of existing arrangements between the government of Canada and the provincial governments;
4. Examination of eligibility requirements of programs and services for the aboriginal peoples of Canada, including residency requirements; and
5. Examination of programs and services to aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the degree to which they are comparable with services received by other Canadians residing in similar communities.

In undertaking this review, the federal government does not intend to undermine in any way its special relationship with aboriginal peoples. Nor will it seek to reduce its financial responsibilities or to invade provincial areas of jurisdiction.

I invite all participants in this Conference to support the objectives of this review and to facilitate Senator Austin's work.