



SUBMISSION

To the

HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE 2005 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION

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Submitted By
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is the national voice of Canada's Inuit women.

Inuit are at the extremes of several Statistics Canada's indicators: highest rates of unemployment, lowest income, highest cost of living, worst housing conditions, highest rates of communicable diseases, and shortest life expectancy of all Canadians.

Pauktuutit advises Canadians in the strongest terms to make a significant investment in the human capital of Canada's Arctic.

Pauktuutit makes the following recommendations for government funding priorities.

- Invest in socio-economic development for Inuit women and their families;
- Invest in initiatives that will improve the social determinants of health;
- Invest in improving the health and well-being of Inuit women and their families so that their health indicators reach at least the level of other Canadians;
- Invest in obtaining Inuit-specific data;
- Invest in Inuit-specific strategies and
- Invest in youth, especially young Inuit women.

Inuit women's rights and opportunities are severely endangered by the marginalization and under-funding of their national organization. Pauktuutit calls upon the Government of Canada to:

- Accord the highest political level recognition to Pauktuutit as a National Aboriginal Organization;
- Make Pauktuutit a partner at public service and political decision-making tables where issues of concern, relevance and/or consequence to Inuit women are being considered, especially, but not exclusively the FPTA tables, NAHO, Health Canada, Canadian Heritage, Foreign Affairs Canada, Status of Women Canada and especially the implementation of the new INAC Inuit Relations Secretariat;
- Provide adequate, stable, multi-year core funding to Pauktuutit, reflective of Canada's commitment to the principle of equality and also recognizing the urgency of the current realities facing Inuit women, their children, Elders and communities.

**HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
2005 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is grateful to the Standing Committee for inviting our written submission to the 2005 Pre-Budget Consultations.

About Pauktuutit

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is the national voice of Canada's Inuit women.

Inuit women have ancient wisdom, traditional knowledge and practical expertise that make them central to family life and also leaders of communities, teachers, caregivers and health providers. Pauktuutit was formed 21 years ago by Inuit women who wanted to adapt their wisdom to a rapidly modernizing world, and become their own agents of change.

Pauktuutit is a national, community-based organization: every Inuit woman in Canada is a member of Pauktuutit.

Pauktuutit is a democratic organization. Our members elect a Board of Directors comprised of thirteen Inuit women who directly represent communities and regions that encompass all of Canada's Arctic, plus urban Inuit women and youth.

Pauktuutit is a northern organization. Our staff is based in Ottawa because advocacy and project funding require a presence close to the federal government. However all of our project and program work initiates from and is implemented in Canada's Arctic: 52 remote, isolated Arctic communities extending thousands of kilometres from the Alaskan border in the west to the eastern shores of Labrador, and in urban Inuit communities.

Pauktuutit fosters awareness of the needs of Inuit women, advocates for political and social improvements, and encourages community, regional and national participation towards social, cultural and economic development.

Pauktuutit develops and implements programs and projects that mobilize communities to tackle important issues, including many that are controversial and painful.

- Pauktuutit works on gender equity, the legacy of residential schools, protection of cultural and traditional knowledge, economic development, and northern environmental issues;
- We undertake long term advocacy and program work on social and health challenges that include: substance abuse, HIV/AIDS/Hep-C, diabetes, tobacco cessation, suicide prevention, abuse prevention and respite for care-givers, to name just a few of our active concerns and

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- Pauktuutit has always emphasized the well-being of children. Our child-focused programs include traditional midwifery, maternal and infant care and pre-natal programs, teen pregnancy, youth suicide, SIDS, FASD, and child sexual assault.

Pauktuutit models community engagement and capacity building - we not only derive our mandate from the communities, we ensure that Inuit women are actively involved in the development and implementation of all initiatives.

Current Reality

Inuit are at the extremes of Statistics Canada's indicators: highest rates of unemployment, lowest income, highest cost of living, worst housing conditions, highest rates of communicable diseases, and shortest life expectancy of all Canadians.

Services to Inuit women and related supports to their children come nowhere close to matching those provided to other Canadians in terms of number, quality and effectiveness. Evidence of the negative effects of this inequity is abundant, and the situation continually grows more complex and more urgent.

To use economic terms: we often see entrepreneurial capital heading north. Pauktuutit advises Canadians that it is past time for a commensurate investment in the human capital of Canada's north.

Here are some of the circumstances that face Inuit women.

Housing - There is an on-going and severely under-addressed crisis in housing – overcrowding, poor quality, and insufficient social housing for Inuit, causing growing numbers of Inuit women to continue to be disadvantaged in ways that impact them throughout their lives.

Early childhood programs –Early learning and child care programs are successful in many communities, but access is limited and many Inuit children have yet to benefit. More subsidized day care spaces would help young mothers continue with their education. This would be a first-rate investment in the future of our communities and our country, as the evidence is clear that educating young mothers increases healthy baby outcomes.

Abuse - Pauktuutit has been addressing family violence issues since its inception in 1984. Our success in partnering with governments to make prevention in this area a priority and to provide services to victims is increasing, but programs remain for the most part marginal. There are a few safe shelters helping to protect women and children scattered across the Inuit regions, however the root causes of violence remain largely unaddressed, mainly because resources to address them continue to be appallingly inadequate.

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Most Inuit women witness violence in their homes, and too many are victims of violence themselves. This has a severe negative impact on children's physical and emotional well-being, their ability to learn and their potential to grow into healthy, stable and productive adults. A significant financial investment in community-based programs and the human resources to carry them out is essential to help these women and children heal and to protect all from future abuse.

Another far-reaching priority area of concern for Pauktuutit is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), now affecting three generations of Inuit. As we promote FASD awareness and prevention, the need for services for those affected by FASD becomes ever more urgent. Currently, access to diagnoses is problematic, due to a variety of factors. Without diagnosis, there is inadequate data to justify to governments the urgent need for services. If these citizens are to reach their potential, adequate program delivery and training of caregivers remain major issues to be resolved.

Unparalleled rate of change – It would be difficult to overstate the effect on Inuit women of their culture changing in less than fifty years from an isolated, family-centred economy, based on subsistence hunting and seasonal relocation, through fractured family structures and children taken far away and educated in a foreign language and culture; population migration from small communities to regional centres; to what we see today: an economy of wage earning employment and life in permanent housing. With so much change going on around them and forced upon them, Inuit women have had to become the ultimate models of lifelong learning.

Urban women – The needs of Inuit women in urban areas are also of concern. More than one in ten Inuit now live in the south. Canada's urban Inuit population is expanding rapidly for a variety of reasons that include greater access to education for children and young adults, employment opportunities, and access to comprehensive medical care. And sadly, many Inuit women move south to escape family violence and abuse. There are services run by Inuit for Inuit in Ottawa, including much-needed family and children's services. Other urban centres where Inuit live are at earlier stages of organizing and most are without such culturally relevant programs.

Pauktuutit makes the following recommendations for government funding priorities.

Inuit Women in Decision-making

Pauktuutit, the independent voice of Inuit women must inform relevant government consultations and decision-making. *“The federal government recognizes that Aboriginal women have traditionally played a significant role in the history of Aboriginal people and will strengthen their participation in self-government processes. This is particularly relevant for women at the community level. Consistent with the approach recommended by*

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the Royal Commission, the federal government will consider additional funding for this purpose.”¹

Holistic Strategies

Inuit have always had a strong relationship with Canada's northern lands, with the sea, with the animals we rely on and with our families. It is heartening to know that our Canadian government is committed to strengthening its relationship with Inuit as well, as evidenced by establishment of the Inuit Relations Secretariat within the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Pauktuutit recommends a holistic, interdepartmental, Inuit-specific strategy for this secretariat – one that reflects and supports the unique culture, geography and living conditions of Canada's Arctic. We can no longer try to improve health without looking also at housing, nor can we look at education without including cultural sensitivity or at economic development without considering environmental protection. In the light of the growing, and some would say, critical stresses on our social, economic, environmental, and family structure, we strongly implore the Government to collaborate with us and with colleague organizations, the National Inuit Youth Council, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) to develop and implement this broad, holistic Inuit Action Plan, as a cornerstone of the new Inuit Relations Secretariat.

Invest in Good Data

We need disaggregated data on Canadian Inuit. Our unique cultural traditions, geography, ecology and perspective are too often lost in broader Aboriginal or northern statistics.

Careful, Inuit-specific, systematic research will establish baselines and demonstrate undeniably how recent radical changes in living conditions and lifestyle are affecting Inuit well-being. It will also identify opportunities for constructive legislative and practical program and policy intervention.

This sound statistical confirmation will validate accounts of the critical social, economic, environmental and health circumstances facing Inuit and especially Inuit women, and demonstrate undeniably how dangerous and consequential a 'business as usual' approach would be.

Invest in health

¹ Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan

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Invest in initiatives that improve the social determinants of health and the health indicators of Inuit women and their families so that these indicators reach at least the level of other Canadians.

The Federal Government is finalizing work on an historic Blueprint on Aboriginal Health, designed to close the gap between the health status of Canadians as a whole and that of Aboriginal people. Pauktuutit was included peripherally (and with no resources) in the development of a paper that outlines Inuit specific needs and programs for this blueprint.

As Pauktuutit has been engaged for more than twenty years in community-based identification, assessment, training and implementation of health related projects in the Arctic, it is critical that Pauktuutit partner directly in the design, development and delivery of health programs and services emanating from the Blueprint.

Invest in Youth

Between 1996 and 2001, Canadian Inuit experienced a population growth rate of 12 per cent – four times the rate of the non-Aboriginal population. Inuit now have an average age of just 20 years, compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians, who have an average age of 38 years.

We must invest our time, resources and energy in our children and youth. We must make it a priority to provide Inuit youth, especially young women, with basic safety, health and social services, and access to educational choices that are meaningful to them. It is both well-known and well-documented throughout the world that, when mothers are educated, outcomes for children's health improve.

A strong, renewed relationship between Inuit and the Government of Canada depends very much on how today's youth are supported, mentored, educated, and respected.

Economic Development

The Government of Canada must invest politically and financially in:

- Income generating activities for Inuit women – capacity-building projects to encourage and support gender equity in areas such as arts and crafts production, fishing, environmental protection and sustainable economic development, tourism, and resource development;
- An intensive implementation phase for '*Inuit Women in Business*' –designed by Pauktuutit in partnership with INAC to help women become economically self sufficient;
- The provision, training, application, servicing and dissemination of leading-edge wireless communications technologies for women in each of the 52 Inuit communities across Canada's Arctic;

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- The necessary human, political and financial resources to ensure a positive outcome on the international issue of Inuit women's traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights, as this is an issue impacting on the livelihood of many Inuit women.

Government Recognition and Support for Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada

Pauktuutit has a democratic grassroots mandate, a successful twenty-one year program track record, and a national and international reputation as the legitimate independent voice of Canadian Inuit women.

Yet Pauktuutit continues to be hindered by two inter-related challenges: lack of political recognition and appalling levels of funding. This situation seriously imperils the rights and the well-being of Canadian Inuit women.

Throughout the economic atmosphere of the 1990s, Canadian Aboriginal women's voices were diminished, marginalized, even silenced, through vastly disproportionate cuts to funding from all sources, and especially from government.

If Pauktuutit is to participate in opportunities for legislative, public policy and program intervention, we must raise awareness about little-known and no longer acceptable social and economic conditions among Canadian Inuit woman. Pauktuutit's ability to represent Inuit women is seriously restricted by our current funding situation.

In fact, Pauktuutit's core funding has slipped to such a low level that we struggle to provide basic administrative support to our projects. Managing minimal board services is increasingly untenable. Our exhausted and under paid employees leave, taking knowledge and experience that Pauktuutit needs with them. Pauktuutit's activities on the international scene – representing Inuit women on pan-Arctic and Aboriginal women's issues – are severely constrained.

Pauktuutit requires strong core financial support to enable adequate human resources development and the corporate activities required to canvas, to respond, to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate urgently needed programs, to build capacity, to train, to facilitate networking – in other words, to effectively represent and express the independent voice of Inuit women within and among the isolated communities across the vast thousands of kilometres of Canada's north.

Canada's track record on exclusion of national Aboriginal women's organizations from the political arena, and on discriminatory federal funding was recently noted for an international audience in the Women's Environment and Development Organization's 2005 report *Beijing Betrayed*, an assessment of implementation of resolutions of the first-ever United Nations conference on women.

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Also, the United Nations Human Rights Committee just completed its 5th review of Canada's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee cited Canada for specific failures on the rights of Aboriginal women, and called for equal funding for Aboriginal women's associations.

Pauktuutit calls upon the Government of Canada to:

- Accord the highest political level recognition to Pauktuutit as a National Aboriginal Organization;
- Make Pauktuutit a partner at public service and political decision-making tables where issues of concern, relevance and/or consequence to Inuit women are being considered, and in the subsequent sharing of resources for implementation, especially, but not exclusively the FPTA tables, NAHO, Health Canada, Canadian Heritage, Foreign Affairs Canada, Status of Women Canada and especially the implementation of the new INAC Inuit Relations Secretariat;
- Provide adequate, stable, multi-year core funding to Pauktuutit - reflective of Canada's commitment to the principle of equality and also recognizing the urgency of the current realities facing Inuit women, their children, Elders and communities;
- Support and enhance women's programs within the Government of Canada, (for one example, the Aboriginal Women's Program at the Department of Canadian Heritage), in order to ensure and increase opportunities for gender lens activities and programs, gender based analysis and gender inclusive public policy development.

The Government of Canada is on record as supporting more women in capacity-building and decision-making positions. *Gathering Strength*, Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan refers specifically and repeatedly to the importance of including Aboriginal women and their perspectives.

In Closing

Pauktuutit is ready to partner with government in fulfilling its commitments to women. We are here; we have the experience, cultural and knowledge capital you need.

If the spirit is celebrated and nurtured in equity, the women will thrive. If the women thrive, the men, children, Elders, and community will too.

Quyanamiik, thank you.

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada