



## Backgrounder

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The current Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was created by an Act of Parliament in 1966. Prior to 1966, responsibility for meeting obligations to Canada's Aboriginal and northern people and for managing northern resources to everyone's benefit was held by a variety of offices and departments.

When the department was created, it was primarily in the business of providing basic services to First Nations – services like education and housing, road maintenance, and water and sewer systems. Yet today, as First Nations communities across Canada evolve toward self-government, the department is becoming much more of an advisory, funding and support agency.

The evolutionary changes within the department have been the result of responding to a combination of changing attitudes of Canadian society and changing needs on the part of the population it serves.

The mandate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) gives it primary but not exclusive responsibility to meet the Government of Canada's obligations and commitments to support Aboriginal people (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) and Northerners in their efforts to:

- improve social well-being and economic prosperity;
- develop healthier, more sustainable communities; and
- participate more fully in Canada's political, social and economic development - to the benefit of all Canadians.

The department's mandate and wide ranging responsibilities are shaped by centuries of history, and unique demographic and geographic challenges. Responsibilities are largely determined by numerous statutes, negotiated agreements and relevant legal decisions. Most of the Department's programs, representing a majority of its spending, are delivered through partnerships with Aboriginal communities and federal-provincial or federal-territorial agreements.

The Minister of INAC is also the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians. The Federal Interlocutor's role is to provide a point of contact between the Government of Canada and Métis, Non-Status Indians and urban Aboriginal people.

In addition, the Minister is responsible for the Canadian Polar Commission, the lead agency advising the federal government on the state of polar knowledge in Canada; the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, which has a specific mandate to deliver federal programs tailored to the unique needs of Northern Canada, headquartered in Iqaluit; and the Inuit Relations Secretariat, which serves as a Government of Canada point of contact for Inuit and for Inuit issues.

The Government of Canada has made significant progress on Aboriginal issues over the past four years, working in partnership to achieve tangible results. This practical approach of working with Aboriginal governments and organizations, provinces and territories, and the private sector, to address clear priorities in an effective and targeted manner is paying off and producing results.

For more about INAC, please visit [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca).