

June 26, 2026

The Honorable Rechie Valdez
Minister of Women and Gender Equality
Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Valdez,

On behalf of Travel Manitoba, I am writing to emphasize the need for continued federal investment in Indigenous tourism to foster destination development, create economic opportunities for Indigenous communities across Canada and support Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs. Ongoing support is essential to the growth, resilience and long-term sustainability of the Indigenous tourism sector.

Indigenous tourism has become a critical area of Manitoba's visitor economy, with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) playing a foundational role in that development and the creation of Indigenous Tourism Manitoba (ITM). In 2017, Travel Manitoba and ITAC entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to advance Indigenous tourism development in the province. That agreement set in motion a series of transformative outcomes, including the creation of Manitoba's first Indigenous Tourism Strategy in 2019.

Building on this momentum, the MOU was renewed and expanded in 2021 to support the establishment of ITM. Today, with the support of the Manitoba government, Travel Manitoba invests directly in Indigenous Tourism Manitoba reflecting a shared recognition that Indigenous tourism is a key economic driver for the province and an essential part of Manitoba's tourism identity.

The results of this collaboration have been significant. In 2019, there were 81 Indigenous-owned tourism businesses in Manitoba; by 2023, that number had grown to approximately 170. This growth reflects not only increased economic opportunity, but also the strength of Indigenous entrepreneurship and cultural leadership in the tourism sector.

Beyond its economic impact, Indigenous tourism plays a vital role in shaping how visitors understand Manitoba and Canada. It creates opportunities to share Indigenous cultures, languages and traditions in authentic and meaningful ways while also contributing to cultural preservation and revitalization. Importantly, it supports improved socio-economic outcomes for Indigenous communities and represents a meaningful and practical pathway toward economic reconciliation.

Within this ecosystem, ITAC's *The Original Original* accreditation program is critical. The accreditation provides an essential framework for supporting Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led tourism experiences while ensuring businesses and experiences are authentic, credible and culturally grounded. The loss of this foundational program would be a detriment to the entire sector.

Reductions in federal funding for Indigenous tourism are disrupting progress and limiting growth opportunities across the sector. In Manitoba, the loss of ITAC funding has resulted in ITM having to reduce staffing capacity, with Indigenous women bearing the direct impact of these workforce reductions. Planned expansion of operating hours at the Explore Indigenous visitor information centre has been cancelled and the second phase of ITM's Indigenous guide training program, which is building sector capacity and creating meaningful employment pathways for Indigenous people, has been put on hold. Budget reductions have also affected business development supports, marketing initiatives, travel and sponsorship activities.

The withdrawal of federal support is undermining the growth of Manitoba's Indigenous tourism sector by reducing access to business supports, workforce development opportunities and market readiness initiatives, ultimately limiting economic opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs, workers and communities across the province at a time when demand for Indigenous tourism continues to grow.

While significant progress has been made in recent years, those gains remain vulnerable without sustained investment. Continued federal partnership and support are essential to maintain momentum and ensure Indigenous tourism can continue to grow, create jobs and contribute to economic growth.

Sincerely,



Angela Cassie
Interim President and Chief Executive Officer

c. The Honourable Rebecca Chartrand, Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency

The Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty, Minister of Indigenous Services

Ginette Lavack, Member of Parliament, St. Boniface – St. Vital, member, Parliamentary Tourism Caucus

Honourable Nellie Kennedy, Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism

Keith Henry, President and CEO Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada

Holly Spence, CEO Indigenous Tourism Manitoba