



February 1, 2024

Honourable Gudie Hutchings
Minister of Rural Economic Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Via email: minister-ministre@acoa-apeca.gc.ca

Dear Minister Hutchings,

On behalf of our collective associations, Alberta Municipalities (AB Munis), Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), and Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM), we are writing to encourage the federal government to boost support for broadband connectivity across the prairies.

While the federal government has made progress in improving access to high-speed Internet across the country, broadband connectivity remains a top priority for our members. Our associations have welcomed the creation of the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) and subsequent top-ups as the fund has grown to \$3.225 billion. However, the slow release of funds under the UBF thus far has had a significant impact on the program's effectiveness. For instance, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba only \$6.6 million and \$9.6 million has been allocated to date respectively, according to the UBF's Selected Programs webpage. It is essential that funding is maximized at the local level to fill the most pressing connectivity gaps in our provinces. We also support the call of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) on the federal government to incorporate a yearly \$150 million needs-based stream into the UBF, aiming to enhance connectivity in the most challenging-to-reach areas across Canada.

Additionally, we recommend the establishment of a single-window intake application process to streamline all federal broadband funding streams to make more them accessible to all applicants. Many of our members have found federal application processes to be complex and cumbersome, which often results in funds not being leveraged to advance projects in local communities. This is especially problematic since many areas of the prairies have low-density population which presents certain business case and accessibility challenges. Moreover, the creation of a dedicated Prairies Broadband Capacity Fund would help respond to our region's specific challenges and counter inequitable investments made by the federal government to support broadband infrastructure across Canada. Such a fund could also help increase local capacity and community awareness, strengthen industry partnerships and improve regional collaboration, and incentivize the targeting of federal resources to where they are most needed.

We also recommend reviewing and amending eligibility and evaluation of the UBF and other programs to minimize funding barriers for municipal and non-profit applicants. While private ISPs play a crucial role in enhancing rural connectivity, an over-reliance on the private sector in current and past funding programs has resulted in a lack of investment in the most isolated, hardest-to-serve areas across western Canada. Ensuring municipalities and non-profit entities can access funding to

invest in broadband as a community development project in areas with low potential for profit may be the most effective way to truly eliminate the most “stubborn” rural connectivity gaps

In closing, our associations share the federal government’s goal in connecting all Canadians to high-speed, quality broadband Internet. We would be pleased to meet with you at your earliest convenience to further discuss how we can work together as well as address the disparities and capacity issues between and within communities across the prairies related to broadband connectivity. To schedule a meeting, please have your staff contact RMA Director of External Relations and Advocacy Wyatt Skovron at wyatt@rmalberta.com or 780-955-4096.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

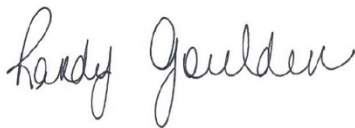
Yours sincerely,



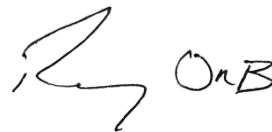
Tyler Gandam
Alberta Municipalities, President



Paul McLauchlin
RMA, President



Randy Goulden
SUMA, President



Ray Orb
SARM, President



Kam Blight
AMM, President

cc: Scott Pearce, FCM President
Hon. Nate Glubish, Minister of Technology and Innovation
Hon. Dustin Duncan, Minister of Crown Investments Corporation
Hon. Lisa Naylor, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and Consumer Protection and Government Services