

Province commits \$97 million to aboriginal post-secondary

By Donna Duric
Writer

The Ontario government announced last week it is committing \$97 million in funding for aboriginal post-secondary education over the next three years.

Ontario Minister of Colleges, Training and Universities Reza Moridi announced the funding at Six Nations Polytechnic June 25.

"All Ontarians — including First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners — deserve equal access to high quality post-secondary education and skills training programs that will help them get good jobs," Moridi said. "Aboriginal institutes are an important component of the post-secondary education and training sector in Ontario and our increased investments and the development of a policy that better establishes their role in the broader sector will create learning en-

vironments for students that are anchored in the diverse cultural and linguistic traditions of Aboriginal communities."

"Investing in the talent and skills of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners is central to our government's plan to build Ontario up. That's why we are working so hard to help all learners access Ontario's world-class postsecondary education system."

The investment of \$97 million over three years, or \$32.3 million a year, is expected to support aboriginal learners' success in post-secondary education and training through funding both institutions and students' post-secondary education funding.

The support includes funding for aboriginal counsellors, elders-in-residence, academic support, transition programs and student and community outreach activities.



Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs David Zimmer attended the announcement last week (Photo by Donna Duric)

The investment includes an additional \$5 million to support the sustainability of Ontario's nine aboriginal-owned and operated learning institutes located throughout the province.

"The enhancements are intended to strengthen aborig-

inal institutes' capacity to support aboriginal learners by growing existing programs and courses, and providing services to aboriginal learners to facilitate retention and completion of these programs," said Ministry Spokesperson Belinda Bien.

The extra \$5 million in funding will be distributed three ways:

- \$3.5 million will be provided to the Student Success Fund for Aboriginal institutes

- \$1.14 million through the Targeted Initiatives Fund will be provided to all nine institutes to take part in a data collection initiative

- \$360,000 will be allocated to support the sustainability of Ontario's nine Aboriginal-owned and operated learning institutes located throughout the province.

"Investments like these are essential to closing the credential attainment and labour market outcomes gap, and to ensuring that all Aboriginal learners have the skills training and formal education necessary to actively participate and succeed in today's economy," said Bien.

Ontario currently provides \$1.5 million in annual funding through the Aboriginal

Student Bursary Fund to help Aboriginal learners with financial needs to participate in postsecondary education and training.

That amount won't change with the new funding announcement.

However, with the new funding announcement, \$35.8 million of the \$97 million will go to a different pot called the Post-Secondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners that will fund students' post-secondary educations.

That money will be spent in the 2015-2016 academic year.

"Our government has supported aboriginal institutes since 2009; we provide \$23.3 million in annual funding to colleges, universities, and aboriginal institutes to develop and deliver aboriginal student support programs," said Bien.

"Since 2009, demand for pro-

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