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Message from the Auditor General of Canada



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October 21, 2025—The work of an auditor general is a cornerstone of the Canadian democratic system. The independent office aims to provide decision makers with non-partisan, fact-based information that can be used to hold government organizations to account. The intention is to be constructive and focused on the pursuit of excellence and accountability for the public service—with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for Canadians.

That goal has been the focus of my first 5 years leading the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG). As I begin the second half of my mandate, and as the OAG approaches its 150th anniversary as a foundational institution in Canada, I take this opportunity to highlight some of the overarching conclusions from the performance audits I have delivered to Parliament. I believe these conclusions contain insights that could be useful for federal organizations as they work to find greater efficiency and increase productivity during a time of transformational change for the federal public service.

Throughout the past 5 years, we have found Canada's federal public service is made up of many resourceful individuals who are dedicated to improving the lives of current and future generations. I echo my predecessors who have said in various ways that the Canadian public service is a world-class institution that should be a source of pride. While our audits of government operations have put the spotlight on specific shortcomings, more often than not we have seen how public servants respond to challenging events with professionalism, resilience, and ingenuity.

The urgency and gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, pushed federal organizations to pivot away from a rigid adherence to fixed rules to a mindset that prioritized helping Canadians quickly. Because lives were at risk, that sometimes meant federal



organizations undertook sequential steps concurrently or even postponed some standard checks and balances. Though there were some missteps, the ability of public servants to work differently during the pandemic—to learn, change, and course-correct in real time—demonstrated what can be accomplished by, what I call, a service mindset.

It is difficult, of course, to maintain that kind of focus and urgency in the face of complex, long-standing issues that span successive federal governments and impact lives across multiple generations. Our audits of Indigenous programs and services, for example, have underscored persistent barriers to equitable outcomes, including fragmented program delivery and a passive, siloed approach to supporting First Nations.

Making substantive improvements to long-standing issues requires the sustained attention of senior officials and parliamentarians working in a unified way. Without this kind of sustained attention, there is a risk that any positive momentum will dissipate over time. For example, over the past 2 decades successive audits have highlighted the government's challenges related to maintaining access to safe drinking water in remote First Nations communities. While our audits have noted progress on this pressing issue, sustained attention remains necessary to resolve the most problematic situations; for example, where boil water advisories have been in place for decades.

The OAG will keep its attention on reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples, particularly in areas where service delivery remains fragmented or outcomes fall short. Future audits will assess the results government programs are achieving and whether the public service is promoting international sustainable development goals in Canada. The time is now to put words into action, whether that is to affirm that the rights of all Indigenous peoples are essential to a fair, inclusive, and equitable society, or to take measures to address the root causes that sustain violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2-spirit and gender-diverse people. More broadly, it is important to prioritize helping those who have fallen furthest behind as a way to advance reconciliation efforts in Canada.

My office's work in the past 5 years has also revealed multiple instances when federal organizations lacked short-term rigour and leadership, particularly in government contracting activities. OAG audits have identified systemic weaknesses in transparency, value-for-money assessments, and contract oversight. Our recommendations have noted that the solution is not to simply add more procurement rules—it may be that the procurement system



could run more effectively and efficiently with fewer rules. Until that system is improved, however, the public service will be counted on to apply the rules in place while promoting transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

Procurement will remain a critical area for OAG audits. The stakes are rising exponentially as large-scale purchases of defence equipment and major infrastructure and energy projects are coming to the forefront. Future audits will assess whether procurement practices are transparent, competitive, aligned with operational needs, and providing value for money.

As large-scale changes are implemented, the public service will need to maintain an agile, forward-looking service mindset. This imperative will be important amid an evolving risk landscape that includes fast-paced geopolitical shifts and increasing cyber security threats—and it will grow in complexity in situations that require cross-departmental, cross-jurisdictional, or private sector collaboration. At the same time, public servants should remain alert for opportunities that could improve their performance, such as finding new ways to harness the power of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies.

Being adaptive and moving efficiently to deliver and develop programs does not mean that public servants should sidestep key rules and principles of transparency and good governance. Faced with cascading pressures, public sector leaders will need—more than ever—to make decisions with accurate and complete information that is balanced with consideration of long-term impacts that transcend political cycles. Important checks and balances often include seeking the advice of top experts in a field, the input and perspectives of Indigenous peoples, public feedback, and dialogue and collaboration with provincial and territorial counterparts. These important undertakings can slow policy or program development, but they represent crucial ingredients for long-term success.

We find ourselves in a period of change. This presents opportunities for the public service to lean on the past to pivot for the benefit of future generations—re-evaluating how programs are designed, delivered, and measured. My unwavering goal is to ensure that the OAG always provides non-partisan, fact-based information to parliamentarians and the federal public service so that they can more easily make those adjustments and best direct resources toward outcomes that serve the diverse needs of Canada's peoples.



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