

## **Budget 2025: Canada Fails to Fulfil Duties To Resolve Specific Claims**

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**(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.)** The Union of BC Indian Chiefs BC Specific Claims Working Group (BCSCWG) is deeply concerned about Prime Minister Mark Carney’s Budget 2025, released November 4, which pushes aside Canada’s legal responsibility to resolve First Nations’ historical claims in favour of a regressive, ill-informed, and hasty approach to advancing “major projects” and economic development on unceded First Nations’ lands.

BCSCWG members, made of up Chiefs and technicians from BC, point to Budget 2025’s complete silence on specific claims research funding. Research is the gateway for First Nations to access the entire specific claims process: only by researching and developing their claims can First Nations engage with Canada in the process of redress that is their human right under the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Canada’s current \$12 million budget for specific claims research has proven woefully inadequate year after year. In 2025–2026 alone, there was a shortfall of over \$22 million. In the past, Canada has acknowledged this damaging shortfall with repeated top-ups, most recently in September 2025. Despite the explicit recognition that specific claims research funding is inadequate to meet First Nations’ needs, Canada has decided to allow the current funding to sunset, pushing the entire Specific Claims Program to the breaking point. Without an urgent commitment to extend and increase the research funding envelope, annual funding will plummet to just \$4 million beginning in April 2026. This amounts to a 75 percent reduction that puts the entire program at risk of collapse and denies access to justice for hundreds of claims across the country.

Budget 2025 emphasizes that CIRNA and ISC “deliver important programs that are legally or constitutionally required.” Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Rebeca Alty also recently stated that addressing specific claims “is essential work, and is central to strengthening relationships with First Nations and advancing reconciliation.”

Budget 2025, however, commits no support for specific claims, which are Canada’s legal responsibility and the main mechanism for Canada to address its own past wrongdoings in ways that avoid political unrest, costly court battles, and a climate of distrust and uncertainty. Redress for past wrongs is an essential precondition for building major projects and partnerships with First Nations. New developments cannot proceed on lands with unresolved claims.

**BCSCWG members call on Canada to provide immediate, urgent and sustained support of \$35 million to meet demonstrated need for specific claims research in**

**2026–2027, well in advance of the March 31 sunset date, and publicly commit to co-developing a joint plan with First Nations for sustaining the program going forward.**

Unless Canada commits to fully supporting specific claims research immediately, the reconciliatory aims of the program will be set back by decades. Without a clear commitment to resolving its past historical wrongdoings, Canada will undermine the trust required to build partnerships with First Nations that are necessary for economic prosperity.

**Chief Dalton Silver, BCSCWG Chair:**

“Specific claims are a crucial mechanism to advance reconciliation by addressing historical wrongs. They are also essential first steps to build trust and create opportunities for First Nations to be equal partners in economic developments in our territories. For these reasons, the BCSCWG is deeply disappointed to see Canada talking of reconciliation but failing to support the research and development of claims. This decision is extremely frustrating for BC First Nations, whose claims account for 53 percent of the total and who continue to face the damaging effects of historical losses on unceded lands and territories. The BCSCWG calls on Canada to publicly commit to this program by providing the immediate and sustained support that First Nations need to be able to research and advance their claims.”

**Judy Wilson, BCSCWG member and former chair:**

“The current budget’s silence on specific claims speaks volumes: Canada is deprioritizing its relationships with First Nations. With this silence, this government is also undermining rightsholders’ ability to participate fully in decision-making regarding the policies that affect them in a way that is contrary to our Indigenous human right to free, prior, and informed consent under the UN Declaration. It also runs against everything that our Chiefs and leaders told the Prime Minister at the ‘First Nations Major Project Summit’ in July and shows that this government will continue to sideline our leadership and rightsholders. Overall, failing to invest in specific claims in this budget is a costly choice. Delays in the specific claims process expose Canada to litigation, reputational damage, and political instability, and create risks to planned infrastructure and ‘Nation-building’ projects. Underfunding does not contain Canada’s liability – it escalates it.”

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