

# ADVICE TO MINISTER

---

## SUBJECT

Insert key words identifying issue, name of project etc.

---

## ISSUE

One or two lines line identifying the issue from the perspective Minister will likely be questioned. You may be provided with, or asked to identify, an anticipated question.

---

## WHAT'S NEW

One or two line lines explaining why this is an issue of the day **today**. (eg: Daily News reports today that; or decision will be released today; discussions broke down yesterday)

---

## SUGGESTED RESPONSE

- **X** Write a maximum of 3 concise, “punchy” bullets - key themes or messages - make them general, high level messages which can be adapted to various questions
- **X** Avoid verbosity, technical or “bureaucratic” terminology
- **X** Read the bullets aloud to yourself - ask does one speak like this?

## SUPPLEMENTARY

- **X** Add only if absolutely required, do not use as excuse to avoid brevity
- **X** For use in responding to a second question on the same issue

---

## BACKGROUND

Lead with most recent developments or the update (rather than chronological ordering of events culminating in issue of the day). Provide answers or information you anticipate the Minister may ask.

Remember to keep it as short as possible.

---

Prepared by: Author's name and phone number

Date:

Date Updated:

Approved by:

## **ADVICE TO MINISTER**

---

### **SUBJECT**

#### **THE PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY IN CANADA**

---

### **ISSUE**

Even though more than 40% of working-age Canadians lack basic literacy skills required for successful participation in our rapidly changing labour market, there is no political will to address this problem. Why is the government doing nothing to address the problem of illiteracy in Canada?

---

### **WHAT'S NEW**

There are media reports today that Opposition members are criticizing the government for not doing enough to address the problem of illiteracy in Canada. This criticism follows release and tabling yesterday of *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: the Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*, the Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

---

### **SUGGESTED RESPONSE**

- **We thank the Standing Committee for its work; we'll study the Report closely and respond officially to its findings and recommendations.**
- **The Committee acknowledged the more than \$30 million we give annually to the National Literacy Secretariat and our targeted funding on family literacy, workplace literacy and new technology.**
- **In the Speech from the Throne, we committed to build on our investments in human capital, including literacy.**

### **Supplementary:**

- **In addition to the \$30 million direct funding, we also fund literacy-related activity through federal labour market development programs, immigration settlement programs, correctional services programs....the list goes on.**
- **We'll continue to work with all partners to address the problem:**
  - **provinces & territories have constitutional responsibility for education;**
  - **private and volunteer sector organizations and employers also have a role to play.**

---

## **Background:**

Media reports focus on two issues. (1) Opposition members are criticizing the government for not doing enough to address the problem of illiteracy in Canada. (2) The social and economic costs of illiteracy are an estimated \$10 billion annually according to the 1988 Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy report.

The Standing Committee Report was tabled June 3, 200X (*Raising Adult Literacy Skills: the Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*). While it recognizes provincial/territorial and private sector responsibilities, the Committee concludes that the federal government has not demonstrated leadership in this national problem.

Claiming it's "time for leadership", the first of 20 recommendations is that the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada meet with provincial/territorial ministers of education and labour market ministers to develop a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development.

According to the report, key elements of this accord should identify provinces and territories as having primary responsibility for education and labour market training, establish joint funding levels and funding duration, determine the means of delivery, set goals, identify the need for flexibility in establishing literacy priorities, and establish methods for evaluating outcomes. If a pan-Canadian accord is not possible, the committee states the Government of Canada should negotiate bilateral agreements with willing provinces/territories.

The report also outlines the following:

- In 1988, a Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy estimated the annual cost to business of illiteracy in the workforce at \$4 billion and the cost to society at \$10 billion.
- In 1987, the National Literacy Secretariat was founded to fund literacy initiatives and provide an infrastructure to support literacy activities across Canada (resource centres, electronic networks and communication systems, provincial & territorial coalitions); all funded partially or entirely by the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS).
- 1997, the federal government increased to \$30 million the annual allocation of the NLS, and targeted the additional money to family literacy, workplace literacy and new technology.
- In 1999-2000, most provincial and territorial governments expanded policy statements on adult literacy or developed positions, if they did not already have one. However provision to learners did not increase in most parts of the country.
- The January 2001 Speech from the Throne pledged an increased commitment to skills and learning with a specific mention of literacy but no federal policy was announced.
- In the September 2002 Speech from the Throne, the federal government indicated that it would build on its investments in human capital, including literacy.
- Participants at the November 2002 National Summit on Innovation and Learning, adopted 18 priority recommendations one of which included the establishment of "a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills development system, supported by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Establish programs to improve literacy and basic skills based on individual and community needs and interests."

---

Prepared by: Public Sector Writer (356-789-XXXX)  
Date: June 3, 200X  
Date Updated: June 4, 200X  
Approved by: Public Sector Writer