

Meeting briefs Chiefs about the requirements of a future Indigenous Police Service in PAGC communities

Of what it will look like and how it will operate

By Ron Merasty

On February 4, 2026, the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) chiefs, executive and senators heard a detailed presentation on the findings of a feasibility study on what a self-administered Indigenous police service might look like, and how it would be transitioned into, and operated, in its 12 First Nations.

PAGC leadership and its communities – in their minds – have advanced beyond the question of, “Do we need our own PAGC police service?” to detailing what its component parts will look like and how the future police service will be governed. However, they haven’t decided yet on whether they will say “yes” to their own regional police service, opt for many single nation police services, or to stay with the current RCMP model. They will decide in the future.

The meeting was held at the River Cree Resort in Edmonton. Caitlin Brown from accounting firm MNP delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the final report. MNP and Brown, as she said, had been hired by PAGC to support the feasibility study “by pulling all of the data together, doing the data analysis, and then using our expertise to come up with a service delivery model and a resourcing model that’s evidence-based.” However, for all intents and purposes, Brown was speaking on behalf of PAGC’s initiative.

MNP has the expertise, as you will read below, on the resourcing needs of large Indigenous police services. Such a PAGC police service, when created,

will have the largest police and civilian employee base of any Indigenous police service in Canada or the U.S. – a massive undertaking and responsibility.

Brown provided an overview of the 265-page final draft regional police model study that had been commissioned by PAGC to assess the feasibility, requirements, and long-term sustainability of establishing a PAGC police service. That study had been led by Public Safety Implementation Advisor, former RCMP officer, David Sanderson (Moose Lake First Nation, MB), assisted by Donna Campbell (Pine Creek First Nation, MB) and PAGC Senator Noland Henderson. They had gone to the communities to engage with, that is, ask questions, and receive feedback from PAGC membership. Brown spoke to the study’s findings and had the attention of the entire room.

The study reported that respondents in PAGC communities were dissatisfied with the quality of policing they were receiving from the RCMP, and to quote Brown: “You’re not seeing the police in many of your communities and when you’re calling them, they’re not responding. In many cases, your folks are not even calling them anymore because they don’t think that they’re going to come, or they don’t trust them. Again, lack of that consistent presence. Not a lot of proactive time at all. They’re just there if they’re called for an emergency. You folks and your community members identified the need for more of that community-based

policing, that relationship-based policing.”

“You want to know your police. You want to see them in your community. You want them to be part of your community. And more incorporation of understanding the culture, ideally folks from your communities that live the culture and are the culture, more language incorporation into your police service, and again, reflection of your culture and traditions in your policing that’s provided to your communities.”

After those comments Brown’s presentation turned to the design of a possible future state police service delivery model and what might be unique about it. She stressed that the policing service would need to have adequate resourcing, which would include the staffing and “unique resources that are going to meet those specific community needs” identified in the feasibility study.

The study team, Brown said, gathered community and RCMP data, publicly available crime statistics, “that kind of data to understand exactly what’s going on from a policing perspective in all of your communities.”

They had asked themselves, “What does this model need to look like to meet the unique needs of the PAGC communities?” In developing the model, they consulted regularly with provincial and federal public safety officials – because the province and federal government will be the funders of a future Indigenous police service – to keep them informed of their direction, “and what we were learning about the communities and what we thought the needs were,” Brown said.

The last stage was visualizing what the process would look like to transition to take on policing in PAGC nations. That transition process will happen in stages and take about 10 years.

It should be emphasized that nothing is finalized at this stage, even about whether PAGC First Nations will choose to go with their own police service. The three options are (to repeat):

1. Staying with the current model (RCMP).
2. Creating a PAGC police service where all the nations partner with each other in a regional model.
3. Developing independent police services in each First Nation.

However, the study has recommended the adoption of a regional, self-administered First Nations police service under the federal First Nations



Ron Merasty Photo

Sturgeon Lake First Nation Chief Christine Longjohn.

and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP) Stream 1 option, supported by Stream 3 Community Safety Officers (CSOs). Under this model, PAGC would establish and manage its own independent police service, authorized under provincial policing legislation, to provide primary, day-to-day policing to their communities.

The proposed model is grounded in:

- First Nations laws, culture and language
- Local accountability through an independent PAGC Police Board
- Relationship-based community policing, and
- Prevention, wellness, and collaboration with community services.

Brown said the team tried to design the best service delivery model based on leading practices elsewhere, while considering the specific needs of PAGC communities, managing available resources and sharing them as much as possible.

She stated that one of the most important elements in a regional police service will be of governance and oversight, “because that governance body really sets the tone for the police service that you’re going to run. They set the policy, they set the budget, they set the strategic plan, they hire the police chief.”

A Board of Commissioners will be struck to represent the communities of the police service. The chief of police will be accountable to the board. The board will make sure the police chief is doing their job. They will create a position for a person to liaise with the communities to get feedback, and that person will report back to the board. The board will set the policy, budget, strategic plan and priorities.

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Eat Nutritious Foods and Stay Healthy

Did you know that March is Nutrition Month? Nutritious food is essential for supporting both our physical and mental well-being. However, rising food prices in recent years have made healthy eating more challenging for many families. According to the Cost of Food in Saskatchewan 2025 report, the average monthly cost of food for a family of four in northern Saskatchewan increased by 16.5% between 2022 and 2025. The impact has been even greater in the far north, where prices have surged by 34%.

Here are some practical tips to help stretch your food dollars further:

1. Consider growing or harvesting some of your own food. Many plants grow seasonally in Saskatchewan, offering opportunities to supplement your grocery budget. Starting a garden or responsibly foraging can help increase access to fresh, nutritious produce—especially during the summer months.
2. Choose fruits and vegetables that are in season. Some fruits—like apples, bananas, and oranges—are available year-round, while others, such as berries and watermelon, are only in season at certain times. Buying produce when it’s in season is often more affordable.
3. Buy shelf-stable foods in bulk and share the cost. While the upfront price may be higher, purchasing larger quantities often lowers the cost per unit (per gram or kilogram). Consider splitting bulk items with friends or family to make it more affordable.
4. Use grocery apps to help reduce your food costs. Apps like Flipp allow you to browse store flyers and compare prices to find the best deals. FlashFood offers discounted items that are nearing their expiry date, helping you save money while also reducing food waste.



A Public Service Announcement from PAGC Health & Social Development.



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Caitlin Brown and David Sanderson.



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Black Lake Denesuline Nation Chief Coreen Sayazie, and PAGC Director, Urban Services, Vince Brittain

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The police leadership team, with the chief of police as the head, will be large and the responsibilities numerous will include:

- Frontline investigations
- Finance and human resources
- Recruitment and training, and retention
- Overseeing infrastructure and technology
- Records management, and
- Cybersecurity requirements

On the other hand, the PAGC political leadership's role will be "to hold the board accountable," Brown said, "and then the board needs to hold the service accountable." Leadership will also be responsible for negotiating the massive budget for the entire years-long administration of it.

As stated above, the proposed model envisions CSOs integrated into the police service, working alongside the police.

"That allows for expansion of the visibility of the community safety resources. It also provides an opportunity for new folks to test it out to see if they like policing. So, it's a good recruitment and retention tool to have (CSOs)," Brown said.

Initially, all police recruits will likely be trained at the Saskatchewan Police College in Regina. "But we wanted to make sure that you had internal training expertise so that you could create your own training and create a higher standard of training requirements for your police service," Brown said. It will be about creating "a PAGC-focused training program that's on top of the standard police requirements to be a police officer in this country."

Other recommendations for such a police service ensures the availability of:

- Mental health resources for post-traumatic stress
- A youth outreach coordinator to encourage youth to join policing
- An alternative justice coordinator to divert entry into the criminal justice system
- General counsel – different types of lawyers because of legal challenges.
- Investigative staff to stop the flow of illegal substances, and
- Information Technology staff.
- The model would have its general headquarters in Prince Albert and have at least one other regional hub, perhaps in La Ronge. Local resources require:
- Housing for officers
- Allowing for fly-in, fly-out as a recruitment and retention tool
- Ensuring every call is a two-officer call for safety reasons
- Standard controller supervisor ratios to ensure quality of oversight and quality control, and
- Having "floater" positions to ensure sufficient police

What needs to be done to create the service?

If 2026 is Year One of the transition, PAGC First Nations will need to decide if, and who wants to participate, and which model. Each First Nation will have to approve a Band Council Resolution. Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie said that the final decision should be made by the October 2026 PAGC annual assembly.

If approved, PAGC leadership, Public Safety Canada and the Province of Saskatchewan will convene at a negotiation and setup table. Meanwhile

the transition team will be filling in the infrastructure needs. Negotiations with the funders will include making sure "they understand what you are trying to do, how you're trying to do it, and what you need to do that," Brown said.

Some of the important initial steps, Brown said, will be PAGC leadership setting up the board, and incorporating the service as a corporation, "so they can be employers of the service." The board support crew will be hired, develop bylaws and governance framework for the board, and select the police chief. From there would be the setup of an actual police service with the creation of an "operational policy, extensive recruitment and hiring."

The new police service would still require a support service agreement with the RCMP providing ongoing "very specialized, expensive, heavy technology requirements," and will outline how they will work together. The RCMP will continue to provide policing until the new service is ready to become the police of jurisdiction. The process will take about 10 years to complete.

Once operationalizing begins for the new service recruitment in the communities will be important "as you will want as many PAGC members as possible to work in it," including the CSOs. HR, training and finance people will assist the chief of police in that process.

Salaries will eat up 80% of the cost estimates. Salaries and benefits will be on par with the RCMP, otherwise other jurisdictions will snap up officers.

The service will need 310 sworn officers: constables, sergeants, staff sergeants, as well as frontline and investigative resources. It will require a civilian staff of 255 for a total of 565 personnel. Annual operating costs will be \$124 million based on 2025 dollars. One-time costs will amount to \$244 million, and include buildings, equipment such as vehicles, boats, snowmobiles, ATVs, clothing, kits, radios, body-worn cameras, computers, fingerprint machines, and maybe even a plane or two.

"If we don't have sufficient funding, we won't be set up for success and we don't want the service to fail," Brown said.

To prevent that from happening, Vice-Chief Tsannie and Sanderson have been keeping the funders informed and have seen what the resourcing ask is, "and that they understand exactly what's coming and why they should be supporting this and that will need to continue as well," Brown said.

Brown turned her attention to some of the benefits provided in the administration of a broad multi-nation police service would look like, with all those resources, compared to a single nation independent service.

Some of those advantages are:

- The ability to create more specialized teams
- An internal training capability
- Easier to absorb vacancies and sick times, and
- Recruitment will have more resources to work with.

A single nation police service may have to rely on the RCMP quite a bit versus a large service where there are more specialized resources and investigators and analytics, for example.

On the other hand, a joint governance model is more complicated because everyone will have to work together. They've got to agree, be committed, and trust their board. There will be centralized



Ron Merasty Photo

PAGC Senator Roy Head; PAGC Senator Noland Henderson; Wahpeton Dakota Nation Elder Cy Standing; and Hatchet Lake Senator, Hector Khailther.

leadership meaning that the police chief will only be at any one of the 12 nations on limited availability.

Following Brown's presentation, Sturgeon Lake First Nation Chief, Christine Longjohn, thanked those responsible for their work on the report, admitting the issue is "complicated."

"I just wanted to remind everyone that before treaties we had our own law systems within all of our communities," she said. "We had our own governance. We had our own ways of raising our children. And all of that was interrupted - through all of the day schools and residential schools and all of those generational traumas that we carry. And so now, you know, we're left with trying to overcome all of those social issues that have entered within our communities, including alcohol. And so now we're dealt with dealing with all of these social issues with no resources."

She added that there was "an understanding during treaties that they (NWMP/RCMP) would come and it would be peace, right? And so that's the relationship that was supposed to happen and that hasn't been happening."

Montreal Lake Cree Nation Senator, Noland Henderson, said that visits had been made to Indigenous police services elsewhere during the study period, "and found out exactly what and where they've been, how they went about getting a police force going. It is a lot of work. There are mistakes that do happen. However, at the end of the day, they say it's worth it. They've encouraged us all the way to go through with this. And so, I think myself, I will say the same thing after hearing all what I have heard from all the places that we have visited, including our people at our home bases. We have to support them."

Red Earth Cree Nation Senator, Roy Head, said "the plan is good, everything looks good on paper." But he was concerned about long-term, sustainable funding, whether it is to be directed at a multi-nation police service or through single nation independent services. He framed future funding as a treaty right, and that "Canada has to honour and respect the mandate, that they received from the British Crown, you know, to



Ron Merasty Photo

PAGC Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie and staff member Mel Mercredi.



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Councillor Magloire Broussie and PAGC Grand Chief, Brian Hardlotte.