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Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa touted his government's job creation success Tuesday at the Canadian Club of Toronto ahead of his fall economic update next week. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

A Northern Ontario think-tank is hoping for something other than a cookie-cutter approach to economic stimulus in the provincial government's fall economic update next week.

"We've heard a lot of language from this government and other governments before around the fact that there are multiple economies in Ontario," said Charles Cirtwill, the president and CEO of the Northern Policy Institute.

Now he wants to see the government take action to address the different needs of those economies, he said.

In a speech at the Canadian Club of Toronto Tuesday, Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa touted his government's job creation success.

"Our plan to build Ontario up is working. Our plan is creating jobs," he said.

"For 18 months in a row Ontario's unemployment has been lower than the national average. Today it's 6.4 per cent, the lowest since the 2008 crisis."

While youth employment numbers in northern Ontario are fairly strong, Cirtwill noted the region is still facing unique economic challenges.

Investments in road infrastructure and information and communications technologies are badly needed, as are policies to address labour shortages across northern communities, he said.

Large swaths of the province still lack access to high speed Internet, something that needs to change if the region is going to be able to attract and sustain private investment, he said.

At the same time, the region needs to attract more workers in both low-skilled and high-skilled professions — everything from retail workers to plumbers and doctors, Cirtwill said.

To address those shortages, Cirtwill called for policies that work to engage Indigenous communities and increase immigration.

In the northwest, Cirtwill said the government could start by improving road infrastructure, giving remote communities better access to education and health care in larger centres and reducing well-known barriers to employment.

Without that basic infrastructure, businesses in remote communities are at a disadvantage, said JP Gladu, the president and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.

Alongside infrastructure, Gladu called on the government to implement more progressive procurement policies.

When the government goes through the process of awarding contracts, indigenous companies and companies that employ indigenous people and have strong indigenous relations should get extra points on the score card, he said.

The government won't only be sending a message that indigenous relations are important it will also be driving indigenous employment and business opportunities, he said.

Cirtwill said he'd also like to see Ontario follow Manitoba's lead and implement an immigration policy based on regional allocations.

"The problem with Ontario is that immigration policy is based on what's happening in the GTA," he said. "But we have real need for people with both high skills and low skills here in the North."

Sousa announced Tuesday that he will deliver the fall economic update on Nov. 14.