

BC Association of Aboriginal  
Friendship Centres  
**BCA AFC**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 11, 2020

# **More support for friendship centres benefits urban Indigenous peoples during pandemic**

**VICTORIA, B.C.** – Indigenous peoples living in urban areas are receiving increased supports to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic through new provincial funding for friendship centres throughout B.C.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has tested everyone in ways we never imagined, and Indigenous peoples living in urban areas are relying on the help offered by friendship centres at unprecedented levels,” said Premier John Horgan. “We have provided additional funds through the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres to meet this significant demand and support the critical, culturally appropriate services that friendship centres are providing during this particularly challenging time.”

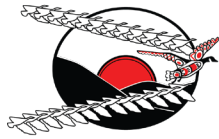
Friendship centres throughout B.C. provide many essential services for Indigenous peoples living in urban areas, including child care, counselling, food, and shelter. Over the past several months, friendship centres have seen a substantial increase in needs from people impacted by the pandemic.

“Friendship Centres have seen a rapid increase in requests for services during the pandemic,” said Leslie Varley, executive director with the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. “They are fulfilling the need for culturally safe and appropriate supports during a time where our people are more susceptible to the impacts of COVID-19.”

“We are addressing three priorities as a result of COVID-19—food security, personal protective equipment and sanitation, and equipment and supplies. The allotted funding will help ensure that those who are most vulnerable to the virus have access to food, and that our staff have the equipment and supplies they need to provide these services safely.” This one-time COVID-19 relief funding of \$7.8 million will help friendship centres continue to assist individuals, young families, single parents, youth and Elders through a mix of in person and online services. The grant will help provide supports like meals and hampers,

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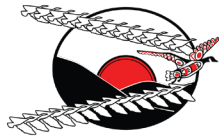
care packages for seniors and education kits for children. It will help keep staff and clients safe with new handwashing stations, sanitization and personal protective equipment.

“Expanding our government’s support for friendship centres, and the Indigenous peoples they serve, is one of the important priorities the Premier tasked me with in my new role,” said Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. “Given the pressures friendship centres have been facing as a result of the pandemic, this new funding comes at a critical time to bring them needed relief, and support their vital services for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in urban areas – including Elders who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 and must be protected as knowledge-keepers of language and culture.”

This announcement is one of the immediate actions government is taking to protect British Columbian’s health and livelihoods from the threat of COVID-19. Government will continue working hard to keep people safe and healthy, so British Columbia can move as quickly as possible to address the economic recovery and its broader priorities: investing in people, strengthening communities, and supporting jobs and growth in a clean-energy future.

#### **Quick facts:**

- B.C. friendship centres are part of a national network of Indigenous-led social service organizations that have served Indigenous families for over 70 years.
- There are 25 friendship centres located throughout British Columbia.
- The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres is distributing this one-time funding among all the centres.
- Approximately 78% of the Indigenous peoples in B.C. live off-reserve or in urban areas.
- In 2018, the B.C. government more than tripled the financial support for friendship centres by providing the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres with an additional \$6.45 million over three years. This was the first time reliable, dedicated funding was provided to the association.



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### **Learn More:**

- For recommendations on protecting yourself and your community, visit:  
[http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel))
- For more information and latest medical updates on COVID-19, follow the BC Centre for Disease Control on Twitter @CDCofBC Or visit the centre's website:  
<http://www.bccdc.ca/>

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