

BC Association of Aboriginal
Friendship Centres
BCAAFC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 4, 2021

BCAAFC Statement: Partnership with TELUS to Provide Mobile Phones to Indigenous Women and Girls

VICTORIA, B.C. – Friendship Centre organizations across B.C. will be distributing mobile phones to Indigenous women and girls who otherwise would not have access to cellular communication. Increasing accessibility to mobile communication is one part of B.C. Friendship Centres' strategy to prevent violence against Indigenous women and girls and improve their safety. The phones will come with one year of nationwide talk & text + data from TELUS, made possible through the TELUS Mobility for Good program.

The distribution of mobile phones follows federal and provincial investments to complete cellular coverage along Highway 16, which is known as the 'Highway of Tears' because it has been the location of many missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Completing cellular coverage along Highway 16 was a recommendation from The Highway of Tears Symposium Report (2006) and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019).

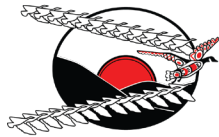
"Reliable cellular communication will help ensure Indigenous women and girls have access to services to support their safety and wellbeing," said Leslie Varley, Executive Director of the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC), "this is an important step towards increasing our capacity to provide culturally safe and inclusive anti-violence services."

Friendship Centres are Indigenous-led social service organizations that have been providing services by and for Indigenous people for over 60 years. Anti-violence programs and services have been a priority in BC Friendship Centres, especially those in Northern BC with proximity to the Highway of Tears.

Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than non-Indigenous women, a number that is even higher for Indigenous women and girls in the North (National Inquiry, 2019). Evidence shows that services designed, developed and delivered by Indigenous people are successful in meeting the needs of Indigenous clients;

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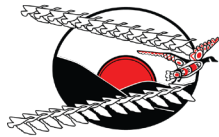
yet, historically, and still today, the majority of services provided in B.C. for Indigenous women fleeing violence are by mainstream organizations.

“This commitment from TELUS reflects an understanding for the importance of Indigenous specific services being led by Indigenous people,” said Varley, “We are grateful for this partnership and the positive impact it will have on Indigenous women and girls, and their communities, who are accessing Indigenous anti-violence services to support their security and wellbeing.”

The majority of phones will be distributed in locations within B.C. identified as high risk for human trafficking and violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Learn more:

- [Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report: A collective voice for the victims who have been silenced](#) (Lheidli T'enneth First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Prince George Native Friendship Centre, Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment & Training Association, June 16, 2006)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#) (United Nations, 2007)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#) (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015)
- [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) (National Inquiry, 2019)
- [Complete cellular connectivity coming to 'Highway of Tears'](#) (Ministry of Citizens' Services, April 7, 2021)
- [2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People](#) (MMIWG National Action Plan Core Working Group, June 3, 2021)



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