

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 8, 2022

## **Indigenous people will have safer access to community social services**

**WHISTLER, B.C.** - The Province is investing \$8.4 million to advance reconciliation in the B.C. community social services sector.

"Non-profits promote connection and provide valuable community services across B.C., and they need to be available and accessible to all," said Niki Sharma, Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits. "Through this investment, we are increasing community social service providers' capacity to offer culturally safe, inclusive, accessible social services to Indigenous people throughout British Columbia."

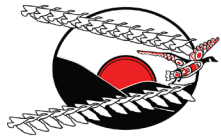
The funding will support the development of a reconciliation framework for the community social services sector over five years.

Overseen by the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCA AFC), the framework will include:

- A custom master's degree in business administration in Indigenous reconciliation, which will build capacity, implement cultural safety and support succession planning in the community social services sector. The program will be delivered by the University of Victoria's Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, with the first enrolment of students to begin in spring 2023.
- The delivery of an Indigenous cultural safety training program to give social service providers the skills and confidence needed to recognize and uproot anti-Indigenous racism.
- The expansion and customization of existing anti-racism tools to inform organizers where cultural safety training needs to be prioritized, such as:

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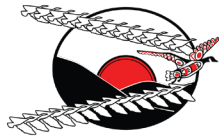
- an organizational assessment tool that provides organizations with a framework to evaluate the level of anti-Indigenous racism internally as a first step toward taking action to remove it; and
- the Safespace web application, which allows Indigenous people and others to anonymously report incidents of racism experienced within the health-care system in the province. The application has demonstrated the value of a third-party reporting system for anti-Indigenous racism and will expand to include other service areas in addition to health care.

“The British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres is pleased to be working together with our Indigenous Safespace app colleagues, the social services sector and the University of Victoria to begin taking steps to collaboratively build capacity in our sector as we actively move toward reconciliation,” said Leslie Varley, executive director, BCA AFC. “To be clear, this is an Indigenous-led, multi-faceted approach, fully supported by our social services sector, academic allies and our Indigenous colleagues with the shared goal of culturally safe and inclusive services for Indigenous people.”

Systemic racism, discrimination and institutional barriers create persistent challenges to Indigenous people in accessing social services. Structural and systemic change is necessary to right the injustices of the past and present, end anti-Indigenous hate and discrimination, and help build a healthy economy and inclusive province.

The Province released the 89-point Declaration Act Action Plan on March 30, 2022. The action plan, which is a legislative requirement under the Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples Act, was developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples to ensure its actions were aligned with the priorities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in B.C.

The reconciliation framework is tied to action 4.41 of the Declaration Act Action Plan: “Work with First Nations, Métis-chartered communities and urban Indigenous organizations, such as BCA AFC, to provide funding for self-determined, community-led programs for Indigenous Peoples to upgrade skills, obtain credentials, secure employment, and develop and support community economies.”



## Quotes:

Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

“We are committed to a future where Indigenous Peoples design, control and set the standards for services that support and facilitate their well-being. This investment supports an Indigenous-led, multi-faceted approach intended to uproot anti-Indigenous racism, remove barriers and support culturally safe and accessible community services for Indigenous Peoples.”

Rick FitzZaland, executive director, The Federation of Community Social Services of BC –

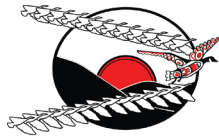
“The social services sector is not immune to the need to change and decolonize our work. This is an exciting step, led by Indigenous people and supported by allies in the sector, to take important steps to make social services in B.C. truly safe, inclusive and welcoming. Thank you to the Province for making this investment and to BCAAFC for their leadership.”

Saul Klein, dean, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria –

“We are honoured to be invited to co-create the MBA in Indigenous Reconciliation together with BCAAFC and the provincial government. We look forward to bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to build a shared understanding and commitment to reconciliation. This unique program will equip leaders in social services, government and non- profits to meaningfully advance reconciliation in their organizations and across our broader society.”

Dr. Kamea Lafontaine and Dr. Alika Lafontaine, co-founders, Safespace Networks –

“An Elder taught us that survivors have the deep desire to share their trauma, but individually and as a society we are rarely prepared to hear it. If we want truth to lead to real reconciliation, we need spaces built where sharing the truth and hearing the truth can be a safe experience for both storyteller and listener. Safespace Networks is proud to be part of a reconciliation strategy that protects truth tellers, educates decision makers and enables all of us to play our part in reconciliation.”



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## Quick Facts:

- B.C. is home to more than 29,000 non-profit organizations that employ more than 86,000 people and contribute \$6.7 billion to B.C.'s economy.
- More than 80% of provincially contracted social services are provided by the community social service sector.
- The B.C. Social Services Sector Roundtable provides a forum for senior government officials and agencies active in the community service sector, including BCA AFC.
- Formed in May 2019, the roundtable collaboratively addresses issues and works to ensure co-ordinated social services delivery.

## Learn More:

- Safespace: <https://safespace.healthcare/bcaafc>
- B.C. Social Services Sector Roundtable:  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/initiatives/social-services-sector-roundtable/>
- Declaration Act and the Declaration Act Action Plan: <https://declaration.gov.bc.ca/>

## Contact

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