



**BCAAFC | BC Association of
Aboriginal Friendship Centres**

Media Release

BC Friendship Centres partner with TELUS to provide mobile phones to Indigenous women and girls to support access to anti-violence services

October 4, 2021 – Friendship Centre organizations across BC 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 BC 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; yet, historically, and still today, the majority of services provided in BC 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 BC identified as high risk for human trafficking and violence against Indigenous women and girls.

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About BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres - <https://bcaafc.com/>

The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) is the umbrella organization for the 25 Friendship Centres located throughout the province. BC Friendship Centres are not-for-profit, Indigenous-led, social service organizations that develop and deliver accessible programs and services to support Indigenous people living in urban areas and away from home to achieve their vision of health, wellness and prosperity. The BC Provincial Government estimates approximately 85% of Indigenous people in BC live off reserve or in urban areas. Collectively, BC Friendship Centres employ over 1,200 people and have over 600 community partnerships—making them the largest Indigenous service delivery infrastructure in the province. The BCAAFC works with Friendship Centres, partner organizations, and government institutions to establish best practices for Indigenous program delivery and advocate for equitable resource allocation for services by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people.

About TELUS - <https://www.telus.com/en/social-impact/connecting-canada/mobility-for-good>

TELUS (TSX: T, NYSE: TU) is a dynamic, world-leading communications technology company with \$16 billion in annual revenue and 16 million customer connections spanning wireless, data, IP, voice, television, entertainment, video, and security. We leverage our global-leading technology and compassion to enable remarkable human outcomes. Our longstanding commitment to putting our customers first fuels every aspect of our business, making us a distinct leader in customer service excellence and loyalty. In 2020, TELUS was recognized as having the fastest wireless network in the world, reinforcing our commitment to provide Canadians with access to superior technology that connects us to the people, resources and information that make our lives better. TELUS Health is Canada's leader in digital health technology, improving access to health and wellness services and revolutionizing the flow of health information across the continuum of care. TELUS Agriculture provides innovative digital solutions throughout the agriculture value chain, supporting better food outcomes from improved agri-business data insights and processes. TELUS International (TSX and NYSE: TIXT) is a leading digital customer experience innovator that delivers next-generation AI and content management solutions for global brands across the technology and games, ecommerce and FinTech, communications and media, healthcare, travel and hospitality sectors. TELUS and TELUS International operate in 25+ countries around the world. Together, let's make the future friendly.



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About TELUS (continued)

Driven by our passionate social purpose to connect all citizens for good, our deeply meaningful and enduring philosophy to give where we live has inspired TELUS, our team members and retirees to contribute more than \$820 million and 1.6 million days of service since 2000. This unprecedented generosity and unparalleled volunteerism have made TELUS the most giving company in the world. For more information about TELUS, please visit telus.com, follow us [@TELUSNews](#) on Twitter and [@Darren Entwistle](#) on Instagram.



Photo: Leaders at the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC), TELUS, and Prince George Native Friendship Centre commemorate the new partnership between BC Friendship Centres and the TELUS Mobility for Good program at the BCAAFC Annual Membership Meeting (September 23, 2021).

Pictured (left to right): Leslie Varley, Executive Director at the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC), Tony Geheran, Executive Vice President & Chief Customer Officer at TELUS, Barbara Ward-Burkitt, Executive Director at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, Marissa Nobauer, Manager of Reconciliation Strategy and Indigenous Connectivity at TELUS, and Geoff Rankin, Director of Policy at the BCAAFC.

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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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