



PRESS RELEASE

BC First Nations Justice Council Welcomes Province of BC's Commitment to Indigenous Justice Services

New Indigenous Justice Centres will open in Nanaimo, Victoria, Vancouver, Surrey and Kelowna next year

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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(X̱m̱əθḵəy̱əm (Musqueam), S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish) and səliiwətəi (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC

The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) welcomes today's announcement by Premier Eby to fully invest in the establishment and long-term operation of ten (10) new Indigenous Justice Centres over the next 2 years.

Indigenous people remain among the most targeted and criminalized populations in Canada and Indigenous Justice Centres address the inequities in the Justice System and the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prisons and institutions. Today, close to a third of the prison population in Canada is Indigenous and in female correctional institutions, the number tops fifty percent.

Indigenous Justice Centres offer culturally appropriate justice services to support Indigenous people with their interactions in the colonial justice system. Designed collaboratively with the rights and title holders on whose territory they are located, the Centres support the capacity in the Indigenous communities to grow, reclaim and increase their justice infrastructure.

Premier Eby's announcement builds on the success of four Indigenous Justice Centres already operating in Prince George, Prince Rupert and the Nicola Valley (Merritt). The Virtual Indigenous Justice Centre (VIJC) provides no-cost legal services and referrals to Indigenous people in BC, regardless of their geography.

Legal services offered at Indigenous Justice Centres have focused on criminal justice and child protection advice and representation while also facilitating client connections to supports such as housing, mental health and addictions treatment, culture-based healing, and employment services.

Clients of Indigenous Justice Centres report that the presence of Elders and knowledge keepers increase feelings of safety. Wrap around supports, coupled with legal staff who are committed to equity for Indigenous people results in better client experiences and overall better justice outcomes.

The establishment of 15 Indigenous Justice Centres is a key deliverable of the tripartite BC First Nations Justice Strategy signed by BC First Nations, the Province of BC and the Government of Canada in 2020.



Quotes

BC First Nations Justice Council Acting Chair Rosalie Yazzie [Syilx & Secwépemc] “Public safety is a serious concern for all British Columbians, especially First Nations people. The problem of repeat offending can be directly tied to the failure of all three orders of colonial government to meet the needs of Indigenous peoples. BCFNJC’s approach is premised on the necessity of unpacking the harms of an unchecked criminal justice system long understood to be plagued by systemic racism. We will continue our engagement with Leadership and Rights holders, Knowledge Keepers and justice community stakeholders to ensure our Centres are strategically placed to ensure the best possible coverage in a huge province. We are committed to fulsome engagement with an open-ended needs assessment and participatory co-design process to address the priorities of the communities we serve.”

BC First Nations Justice Council member Kory Wilson [Kwakwaka'wakw]. “The BC First Nations Justice Council is deeply thankful that our new Premier, David Eby, has committed to advancing equity in access to Justice services. Indigenous Justice Centres are a cornerstone of the Justice Strategy and the solution to many public safety issues our province and our communities are experiencing. Lifting up Indigenous people to lead this work for ourselves is the right approach: it aligns with BC’s commitment to implement the UN Declaration and has the potential to reverse decades of appalling statistics that speak to the growing overrepresentation of our people in the justice and child welfare systems. BCFNJC remains steadfast in our commitment to reforming colonial justice and child welfare systems, and today’s announcement is an enormous step in the right direction.”

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Background

Indigenous Justice Centres are established to

1. Keep Indigenous people safe by reducing incarceration.
2. Divert Indigenous people to a healthy path away from justice involvement.
3. Make the justice system experience more Indigenous.
4. Make it easier for Indigenous people to navigate justice and obtain support.

Strategy 4 of [the BC First Nations Justice Strategy](#), which was endorsed by BC in 2020, and by Canada in 2022, calls for the creation of 15 IJCs within 5 years.

Read more about Indigenous Justice Centres at <https://bcfnjc.com/indigenous-justice-centres-in-british-columbia/>

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About the BCFNJC:

The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) was established in 2015 by the 203 First Nations of British Columbia through parallel resolutions of Chiefs assembled in the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. The urgent mandate provided by the Chiefs directs the BCFNJC to work to address the failings in the criminal justice system and the child protection system that have so significantly harmed our people, families, and Nations. BCFNJC works collaboratively with BC First Nations, the Province of BC, the government of Canada, and key justice system stakeholders to bring about transformative change to government policy, programming and initiatives related to criminal justice and child welfare.

Visit BCFNJC's website: <https://bcfnjc.com/>

Read the full Justice Strategy here: https://bcfnjc.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/BCFNJC_Justice-Strategy_February-2020.pdf