



CARRIER SEKANI
FAMILY SERVICES

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Plans for essential Indigenous Healing Facility stalled: Carrier Sekani Family Services requests Province of BC to help make project a reality

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For immediate release

Planning for an essential Indigenous Healing Facility serving people requiring treatment for addictions and mental health in the northern interior region has been hindered by a decision made by the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) North Panel on February 26, 2021. This decision effectively denies a non-farm use exemption application by Carrier Sekani Family Services (“CSFS”).

The location for the facility, what is currently Tachick Lake Resort, was identified as an optimal site. It has been used as a commercial lodge and campground since the 1960’s. This location was chosen after years of due diligence and feasibility studies commissioned by CSFS to identify potential sites for a health and treatment centre. The center will serve local Indigenous people from a medically based service delivery model that is grounded in Carrier Sekani healing and land-based wellness practice.

“The services to be offered in this facility will work to begin to address some of the alarming rates of harm being endured by Indigenous people in our home communities. The data is clear – Indigenous people are being affected by the opioid crisis at a higher rate, with recent statistics showing that First Nations are dying from overdose at a rate of more than 5 times higher than other BC residents” says Carrier Sekani Family Services Board President and Chief of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Corrina Leween. “Carrier Sekani Family Services has waited more than 25 years for the full support needed to develop a quality treatment and healing facility - no further delay should be endured.”

Tachick Lake Resort addresses the needs of the facility—including its size, a natural setting near water that is necessary for the land-based healing model, location near to Saik’uz First Nation, and situated near enough to major centres (Vanderhoof and Prince George in particular) to attract and retain professional medical staff and allow proximity to continued support.

CSFS serves a predominantly Indigenous clientele from local Carrier and Sekani Nations. This project is extremely important to removing barriers to health services and making progress toward fundamental objectives of improved health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples.

“Part of our treatment model includes agriculture activities, whereby patients will learn gardening through building and maintaining a community garden, and a traditional food processing unit” states Carrier Sekani Family Services CEO Warner Adam. “Local elders will be brought in to assist in therapeutic counselling during food security activities to compliment the medically based treatment model.”

Transitioning back into their communities without the added challenges of significant geographical distance is important to ongoing health and wellness.

The ongoing opioid crisis and a lack of support services for people in the northern interior (and particularly in rural and remote communities) has added an urgency to the current planning process, and the delay impairs the health and wellness of Indigenous people of this region.

Despite broad statements from both levels of government in support of improvements in indigenous health, and the significant amount of work CSFS, with the support of the First Nations Health Authority, has put into planning for this Healing Centre, the project still lacks essential funding. It has recently been stopped in its tracks by a negative decision by the Agricultural Land Commission, rejecting an application to allow the construction of a new building (on land that is currently a commercial resort not used for farming) and to operate the facility on this key site.

CSFS is very disappointed in the decision of the ALC. While the Commission is to preserve agricultural land, the Act allows for exemptions. Surely, when the Commission interprets its mandate in light of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*¹ and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,² an exemption that allows for the provision of essential health care for First Nations in a manner that respects First Nations cultures and land-based healing practices is appropriate. In addition to considering seeking a reconsideration of the decision by the Commission, CSFS has called on all levels of government to come up with ways to make this project happen. If land can go into the ALR, it can come out.

CSFS has entered into discussions with the BC Government about partnership for this important project, which includes an initial dedication of \$5.7 million in funding provided by the First Nations Health Authority. This initial funding does not meet the total project costs estimated at \$16 million. Talks are underway between CSFS, provincial and federal officials including the First Nations Health Authority around the funding shortfall. Dedicated financial and political support is critical for this essential Centre to proceed.

CSFS emphasizes that the organization has a positive relationship with federal and provincial government leadership. Dedicated financial and political support is critical for this essential Healing Centre to proceed. CSFS looks forward to working in collaboration to achieve long-term goals of addressing the ongoing opioid and mental health crises that are disproportionately affecting our communities, and improving Indigenous health in British Columbia.

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¹ SBC 2019, c 44.

² resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295.