



CARRIER SEKANI  
FAMILY SERVICES

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Creating wellness together

## Essential Indigenous Healing Facility to move forward

August 31, 2021

For immediate release

The City of Prince George has passed a bylaw known as the 'Safe Streets bylaw' which is intended to reduce and restrict perceived 'nuisance behaviours' from people, many of whom are living with addictions and experiencing homelessness in the city's urban core. Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS) recognizes the need for safety of all community members. This issue highlights a profound need for health & wellness services and recovery support, a need that is most acute with Indigenous citizens.

An increasingly toxic drug supply, combined with the harms of historical and present-day colonialism, has led to Indigenous people dying from toxic drugs at a much higher rate compared to other BC residents. In 2020, 14.7% of all toxic drug deaths in BC were Indigenous people – a group that represents only 3.3% of BC's total population.

With the eventual development of a holistic Healing/Treatment Centre on Tachick Lake (a newly-acquired property located on the traditional territory of the Saik'uz First Nation, and targeted specifically for this purpose), CSFS will be able to greatly increase the support so sorely needed by many of the people currently suffering on the streets of Prince George, and other communities across BC. Our approach will include detox, cultural and western treatment modalities and aftercare.

CSFS seeks to expand its Addictions Recovery Program from a seasonal service to an all-year round service. While CSFS works toward the development of our new Healing/Treatment Centre with significant addictions recovery support and a cultural safe model, the need for mental health and addictions services in our region has never been greater. Data shows us that in 2019, Indigenous People died at 3.9% times the rate of other BC residents, and that percentage rose to 5.3% in 2020.

Next steps for the Healing/Treatment Centre project will include fundraising for the remaining funds needed to begin construction of the facility and then moving to the Design Phase of the construction process. We continue to work with the Province of BC and the Federal Government to fully fund this project – but the urgency in doing so cannot be understated.

To date less than \$6 million has been committed by the First Nations Health Authority. The costs for a comprehensive healing center is estimated at \$16 million and CSFS has been in discussions with the

federal government, provincial government and the First Nations Health Authority to respond to this need, despite the support demonstrated by the then Minister Marc Miller.

Chief Corrina Leween, CSFS Board President, is further frustrated by the lack of financial commitment from both levels of government to complete the much-needed facility. “CSFS had provided government with data on the opioid and mental health crisis; instead CSFS was told to wait for the completion of government budget estimates” said Chief Leween, “Now, CSFS is caught up in a federal election. It further annoying that governments commit billions to public infrastructure, yet will not invest in Indigenous health facilities.”

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal recently rendered another judgement against the Federal Government to provide funding for capitol projects ready to proceed.

After facing and overcoming hurdles like land exemption from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) for the Healing Centre (located on a long-standing developed resort site) and stagnant requests for full project funding from Federal coffers, Carrier Sekani Family Services is making a public appeal for this Indigenous-led facility to be wholly funded. This call-to-action is correlated with existing recommendations for Truth and Reconciliation. This is a real-world solution that is already underway and its realization will lead to some solutions to the myriad issues facing the public and government leaders today, including working towards ‘safer streets’ for all.

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

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