



For Immediate Release
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BC First Nations Justice Council Receives Funding from Public Safety Canada for Innovative Pre-Charge Diversion Program in Lheidli T'enneh Territory (Prince George, BC)

Public Safety Canada has awarded BCFNJC five years of funding to develop and run a pre-charge pilot program that will divert Indigenous people from entering the justice system and instead offer pathways to healing and support.

Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC: The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) is pleased to announce that a new pre-charge diversion pilot program in Prince George is in the initial stages of development with financial support through Public Safety Canada's Northern and Indigenous Crime Prevention Fund (NICPF).

The NICPF supports the adaptation, development, implementation and evaluation of innovative and promising culturally sensitive crime prevention practices and promotes community safety approaches in Indigenous communities both on and off-reserve and in the North.

The Prince George Pilot Program was designed with funding from the BC Ministry of Attorney General following a recommendation of the [final investigative report](#) into repeat offending and unprovoked attacks released by the Province in 2022. The pilot program aims to interrupt the escalating interactions that vulnerable Indigenous individuals have with law enforcement in Prince George and move towards a culturally sensitive crime prevention model that emphasizes traditional healing, long-term social work case management, and empowerment.

The vision of the pilot program is to advance the presumption of diversion (as articulated in the BC First Nation Justice Strategy) to divert individuals at the point of contact with police who may be experiencing unmet mental health and addictions needs, and housing and income insecurity. Diverted from the usual criminal justice sequence (i.e., charge, prosecution, incarceration, etc.), those who will access the pilot program will instead have rapid access to supportive services and be connected to a social worker over the long term. Where the necessary community-based supports do not exist, BCFNJC will use its tripartite partnership with British Columbia and Canada to identify gaps and find solutions outside the criminal justice system. This approach aims to help break cycles of reoffending, support and protect at-risk individuals, and ensure culturally appropriate, trauma-informed responses are supporting the healing pathways of Indigenous communities.

With the support and partnership of Public Safety Canada, BCFNJC is pleased to pilot a new direction for public safety and policing, grounded in Indigenous ways of healing that recognize the root causes of crime. The project team is currently engaging with the Lheidli T'enneh Nation, surrounding First Nations, urban Indigenous communities, and other local Indigenous groups to ensure the pilot respects their protocols and is informed by community needs. BCFNJC's goal is not to replace existing community services, but to support the community's capacity to meet its diversion needs in a culturally appropriate manner.

Consultation is also currently underway with the Lheidli T'enneh 'Atsiyan Ink'E 'Atsoo Elders Society to ensure that the Prince George Pilot Program carries a meaningful and powerful name that is reflective of the territory on which this important diversion work will take place.

“In partnership with Public Safety Canada, BCFNJC is excited to initiate the Prince George Pilot Program, which will transform how we treat and care for Indigenous people experiencing housing insecurity, poverty, and unmet mental health and addictions needs. We know that police use of force is not an appropriate or effective response to people in crisis, with police encounters often leading to harmful and costly entanglements with the legal system. The pilot program will instead divert people in need to culturally appropriate services in the community. This program will advance diversion, but it requires bold and courageous collaboration from Rightsholders, community service providers, and policing partners alike. We are ready to do this long overdue work in BC, which has proven successful in other jurisdictions nationally and internationally.” – Kory Wilson, BCFNJC Chair.

“The Northern Indigenous Crime Prevention Fund is an important initiative that can foster promising solutions to the challenges faced by our Indigenous communities. I am pleased that it is supporting this pilot program, which can offer insight to support communities across the country.” - the Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan, President of the King’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada

Quick Facts

- The pilot program in Prince George will help uphold the presumption of diversion and Strategy 1 of the [BC First Nations Justice Strategy](#). Strategy 1 aims to establish multiple checkpoints throughout the justice system where the presumption of diversion can be applied. This means that at every point in time, culturally appropriate alternative responses to the existing justice system are considered and Indigenous individuals are supported in ways that help them avoid future incarceration.
- In August 2021, the Department of Justice Canada (JUS), the Government of BC and the BCFNJC signed an MOU, committing to work together to advance shared First Nations justice priorities—including through the BC Strategy and Canada’s development of a federal Indigenous Justice Strategy. In May 2023, Public Safety Canada joined JUS in signing on to the Tripartite MOU.
- In October 2022, British Columbia received the final investigative report about the challenges of repeat offending and unprovoked attacks. Authors Dr. Amanda Butler and Doug LePard made 28 recommendations, including providing funding to BCFNJC to develop a pilot project to better support Indigenous people in Prince George who come into conflict with the law. BC will provide in kind support to the project through their participation on BCFNJC’s Steering Committees.
- The Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs established the Northern and Indigenous Crime Prevention Fund to support projects that fulfill objectives related to the adaptation, development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative and culturally sensitive crime prevention practices that will help reduce vulnerability to crime among at-risk Indigenous and northern populations.
- The Lheidli T’enneh are the original caretakers of their lands, waterways and people, and their territory is home to a vibrant urban Indigenous community from many parts of BC and Canada. However, the traumatic experience of colonization and its complex web of injustices and indignities has led to a growing Indigenous population experiencing homelessness in Prince George, many of whom are women.
- Prince George has been one of the cities hardest hit by B.C.’s toxic drug crisis, regularly recording the highest death rate per capita. In 2022, 87 people died of toxic drugs in the city, an average of one person every four days, and many of them were Indigenous.
- In B.C., one in five interactions with police involve someone with a mental-health disorder.

ABOUT THE BCFNJC

The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) was created by the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs who together form the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC). BCFNJC represents BC First Nations on justice-related issues to bring about transformative change to the legal system. BCFNJC is guided by the unique and comprehensive BC First Nations Justice Strategy (the Strategy) which was jointly developed by the BC First Nations Justice Council, BC First Nations communities and the Province of British Columbia. The Strategy advances 25 individual strategies along two tracks of change: reforming the current criminal justice system and restoring Indigenous justice systems, legal traditions, and structures.

Today, BCFNJC is a dynamic, expanding non-profit organization that is making a powerful, enduring mark on the justice landscape. Guided by the vision and voices of Indigenous leadership, including our Elders and Knowledge Keepers, we employ over 150 people with diverse professional, cultural, and community expertise who are working hard to implement the Justice Strategy and advance Indigenous self-determination over justice. With the direction and support of First Nations communities, work will continue to transform the mainstream colonial justice system and champion innovative, Indigenous-led justice solutions. Visit [Tracking Justice](#) for more information.

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