

Press release



National Association
of Friendship Centres
Association nationale
des centres d'amitié



REGROUPEMENT
DES CENTRES D'AMITIÉ
AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC

National Forum on Urban Indigenous Health Governance in Care, Health Services and Healing

Time to act on Indigenous health inequities: ending discrimination based on place of residence

Montreal, May 29, 2025 – During the *National Forum on Urban Indigenous Health Governance in Care, Health Services and Healing*, the Native Friendship Centres from across the country are making an urgent appeal to the Government of Canada. These Friendship Centres, from 9 provinces and 3 territories, are calling for an end to the glaring inequity in health and social services for urban Indigenous people living outside their home communities. Their health and wellness indicators reveal a significant gap with the rest of the population, and it's time that this be addressed.

With their *Statement for More Inclusive Indigenous Health*, the Friendship Centres are calling on the federal government to immediately commit to the following:

- Recognize the **distinct needs** of all indigenous populations, regardless of where they live;
- Unreservedly recognize **the expertise of the Friendship Centres** in providing front-line services for Indigenous people living in urban areas; and
- Provide **stable, flexible and permanent funding** to the Friendship Centres, to enable them to develop or enhance health and social services within their infrastructures.

Urban Indigenous people continue to be marginalized and face many cultural, linguistic and social barriers in a health care system that is designed for the non-Indigenous reality. Public policy currently favours Indigenous people living on reserves, while the majority (59.4%¹) of First Nations members live permanently in cities. This geographical favouritism creates a huge imbalance every day.

Friendship Centres: On the front line

Many Friendship Centres have taken the initiative to open their own community health clinics tailored to the needs of Indigenous people. They take action despite there being little to no federal funding

¹ Statistics Canada, 2021.

earmarked for health services for urban Indigenous populations, in addition to a lack of official recognition. Urban Indigenous people's specific realities raise unique challenges that Friendship Centres are best equipped to address, but doing so requires formal recognition as well as a significant financial investment.

The importance of cultural safety

In cities, Indigenous people face many challenges in accessing appropriate healthcare. Public health care personnel have a limited understanding of Indigenous realities, which can lead to snap judgments and discriminatory attitudes. It's not enough to acknowledge the existence of systemic racism in public services; concrete action must be taken to eliminate it, including by investing in indigenous health clinics that meet the specific needs of urban Indigenous and promote equitable access to care.

Quote

"Ignoring the health needs of urban Indigenous people perpetuates historical injustices. By improving their physical and mental health, we help establish a healthier population that learns, works, creates, provides care and passes on knowledge."

Jocelyn W. Formsma, Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Friendship Centres

About the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)

The NAFC represents over 100 local Friendship Centres and provincial/territorial associations across the country (excluding Prince Edward Island). Friendship Centres are urban Indigenous community hubs that offer a wide range of programs and services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people living in urban, rural and northern communities. Collectively, Friendship Centres form the largest urban Indigenous service delivery network in Canada.

About the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ)

The RCAAQ is a network of 11 Friendship Centres in 14 Quebec cities, offering Indigenous people culturally relevant and safe services that contribute to the harmony and reconciliation between peoples in Quebec cities. The Friendship Centres are the largest urban service infrastructure for Indigenous people, offering a range of integrated services in a variety of sectors, including health, social services, justice, social inclusion, education, employability, early childhood and youth.

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Information

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