

PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

**Public inquiry into the death of Pasha Ekoomiak:
Reaction from the Val-d'Or Indigenous Friendship Centre**

Val-d'Or, May 13, 2026 — The Val-d'Or Indigenous Friendship Centre (VDIFC) welcomes the findings of the public inquiry report by coroner Me Stéphanie Gamache, which follows legitimate questions regarding the care and services received by Ms. Pasha Ekoomiak, an Inuk/Cree woman, anglophone and experiencing homelessness, at the Val-d'Or Hospital prior to her death.

While acknowledging that Ms. Ekoomiak received care that was diligent and in accordance with medical standards from the healthcare team, the VDIFC wishes to emphasize that Pasha's life trajectory, marked by suffering, social disconnection, and significant precarity, highlights the importance of strengthening social safety nets, reinforcing community partnerships and, in an Indigenous context, grounding services in a genuine and ongoing process of cultural safety.

The coroner recognizes the VDIFC's expertise and urban Indigenous governance

The Val-d'Or Indigenous Friendship Centre notes that the coroner retained three of the four recommendations submitted by the VDIFC and recognizes it as an “urban Indigenous governance instance in Val-d'Or” actively working to improve quality of life, promote cultural resurgence, and advance reconciliation.

Concretely, the Centre's approach to addressing homelessness is based on upstream work through the implementation of structural solutions, including the construction of social housing, the creation of culturally safe living environments, access to justice, and the provision of frontline services through its Indigenous health clinic.

In line with Call to Action No. 97 of the Viens Commission, the VDIFC welcomes the coroner's Recommendation R-7, which calls on the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services to ensure sustainable funding for the Indigenous health clinic. This recommendation recognizes the clinic as “an example of [systemic] progress in improving access to frontline services while respecting cultural and identity realities.”

The VDIFC calls on the Government of Quebec to act promptly and sustainably on this recommendation by ensuring stable, recurring, and adequate funding for its Indigenous health clinic. This represents a fundamental act of responsibility, commitment, and reconciliation, acknowledging years of close collaboration and co-development between the Friendship Centre and the CISSS de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue to concretely improve access to culturally relevant and respectful healthcare and social services for First Nations and Inuit.

Honouring the memory of Pasha Ekoomiak

The Val-d'Or Indigenous Friendship Centre wishes to honour the memory of Pasha Ekoomiak. Her death must not be in vain.

Remembering her journey is to remember that behind every situation of homelessness lies a human life, a story, a dignity that must be recognized—particularly that of Indigenous women, who too often face invisibility and exclusion. It also affirms that our collective choices—in health, social services, justice, and public safety—must first aim to protect, support, and accompany, rather than exclude or penalize poverty.

The findings of the coroner's report underscore the importance of responses grounded in support, prevention, and decriminalization. In Val-d'Or, for over a decade, these approaches have contributed to improving both individual well-being and collective safety. Replacing these concerted efforts with a return to repressive measures and the abandonment of alternative justice approaches would risk increasing marginalization and weakening the social progress achieved in our community.

Because every life matters...

The Val-d'Or of today is no longer the “Far West” of yesterday. Despite the tensions surrounding the issue of homelessness, we choose to believe in a city that is increasingly open to diversity, that reaches out to others, and that chooses humanity in the face of fragility and vulnerability.

Beyond its findings and recommendations, the public inquiry report by Me Stéphanie Gamache on the death of Pasha Ekoomiak reminds us of our collective responsibility toward the most vulnerable. It calls on us to continue, with even greater determination and solidarity, our efforts to build in Val-d'Or—and across Quebec—a society where dignity, respect, and humanity are never negotiable, and where every life truly matters.

About

A welcoming gathering place and platform for expression, the Val-d'Or Indigenous Friendship Centre advocates for the well-being, rights, and individual and collective interests of Indigenous people living in an urban context.

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