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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2024PREM0001-000022  
Jan. 11, 2024

Office of the Premier  
Ministry of Attorney General  
BC First Nations Justice Council

### **Justice centre expansion will create safer communities, change lives**

VANCOUVER – More Indigenous people will have access to culturally safe, Indigenous-led legal supports and services with five new Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) now operating in Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, Surrey and Kelowna.

“Making our communities safer means addressing the core issues that bring people into conflict with the law and their neighbours – a lifetime in and out of jail and back again doesn’t make anybody safer,” said Premier David Eby. “We have to break that cycle. For Indigenous people in B.C., the solutions to break that cycle are most likely to be successful if they’re culturally grounded. I’m very grateful to the First Nations Justice Council for working with us to deliver safer communities and help change lives.”

In B.C., Indigenous Peoples make up approximately 5% of the population, but they account for approximately 30% of those incarcerated provincially. A key part of making communities safer is addressing why people come into contact with the justice system in the first place so it can be prevented from happening.

“What we have accomplished with the expansion of the IJC network in B.C. is astonishing. In collaboration with First Nations and Indigenous communities, organizations, and leaders across the province, we have successfully established five new IJCs in the span of 12 months, hired a strong team of lawyers, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and outreach workers and are ready to serve the needs of Indigenous people,” said Kory Wilson, chair, BC First Nations Justice Council. “I want to thank the provincial government for recognizing the dire need to correct the harms inflicted by a broken system, and for working with us at this rapid pace to create safe, welcoming spaces in communities that place decision-making back into the hands of communities and provide Indigenous people with access to critical legal and wraparound supports and services.”

The opening of IJCs is an important part of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy (BCFNJC), which advances 43 transformative lines of action along two tracks to change lives and outcomes for Indigenous people. IJCs are advancing track 1 work of the strategy, reforming the existing justice system, while providing a foundation for track 2 work of the strategy, the restoration of First Nations legal traditions, systems and structures.

“Everyone deserves equitable access to legal services,” said Niki Sharma, Attorney General. “In addition to being culturally safe, community-based spaces, these regional IJCs can be sites for dialogue and support for First Nations to develop justice solutions at the community level, partner on local priorities, expand their services or revitalize their legal orders. I would like to thank BCFNJC and all involved for their hard work and collaboration to get these five IJCs up

and running to serve more Indigenous communities.”

The IJCs aim to help Indigenous people involved in the justice system address the root causes of their involvement and offer supports to help prevent future interactions with police and the justice system. Recognizing that justice issues do not exist in isolation and should be addressed holistically, the centres facilitate connections to supports such as Elders and Knowledge Keepers, as well as wraparound services. These services include housing, mental-health and addictions treatment, and employment services.

“Before Vancouver existed, the x̱m̱əθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and sə̱lilw̱ətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations administered their own unique legal systems, traditions and protocols, honouring the teachings of Elders and grounding justice in community,” said Squamish Nation Council spokesperson Sx̱w̱ix̱wṯn Wilson Williams. “The IJC will serve Indigenous people properly, addressing the root causes of why they require legal supports and services to ensure they don’t encounter the colonial justice system ever again. Squamish Nation is excited to continue alongside BCFNJC and the Musqueam and Tseil-Waututh Nations to ensure the Vancouver IJC reflects our traditions and protocols and is giving back to Indigenous clients in a way that upholds the culture, values and richness of our communities.”

Each of the new IJCs will offer services to Indigenous people facing criminal or child protection legal matters. The range of services and the focus in each location will vary based on the needs, strengths and services already available in each community. Each IJC is designed collaboratively to ensure they meet the local needs.

Indigenous Justice Centres are a key part of the Province’s commitment to implement the BC First Nations Justice Strategy and advance reconciliation under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act). They are also a key action in the Safer Communities Action Plan.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- There are currently four physical Indigenous Justice Centres operating across the province in Chilliwack, Prince Rupert, Prince George and Merritt, as well as a virtual IJC that serves the entire province.
- Since the beginning of the 2023, existing IJCs have served more than 500 people with legal issues and provided referral services.
- As part of the Safer Communities Action Plan, in partnership with the BC First Nations Justice Council, the Province has committed to increasing the total IJCs in B.C. to 15 by the end of 2024-25.

#### **Learn More:**

For information about the BC First Nations Justice Council, visit: <https://www.bcfnjc.com>

For information about the virtual Indigenous Justice Centre, visit: <https://bcfnjc.com/virtual-indigenous-justice-centre>

For information about the Indigenous Justice Centres in Chilliwack, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/28978>

To read the BC First Nations Justice Strategy,

visit: [https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/First\\_Nations\\_Justice\\_Strategy\\_Feb\\_2020.pdf](https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/First_Nations_Justice_Strategy_Feb_2020.pdf)

For information about hosting an IJC in 2024, visit: <https://bcfnjc.com/2024-ijcs>

For information about how Indigenous Justice Centres fit into the Safer Communities Action Plan, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022PREM0090-001743>

A backgrounder follows.

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## BACKGROUND

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### **Indigenous Justice Centres and the services they offer**

**Kelowna IJC:** 275 Lawrence Ave., Kelowna

Located on Syilx territory, the Kelowna IJC will offer legal and community-based services to Indigenous people in the southern Interior of the province. The IJC will include a flexible space that can be used for justice-related training. The Kelowna IJC will also house part of the BCFNJC leadership team.

**Nanaimo IJC:** 17 Church St., Nanaimo

Located on Snuneymuxw First Nation territory, the Nanaimo IJC will be a downtown location, close to the courthouse, for legal services, which welcomes Indigenous people and their families to access related services. It will also house the provincial co-ordination of a Gladue services team of writers and workers supporting people embarking on a healing plan as a part of their sentence.

**Surrey IJC:** 13041 108 Ave., Surrey

Located on the territory of the Semiahmoo First Nation and overlooking the Fraser River, the Surrey IJC will reflect Coast Salish cultural practices. It will offer a mix of legal and community-based services to First Nations and Métis people, as well as access to Elders and outreach teams. Like all IJCs, Gladue writers and workers will work out of the space, producing Gladue reports for the court in sentencing hearings.

**Vancouver IJC:** 510 Beatty St., Vancouver

Located on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, the Vancouver IJC will provide services to both members of the local Nations and to the large urban Indigenous community in Vancouver. The Vancouver IJC will also be the hub for planning for transition of legal aid services to BCFNJC and house staff in BCFNJC's police accountability unit.

**Victoria IJC:** 794 Yates St., Victoria

Located on the territory of the Lekwungen peoples and the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, the Victoria IJC will provide services to Indigenous people on the south end of Vancouver Island and house the community and Elder engagement team. Services in the IJC will include legal and outreach supports linked to the community services available both in Victoria and through local First Nations. The Victoria IJC will also be a focus for liaising with provincial organizations such as the BC Association of Friendship Centres and with the provincial government.

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