



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

PRESS RELEASE

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Friendship Centres ready to assist with urban Indigenous Covid-19 vaccine rollout

Approximately two-thirds of the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) members have expressed interest in supporting national vaccine roll out, representing nearly 60 sites.

“We know that at least 50 to 60 Friendship Centres across the country are ready and able to take on a Covid-19 vaccine clinic should they be supported by the appropriate decision makers,” said NAFC executive director Jocelyn Formsma. “We also know of many other urban Indigenous organizations that are also interested and able to provide supports.”

As vaccine rollout advances across the country, the NAFC expresses concerns that without a standard or plan, urban Indigenous people may be left out in some regions.

“We have been encouraged to see some provinces include urban Indigenous specific strategies in their overall vaccination action plans, however, not all provinces yet have them and for those that do, the strategies must include concrete follow up,” continues Formsma. “The best way to engage with urban Indigenous community members is to ensure that Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous organizations are full partners in vaccine rollout. Otherwise, we fear that the level of vaccine accessibility and uptake in urban Indigenous communities will be unnecessarily low.”

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recently updated its [Guidance on the prioritization of key populations for COVID-19 immunization](#) to include in Stage 2 - “Adults in or from Indigenous communities not offered vaccine in Stage 1.” Previously, only “Adults in Indigenous communities” were included in Stage 1. This update ensures that Indigenous adults, regardless of residency, are included in priority planning.

“Indigenous peoples are constantly traveling between urban and home communities, there are the same comorbidities, and lack of accessibility to culturally safe vaccination sites, so it is essential that urban Indigenous people are treated with the same urgency as on-reserve, northern, and remote First Nations, Metis and Inuit,” says NAFC President Christopher Sheppard.

The NAFC is encouraged by recent urban Indigenous vaccine clinics that have already been implemented in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Whitehorse, with local urban Indigenous partners and Indigenous governments, and are aware of plans that are in place for more clinics in other regions soon. The NAFC would like to see these examples of culturally safer vaccine clinics replicated broadly across the country.

Ultimately, the NAFC would like to ensure that the Covid-19 vaccine rollout is swift and efficient for the safety and security of all Canadians. Friendship Centres are ready to assist provincial and





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federal governments to ensure that urban Indigenous communities are prioritized in Covid-19 immunizations strategies.

FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES:

Sara Kelly
Communications Officer
communications@nafc.ca

The NAFC represents over 100 local Friendship Centres and Provincial/Territorial Associations in every province and territory in Canada (except Prince Edward Island). Friendship Centres are urban Indigenous community hubs that provide a wide range of programs and services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people living in urban, rural, and northern communities. Collectively, Friendship Centres are the largest and most comprehensive urban Indigenous service delivery network in Canada.

