



May 23, 2023

Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Whiteside,

Re: Urgent need for a culturally appropriate detox centre in Northwest B.C.

I am writing to follow up on the exchanges that I had with Minister Rankin during both Supplementary estimates and Budget estimates about the proposal by the Northern First Nations Alliance (NFNA) to establish a culturally appropriate and holistic health, wellness, and detox centre in Terrace to address the shortage of treatment facilities in northwest British Columbia.

My colleague Ellis Ross, the MLA for Skeena, first brought this project to my attention, and we have met with members of the NFNA Health and Wellness Committee about their proposed project and related feasibility study, as well as their struggles to obtain funding.

The proposed facility would help meet the growing need for easily accessible wraparound mental health services in the Northwest. Currently, there is no detox centre in the Northwest, even though the region had the highest rates per population of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2022 according to Northern Health. The closest detox centre is in Prince George, which is more than 500 kilometres away and leaves many members of the NFNA and surrounding communities unable to access the care they need.

The lack of facilities in the Northwest is very concerning as there are many people in dire need of these services. This project would be immensely beneficial to the community, however after years of advocacy, the NFNA has received little assistance from the government. The NFNA previously reached out to the government in 2022 and received a response that provided no indication of any funding support and only directed the NFNA to seek financial assistance from third-party funders.

As the NFNA continued to be challenged to receive any buy-in from the government, the NFNA obtained funding from the First Nations Health Authority to conduct a feasibility study in June 2022. This feasibility study was finalized in February 2023 and concludes that not only would it be beneficial for a treatment centre to be established in northwest B.C., but it is also desperately needed due to the lack of available services. This validation highlights the ongoing question of why the government has not met the NFNA's funding requests for the centre.



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

The NFNA has laid out its plans and the costs that would be involved in this project and provided all this information to the government in a clear report. We urge you to recognize the importance of this project and work with the NFNA to build a detox centre that will have a significant positive impact on those struggling with addictions.

I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Michael Lee
MLA for Vancouver-Langara
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

CC: Hon. Murray Rankin
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

CC: Ellis Ross, MLA for Skeena
Shadow Minister for Energy and LNG

CC: Elenore Sturko, MLA for Surrey South
Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Addiction, Recovery and Education