

# **Proposal For a Northeastern Alberta Recovery Community: Healing Through Culture and Tradition**

## **Introduction:**

We propose the establishment of a recovery community in northeastern Alberta's Lakeland district. A culturally appropriate and holistic treatment centre designed to address addiction and mental health challenges in consultation with northeastern Alberta communities, First Nations and Metis Settlements (FNMI), the business community and area friendship centres. This initiative is inspired by the Blood Tribe Recovery Community and the Tsuut'ina Nation Recovery Facility. Our primary objective is to create a secure and supportive environment that leverages the wisdom of Indigenous traditions. This environment will foster healing, growth, and empowerment for up to 300 individuals annually.

While this proposal is committed to addressing and accommodating First Nations and Metis considerations, it is important to highlight that its scope extends beyond these communities.

## **Background:**

The opioid crisis and substance abuse have profoundly impacted all communities in northeastern Alberta, mirroring a nationwide concern. The surge in addiction-related fatalities emphasizes the urgent need for targeted and immediate interventions that can address the distinct challenges faced by these communities. This crisis has triggered a distressing increase in criminal and violent activities across northeastern Alberta's communities. Individuals grappling with addiction often resort to property crimes to finance their habits, creating a distressing pattern. This not only elevates tensions and conflicts but also strains relationships within these communities, leading to a troubling rise in violent confrontations. Moreover, compromised decision-making resulting from drug abuse, combined with interactions with law enforcement, significantly escalates the potential for these situations to escalate into acts of violence.

Notably, every major community in the region, including Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Elk Point, and St. Paul, ranks within the top 30 for violent crime on the nationwide Crime Severity Index (CSI), significantly surpassing the national average.<sup>1</sup> Cold Lake witnessed an astounding 33% surge in violent crime during 2022, underscoring the acute nature of this crisis.

Additionally, when examining non-violent crime through the CSI, Bonnyville ranks 9th in Canada, closely followed by St. Paul at 11th place. Elk Point holds the 23rd position, while Cold Lake secures the 31st spot. In terms of overall crime, both Bonnyville and St. Paul rank 13th and 14th, respectively, in the national rankings. Elk Point and Cold Lake also feature prominently within the top 25 communities for overall crime in Canada. This marks an unprecedented rise in crime in communities where residents could once leave their homes and car doors unlocked. Residents now grapple with an unfamiliar reality. While this is not solely the result of addiction, it plays a substantial role. Anecdotes from law enforcement in the area indicate 70 - 80% of the crimes occurring are ultimately drug and alcohol related.

Amidst these daunting circumstances, a glimmer of hope emerges through the creation of new treatment and recovery centers in Alberta. These centers have the potential to demonstrate real results, effectively showcasing the power of culturally sensitive approaches in fostering recovery and enhancing broader health outcomes. These initiatives signify a meaningful step toward addressing the unique needs of communities and formulating comprehensive strategies to combat the multifaceted impacts of the opioid crisis and substance abuse.

### **Objectives:**

**Create a culturally sensitive recovery center:** The proposed recovery community will be rooted in faith and culture, incorporating Indigenous traditions, values, and practices to provide a nurturing and empowering environment for healing. Participants from other religious backgrounds will be accepted and supported by inviting their respective faith leaders to offer personal guidance.

**Promote holistic healing:** The recovery center will address not only addiction but also mental health, intergenerational trauma, and related challenges. Our aim is to foster comprehensive and enduring recovery.

**Capacity and accessibility:** With 75 recovery beds, the center will accommodate up to 300 individuals annually, ensuring accessibility for those most in need within the Lakeland and surrounding communities.

**Empower Indigenous leadership:** The facility will be developed in consultation with the region's First Nations and Metis Settlements, empowering the community to lead their healing journey.

**Strengthen the continuum of care:** The recovery community will integrate seamlessly into Alberta's recovery model, supporting participants' recovery and reintegration into their communities for sustainable well-being.

### **Approach:**

**Culturally Appropriate Programming:** The recovery center will provide an array of programs and therapies, tailored to meet the diverse needs of its participants. For individuals of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) heritage, the center will offer a rich selection of offerings rooted in Indigenous cultural practices. These offerings encompass traditional healing methods, ceremonial practices, lodge experiences, storytelling circles, initiatives for the revitalization of Indigenous languages, and various other approaches aimed at aiding participants in reestablishing a profound connection with their cultural heritage. Moreover, participants hailing from different religious traditions will be accommodated by inviting their respective faith leaders to provide guidance and support. This ensures that the recovery center respects and addresses the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals from varying religious backgrounds.

**Holistic Treatment Model:** A multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, including addiction specialists, counselors, psychologists, and traditional healers, will develop personalized treatment plans addressing the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of healing.

**Aftercare and Community Support:** Upon program completion, participants will receive ongoing support and aftercare services to aid their transition back into their communities. We will establish partnerships with local support networks to ensure continuity of care.

**Community Involvement:** Engaging family members and the broader community in the recovery process is essential for successful outcomes. Regular family therapy sessions and community events will be organized to build a network of support.

### **Regional Partnership:**

The center is envisioned as a collaborative effort between the Alberta Government and the communities in northeastern Alberta, spanning several ridings. This area encompasses approximately 60,000 residents (excluding FNMI), and the centre will serve Cold Lake, Bonnyville, St. Paul, Vermilion, Vegreville, Smokey Lake, and Lac La Biche. An important driving force behind this partnership will be the need to address the surging crime rates that place most of these communities among the top thirty highest overall crime rates in Canada.

### **FNMI Partnership:**

The center will also be in partnership with regional Friendship Centres, including the Mannawanis Native Friendship Centre Society, the Bonnyville Friendship Centre, and the Cold Lake Native Friendship Centre. Additionally, it will engage four local First Nations and two Métis Settlements, namely Frog Lake First Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, Saddle Lake First Nation, Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, and Elizabeth Métis Settlement. The recovery center is intended to serve an FNMI population totaling at least 25,511 people, excluding off-settlement Métis.

### **Funding and Timeline:**

We propose an investment comparable to that of the Blood Tribe Recovery Community and the Tsuut'ina Nation Recovery Facility. Construction is set to commence in 2026, with completion targeted for late 2027. Early planning and collaboration with the involved communities will ensure a smooth and efficient process.

### **Conclusion:**

A Lakeland region recovery community stands as a transformative initiative building upon successful Indigenous-led treatment center models. By offering culturally appropriate treatment and holistic healing, our goal is to empower individuals, families, and communities in northeastern Alberta to break free from the cycle of addiction and foster enduring well-being. We seek support from the Alberta government and relevant stakeholders to materialize this project and contribute to the broader objective of creating a healthier and more resilient Alberta.