

# Media Advisory

To: All BC Media Outlets

## Critical Funding in Peril for Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Organizations

*(Metro Vancouver – March 13, 2014)* Metro Vancouver – The Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) social service providers members' funding is in peril due to the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) Minister Bernard Valcourt's February 6th, 2014 decision to consolidate four Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) programs into two. The decision was made without adequate consultation of Aboriginal social service providers in cities across Canada as well as Metro Vancouver. Instead of increasing the economic participation of urban Aboriginal people, MVAEC social service providers will lose vital programs provided for Aboriginal youth, children and families, the less fortunate, and those who live in extreme poverty, in the following areas: poverty reduction, youth engagement, education, employment and training, housing, health and wellness, and arts, culture and language. The decision by the Government of Canada marks a serious lack of transition planning that would ensure there are no funding or services gaps from Aboriginal service providers to the urban Aboriginal community in Metro Vancouver. With funding set to expire March 31, 2014 and no transition plan in place, many programs currently running in Metro Vancouver will simply come to an end. The impact on these service organizations and Aboriginal people (who can least afford it!) will be widely felt

The Metro Vancouver urban Aboriginal population is the largest urban Aboriginal population in British Columbia with the highest social needs of any other population. Culturally based social service programs offered by the MVAEC members are critical to the well-being of the urban Aboriginal community. With anticipated gaps in UAS programs expected to last several months while Government and its new partner agency work out its working relationships, the impact to the Aboriginal community is expected to displace many. "Like the Friendship Centres in British Columbia, the MVAEC and its member agencies will suffer and services to marginalized youth, woman, children, and those less fortunate will result in higher numbers of child apprehensions, higher rates of suicides, increased child poverty, hunger, and increased suffering for young people" said Christine Martin, Executive Director of the Vancouver Aboriginal Transformative Justice Services Society and Co-Chair of the MVAEC. "There will be more use in the justice system, more visits to hospital waiting rooms, and an increase in homelessness in cities such as Vancouver and Surrey" said Martin. With over 12,000 clients on wait-lists for service in Vancouver and over 183,000 client visits annually to MVAEC member agencies, Aboriginal peoples cannot wait while Government works out its new urban services working relationship.

The MVAEC is the largest network of Aboriginal social service providers in the lower mainland with some of its member agencies providing services for the past 50 years. Collectively MVAEC member agencies have approximately 1,000 workers and nearly 200,000 client visits annually from the

urban Aboriginal community. The MVAEC and its collective agencies provide services in Justice, Housing Homelessness, Child, Youth and Families, Arts, Culture, Language and Elders, Education, Training Employment and Health and Wellness. The MVAEC and its member agencies are the leading Aboriginal agencies in the Lower Mainland and must be engaged by government and others before decisions like this recent announcement by Minister Bernard Valcourt. With the largest urban Aboriginal investments and asset base anywhere in British Columbia, the MVAEC, like many other urban Aboriginal social service providers across Canada (see: Winnipeg, Toronto, etc.), have been left out of the discussions leading to significant and detrimental consequences for the Aboriginal people now being served.

The MVAEC is calling on the Minister Valcourt and the Government of Canada to work with the MVAEC and its member agencies to ensure that adequate levels of funding currently provided to support Aboriginal people in the lower mainland and those seeking to participate in the economy have a chance to do so without fear of losing their programs altogether because of a lack of forward planning to create a transition from the current UAS program to a new relationship. The lack of adequate consultation on this front is now creating serious service gaps and an impending crisis for Aboriginal youth, women, and children, and those who less fortunate. The Government of Canada must maintain its current funding to those MVAEC funded agencies until a transition plan is completed and secured in consultations with said Aboriginal service providers in the lower mainland.

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