

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

The Native Friendship Centre unveils its large-scale, unifying project

Val-d'Or, May 1, 2023 _ The Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre is proud to announce a major infrastructure renovation and expansion project in downtown Val-d'Or.

The announcement was made in the presence of the Minister of Crown-Aboriginal Relations, the Honourable Marc Miller and the Minister responsible for First Nations and Inuit Relations, Ian Lafrenière. This project represents an investment of \$60 million, of which \$40 million comes from the Government of Canada, more specifically from Infrastructure Canada (\$25 million), and from Indigenous Services Canada (\$15 million). As announced in the last provincial budget, Quebec will contribute \$10 million. The Native Friendship Centre has also received support from the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, which is contributing \$10 million.

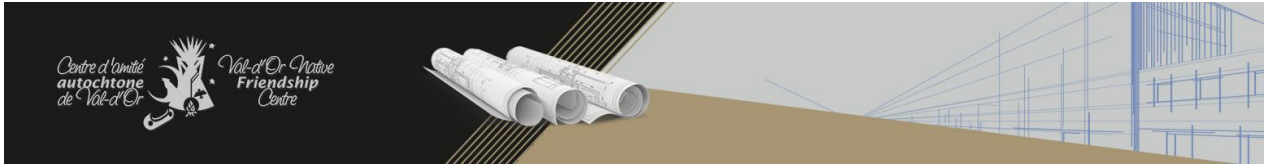
The Centre was assisted by the City of Val-d'Or, which, in addition to supporting the project, helped facilitate the team's work throughout the process.

With a view to consolidating its social and community vocation and increasing its social economy activities, this project will generate significant spin-offs in its milieu, whether through an enriched offer of culturally relevant and safe services for the community members, access to community spaces and living environments, job creation and the participation of Indigenous people in the economy, all of which will promote the improvement of the quality of life of First Peoples in Val-d'Or.

A forward-looking project

The project involves the construction of a new five-storey pavilion, adjacent to the Centre's current building and dedicated in part to accommodation services. This pavilion will be built on the Centre's land, on the existing parking space. The building will be entirely carbon neutral and will be highly energy efficient and resilient to climate change. The current building will be completely renovated in order to ensure the sustainability of its infrastructures, to redevelop the spaces freed up by the expansion, to increase its capacity to deploy an enriched offer of services to the community and to develop living environments promoting Indigenous users' well-being.

The new pavilion will also include the reception, kitchen, dining room, community living areas, office space, a multi-purpose room and the Indigenous Health Clinic. In total, the new extension will cover an area of 4194 m².



A culturally safe partnership

For nearly 50 years, the Centre has been one of the providers of accommodation services for patients of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) who come to Val-d'Or to receive health care. The two organizations are pleased to announce their continued partnership. The three upper floors of the new pavilion will include 48 rooms with private bathrooms, for a total of 90 beds, as well as communal areas specifically for Cree patients to socialise and prepare meals together. Thus, the Centre will become a key player in the accommodation of CBHSSJB patients and their close caregivers who accompany them to Val-d'Or.

A venue for artists and knowledge-carriers

In addition to being a unifying project, it is an exceptional opportunity to affirm the identity and pride of the Anicinabe First Nation as well as other First Peoples who live in, frequent and transit through Val-d'Or. It will provide a space for the dissemination of culture, identity, language and territorial issues. It will allow Indigenous artists to spread and share the knowledge and traditions of Indigenous peoples, especially the Anicinabek.

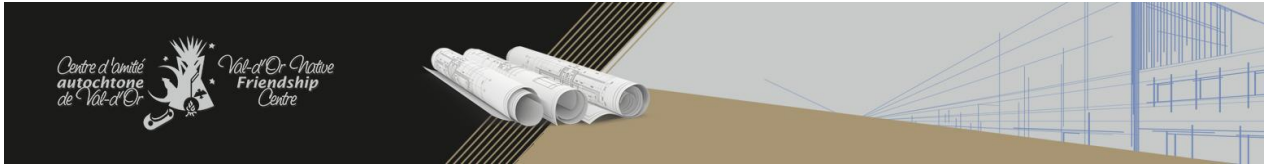
About the VDNFC

The Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre is a privileged gathering place and a public forum advocating for the well-being, rights and individual and collective interests of Indigenous people coping with the urban reality.

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Our partners' quotes

"This project is more than an infrastructure project. It traces a path towards reconciliation and is part of a process of cultural safety and bridge-building between peoples that reflects the very mission of the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre. Integrating a cultural approach into the project enriches its contribution to the community. The contribution of Indigenous knowledge-carriers, artists and artisans gives the project an invaluable sense of purpose and identity."

Oscar Kistabish, President, Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre

"It is a real pleasure to participate in this announcement and to reiterate our support for the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre. This organization, which acts as an anchor for the region's Indigenous community, has already accomplished a great deal and these investments will allow it to pursue its mission of social, economic and cultural development within the community. Access to culturally safe services will be all the more important in our all-out struggle to end the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. With the contributions of the Province of Quebec and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation adding to our own, the future of the Native Friendship Centre is very promising."

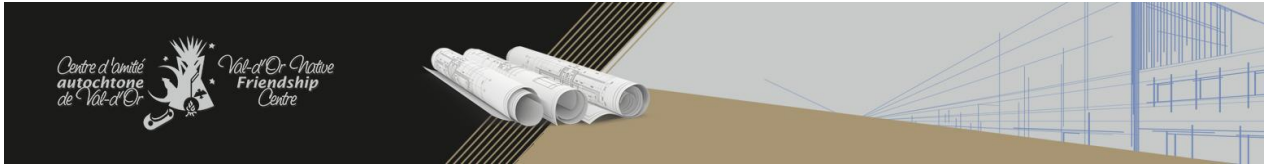
Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Aboriginal Relations, on behalf of the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities

"The expansion of the Native Friendship Centre will allow First Nations members who are transiting through Val-d'Or for health care to find a modern accommodation where they will find community services and an environment with a cultural identity. I am proud that we are participating in such a great initiative."

Ian Lafrenière, Minister responsible for First Nations and Inuit Relations

"Investments in community and social infrastructure are essential to our population's well-being and quality of life. Every opportunity must be taken to improve and enhance these services. Thanks to the vision and dynamism of organizations such as the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, our community will continue to position itself as an important service centre for First Peoples. The City of Val-d'Or is proud that this project is moving forward in our community."

Céline Brindamour, Mayor, City of Val-d'Or



"Our support for this project is the result of several years of close collaboration during which we have built a strong trust relationship with the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre's team. It allows us to participate, in our own way, in the implementation of the recommendations of numerous commissions of enquiry aimed at reconciliation."

Andrea Clarke, President, Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon

The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay is a key player in this infrastructure project we agreed to support. For our clientele who needs to move away from their community to receive health cares, it is fundamental for us to ensure the best conditions during their stay. Our expectations have been met and we acknowledge the efforts of the Native Friendship Centre to offer dedicated lodging and a safety to our clients, as well as a revitalized and welcoming environment that respects indigenous culture and traditions.

*Bertie Wapachee, Chairperson of the Board of directors,
Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay*

The current service corridor between the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay and the CISSS de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue facilitates access to care for nearly 9,000 Cree patients and their caregivers each year. More than 80% of them are accommodated in hotels in Val d'Or and the surrounding area due to a lack of accommodation resources. With an average length of stay of four nights for our clientele, some of whom with a fragile health, our partnership with the Native Friendship Centre will be an added value to our service offer. It also represents a mutual trust between our two organizations.

*Daniel St-Amour, Executive director,
Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay*