

Political Landscape

Relevant Details

- Urban Aboriginal populations are growing at a very fast rate, but the Federal and Provincial governments are not adapting to this reality fast enough to ensure that off-reserve Aboriginal people have access to programs and services that on-reserve Aboriginal people have.
- Federally, the Congress of Aboriginal People and the National Association of Friendship Centres have a mandate to advocate for urban Aboriginal people. The Assembly of First Nations' main focus is on-reserve status people. They state that they represent all Aboriginal people, although this is not apparent to most off-reserve Aboriginal people.
- In Vancouver, the United Native Nations is the only politically-mandated organization.
- There continues to be resistance from both municipal and provincial governments to the federal devolution of responsibility for urban Aboriginal people. Until there is some form of agreement, urban Aboriginal people will continue to suffer the socio/economic burdens associated with being a marginalized group of people caught between bureaucracies.
- The vast majority of Aboriginal people in Vancouver live off-reserve, with less than 1% living on the Musqueam Reserve.

Who's Involved?

Vancouver Aboriginal Council

- A non-political organization that serves a political purpose by striving to improve communication between Aboriginal organizations, government representatives, and funding agencies in order to work towards collaborative solutions to local issues and concerns.
- Purpose is to build trust, collaboration, partnership, openness, transparency and cooperation, inclusiveness, and accessibility among its members.

Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre (1607 East Hastings Street)

- A member of the BC and National Associations of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, both of which advocate politically for urban Aboriginal people regarding what programs may assist Friendship Centres, in the development of programs to better the lives of Aboriginal people.

Indian Residential School Survivors Society (100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver)

- Many of the survivors of the Indian Residential Schools are now Elders.
- Support includes crisis counselling, court support, info and referrals, workshops, media, conferences, supports & conducts research, advocates for justice and healing.

United Native Nations (425 Carrall Street)

- Has individual chapters throughout BC, including Vancouver. Was formed in order to address the political and socio-economic concerns of Non-status Aboriginal people in BC.
- Advocates on issues concerning self government, housing, employment, child welfare, education, and economic development.

Aboriginal Women's Collective (3965 Dumfries Street)

- Helping Spirit Lodge hosted a full-time Coordinator whose mandate was to seek, encourage, and document Aboriginal women's input on various issues that they identify as important to them. Much of this information is meant to inform the Vancouver Aboriginal Council's work. This position is no longer funded, but HSL is trying to continue with this important work.

Vancouver Métis Association (744 West Hastings Street)

- Works towards developing stronger Métis communities and families through advocacy, education, and partnerships.

Local First Nations

- The three local First Nations that are directly connected to Vancouver are Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh. None of these First Nations has signed a treaty ceding their traditional territories which creates uncertainty for all concerned, and sometimes creates tensions with local residents.
- All three are at some point in the six-step BC Treaty Process. More specific information can be found at www.bctreaty.net/files_3/first_nations_lower-mainland-fraser-valley.html.

Union of BC Indian Chiefs (342 Water Street)

- Goal is to support the work of Aboriginal people, whether at the local, national or international level, in their common fight for the recognition of their Aboriginal rights and respect for their cultures and societies.
- Are dedicated to information-sharing as well as to the fostering of fundamental and necessary research skills for Aboriginal people in the province.

Assembly of First Nations (Ottawa)

- A national organization whose mandate is to represent First Nations citizens in Canada. The AFN represents all citizens regardless of age, gender or place of residence.
- The AFN is moving more towards advocating for off-reserve urban Aboriginal people, rather than solely for on-reserve First Nations status individuals.
- Has Regional Vice-Chiefs across Canada.

Other Initiatives

Government-led initiatives such as the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, BC Ministry of Children & Family Development, and the Vancouver Agreement all seek to include, consult, and work with Aboriginal communities to work on specific issues.

Partnerships

While there are no official partnerships, some of these organizations have signed agreements or memorandums of understanding on specific issues such as the restructure of the Ministry of Children & Family Development or the BC Aboriginal Workforce Strategy.

Committees

Organizations that have signed agreements or memorandums of understanding on specific issues are members of committees that lead the initiatives. For the Ministry of Children & Family Development process it is the Joint Aboriginal Management Committee (JAMC).

Trends

- Urban Aboriginal populations are growing at a very fast rate with at least 50% of Aboriginal people living in urban settings. However, their needs are not being addressed or met by the Federal or Provincial governments. The Federal government is talking more about urban issues, but very little funding has been included. The Provincial government recently made a large funding commitment, but that is for on-reserve populations only.

Gaps

- The Congress of Aboriginal People and the National Association of Friendship Centres have a primary mandate of advocating for urban Aboriginal people, but they are often not included at the provincial or national tables so the voice of urban Aboriginal people is being ignored.

Contact Information

Addresses, phone, fax, email, and website information for any of the organizations above can be found in the Contact Information section of this manual.