

About CAI

Where Communities Lead, Better Health Follows

We are Community Action Initiative (CAI), a nonprofit organization transforming mental health and substance use (MHSU) support across BC. We believe lasting change starts with listening to communities and fostering a more community-centred approach to MHSU support.

At our core, we're connectors between grassroots organizations and government. Our role is to nurture community-led efforts, helping align their needs with broader provincial objectives while prioritizing unique local contexts.

Our approach is rooted in capacity building, trust-based granting, and creating strong relationships with the communities we engage. That's how we ensure that local wisdom and lived experiences actively shape MHSU programming and resource allocation.

Our funding areas are inclusive of activities across the mental health and substance use response continuum, and we aim to achieve a balanced representation across demographic groups and geographic areas in the province.

Transforming Local Wisdom into Provincial Health Action

We offer a range of projects and initiatives designed to support local communities in addressing the mental health and substance use crisis. Our projects aim to empower local governments, elected officials, and community partners with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to develop effective responses to this complex issue.

With gratitude to our funders:

Community Counselling Fund (CCF)

Since 2019, CAI has stewarded the CCF, which supports community-based organizations to deliver free/low cost, culturally relevant mental health care. These organizations are situated in every health authority in both urban and rural communities. Our equity-focused approach ensures that adults from all walks of life can access quality mental health supports.

CAI Community Counselling Grantee Organizations for 2025–26

Fraser Health Authority (11)	Communities Served
Archway Community Services Society	Abbotsford
Cythera Transition House Society	Maple Ridge
Deltassist Family and Community Services Society	Delta
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society	Surrey
Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver	New Westminster and province-wide
Fraser House Society	Mission
Kinghaven Peardonville House Society	Abbotsford
Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Community Services	Maple Ridge
Moving Forward Family Services Society	Province-wide
Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia	Surrey
SHARE Family and Community Services	Tri-Cities (Port Moody, Port Coquitlam, Coquitlam, Anmore, and Belcarra)

Northern Health Authority (5)	Communities Served
Canadian Mental Health Association —Northern BC	Prince George and surrounding northern communities
Central Interior Native Health Society	Prince George and surrounding Northern communities such as Hazelton, Gitsegukla, Kitwanga, Fort Babine, Lake Babine, Witset, Takla, Tlazten, Binche, Nakazdli, Yekooche
Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society	Smithers, Houston
Prince George Native Friendship Centre	Prince George
Quesnel Women's Resource Centre	Quesnel

Vancouver Island Health Authority (8)	Communities Served
Esquimalt Neighbourhood House Society	Esquimalt
Hiiye'yu Lelum (House of Friendship) Society	Cowichan Valley
Kwakiutl Band Council	Northern Vancouver Island
Pacific Centre Family Services Association	Victoria, Colwood
Peers Victoria Resources Society	Victoria
Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Community Services Society	Salt Spring Island
Snuneymuxw First Nation	Nanaimo
Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees (VICCIR)	Victoria, Vancouver Island

Interior Health Authority (10)	Communities Served
Canadian Mental Health Association –Cariboo Chilcotin Branch	Williams Lake
Canadian Mental Health Association –Kelowna Branch	Kelowna
Cariboo Family Enrichment Centre Society	100 Mile House and communities in the South Cariboo region
Circle of Indigenous Nations Society	Nelson, Castlegar, Trail, Nakusp and Grand Forks
Family Tree Family Centre (Kamloops Family Resources Society)	Kamloops
Independent Living Vernon Society	Vernon
Lillooet Friendship Centre Society	Lillooet
Metis Community Services Society of BC	Central Okanagan
OneSky Community Resources	Penticton
Yellowhead Community Services	Barriere & Clearwater, McLure to Blue River

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (10)	Communities Served
Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC, DBA Gordon Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Canadian Mental Health Association —North and West Vancouver	North Vancouver and West Vancouver
Family Services of the North Shore	North Shore, including the Sea to Sky Corridor
Jewish Family Services	Vancouver
REACH Community Health Centre	Vancouver
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.	Vancouver
Sunshine Coast Community Services Society	Sunshine Coast
Turning Point Recovery Society	Richmond, Vancouver, North Shore
Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture	Vancouver
Watari Counselling and Support Services	Vancouver

Total number of grantees (as of September 2025) = 44

Impact Stories

Alexandria, an Indigenous woman in her mid-thirties with three school-aged children, experienced a series of deaths, several of which were quite traumatic in nature. She sought counselling after each subsequent loss, eventually completing three rounds of services, each eight sessions in length. Rather than attempting to 'move past' the grief, Alexandria instead found her own ways of maintaining meaningful relationships with the deceased. She described herself as being frozen and so collected herbs in the forest so she could thaw herself with tea. She saw the pain etched on her hands, so she cleaned them in the lake. She felt overwhelmed, so she cried and let others cry with her. She felt shame, so now shares her experiences with her children so shame can't have the same hold on them.

—**Cariboo Family Enrichment Centre**

[Our counselling program's] strong Indigenous lens means we do a lot of work with residential school and intergenerational trauma and building resilience. I have clients who are Elders who are only now working through childhood abuse they've been holding on to for a lifetime. For many of them, this is the first mental health support they've ever received. We have been able to work through generations towards this space of healing—this captures the full circle of healing we want to embrace. One client and I were talking about residential school trauma. She's the first person in her family to not go to residential school. She said, "I feel like I am the prayers of my ancestors answered."

—**Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society**

For many clients, counselling is the only space they have to talk openly about their experiences and to be heard. One client began receiving services while in active addiction. With counselling support, the client began their recovery journey and was able to receive a referral to attend treatment due to this [counselling] program. Currently, the client has turned their life around and is sober for over a year with steady employment, has a strong relationship and social life and is doing well. The client said this program helped them beyond what they imagined was possible and completely changed the trajectory of their life.

—**Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society**

[One of our clients was] a middle-aged woman who had been living on the streets after escaping an abusive relationship. Fraser House, in collaboration with SARA for Women, provided her with immediate necessities such as food and clothing but also advocated on her behalf to secure temporary shelter. Through persistent efforts, the outreach team was able to connect her with a short-term housing program and mental health services, ultimately helping her regain stability and a sense of security.

—**Fraser House Society**

One of our clients was a homeless Metis person with PTSD and numerous medical and disabling challenges. When she first became our outreach workers' client, she would frequently have interactions with the police, the criminal justice system & would get kicked out of social services & evicted from housing as she would get triggered and act in a way to protect herself, which was interpreted as violent without an understanding of the reasons for this behaviour. While in treatment, this client thrived and moved into a leadership role. She has also successfully secured a spot in transitional housing for up to two years and is now involved in peer work. Being able to see her transformation when she has stable housing, basic needs being met and access to support staff, has been exciting and moving.

—Fraser House Society

Bridging the gap between people and resources is crucial in every community. In some areas, the resources may be available, but people may not be aware of them. In other areas, resources may be scarce, and people may not have access to them. This is where outreach workers can play a vital role in connecting the dots and ensuring that people get the help they need.

—Fraser House Society

"S.C." is an Indigenous man from the Nisga'a Valley. He is a multi-generational trauma survivor from his parents being in residential school. He is also a survivor of Indian Day School, survived sexual abuse and violence. He was a youth worker in his hometown when the RCMP came to his work to tell him that they had arrested a man who was his Elementary School Teacher and was being

charged with sexual abuse. He charged him as well. That same year "S.C." had another visit from RCMP this time to let him know that his father was killed in police custody. He started drinking heavily, trying to cope with all the pain. He lost his job because of this. He came to Vancouver and found himself in the DTES and started using crack-cocaine. He hit bottom and got into recovery tapped into culture and spirituality and started coming to Watari for counselling. Attended Talking Circles, smudging, drum making. "S.C." has finally found forgiveness for all including himself. He is now 4 years into his sobriety. He has completed his adult Education Diploma from Native Education College and was on the Dean's List and he is currently in his 3rd year at SFU. (The name is fictional to protect confidentiality)

—Watari Counselling and Support Services

"D." fled her home country with her two children after facing threats and losing her husband to a guerrilla group. Upon reaching Mexico, she attempted to cross the border but was apprehended by border police and separated from her children, enduring psychological abuse and threats over four harrowing days. The perpetrator in this instance was the police, whose actions constituted an act of torture against her as an immigrant. As a result of this trauma, both "D." and her children experienced profound fear and anguish, particularly when encountering law enforcement. Fortunately, "D." was able to attend "Getting Through It" (GTI) sessions and received 15 individual counseling sessions, well over our normal maximum number. Additionally, she was connected to another organization that provided support for her children.

—Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture

"M." concealed their sexual orientation while working as a flight attendant on international flights. Upon returning to their conservative hometown, they faced severe mistreatment and aggression, including physical and psychological abuse, which escalated to the point that even the police mistreated them when they sought to file a report. Recognizing the need for a safe space, we worked collaboratively to create an environment of trust, helping the client build self-confidence. Together, we addressed various areas, including psychoeducation, boundaries, and previously unrecognized triggers. "M." attended 10 individual counseling sessions and also received support from Rainbow Refugee and Immigrant Services Society of BC's Settlement Orientation Services.

—Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture

One client is near graduating from our counselling program, and she shared that our program has allowed her to truly heal and progress and has been the only thing that has worked. She has attended detox, residential treatment, and has seen various counsellors over the years, but they were not able to provide the insight that EMDR [eye movement and desensitization reprocessing trauma therapy] has provided for her.

—Kamloops Family Resources Society

Through the CAI funding we were able to train staff and run a Circle of Security Parenting program. This program is an attachment based program that focuses on how our own experience being parented influences the way we parent our children. The program is meaningful for Indigenous

communities because we are able to discuss how residential schools have impacted our communities' parenting. This program was run for a small group of single dads. The opportunity to gather together each week, sharing challenges and celebrating success was uplifting for everyone after a season of isolation. Not only the clients, but facilitators felt lifted up by the opportunity to gather. Holding a group specifically for single dads was meaningful and delightful because there are no resources or programs for dads in our valley. Facilitators were particularly thrilled to see two of the dads become friends, offering support and companionship to each other outside of the group.

—Hiyye'yu Lelum Friendship Centre Society

EFry's Counselling Program supports women in accessing no-cost counselling to address a variety of goals, including addressing substance use concerns, developing effective coping skills and setting healthy boundaries in relationships, managing stress through life transitions (eg leaving a bed-based treatment facility, searching for employment and housing), and emotion regulation. One client engaged in counselling to seek support while she transitioned from a bed-based substance use treatment program to their home community. The client stated that the ongoing counselling helped her to maintain abstinence even during a brief period of homelessness. She is now housed, has found employment after a period of job seeking, started a new relationship, and reported an increase in self-confidence and stability in her life.

—Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver