



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations and Partners Take the Lead in Cultural Safety  
with Saanich Peninsula Hospital Carving Project**

**W̱SÁNEĆ Territory – Saanich Peninsula** - A collaboration driven by First Nations communities on Vancouver Island supported by a number of partnerships has resulted in four 15-foot, locally carved cedar totem poles raised at the Saanich Peninsula Hospital on the traditional territory of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation communities.

The project is a joint partnership between the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations communities of Tseycum, Pauquachin, Tsartlip and Tsawout, the First Nations Health Authority, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, the Saanich Peninsula Hospital Foundation, Island Health, Western Forest Products, Peninsula Co-op, and others.

The primary goal of the project is to build partnerships and respectful relationships with local First Nations communities, Island Health, and the First Nations Health Authority to support cultural safety efforts in the health care setting that can lead to more effective, culturally safe health services. The carvings provide a visible representation of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation communities, sharing their culture, values, beliefs and traditional territory with the staff and public who access the hospital.

A presence of the culture, art, and history of local First Nations communities in their home territories' health care setting supports the creation of a welcoming, inclusive, and culturally safe care experience. The project supports Island Health's Aboriginal Health Plan by helping to build relationships and creating more welcoming health environments for First Nations peoples.

This project is among many efforts Island Health and the First Nations Health Authority are undertaking as partners to address the gaps in health outcomes between First Nations and Aboriginal people, and the rest of the Island population. In doing so, the partners hope to

remove barriers that prevent local First Nations communities from accessing health care and services, thereby improving health outcomes.

### **Partner Quotes**

“We are grateful for the contributions from FNHA and other supporters - Saanich Peninsula Hospital Foundation, Peninsula CO-OP, Island Health and Western Forest Products - who donated towards the carving and raising of the totem poles at Saanich Peninsula Hospital BC. Much appreciation and gratitude to the four W̱SÁNEĆ carvers who expressed our people’s hearts and culture and identity of the land through carving. We are looking forward to celebrating the prestigious work and its meaning. HISWKE!”

**Chief Harvey Underwood, Tsawout First Nation**

“We are so grateful for our partners at Western Forest Products, Peninsula CO-OP and the trustees for the estates of David Blair and Enid Blakeney. Together we have been able to support an important milestone for our hospital and encourage culturally safe and inclusive health services for years to come.”

**Gordon Benn, Board Chair for the Saanich Peninsula Hospital Foundation**

“It’s been wonderful to watch this project grow and take shape. When communities come together to create health care that is culturally inclusive and rooted in respect, everyone benefits.”

**Don Hubbard, Board Chair for Island Health**

“These totem poles honour the ancestors and represent the peoples who have always been in this territory and share a message of how we can work better together as neighbours and partners. They are also a way to honour and recognize the service providers and caregivers, supporting them to reflect on cultural humility, and how to best offer culturally safe services in a health care setting.”

**Lydia Hwitsum, Board Chair for the First Nations Health Authority**

“I know the work of these highly skilled and respected Aboriginal artists will speak to all who enter here of the lasting culture, and presence of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation people. Carvers Mark Henry, James Jimmy, Doug LaFortune, and Charles Elliott have created powerful symbols of Indigenous identity that symbolize teamwork, protection, devotion and perseverance. They are fitting sentinels to stand watch over the entrance to this hospital.”

**John Rustad, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation**

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