



Indigenous People and Communities: Health and Well-Being

Vision

As Nations¹, First Nations, Métis and Inuit have a society, and more specifically a health system, with equitable access to services and supports for all health conditions, including substance use, that privilege Indigenous ways of knowing and are trauma-informed; and have health and related systems that honour Indigenous experiences and strong medicine societies of Indigenous peoples. We know we can achieve this and we are going to achieve this!

Mission

To support the health and wellness priorities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit and address health and health inequities related to substance use in Indigenous communities, dismantle racist systems and policies and beliefs by acknowledging that racism and discrimination towards Indigenous people exists, strengthen the organizational culture at CCSA and lead by example with our partners, and solicit and incorporate traditional knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing into its work.

Context

Stating our commitment to health services that are safe for Indigenous people and free of discrimination against them, was inspired by Joyce's Principle. It was a call to action for all of us brought about by the tragedy that befell an Indigenous woman in the fall of 2020 while in the care of a hospital in Quebec. Joyce Echaquan was a 37-year-old Atikamekw woman. She died on September 28, 2020, in the Centre hospitalier de Lanaudière in Saint-Charles-Borromée. Before her death, Joyce recorded a video that showed her screaming in distress while healthcare workers insulted her.

Since this horrific incident, while writing this statement, the recovery of children from mass and unmarked graves has been acknowledged across the country, and this in turn has also put national attention to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations and putting them into action.

¹As Canada continues its reconciliation journey with First Nations, Métis and Inuit, it does so on a nation-to-nation basis with recognition that Indigenous peoples are not interest groups but rather nations, just like any other nation on earth.

"No relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Our Government is working together with Indigenous Peoples to build a nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown, government-to-government relationship – one based on respect, partnership, and recognition of rights. (Prime Minister Trudeau, 2017)

Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 explicitly recognizes and affirms the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Section 35 also indicates that the term "Aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.



CCSA acknowledges that racism and discrimination exists because of colonization and that we have an important role to play in bringing about change. Supporting the leadership of Indigenous communities in the journey of healing from colonization, intergenerational trauma, and the interrelated social determinants of health, requires cooperation and encouragement at many levels and in many settings, recognizing that the health system interacts with other systems, such as education, public safety and justice.

Equitable access for Indigenous people is not enough. As noted by Debbie Martin, Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair, Indigenous Peoples' Health and Well-being at Dalhousie University, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit fare more poorly than the average non-Indigenous person living in Canada on many measurable health indicators². Improving the social determinants of health, including housing, education, and access to culturally safe health care is important for physical and mental well-being. However, she also emphasizes that relationships, including listening and learning about how to respect one another and the world around us, are key to helping to reduce the inequities in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

We acknowledge that the First Peoples are the holders of traditional knowledge. CCSA recognizes and respects the power of the ways of knowing and traditional knowledge held by the First Peoples and commits to soliciting and incorporating traditional knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing into its work.

CCSA acknowledges 'all my relations,' such that the wellness and existence of all is interwoven and commits to learning more about our reciprocal relationships with the people, the animals and the environment. This acknowledgment will inform our continued learning and our work forward. We will forge and maintain respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts. And, we will follow the protocol that is offered from our relationships as we look to bring life to this acknowledgement. A Western understanding terms this One Health. This understanding is shared in a Facebook post by Indigenous writer Richard Wagamese:

"I've been considering the phrase 'all my relations' for some time now. It's hugely important. It's our saving grace in the end. It points to the truth that we are related, we are all connected, we all belong to each other. The most important word is all. Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. It means every person just as it means every blade of grass, rock, mineral and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to collectively choose to live that teaching the energy of that change of consciousness would heal all of us – and heal the planet. We do it one person, one heart at a time... we are connected, we are the answer."³

We Can Do Better

CCSA cares about First Nations, Métis and Inuit and we will do better. Organizations and individuals each have a role in creating positive change. Supporting the leadership of Indigenous people and communities in the journey of healing from colonization, intergenerational trauma, aggressive assimilated policies (such as the Indian Residential Schools, the Metis scrip commissions and the forced Inuit relocation), systemic racism and the interrelated social determinants of health, requires critical questioning, reflecting and evaluation and support at many levels and in many settings.

² The Conversation: Indigenous knowledge is the solution to Canada's health inequities - Dal News - Dalhousie University

³ The Conversation: Indigenous knowledge is the solution to Canada's health inequities - Dal News - Dalhousie University



Despite actions being taken, discrimination remains endemic to the health system and is often overlooked and unaddressed. A transformation of culture in health care and frontline workers is needed to ensure that there is more equitable services and supports and equality in the level of health care services that Indigenous people receive. Moving forward requires an understanding of the systemic issues underlying substance use in Indigenous communities but it requires as well our paying attention to the roots of health and health care inequities and racism. Consideration must be given to the historical and intergenerational trauma that underlies the harmful use of alcohol and other substances. This understanding is foundational to creating more effective, more inclusive and less discriminatory approaches to Indigenous health. CCSA has a role to play in enacting positive change and supporting reconciliation efforts with Indigenous people.

The role of CCSA is to reduce the harms of substance use on people in Canada. We achieve that by advancing what we know from the evidence gathered about substance use and by collaborating with experts in the field, including traditional knowledge holders, people with lived and living experience, and scientists, to help bridge the gap between what we know and what we do. We want to create positive change so that the foundation of knowledge pertaining to substance use and addiction is richer and so that responses to the harms of substance use are more comprehensive and reflective of all evidence. Building on the research and collaborative strengths that CCSA brings to the table and respecting First Nations, Métis and Inuit sovereignty over policies and approaches to substance use in their communities:

- We will do better by committing to create a culture within CCSA that holds space for challenging and difficult internal conversations, gives permission for others to challenge us in our practices, and encourages ongoing self-analysis on our own attitudes, beliefs and biases;
- We will do better by committing to continuously examine our work and initiatives through a reconciliation lens;
- We will do better by helping to increase understanding of the impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities and working to eliminate racist policies;
- We will do better in helping to promote the health and well-being of First Nations, Métis and Inuit through our work;
- We will do better by learning from the First Peoples and their experience and knowledge, past, present and future, and applying that learning to our work through respectful and meaningful exchange with First Nations, Métis and Inuit;
- We will do better by informing ourselves about what others have done in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, building on other forms of knowing, learning from what is already in existence and reflecting this in what we do;
- We will do better by identifying for others when they are continuing to use colonial or racist practices and will take responsibility to talk to them about it;
- We will do better by building out a foundation of information and knowledge in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities; and
- We will do better by building upon our authentic collaborations and past learnings as an organization.

We acknowledge that racism and discrimination towards Indigenous People exists. To guide us on our journey of supporting the health and wellness priorities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, addressing health and health inequities related to substance use in Indigenous communities, and dismantling racist systems, policies and beliefs, we will:



- seek ongoing guidance from a group of Indigenous advisors, including knowledge and language keepers and Elders, as well as from academia and health professionals in substance use service delivery to inform our ongoing work including research, information gathering and information sharing.
- Be guided by a greater understanding of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report, OCAP® (ownership, control, access and possession) principles and other relevant calls to action, including Joyce's Principle; and
- take on the burden that has been carried by Indigenous people who have been healing from the trauma.

On our organizational journey to cultural humility, we want to strengthen our organizational culture to ensure that we further foster and embed all aspects of diversity, equity and inclusivity into our policies and practices; and in how we work with others. This will be accomplished by:

- Ensuring that all staff:
 - develop or enhance their understanding of the historical and contemporary colonial legacies and practices, and their impact on both Indigenous people and communities in Canada generally, as well as on substance use more specifically;
 - increase their knowledge of the key elements of UNDRIP, the TRC's Final Report, and other relevant Calls to Action as noted above including Joyce's Principles
 - increase their understanding of Indigenous specific racism;
 - participate in courses and workshops:
 - about reconciliation and cultural safety;
 - on implicit bias to become self-aware of personal biases and privilege and how they impact behaviours, decisions and actions.
 - have an understanding of *allyship* and our role in inspiring those we work with to advocate for social justice for Indigenous People and to appropriately act upon anti-Indigenous racism.
- Ensuring that members of CCSA's volunteer advisory committees:
 - are provided with training to increase their understanding of the historical and contemporary practices and their impact on Indigenous people and substance use, and of Indigenous specific racism and health disparities;
- Encouraging that individuals and organizations that CCSA works with have participated in Indigenous awareness training
- Building a repository of guidance documents/materials supporting on an ongoing basis staff knowledge and understanding.
- Continue to monitor our changes in knowledge and practice over time.

We acknowledge that this will take time, it will involve successes and mistakes, and we want open communication with all partners and the community at large in moving forward on this path.