

CCSA's Reconciliation Path with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Communities and Organizations

This summary report details reconciliation activities the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) held with First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) organizations in fiscal year 2023–2024.

Background

In the fall 2021, the CCSA Board of Directors made a reconciliation commitment to the health and well-being of Indigenous people and communities. CCSA's [Indigenous People and Communities: Health and Well-Being](#) outlines a vision that FNMI people and communities have

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.

This commitment was made in response to the ongoing racism and discrimination toward FNMI people within Canada's complex and interactive systems such as health care, education, public safety and justice, which has caused injuries and death.¹

CCSA acknowledges that racism and discrimination exist and that we can play an important role in making positive changes and improvements in services within these complex yet adaptive systems. Essential to our reconciliation commitment is for CCSA to lead by example through education on the historical and contemporary effects of colonialism and by being an ally to FNMI people and communities. Allyship means including the distinct voices, worldviews, priorities, methods and needs of FNMI people and communities into our work through collaboration and partnerships.

These efforts include working with federal, provincial and territorial governments, and seeking partnerships with Indigenous organizations and guidance from Indigenous advisers, Elders, and knowledge and language keepers. Our work is further guided by the 94 Calls to Action in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* report, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* enacted in June 2021, the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, the *Utiagvik Declaration* and other relevant calls to action, including Joyce's Principle.

¹ "As a country, we must work together to eliminate all forms of systemic racism in our institutions. Working together with Indigenous partners, provinces and territories, we need to support culturally safe and inclusive health systems. The circumstances surrounding Joyce Echaquan's death cannot and should not be forgotten" — [Indigenous Services Canada](#)



Building Capacity: Indigenous Partnerships and Strategies

As part of CCSA's reconciliation commitment, we hired a new director of Indigenous partnerships and strategies in early 2023. The director develops and nurtures collaborative relationships with FNMI communities and organizations across Canada. They build CCSA's internal capacity to cultivate reciprocal relationships and collaborate with partners to create meaningful reconciliation initiatives. The director works closely with CCSA's leadership team and staff to create and implement a strategic plan for developing a reconciliation framework. The director also advises senior leaders on key emerging issues, themes, evidence and approaches related to CCSA's priorities in the context of FNMI health and wellness.

Indigenous Partnerships Strategic Framework

Theory of Change

As part of leading by example, CCSA has developed an Indigenous Partnerships Strategic Framework. A key component of the framework is to strengthen CCSA's relationships with FNMI communities and organizations to co-develop evidence that reflects FNMI worldviews, methods, priorities and needs.

The framework uses a theory of change approach to change the culture within CCSA to ensure FNMI voices are built into CCSA's work plans and activities. The framework may also be used to seek more funding in partnership with FNMI groups for initiatives to address issues related to substance use in FNMI communities. Importantly, CCSA will not seek funds that are earmarked for FNMI groups, but rather provide support through collaboration and partnerships. The framework is not intended to take away existing government-to-government relationships; it supports FNMI self-determination. The framework includes four key principles, seven core priority investment areas, evaluation and implementation approaches, and a budget plan, among other elements.

The framework respects that FNMI are distinct Peoples² with distinct cultures and languages. It respects that each Indigenous organization CCSA engages with has its own governance and approval processes, and their schedules and work plans may not align with ours. It will therefore take time for Indigenous groups to consider a potential partnership. With these conditions and distinctions in mind, the framework includes the following priorities:

1. Develop an Indigenous Partnership and Strategy division.
2. Build internal capacity for FNMI work. For example, this could mean devoting at least 10 per cent of time, core funds or projects to FNMI initiatives across the organization.
3. Hold annual partnership building roundtables. These meetings could be used to strategically address FNMI priorities, partnership planning, calls for proposals, substance use data, planning for the biennial Issues of Substance conference, and other activities.

² [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.



4. Hold reconciliation gatherings. These gatherings would contribute to building cultural competency within CCSA by inviting FNMI Elders, knowledge keepers and partners to educate staff.
5. Implement internships or interchanges and partner supports for capacity development.
6. Support Indigenous businesses to promote economic growth in Indigenous communities.
7. Support a wholistic continuum of care that is centred on family and community.

The framework emphasizes implementation and evaluation. CCSA is integrating more short-term, mid-term and long-term objectives into the framework based on feedback from FNMI communities and organizations. It was recommended that the evaluation be ongoing so that FNMI communities and organizations can review the framework when they wish.

Accountability is key. CCSA has set up reporting tables so all directors and associate directors report to the chief executive officer about how they are engaging FNMI groups and progressing in the seven priority areas. An internal evaluation process to track and review individual and organizational progress.

Feedback on the Framework

During the development of the Indigenous Partnerships Strategic Framework, representatives from national Indigenous organizations and some of their regional members provided helpful ideas and perspectives for CCSA to deeply reflect and act on. These ideas and perspectives are reflected in the 16 recommended actions included in CCSA's *First Nations, Métis and Inuit National Partnership Building Roundtable Meeting Report*.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Partnership Building Roundtable

Current Partnership Context

We were honoured to have Mi'kmaq Storyteller Elder Julie Pellissier-Lush open our inaugural FNMI Partnership Building Roundtable. Her opening set the tone for building distinct partnerships between CCSA and FNMI organizations with a focus on working together on our common goals.

With the understanding that pan-Indigenous initiatives do not work, CCSA held its first distinctions-based FNMI Partnership Building Roundtable in October 2023. The roundtable provided a safe space for participants to come together to discuss how CCSA may be able to support FNMI organizations and communities in the face of Canada's substance use crisis, which disproportionately affects Indigenous communities.

CCSA staff presented the national context of substance use issues and shared existing disaggregated FNMI data with the delegates. Together, we saw what the substance use crisis looks like in Canada and meaningfully discussed the types of distinct partnerships that could work for each group. It was also the first time that FNMI groups had the opportunity to hear from each other and learn about what others are doing in their organizations and communities to address substance use issues. Participants also discussed how social determinants of health impact people in an increasingly polarized Canadian society.



More information on the event is available in CCSA's *First Nations, Métis and Inuit National Partnership Building Roundtable Meeting Report*. The report includes next steps that will lead us from short-term collaborations to longer-term partnerships.

Learn more about the rich Indigenous history from those who lived it and pass the stories down from their Elders, this is the true history. It is full of hard truths, but it is also full of pride and resilience. — Elder Julie Pellissier-Lush, Meritorious Service Medal recipient, Mi'kmaq storyteller, Prince Edward Island



Heather Ochalski, Director of Indigenous Partnerships and Strategies; Elder Julie Pellissier-Lush; and John Weekes, Director of Knowledge Mobilization and Strategic Partnerships.

Collaboration and Support

Collaborating with FNMI Organizations

Throughout 2023–2024, CCSA collaborated with FNMI organizations on specific projects such as research on cannabis and the impact of legalization. Government and other organizations working to support Indigenous people also reached out to CCSA seeking collaboration and partnerships.

Métis Mental Health and Cannabis Workshop

In May 2023, the Métis National Council (MNC) brought together representatives of Métis governments from Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario; Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LMFO); and other participants from the federal government and partner organizations. CCSA co-presented data from a report that was co-developed by the MNC, CCSA and the Mental Health Commission of Canada. CCSA also participated in numerous discussions on cannabis, including cannabis research, cannabis education, cannabis regulation, the impacts of cannabis on the health of Métis people, and the impacts of cannabis on Métis youth. For more information about



the workshop, see the MNC's [*Cannabis and the Métis Nation: Impacts, Perspectives, and Recommendations for Action*](#).



CCSA's CEO Dr. Alexander Caudarella provided a keynote speech at the Métis Mental Health and Cannabis workshop.

Inuit Engagement and Partnership Building

CCSA has been working closely with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and Inuit regions, and keeping them abreast of issues and trends related to substance use.

Best Practice Webinar

In the fall of 2023, CCSA was invited to give a presentation to ITK's Public Health Task Group, a group with representatives from the four Inuit land claim regions. CCSA shared information about *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health* and how it may be relevant and tailored for Inuit communities. For example, consumption of alcohol affects the immune system and increases the risk of contracting tuberculosis. Further educational resources are needed to better understand the link between alcohol consumption and tuberculosis, including latent tuberculosis.

Competencies for the Substance Use Workforce

CCSA met with representatives from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) to discuss the needs of the workforce supporting Inuit and how to prepare the workforce for the upcoming opening of Aqquasariaq, a new treatment centre in Iqaluit. Drawing on our subject-matter expertise in developing integrated mental health and substance use competencies, we have offered to support NTI's efforts to develop the skills of the substance use workforce while respecting the Inuit traditions and practices that are foundational to this population.

Inuit Health Synergy Sessions

Grounded in Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles, CCSA and Ottawa Public Health (OPH) have partnered as allies to support Inuit health service providers in Ottawa in addressing the urban Inuit



homelessness and substance use crisis in the nation's capital. There is interest in engaging other urban Inuit organizations across the country who may be facing similar urgent issues. Biweekly group meetings are held with participants from:

- Ottawa Inuit service providers: Tungasuvvingat Inuit, Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families, Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team, Inuit Non-Profit Housing and Larga Baffin;
- CCSA and OPH;
- Other health organizations such as the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario; and
- National and regional Inuit organizations such as ITK and NTI (observers), and Pauktutit Inuit Women of Canada.

While the meetings are co-chaired by CCSA and OPH, the discussions, direction and proposed processes and solutions are Inuit-led.

Supporting FNMI Communities and Organizations Through Allyship

From time to time, various organizations addressing issues related to substance use (e.g., colonial legacy, racism, homelessness, policies, costs, etc.) seek support from CCSA. Below are some examples of how we have collaborated with various research organizations and service providers seeking support:

- OPH and the urban Inuit community: Inuit Health Synergy sessions
- Thunderbird Partnership Foundation: Issues of Substance conference
- Government of Nunavut: Impaired driving education campaign
- NTI: Mental Health Competencies Framework (discussions are ongoing)
- Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association: Supporting tenants

CCSA's Reconciliation Events: Learning from First Nations Métis and Inuit People

CCSA has embarked on a learning journey about FNMI Peoples. By educating CCSA staff on historical and contemporary issues affecting Indigenous Peoples, we help to dismantle racist systems, policies and beliefs, and support the transformation of culture in complex systems that serve Indigenous people such as health care, justice, policing, education and child welfare systems. In 2023–2024, we held four reconciliation events and integrated our learning into our work.

First Nations Land Acknowledgement

In April 2023, CCSA staff participated in a workshop on the significance of a land acknowledgement. The event was opened by Elder Jo-Anne Saddleback and guided by Knowledge Keeper Christina Vincent. The workshop was facilitated by Eddie Robinson, member of the Anishinaabe/Muskegowuk Cree artist, activist and educator, and James Marchand, member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (Algonquin Nation). Their teachings gave CCSA staff an opportunity to learn about the sacredness of the land, and reflect on its history and what it means to be living and working on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation. CCSA staff also acknowledge that CCSA's work spreads across many Indigenous territories, including Métis settlements and Inuit Nunangat.



I appreciated the opportunity to facilitate discussions and foster a positive and safe learning space. As a proud member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (Algonquin Nation), the CCSA took appropriate steps to ensure that community representation and Algonquin (Indigenous) voices were not only respected but also heard. –James Marchand

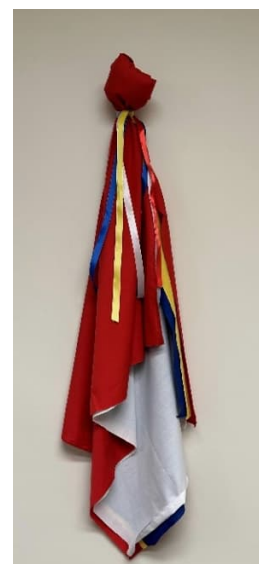


CCSA Director Heather Ochalski participated in a workshop on the significance of a land acknowledgement, which included an outdoor activity.

Tobacco Offering, Healing and Cultural Appropriation Workshop

Anishinabek Elder Robin Decontie and her niece Autumn Decontie from Sàgàsige, an Algonquin consulting enterprise, spent the day with CCSA staff for a workshop on healing and cultural appropriation. Discussion included ways CCSA can appropriately follow protocol when asking First Nations Elders to take part in our events, such as through prayers, smudges and other ceremonies. As part of this training, staff made tobacco bundles and learned how to offer them properly to an Elder. Participants also discussed the difference between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation.

A colourful tobacco bundle with red and white cloth and white, yellow, blue and black ribbon.





Inuit Governance Module 101

As part of their journey toward reconciliation with Inuit communities, CCSA staff and leadership learned from ITK's Mitch White about Inuit governance processes and how to meaningfully engage with Inuit. This session increased CCSA staff's knowledge of Inuit history, worldview and contemporary issues affecting Inuit across Canada.



ITK's Mitch White shares information on Inuit governance processes and meaningful engagement with CCSA staff

Creating Reconciliation Allies, Advocates and Champions

Warren Lewis of the Indigenous Training Collective delivered the Awareness (AWE) 400 course, *Creating Reconciliation Allies, Advocates and Champions*, to CCSA staff on the importance of Indigenous human rights and the many reports that inform reconciliation. CCSA staff learned what being allies, advocates and champions for Indigenous Peoples means and how to better contribute to increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

As a result of the Indigenous Cultural Competence Training that took place on January 25th, we made specific and intentional changes to our document, *Technical and Behavioural Competencies for Non-Expert Prescribers*. In addressing the context of **why** prescribers need certain behavioural skills, we were uncertain how much background to include in the document about systems of oppression and interpersonal experiences of racism.

As a result of the training, we decided that it was our responsibility to make sure the truths of Indigenous experiences were included in this CCSA document, and moreover that we encourage our partners across Canada to act on their role in reconciliation and address health inequities. The training provided by Warren contributed to our document, focusing in on anti-racism, anti-oppression and decolonization. –Sheena Taha, Associate Director, Quality and Accountability



**CCSA Director Heather Ochalski and Warren Lewis,
Founder and Principal, Indigenous Training Collective**

FNMI Engagement at CCSA-Led National Events

Summit Series to End the Substance Use Crisis

CCSA convenes up to four national summit events per year to bring focus to key issues and develop effective strategies to end the substance use crisis in Canada. The purpose of the summit series is to unite key partners and contributors to develop calls to action and clear recommendations for governments at all levels and non-governmental organizations. These calls to action and recommendations can be used to increase efforts to end the substance use crisis and promote the use and availability of evidence-based, culturally appropriate resources.

The first summit took place in Ottawa, Ontario, in March 2023 and focused on the role of family physicians. Family physicians are often the first point of contact for people wanting to explore their relationship to substances. A second summit was convened in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in October 2023 and examined the role of families in preventing harms associated with substance use. Both events were designed to include strong representation from FNMI groups. FNMI participants offered their unique perspectives on the issues under discussion as they relate to their individual communities. Both events were successful in yielding solutions and direction to guide the way forward.

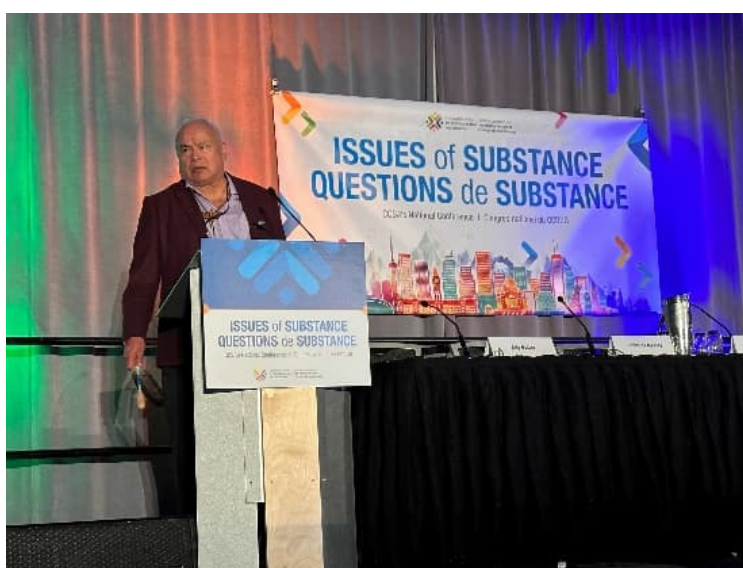
Future summits are now being planned for 2024–2025 and will continue to prioritize the voices and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples.

2023 Issues of Substance Conference

CCSA hosts a biennial conference on issues related to substance use. The Issues of Substance 2023 conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, was CCSA's first in-person event since the pandemic. The event had more than 800 participants from across the country.



CCSA welcomed many Indigenous participants and presenters. For instance, just less than 20 per cent of the program was focused on FNMI perspectives and approaches to healing. A representative from the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation participated in the planning for the conference as an Issues of Substance program committee member. They communicated regularly with the Issues of Substance program chair to ensure that the guidance received from the Assembly of First Nations Mental Wellness Committee was incorporated into all aspects of the conference. It is through this guidance that we were connected with the First Nations Health Authority in Vancouver, which helped us ensure that the proper protocols were in place for the Vancouver Coastal region. Three cultural support workers and an Elder from the Indian Residential School Survivors Society provided counselling, emotional support, smudging and cedar brushing throughout the conference. Supports were also in place for Métis and Inuit delegates.



First Nations Elder Xwechtaal Joseph Denis of Squamish Nation opened the 2023 Issues of Substance conference with a prayer through traditional song and drumming. An Elder's opening is sacred and sets the tone of events and experiences that delegates will have.

As a national event, the Issues of Substance conference was important to ensure an Elder spoke words of wisdom to the audience every day. We were honoured to welcome three Elders to inspire the event.



Métis Elder Deni Paquette opened the event on the second day. As a *kokum* (grandmother), she has extensive life experience, which she shares through her art and stories. She has a background in Indigenous policy and socioeconomic development and has worked in publishing and commercial graphics.



Inuit Elder Michael Kusugak closed the final day. Elder Michael is *Arvaarluk*. He was born and raised in Nunavut and lives now in Manitoba. His father was Kusugaq, and his mother was Kukik. He went to three residential schools and graduated from high school in Saskatoon, Sask., in 1968. Elder Michael has authored 18 books and makes his living as a storyteller. It is through his storytelling that he delivered a final keynote address that captivated the audience. He talked about what it is like to be Inuit and part of one of the most successful societies on earth, sharing a story of pride, pain and resilience.



Atlantic Canada Roundtable on Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health

On Jan. 17 and 18, 2024, CCSA led a roundtable in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, on *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health*. The roundtable provided a forum for participants with varied perspectives from Atlantic Canada to learn about and engage with the new guidance, with specific consideration to regional priorities and needs. Participants included health professionals, policy makers, service providers working in sectors related to alcohol and health, and community members. The roundtable provided an opportunity for engagement and space for participants from First Nations and Inuit communities in Atlantic Canada to share their insights and knowledge and prioritize culturally appropriate next steps.

The goals of the event were to:

- Connect partners in the alcohol and health space in Atlantic Canada,
- Identify common areas of interest and needs across regions and disciplines,
- Learn how CCSA can further support knowledge mobilization and partnerships in Atlantic Canada, and
- Create a plan with concrete next steps in knowledge mobilization for *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health*.



Mi'kmaq Elder Marjorie Muise closed the roundtable. Elder Marjorie is originally from the west coast of Newfoundland and moved to St. John's nine years ago. She is very active with First Light and Empowering Indigenous Women for Stronger Communities. Elder Marjorie continues to work within the community as a support connecting people in culture through drumming, ceremony and other teachings, providing safe spaces without judgment and with strength and compassion. Elder Marjorie Muise closes the meeting with positive messaging and a ceremonial smudge, sharing her "story of truth" and experiences.



Conclusion

CCSA is making great strides in its commitment to reconciliation with FNMI Peoples, but we know this is only the beginning. Much work remains to help improve the lives of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. CCSA is committed to being an ally and is ready to help make the required systemic changes in our society. We look forward to strengthening our relationship with FNMI communities and organizations, and to continue our learning journey and path toward reconciliation.

Looking Forward to 2024–2025 Reconciliation Activities

Our work to carry on the momentum toward reconciliation through learning, engagement and partnership building, activities and planning is underway. We will continue holding reconciliation events for CCSA staff to ensure our team is continuing our learning journey and applying what we have learned into our work plans.

We plan to host our second annual First Nations, Métis and Inuit Partnership Building Roundtable to continue to build distinct, specific and authentic collaborations and partnerships with FNMI communities and organizations. These relationships will help us integrate FNMI perspectives into our work, and our progress will be co-evaluated by our partners.

We will implement the Indigenous Partnerships Strategic Framework. By applying the four principles and implementing the seven core investment areas, we will continue to contribute to CCSA's reconciliation commitment and the Calls to Action in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* report, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, the *Utqiagvik Declaration*, and other relevant calls to action, including Joyce's Principle.

The work of CCSA's Indigenous Partnership Strategies (IPS) Division spans CCSA's activities. The IPS team is kept informed of other CCSA workplans and keeps leadership and staff informed of FNMI priorities and needs. These exchanges ensure the perspectives of FNMI communities and organizations are built into CCSA's workplans and activities. The team is dedicated to implementing these important activities and supporting the transformation that is needed in our communities and complex systems that serve FNMI people.

ISBN 978-1-77871-148-0

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CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

CCSA activities and products are made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views of CCSA do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.