

# Integrating Aboriginal Health Practices into Canadian Healthcare

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## Call to Action

"We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 210). To bridge gaps between traditional practices and Western medicine, public health nurses (PHNs) and nursing, as a whole, can take various steps to help Aboriginal patients receive care in a way that respects their values.

## Actions for Public Health Nurses (PHNs)

Here are some activities for PHNs to improve care for the Indigenous populations of Canada:

- Assess patients via [questionnaires](#) and perform a [windshield survey](#) of the community to identify its weaknesses and strengths along with the willingness to learn and take action
  - This will allow you to gain understanding of the [social determinants of health](#) and factors that play a role in the community's health, including [trauma](#) and [culture](#)
  - Strengths may include "culture brokers" or leaders in community (Government of Canada, 2012)
- Communicate with patients to understand their values and goals of care
  - Healthcare often takes on a [biomedical](#) model where the priority goal is to eradicate disease (Thieme-Burdette, 2021)
  - Aboriginal patients may be more focused on [psychosocial](#) aspects like [spirituality](#) (Smith, 2018)

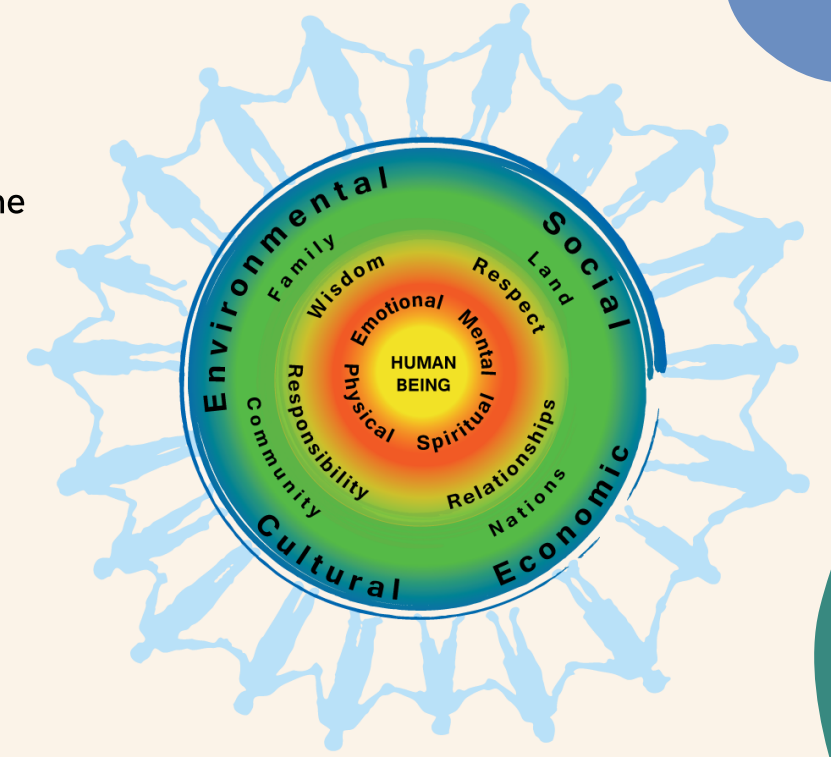


Figure 1.

It is important to realize that as PHNs, you may have a different perspective on care than individuals of a given culture and you may not understand the backgrounds of all patients. Intergenerational trauma and distrust in the system complicates the fostering of cross-cultural collaboration between Western medicine and spiritual-based care approaches (Logan et al., 2020). As mentioned in the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) Professional Standards, continuously improving your knowledge on Indigenous populations and incorporating it into your practice increases your competence and helps foster culturally sensitive relationships with clients (CNO, 2002).

## Steps to Take as a Profession

Here are some activities for nursing as a whole:

- Perform [research](#) (e.g., census) with [community leaders/Elders](#) and policy makers to evaluate current health care services (Logan et al., 2020)
  - This will help discover health [trends](#) that are concerning
  - [Conferences](#) and [discussions](#) can be held to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and propose new interventions
- [Advertisement](#) campaigns to increase public awareness on Indigenous health issues and resources
  - Ensure that physicians are aware of local Indigenous resources to provide referrals to patients who want alternative care (Logan et al., 2020)
- Create and fund [accessible facilities](#) for Indigenous populations to heal and seek traditional care in conjunction with Western medicine, e.g., sweat lodges in communities, healing rooms in hospitals, connecting community Elders to outpatient facilities (Logan et al., 2020)
  - Empower patients to seek care because it is tailored to their values and facilitates easy access



Figure 2.

## Cultural Humility

Cultural safety must be a top priority when caring for vulnerable populations. To ensure cultural safety, providers must identify power imbalances and implement culturally competent interventions (CNO, 2002). This helps offset long standing power dynamics that negatively impact Indigenous communities. PHNs must reflect on personal knowledge and identify differences between cultures, to gain understanding of Indigenous communities through Elders of the Metis, Inuit and First Nations groups.

Ways to apply cultural humility into care for Indigenous communities:

- [Self-awareness](#), recognizing your own [biases](#) and avoiding [assumptions](#)
- Not fearing or avoiding care provision for different cultures; instead, viewing all interactions as a learning opportunity to enhance your knowledge of various cultures, traditions and beliefs
- Fully understanding concepts like [colonialism](#) and [intergenerational trauma](#) along with their prolonged impacts on individual and community health
- [Two-eyed seeing](#): combining both Indigenous and Western perspectives of care and medicine to achieve better health outcomes (Peltier, 2018)

Canadian Community Health Nurses (CCHN) standards that apply to cultural humility:

- [Health Promotion](#): collaborate with individuals and community to address root causes and apply care using the Population Health Promotion Model (CCHN, 2003)
- [Building Relationships](#): use culturally relevant communication to establish an inclusive and supportive environment that enhance human dignity while recognizing their own beliefs and values (CCHN, 2003)
- [Facilitating Access and Equity](#): providing universal and equitable access to care for all population, while adapting care to meet the needs of patients and addressing any gaps within care (CCHN, 2003)
- [Demonstrating Professional Responsibility and Accountability](#): taking preventive or corrective measures to protect patient from unethical events and advocating for societal changes (CCHN, 2003)

Cultural humility is a continuous process! It can be tough to recognize and remove your biases; however, it is integral to creating safe environments that Indigenous patients feel comfortable seeking care in.

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## Figures List

Figure 1. [Diagram of First Nations model of health and wellness]. First Nations Health Authority. Traditional Healing. <https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/traditional-healing>

Figure 2. Lavoie, J. (2019). [Photograph of Indigenous sweat lodge]. Toronto.com. <https://www.toronto.com/news-story/9547981-east-york-s-michael-garron-hospital-opens-indigenous-sweat-lodge/>