WHAT JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE

Confronting Anti-Indigenous Racism and Building Safe and Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Systems for Indigenous Peoples

Anti-Indigenous Racism Advisory Circle November 6, 2024

Dr. Brenda Restoule and Dr. Carol Hopkins

FIRST PEOPLES WELLNESS CIRCLE

THUNDERBIRD PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

We respectfully acknowledge that Calgary is located on the unceded traditional territory and lands of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

FIRST PEOPLES WELLNESS CIRCLE

THUNDERBIRD PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

About us

FIRST PEOPLES WELLNESS CIRCLE

- Implementation of the **First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework**
- **Capacity building of the mental wellness and trauma-informed specialist workforce** through the development and delivery of training, tools, and resources based on Indigenous knowledge and evidence. *(Mental Wellness Teams, Crisis Response Teams, Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program)*
- Building evidence through research and evaluation on efficacy of **Indigenous knowledge and evidence** in mental wellness programming
- **Systems change** through advocacy by meaningful inclusion and promotion of Indigenous knowledge and practice-based evidence
- **Creating opportunities for knowledge exchange**, sharing of best practices, networking and developing and strengthening relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations

Hope

Our vision for a better future. A nation where First Peoples and communities experience holistic health and wellness, through living diverse cultural values, beliefs, and practices

Belonging

We are all connected; these are the lenses through which we understand our relationships to the communities we serve, the work we do, and the world

Meaning

The work we do to achieve our hoped-for future. The FPWC advocates for collaborative transformative change to create pathways to wellness and whole health for First Peoples shaped by diverse Indigenous cultural lenses

Purpose

The reason we exist. To walk with and support First Peoples and communities to share collective intelligence for healing, peace-making, and to live a good life

About us

- **The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation** is a non-profit organization that is committed to working with First Nations to further the capacity of First Nation communities to address substance use and addiction.

THUNDERBIRD
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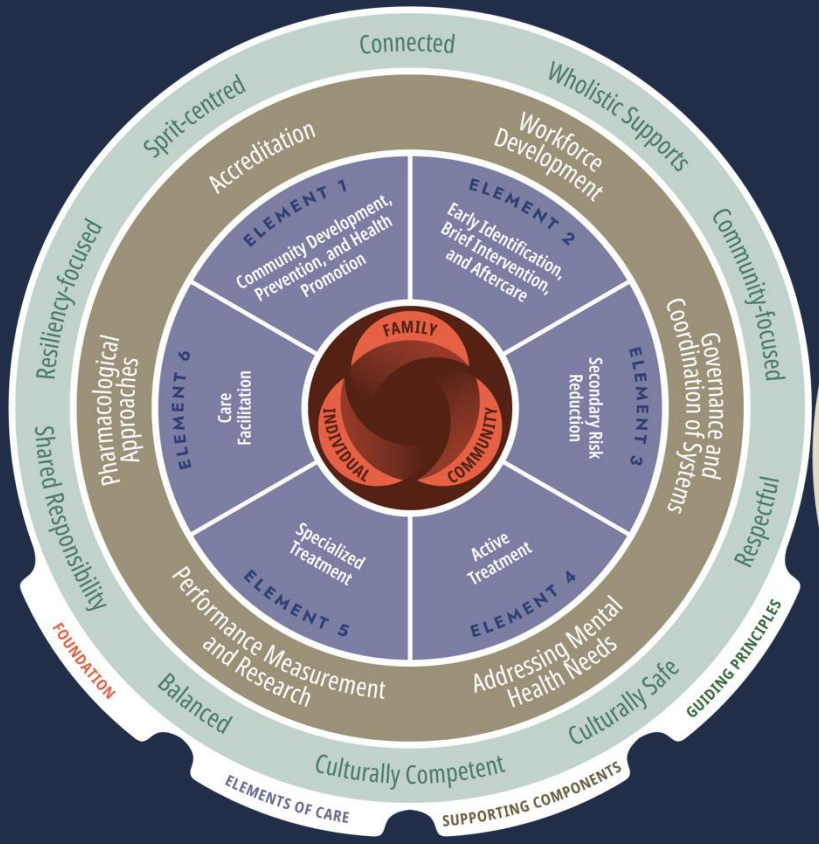
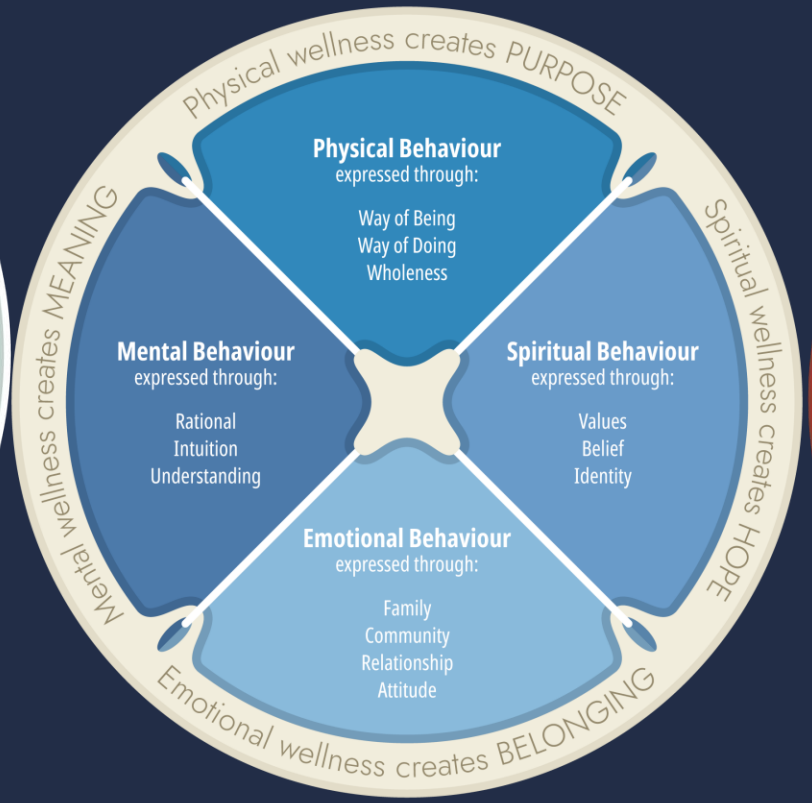
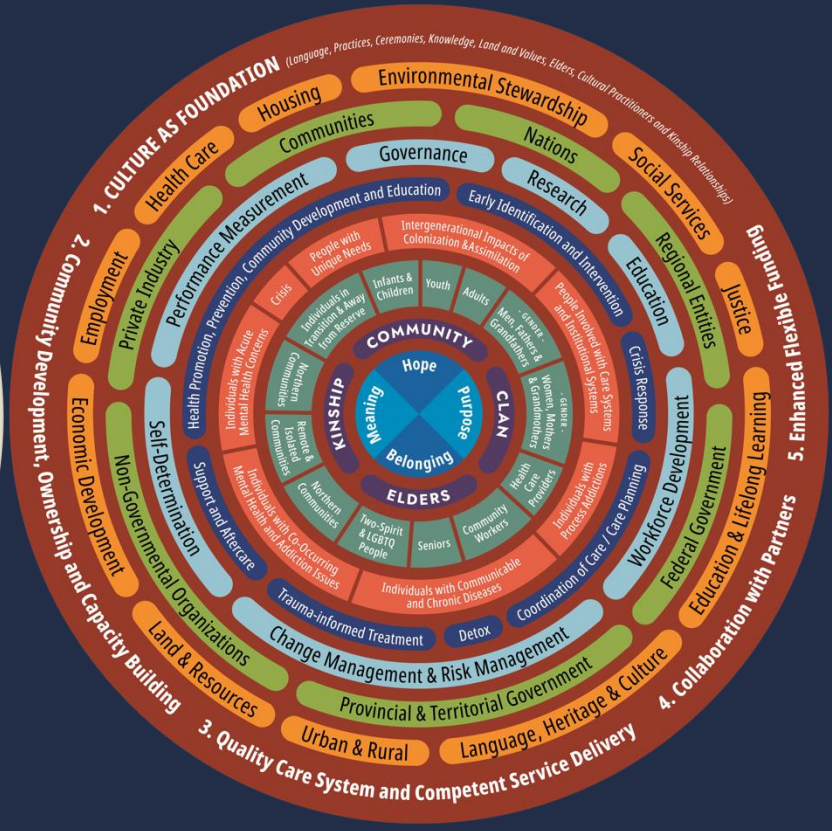


Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Among First Nations



Indigenous Wellness Framework



First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework

Culture and Indigenous Knowledge is the foundation

These frameworks set the foundation for our mandate

THUNDERBIRD
PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation: Five Strategic Priorities 2024-2029

Thunderbird's Strategic Priorities

Increase Regional Capacity Across First Nations

Establish regional offices to strengthen mental wellness capacity of First Nations across Canada guided by the FNMWC and HOS Frameworks.

Increase Data Quality, Quantity and Accessibility

Provide accessible, high-quality data to individuals in First Nation communities and generate information that provides insight into substance use trends and the impacts of culture-based healing.

Public Policy and Corporate Affairs

Promote equity and parity for all members of the First Nations Mental Wellness continuum of care by raising awareness and developing policies that ensure culturally relevant First Nations services.

Establish a National Mental Wellness Workforce Association

Establish an association with culture as the foundation that would provide support, guidance, and resources to ensure quality Mental Wellness Workers across Canada.

Build Foundations for an Indigenous Accreditation Body

Build the foundations for an Indigenous Accreditation Body to create an accreditation system aligned with Indigenous cultural values and standards of excellence to ensure quality in service delivery.

Anti-Indigenous Racism Roundtables

Project Background

- In response to calls for justice and change, the federal government supported a series of National Dialogues that sought to surface challenges and opportunities for transformation

- These dialogues did not provide enough opportunity to consider the unique and important context of anti-Indigenous racism within mental health and substance use systems

- Late summer and early fall 2023, FPWC and TPF partnered to implement a project funded by Indigenous Services Canada.

Project Objectives

1. To better understand First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples' experiences of anti-Indigenous racism within the mental health and addictions services sector within both training and practices contexts

2. To identify best existing or potential intervention or approaches to prevent and/or respond to anti-Indigenous racism in mental health and addictions programs and services; and,

3. To develop key factors and recommendations related to actionable strategies to be taken up by governments, professional associations, training programs, and policy makers

Project Approach

1. Focus Groups

- 5 roundtable discussions in September 2023
  - 4 held virtually
  - 1 held-in person (Healing our Spirits Worldwide, Vancouver, BC)
- Sessions lasted approx. 2 hours
- Semi-structured, conversational methods
  - Emphasize relational process of knowledge sharing

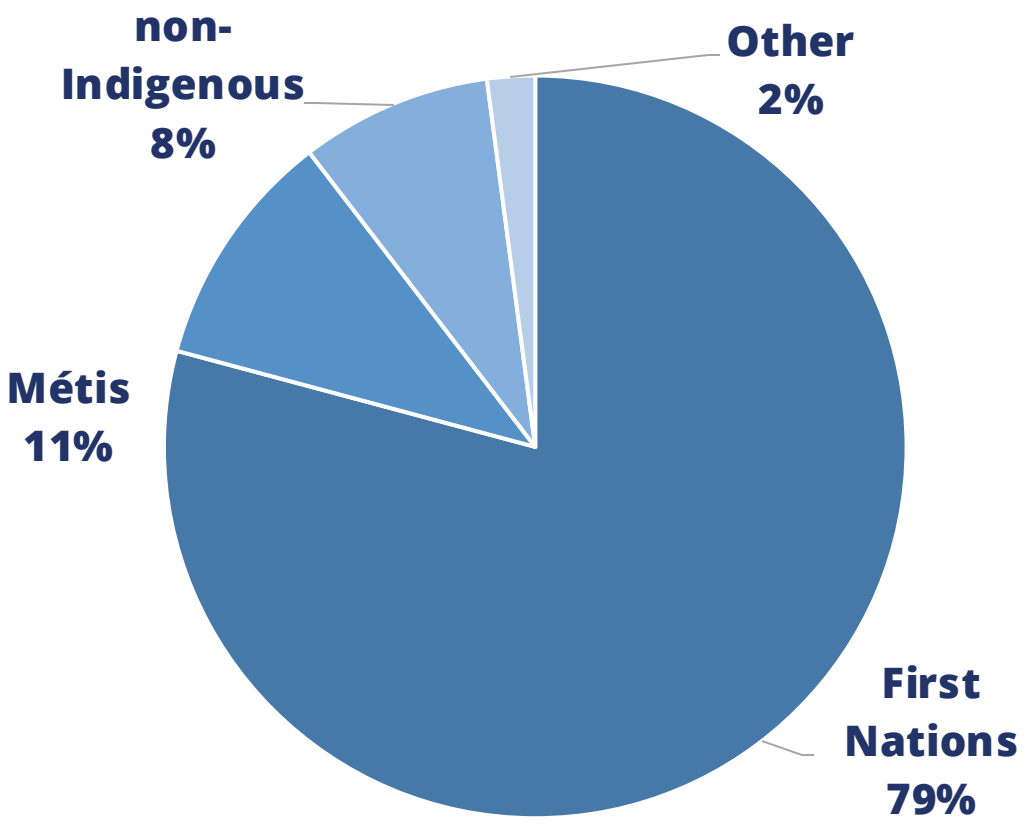
96 Participants from across the country:

BC	32
AB	7
SK	2
MB	14
ON	29
QC	3
NB	2
NS	6
NL	1

Participants

- Included workers, addictions, workers, health directors, cultural workers, youth workers, and health counsellors
- Employed by communities, health organizations, universities, Indigenous political and advocacy organizations

Limitations:
*Missing: YK, NWT, NU, and PEI
*Lack of Inuit representations



Project Approach

2. Surveys

- 5-question post-engagement survey distributed online to roundtable participants
- 50/96 respondents

3. Analysis

- Transcripts manually coded thematically
- Flexible approach to explore themes

Results: Anti-Indigenous Racism in Mental Health and Addictions

"They do a lot of performative things to make it seem like they are doing the work, but on the ground, **there [are] continued racism, stereotypes, and assumptions that [are] built into the education and health systems** that have not been properly addressed. **There is lots of "box checking", but no real transformative change**"

Participant, September 18, 2023

Results:

Absence of Services is Racism

- Lack of provision of safe and adequate mental health and addictions services
- Risk of relapse because of little to no aftercare

"For two years I've been trying to put her, get her into rehab, trying to find all the supports for her. And then when I can get her into the emergency department, she's ready to go. But we're sitting around for hours. I don't know if because we're First Nations or if it's because she's an addict... But by the time I sit there with her for three, three hours she gets agitated. So, like I'm forced to take her out, so she doesn't upset the rest of the people sitting in the waiting room."

(Participant, September 19, 2023)

Results:

Hiding Behind Jurisdictional Ambiguity

"There are places in this country where you're told "you're First Nations. We can't provide those services for you. We can't provide access to those harm reduction kits. We don't have enough money to give them out to First Nations. Go back to your reserve and get them" – well that's racist. That's racism at a systemic level."

(Participant, September 22, 2023)

Results:

Colonialism via Funding Policies

- Teams and conditions of current funding schemes perpetuate colonial logic
- Funding structures precent communities from providing adequate care and supports
- Reinforce and perpetuate inequities

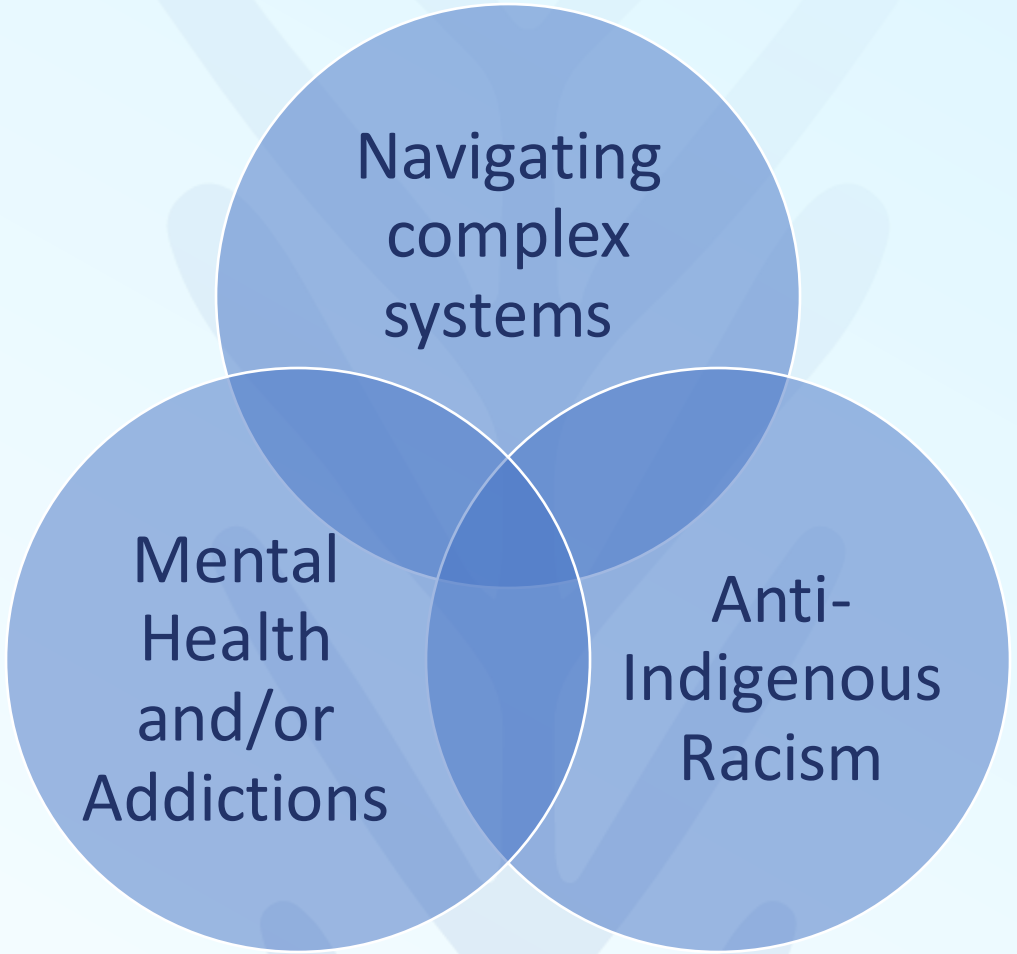
Due to federal funding for the Mental Health & Wellness and NNADAP programming, the system prevents us from providing services to those of our members who live off reserve. Continuing the practice of, "we will give you some resources but not what you really need or are entitled to". We've become the agents of oppression toward our own

(Participant, September 19, 2023)

Results:

Racism Generates Avoidance

Intersecting and compounding barriers to care are so profound **people in need are simply not accessing the limited programs and services that are available**



Results:

Racism Leading to Poor Care

- Accounts of racism directly negatively impacting the quality-of-care Indigenous patients receive
- Pervasive stereotypes leading to insufficient care, or even denial of care
- Lack of trust in system and healthcare providers

Recommendations:
The Way Forward

System Transformations

Resistance and Reclamation

System Transformation

Anti-Racism Education and Training

- Addresses system/s of power
- Takes a strength-based approach
- Grounded in reciprocal relationships
  - Meet local needs and priorities
- Support local capacity
- Accounts for and embeds intersectionality
- Ongoing and mandatory training
  - Including Indigenous-led monitoring and evaluation

"...Education just about the negatives creates a worse narrative and a worse situation because then they all think that we're about our deficits, and that's it."

(Participant, September 18, 2023)

Self-Determination within Transformation

System transformation and power sharing must be accompanied by **meaningful, adequate, and sustained funding and capacity supports**

"Part of the challenge around racism is that there were no resources for any of our Indigenous organizations to have representation there. … Who is there advocating for things to be better? No one advocates for resources for Indigenous people to sit at those tables. It happens in all areas. They should know better by now."

(Participant, September 18, 2023)

System Transformation

Accountability and Justice

Indigenous-led Processes

- Oversight and decision-making authority
- Meaningful engagement and relationship building
- Indigenous-led restorative and healing practices

Involvement of Regulators

Accountability Process Evaluation and Reports

- To ensure system performance in anti-Indigenous racism

Indigenizing Education and Training

- Need to challenge epistemic racism and dismantle Western-centric curricula

- Generate curricula that is culturally relevant and safe, values equally the insight, contributions, and wisdom of First, Nations, Inuit, and Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing

- Access to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis scholars, mentors, community leaders, and elders to support learning and training

Recruitment and Retention of Indigenous Staff within Mainstream Systems

Promising practices for mainstream system to expand their Indigenous Workforce:

- Cluster hires
- Establish partnerships
- Pay equity
- Evaluate workloads
- Develop leadership training and mentorship programs

Increasing Access

- Increased programs and services that reflect the needs, priorities, and realities of communities
- Co-design mental health and addictions programs and services
- Long-term, adequate, and stable funding

"The service delivery models often don't really consider that aspect of access. When your healthcare provider is hours away, boat rides away, float planes away, or 12-hour dirt roads away. When they also don't think of culturally safe and appropriate resources and spaces and individuals for First Nations, and they often don't think outside the box when providing services differently."

(Participant, September 19, 2023)

System Transformation

Service Standards

Develop Indigenous mental health and addiction service standards

Key elements:

- Cultural safety
- Holistic approaches and recognition of traditional healing practices
- Program development grounded in Indigenous self-determination
- Trauma-informed care
- Culturally relevant assessment and treatment
- Culturally relevant and safe data collection and evaluation
- Equitable and accessible services

Assessing Strengths and Centering Indigenous Knowledge and Practices

Strengths-based and culturally relevant assessment tools with consideration for:

- Lived reality (including rights and legal status)
- Indigenous social determinants of health
- Resilience and skills
- Cultural knowledge
- And family and community connections

Requires funding and commitment from institutions (health, government, professional, and insurance organizations)

"Indigenous people carry a lot of complex trauma that stems from residential school, and a lot of our issues are from disconnection from our culture, land, and sense of self. If we keep being assessed under Western standards, I think a lot of our people will internalize something is "wrong" with them and will perpetuate a cycle of helplessness"

(Participant, September 18, 2023)

Enabling Holistic, Culturally Relevant Practice

Replace and/or augment current treatment with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis-specific treatment practices:

- Traditional healing practices
- Land-based practices
- Cultural connection
- Story-telling and oral traditions
- Family and community-centred care
- Holistic approaches
- Healing-centred care

System Transformation

Indigenous Research

- Increased support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis-led research
  - Support policy and program
  - Monitor anti-Indigenous racism
- Increased support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis-led program evaluation
- Adapt and adopt best practices identified by First Nations Information Governance Centre

"We need more information. [...] There's a lot of anti-research sentiments in our communities, but we do need more data because... where I work there's no data. So, it's hard for me to argue with people that there's racism... because data doesn't exist... Even though I think that's what's happening. I don't have any way to prove that to the decision makers"

(Participant, September 19, 2023)

Resistance and Reclamation

"My dream world is not [focused on] eradicating racism within the healthcare system or within the education system. My dream world is stepping outside of that and allowing or creating space and funding and opportunities for Indigenous children, youth, and Elders to come together and build that up themselves"

(Participant, September 22, 2023)

Accounting for the Indigenous Social Determinants of Health

Meaningful and reciprocal partnerships that support and promote:

- Indigenous rights to self-determination
- Equity in resource allocation, employment and economic development
- Culturally-relevant holistic health and social services
- Language, culture, and education initiatives
- Safe and adequate housing and infrastructure
- Food security

Practicing Relationality and Generating Collective Strength

Relationality at the foundation of all responses to anti-Indigenous racism

- Interconnection and interdependence between all things
- Implies *responsibility* and *reciprocity*

Collective voices to advocate for equity

- Workforce pay equity
- Development of distinctions-based standards of care
- Support for a national mental wellness workforce association

Supporting Cultural Resurgence

Supporting cultural resurgence supports mental wellness

- Language revitalization
- Land and waters-based practices
- Cultural practices
- Intergenerational learning
- Traditional governance and accountability measures

Supporting Distinctions-Based, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit-led Continuums

First Nations

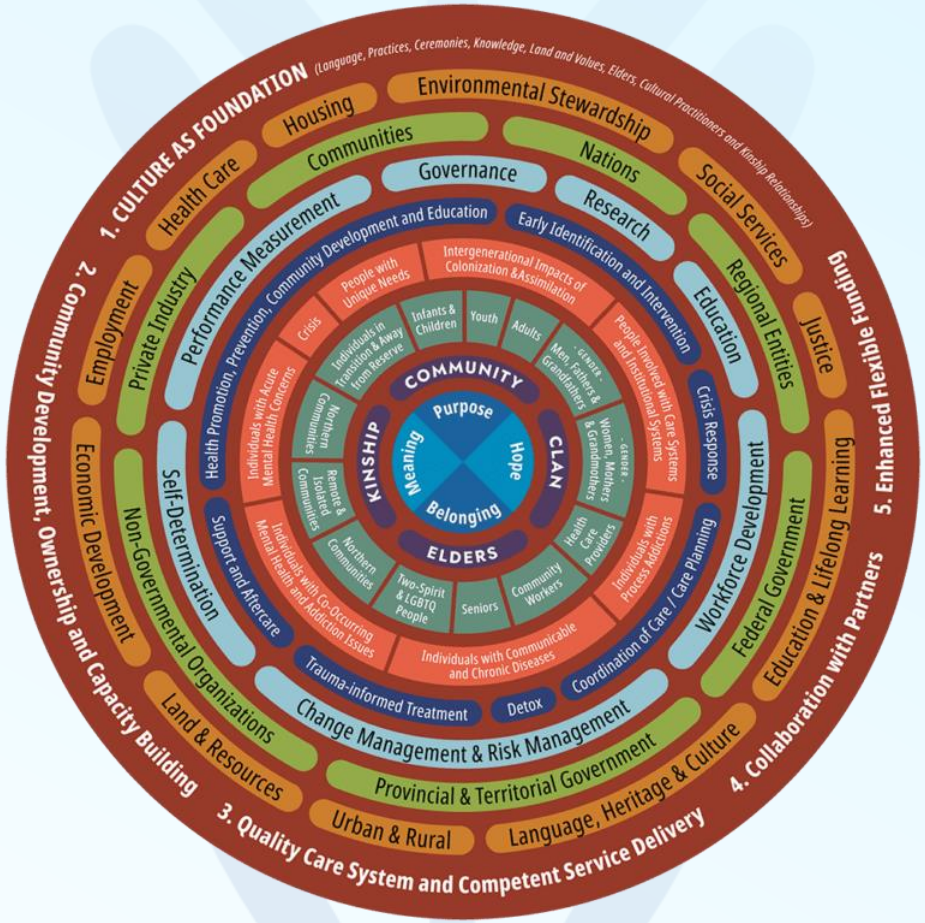
- First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework

Inuit

- National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy (ITK, 2016)

Métis

- No established analogous model, expressed interest and need



Keeping the Conversation Going

Federal and provincial/territorial partners should support further **dialogue with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and organizations to seek perspectives on the realities of and responses to anti-Indigenous racism within mental health and substance use spaces**

- First Nations, Inuit, and Métis scholars, students, and youth
- Multiple and intersecting identities (e.g. gender identity, class, disability)

"Our health disparities are a known outcome of the systemic racism experienced...We have the highest overdose and suicide rates; we have a population in this region with no hope... Racism is pervasive across systems and a training course is unlikely to correct institutionally indoctrinated beliefs. **Until we decolonize systems, we will be at the mercy of systems designed to assimilate us.**"

Survey Respondent

Miigwetch!

www.fpwc.ca

Dr. Brenda M Restoule, C.Psych

Chief Executive Officer
brenda.restoule@fpwc.ca
P 1-705-313-4942 ext. 1 **TF** 1-833-311-3792

www.thunderbirdpf.org

Dr. Carol Hopkins

Chief Executive Officer
chopkins@thunderbirdpf.org
P 1-519-692-9922 **TF** 1-866-763-4714