

**Caring for Our People:**  
Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020

**Votre bien-être, notre priorité:**  
Plan d'action sur le respect de la culture 2018-2020

Government of | Gouvernement des  
Northwest Territories  
Territoires du Nord-Ouest



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English

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Si vous voulez ces informations en français, contactez-nous.

French

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Kĩspin ki nitawihhtĩn ē nĩhĩyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsĩnān.

Cree

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Tłjchq yati k'ěě. Dı wegodi newq dè, gots'o gonede.

Tłjchq

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?erihht'is Dēne Sųhĩné yati t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyati the?ą ?at'e, nuwe ts'en yófti.

Chipewyan

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Edı gondı dehgáh got'je zhatié k'ěé edatl'éh enahddhę nide naxets'ę edahí.

South Slavey

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K'áshó got'jne xədə k'é hederı ?edjhtl'é yeriniwę nídé dúle.

North Slavey

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Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijáhch'uu zhit yinothtan ji', diits'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

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Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqłuta.

Inuvialuktun

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Ć'bdł ɒɒ<sup>sb</sup>Δ<sup>c</sup> Λ<sup>c</sup>LJΔ<sup>nc</sup> Δ<sup>db</sup>ɒɒ<sup>c</sup>ɒ<sup>sb</sup>ɒ<sup>nc</sup>ɒ<sup>b</sup>, ɒ<sup>c</sup>ɒ<sup>nc</sup>ɒ<sup>c</sup> ɒ<sup>sb</sup>ɒ<sup>nc</sup>ɒ<sup>c</sup>.

Inuktitut

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Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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# Message from the Minister of Health and Social Services

I am proud to present *Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020* that shares a vision for a territory where Indigenous peoples, families and communities

enjoy physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness.

Cultural safety is key to improving quality of care for Indigenous peoples because it addresses the difficult reality that the Northwest Territories health and social services system has not been a place of healing for many Indigenous residents. The legacies of colonization and residential schools have impacted Indigenous health outcomes and the way health and social services are delivered. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action challenge us to acknowledge that the status of Indigenous health is a direct result of Canadian government policies. The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to meeting these Calls to Action, including the development of cultural competency training for health and social services staff.

In 2016, I tabled the document *Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System*, which included a commitment to develop an action plan outlining a system approach to ensure cultural safety in health and social services. In the fall of 2017, we began a knowledge sharing process with Indigenous and Northern peoples and staff to listen to their experiences, concerns and aspirations for the Northwest Territories health and social services system. Indigenous residents

imagine cultural safety as rooted in relationships that are trusting, caring and ongoing. One of the ways that cultural safety is achieved is through relationship-based care. This includes honouring Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and diversity of the North.

In these knowledge sharing sessions we heard stories that are unique to the North and recognize that while we have many strengths, we also have much work to improve the quality and access to care for Indigenous residents. A whole system approach to change is necessary to embed cultural safety in the health and social services system. We began this shift in 2016 with system transformation and the creation of a single Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority that works in partnership with Hay River Health and Social Services Authority and the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency. This has placed us in a stronger position to make the significant changes needed to respond to our Indigenous and Northern clients. The timing is right to incorporate cultural safety throughout the health and social services system and to focus on relationship-based care.

Indigenous peoples know what is best for their own health, families and communities. As we move forward, the Department of Health and Social Services will continue to listen to and work with Indigenous residents, communities and governments to meaningfully support and incorporate cultural safety across the territory. By working collaboratively with our partners we can make positive change a reality for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous residents in the Northwest Territories.

## **Our Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action**

The Government of the Northwest Territories has acknowledged the role that residential school policies have played in contributing to health disparities for Indigenous peoples and is committed to meeting Call to Action #23:

**We call upon all levels of government to:**

- iii. Provide cultural competency training for all health care professionals.**

# Executive Summary

This *Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020* shares a vision for the Northwest Territories where Indigenous peoples, their families and communities enjoy physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness. Over the next two years, the Department of Health and Social Services will work to implement the objectives and actions to embed cultural safety throughout the entire system. This contributes to the larger efforts of the *Caring for Our People Strategic Plan for the NWT Health and Social Services System 2017-2020* vision for Best Health, Best Care, for a Better Future.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, including Call to Action #23 which is the development of cultural competency training for health and social services staff.

## What is Cultural Safety?

Cultural safety is an outcome where Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, free of racism and discrimination, when accessing health and social services programs and services.

## What is Relationship-Based Care?

Indigenous residents want trusting, caring and ongoing relationships with their providers. Relationship-based care is an approach that puts the needs of clients and their families first.

## Building on Success

System transformation efforts made over the last two years have placed the Department of Health and Social Services in a stronger position to respond to the needs of clients and their families in the Northwest Territories. The timing is right to embed cultural safety and to focus on relationship-based care in the health and social services system.

## The Case for Cultural Safety and Focus on Indigenous Peoples

*Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020* takes an equity approach by targeting the population in most need. In the Northwest Territories, Indigenous peoples make up 50% of the population and experience greater health disparities in comparison to other residents.

## What We Heard

The key objectives and actions laid out in the *Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020* were identified by Indigenous and Northern residents including health and social services clients, Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Leadership Council, Regional Wellness Councils, non-government organizations as well as health and social services staff as priorities during nine months of community collaboration and informed by a review of the best practices in the field.

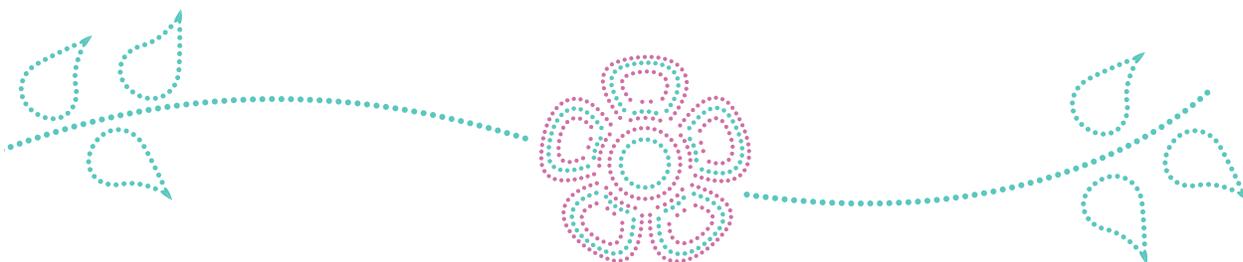


## Vision

A territory where Indigenous peoples, families and communities enjoy physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness.

## Goal

Support equitable access to culturally safe and relationship-based care to improve health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.



## Objectives

### 1. Create an Organizational Culture of Cultural Safety

Develop a whole health and social services system approach, including commitment from leadership, policies and organizational structures to embed cultural safety in the organization.

### 2. Strengthen Staff Capacity for Cultural Safety

Build and enhance staff capacity through training and other professional development supports to have the knowledge, skills and behaviors to provide appropriate and equitable care rooted in culturally safe practices.

### 3. Honour Traditional Knowledge and Healing Approaches in Care

Explore and incorporate ways in which traditional knowledge and healing approaches can respectfully be incorporated alongside existing health and social services.

### 4. Improve Client and Community Experience

Improve the client and community experience through culturally safe and relationship-based care, which puts the needs of clients and their families first.

These objectives are intended to be foundational, setting the stage for further development while aligning with best practices in the field. Once the Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020 is completed, the Department of Health and Social Services will continue to engage with Indigenous and Northern residents to measure the progress of the goal and objectives. Client experiences will be monitored and outcomes evaluated and to inform quality improvement. This is just the beginning. As we move forward, the Department of Health and Social Services will continue to embed cultural safety across the health and social services system.

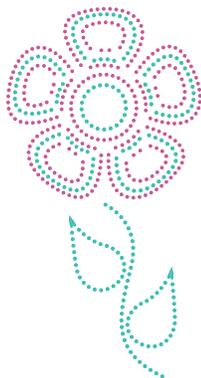
# Résumé

Le plan d'action *Votre bien-être, notre priorité : Plan d'action sur le respect de la culture (2018 2020)* a pour ambition d'instaurer aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO) un climat favorable à la santé et au mieux-être physiques, mentaux, émotionnels et spirituels des résidents, des familles et des collectivités autochtones. Au cours des deux prochaines années, le ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) s'efforcera de mettre en œuvre les mesures nécessaires pour atteindre son objectif d'ancrer le respect de la culture dans l'ensemble du système. Ce plan d'action contribue aux efforts globaux de *Votre bien-être, notre priorité : Plan stratégique pour le système de santé et de services sociaux des TNO (2017-2020)* mettant de l'avant la perspective d'avenir du MSSS : une santé optimale, des soins optimaux, un avenir prometteur.

Le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest s'engage à répondre aux appels à l'action de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation, y compris l'appel à l'action n° 23, qui concerne l'élaboration d'un programme de formation sur le savoir-faire culturel pour le personnel des services de santé et des services sociaux.

## Qu'est-ce que ça signifie, des soins ancrés dans le respect de la culture?

Offrir des soins ancrés dans le respect de la culture signifie faire en sorte que les peuples autochtones se sentent respectés et à l'abri du racisme et de la discrimination lorsqu'ils reçoivent des services de santé et de services sociaux.



## Qu'est-ce que ça signifie, des soins ancrés dans un rapport de confiance?

Offrir des soins ancrés dans un rapport de confiance signifie adopter une approche qui place les besoins des patients et de leur famille au premier plan et qui reconnaît l'importance d'établir de bonnes relations pour obtenir de meilleurs bilans de santé. Les résidents autochtones souhaitent établir un rapport de confiance permanent avec leurs professionnels de la santé.

## Inspirons-nous de nos réussites

Grâce aux travaux de transformation du système des deux dernières années, le MSSS se trouve dans une meilleure position pour répondre aux besoins des patients et de leur famille. Le temps est propice pour intégrer le respect de la culture au système de santé et de services sociaux et pour canaliser nos efforts sur les rapports de confiance.

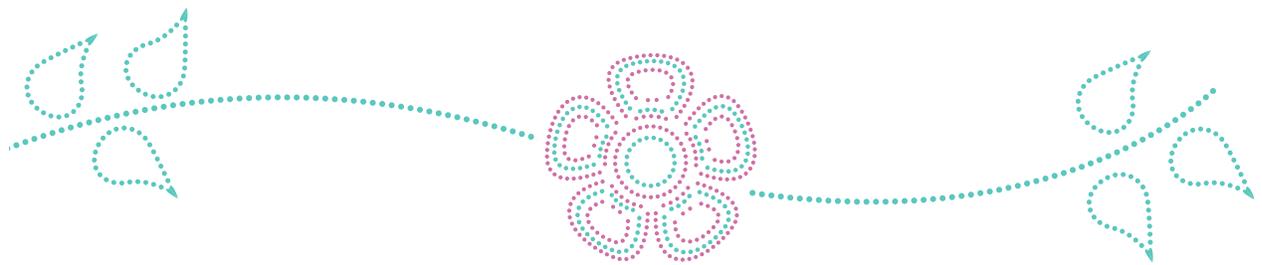
## L'importance des soins ancrés dans le respect de la culture pour les Autochtones

Le document *Votre bien-être, notre priorité : Plan d'action sur le respect de la culture (2018 2020)* adopte une approche axée sur l'équité en ciblant la population qui en a le plus besoin. Aux TNO, les Autochtones comptent pour 50 % de la population et ils se heurtent à des disparités en santé, comparativement aux autres résidents. Les personnes LGBTQ2S+, les immigrants et les réfugiés affirment également avoir de la difficulté à recevoir des services de santé et de services sociaux. En outre, les Autochtones qui appartiennent à la communauté LGBTQ2S+ peuvent se heurter à des obstacles supplémentaires liés à une discrimination fondée sur l'origine, l'orientation sexuelle ou l'identité de genre. Le ministère est appelé à faire un meilleur travail pour répondre aux besoins de tous les résidents. Bien que nous accordions la priorité aux Autochtones, le renforcement du savoir-faire culturel grâce à des formations profitera à tous.

## Ce que nous avons entendu

Les mesures et les objectifs clés de *Votre bien-être, notre priorité : Plan d'action sur le respect de la culture (2018-2020)* reposent sur l'examen des pratiques exemplaires dans le domaine. Elles reposent également sur les commentaires formulés par les personnes et les organismes suivants au cours d'une collaboration communautaire de neuf mois : les résidents autochtones et non autochtones ténois, notamment les patients du

système de santé et de services sociaux; le Conseil de leadership des services de santé et des services sociaux des Territoires du Nord-Ouest; les conseils régionaux du mieux-être; l'Administration des services de santé et des services sociaux de Hay River; l'Agence de services communautaires t̃h̃ch̃q̃; des organismes non gouvernementaux, et le personnel de la santé et des services sociaux.



## Vision

Instaurer aux TNO un climat favorable à la santé et au mieux-être physiques, mentaux, émotionnels et spirituels des résidents, des familles et des collectivités autochtones.

## But

Favoriser un accès équitable à des soins ancrés dans le respect de la culture et le rapport de confiance pour améliorer la santé des Autochtones.

## Objectifs

### 1. Intégrer le respect de la culture au système des services de santé et des services sociaux

Mettre en œuvre une approche globale qui permette d'intégrer le respect de la culture à toutes les sphères de la santé et des services sociaux, notamment la haute direction, les politiques et les structures de l'organisation.

### 2. Renforcer les compétences culturelles du personnel

Permettre au personnel d'acquérir et de renforcer ses compétences culturelles grâce à de la formation et du perfectionnement professionnel afin qu'il possède les connaissances et les aptitudes nécessaires pour offrir des soins appropriés, équitables et ancrés dans le respect de la culture.

### 3. Respecter les connaissances traditionnelles et les méthodes traditionnelles de guérison

Étudier les façons d'intégrer de façon respectueuse les connaissances et les méthodes traditionnelles de guérison aux programmes et aux services actuels de santé et de services sociaux.

### 4. Améliorer la satisfaction des patients

Améliorer la satisfaction des patients en offrant des soins ancrés dans le respect de la culture et le rapport de confiance. Ainsi, les besoins des patients et de leur famille sont à l'avant plan.

Les objectifs précités constituent une première étape, tout comme l'adoption de pratiques exemplaires du domaine. Le MSSS poursuivra sa collaboration avec les Ténos et les résidents du Nord après la mise en œuvre de *Votre bien-être, notre priorité : Plan d'action sur le respect de la culture (2018-2020)*. Pour soutenir l'amélioration de la qualité des services, le Ministère évaluera l'état d'avancement des buts et des objectifs fixés en faisant un suivi de la satisfaction des patients et en analysant les résultats de la mise en œuvre du plan d'action. Et ce n'est que le début : le MSSS continuera d'offrir des soins ancrés dans le respect de la culture dans l'ensemble du système de santé et de services sociaux.

# Introduction

This *Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020* (Action Plan) shares a vision for the Northwest Territories (NWT) where Indigenous peoples, families and communities enjoy physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness. The Action Plan guides the work with objectives and actions required over the next two years to embed cultural safety throughout the health and social services system, while improving quality and increasing access to programs and services. The Department of Health and Social Services (the Department) is dedicated to allocating resources and making efforts to accomplish these key objectives and actions. The Department recognizes that work must happen now and is committed to doing so.

The Action Plan contributes to larger efforts to realize the Department's vision of Best Health, Best Care, for a Better Future outlined in the *Caring for Our People Strategic Plan for the NWT Health and Social Services System 2017-2020*. In addition, the 2016 *Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System* document made a commitment to ensure that all aspects of the health and social services system are culturally safe and respectful for all clients. This has provided a framework for the Department's approach to cultural safety.

## What is Cultural Safety?

Cultural safety is an outcome where Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, free of racism and discrimination, when accessing health and social services programs and services. Unfortunately, Indigenous residents have described experiencing various forms of racism within the NWT health and social services system. Working towards cultural safety requires transformation at all levels of the system, from policies to practices, to properly address inequities related to accessing health and social services. An important feature of cultural safety is understanding that a legacy of colonialism, including racism in health and social services, influences Indigenous health outcomes and access to care and services.

## What is Relationship-Based Care?

Indigenous residents have expressed that relationship-based care is a priority, meaning that clients want trusting, caring and ongoing relationships with their providers. Relationship-based care is an approach that puts the needs of clients and families first and results in a health and social services system that prioritizes relationships while removing barriers to achieving those relationships. The Department recognizes that building long-term relationships between clients, practitioners and staff makes a difference to both client experiences in health and social services and health outcomes. Relationship-based care is foundational to cultural safety and is therefore an integral part of this Action Plan.



Photo by Amos Scott

## What are Cultural Safety Best Practices?

“Best Practices” are methods that have been shown by research and experience to promote the best results and are widely accepted. Cultural safety is achieved when all of these best practices are incorporated:

1. Clients are engaged to identify whether their care has been culturally respectful.
2. Staff is trained to have the skills, knowledge and behaviours to provide culturally safe care.
3. Leadership is committed to supporting a culturally safe organization.
4. Cultural safety is embedded throughout the health and social services system, from policies to practice.
5. A more diverse workforce reflects the population it serves.
6. The physical nature of health and social services facilities promote cultural safety, including design features that honours and integrates traditional knowledge and healing approaches in care.

## Building on Success

2018 marks the beginning of the third year of system transformation. Efforts made over the last years to improve the quality of and access to programs and services and to better allocate resources have placed the Department in a stronger position to respond to the needs of clients and their families in the territory. The timing is right to embed cultural safety throughout the health and social services system and to focus on relationship-based care. When Indigenous peoples feel culturally safe interacting with staff and the health and social service system they are more likely to access care when needed, leading to improved health outcomes.





Photo by Tawna Brown

## The Case for Cultural Safety and Focus on Indigenous Peoples

Cultural safety takes an equity approach by targeting the population in most need. This Action Plan seeks to address health inequities experienced by Indigenous residents in the NWT by improving equitable access to health and social services. Indigenous peoples make up 50% of the population in the NWT. Despite some efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of programs and services, Indigenous peoples experience significant health disparities compared to non-Indigenous residents. Health disparities are complicated or made worse when Indigenous peoples do not access care because of barriers like racism including systemic racism. In addition, experiences of racism have been linked directly to poor health.

Other groups of people, including the LGBTQ2S+ and the immigrant and refugee communities, have also expressed challenges accessing care in the health and social services system. In addition, Indigenous peoples who identify with the LGBTQ2S+ community may face added barriers due to racism and sexual orientation and/or gender discrimination. The Department is challenged to do a better job of meeting the needs of all residents.

A culturally safe system for Indigenous peoples benefits all Northerners, including the LGBTQ2S+ and immigrant and refugee communities. Cultural safety goes beyond learning about Indigenous cultures and practices, or the cultures of other groups, to examine how barriers to accessing care are caused by the health and social services system itself. Training also has an important role in building competencies among the workforce to meet the needs of all who receive care from the health and social services system. In addition to understanding factors that uniquely affect the lives of Indigenous peoples, such as colonialism, cultural safety recognizes that all client health outcomes, including the LGBTQ2S+ and the immigrant and refugee communities, are impacted by outside forces, otherwise known as the social determinants of health.

## What We Heard

In the fall of 2017, the Department began a knowledge sharing process with Indigenous and Northern peoples including health and social services clients, Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Leadership Council (Leadership Council), Regional Wellness Councils, Hay River Health and Social Services Authority, Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency, non-government organizations, and health and social services staff to listen to their experiences, concerns and aspirations for the NWT health and social services system. The vision, goal, objectives and actions laid out in the Action Plan were identified as priorities during nine months of community collaboration. The Action Plan was also informed by a review of the best practices in the field.

## Ongoing Collaboration

As the Department moves forward with implementing the objectives and actions in the Action Plan, ongoing community collaboration is critical to ensure that cultural safety is grounded in the unique cultures of Indigenous and Northern peoples and is integrated throughout the entire health and social services system. Approaches to engagement have been established through legislation including the Leadership Council and Regional Wellness Councils that provide governance and guidance from the communities they represent. The Department is also committed to hearing the voices of peoples and communities including Indigenous governments, the Indigenous Advisory Body, and non-governmental organizations through continued community collaboration.

# Vision, Goal and Objectives

*Based on the direction received from client and community collaboration including Indigenous and Northern peoples and a review of best practices from jurisdictions across Canada and the world, the following vision, goal and objectives have been identified as critical to embedding cultural safety in the health and social services system.*

## Objective 1



## Objective 2



## Values

### Holistic

Nurture the wellbeing of the whole person, family and community respecting physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs.

### Innovation

Infuse new ways of thinking and knowledge into the health and social services system to enhance the lives of those we serve.

### Relationships

Build mutually respectful, trusting, caring and ongoing relationships between Indigenous and Northern residents, their families, communities and the workforce as the foundation of health and social services care and healing.

## Vision

A territory where Indigenous peoples, families and communities enjoy physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness.

## Goal

Support equitable access to culturally safe and relationship-based care to improve health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

### Objective 3



### Objective 4



### “Nothing about us without us”

Partner with Indigenous peoples and communities to define issues of concern and identify solutions to inform policies and programs. Indigenous residents know what is best for their own families and communities.

### Equity

Support fair opportunities for all people to live long healthy lives, especially those in greatest need.

### Respect and Caring

Value and honour diversity, and treat all peoples and their families with dignity and compassion.

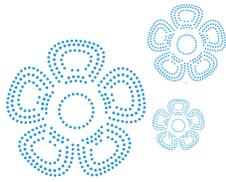


Photo by Tawna Brown

# Ongoing Action

*In 2018, the Department has worked to make the health and social services system more responsive to Indigenous peoples and their families' experiences, concerns and aspirations. Positive work has taken place that includes:*

- Collaboration with Indigenous and Northern peoples including health and social services clients, Leadership Council, Regional Wellness Councils, Hay River Health and Social Services Authority, Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency, non-government organizations, and health and social services staff to guide the development of the Action Plan. Over thirty knowledge sharing meetings, including with every Regional Wellness Council, were held in all six regions.
- Established the Indigenous Advisory Body to guide policies, programs and overall implementation of the health and social services system. Members represent Indigenous government organizations in the NWT.
- Developed the Elders-In-Residence pilot program at Stanton Territorial Hospital to provide cultural and spiritual care to Indigenous clients and their families.
- Worked with partners including a local Indigenous consultant on the expansion of the Elders-in-Residence pilot program to other regions in the NWT.
- Developed the Inuinnaqtun Pilot Program at Emegak Health and Social Services in Ulukhaktok to support the language needs of Inuinnaqtun speakers receiving health and social services care in the community as well as on medical travel.
- Researched and trialed cultural competency trainings from nationally and internationally recognized programs to inform the development of a training package suited for the NWT.
- Met with organizations in Canada and the United States including British Columbia First Nations Health Authority, British Columbia Northern Health Authority, Canada School of Public Service, Indigenous Reconciliation Group, National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, Native American Connections, Southcentral Foundation's Nuka System of Care and the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health to seek guidance on developing culturally safe health and social services system.



## Objective 1:

### Create an Organizational Culture of Cultural Safety

In order for cultural safety to be successfully implemented and modeled by the workforce, a whole system approach is required. This means the health and social services system must embed cultural safety into the entire organization and not treat it as a separate initiative. The work conducted over the last two years under system transformation has provided the foundation to do this.

Over the next two years, targeted actions will focus on leadership to build organizational capacity and foster commitment to cultural safety. Improvements to the

design and function of primary health care will take a relationship-based care approach that puts the needs of clients and families first. This results in a health and social services system that works to remove barriers and supports respectful and caring relationships between residents, providers and the workforce.

Policies and organizational structures aligned with cultural safety and relationship-based care will support and build an organizational culture of cultural safety for clients, their families, communities and the workforce.

## Areas of Action

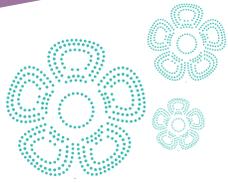
In 2019, the Department will:

- Formalize a project team dedicated to incorporating relationship-based care in primary health care.
- Identify cultural safety champions across the health and social services system to support advancement and promote awareness of cultural safety.
- Develop an educational resource for staff that includes practical information and tips on how to create welcoming environments in facilities for clients.
- Develop an engagement toolkit for staff to improve and promote respectful engagement processes when working with Indigenous peoples and communities on areas of concern and to inform policies and programs.

In 2020, the Department will:

- Provide support to the Leadership Council and Regional Wellness Council members to enhance their roles as cultural safety champions in the health and social services system.
- Develop an equity lens to ensure programs and services address inequities in the health and social services system and do not further disadvantage Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+ and immigrant and refugee populations.





## Objective 2:

### Strengthen Staff Capacity for Cultural Safety

Successfully embedding cultural safety calls for shared responsibility and commitment from all levels of the health and social services system including the workforce. Staff must have the knowledge, skills and behaviors to provide appropriate and equitable care rooted in culturally safe practices.

In order to provide culturally safe care, staff must be equipped with cultural competencies that enhance relationship-based care. Training, on the land learning opportunities and professional development, including resources and tools, can support staff in their cultural safety journey as well as the attainment and enhancement of cultural competencies. Training will be provided with a sequenced approach. The first step will focus on ensuring staff have completed the GNWT

Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training. Next steps will include working with leading experts that deliver cultural competency training to build a package that is NWT specific.

Cultural safety is achieved when best practices are incorporated including having a workforce that reflects the population it serves. This means clients should expect to see more Indigenous peoples working in a variety of positions across the health and social services system. Staff that is representative of the diversity in communities leads to improved access to care and health outcomes. New recruitment strategies will be developed for a more representative workforce.

## Areas of Action

In 2019, the Department will:

- Ensure that the majority of the health and social services workforce complete the online GNWT Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training.
- Develop a toolkit to support culturally safe and respectful communication between staff and clients.

In 2020, the Department will:

- Establish regional specific onboarding processes for locum practitioners working with Indigenous peoples and communities.
- Deliver on the land learning opportunities for the workforce that are Northern specific and delivered on an annual basis.
- Identify, test and evaluate nationally recognized cultural competency training programs that are best suited for the NWT.
- Develop new human resources recruitment strategies aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous peoples in the workforce.
- Require staff to include in their performance evaluation learning plan annual goals focused on building or enhancing cultural competencies.

### Cultural Competency Training

Cultural competency training focuses on developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes of staff and reflects the process of building effective relationships with Indigenous clients. The Department will provide training to staff on the following topics:

- The history and impacts of colonization and residential schools on Indigenous peoples in the NWT;
- Regional specific information about Indigenous peoples in the NWT;
- Understanding systemic and unconscious racism and bias;
- Relationship building to work effectively and respectfully with Indigenous people; and
- An experiential component led by local Indigenous peoples.

Photo by Tawna Brown



## Objective 3:

### Honour Traditional Knowledge and Healing Approaches in Care

Traditional knowledge refers to the knowledge, practices and innovation emerging from Indigenous worldviews, or ways of understanding the world, since time immemorial. Traditional knowledge continues to be applied to current day contexts and is expressed in many ways including traditional healing, storytelling, hunting and trapping and food gathering.

Traditional healing are practices and approaches rooted in Indigenous knowledge to improve, restore and uphold health and wellness among Indigenous peoples, their families and communities. All aspects of a person including the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs are equally important for overall health and wellness.

Indigenous peoples have expressed that traditional healing practices and approaches are important for their health and wellness journeys. However, the legacies of colonization and residential schools, as well as the introduction of western medicine, which primarily

focuses on the physical aspect of a person, have impacted the availability and accessibility of traditional healing in the North. Exploring ways traditional healing can be respectfully incorporated alongside existing programs and services will be done in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, knowledge holders and other partners.

The physical nature of health and social services facilities can make a meaningful difference in a client's experience. Facilities that are responsive to Indigenous peoples through design features including designated areas for smudging and spaces to accommodate families and community promotes equitable access to programs and services. The healing journey for Indigenous peoples is also facilitated through access to traditional foods and guidance from Elders in facilities, such as the Elders-in-Residence program at Stanton Territorial Hospital. Continued efforts will be made in partnership with Indigenous peoples to identify and explore options to meet health and wellness priorities.

## Areas of Action

In 2019, the Department will:

- Examine the success of the Elders-in-Residence program at Stanton Territorial Hospital and identify opportunities for expansion to other NWT facilities.
- Review and provide policy options to increase delivery of traditional foods for Indigenous clients.
- Facilitate a gathering of knowledge holders to develop strategies on ways to incorporate traditional healing practices alongside programs and services.

In 2020, the Department will:

- Identify system changes necessary to incorporate traditional healing practices into the delivery of care in the NWT.
- Develop design standards so that new builds and renovations promote welcoming environments and access to care for Indigenous clients.
- Review and provide policy options for smudging in facilities and designated outdoor spaces.
- With guidance from the Indigenous Advisory Body, conduct an environmental scan on existing traditional healing practices and services in the NWT, including a review of best practices in other jurisdictions and produce a report on findings including gaps, challenges and opportunities.



Photo Credit Kristian Binder



## Objective 4:

### Improve Client and Community Experience

#### *“Nothing about us, without us”*

To improve the client and community experience the Department is committed to culturally safe and relationship-based care, which puts the needs of clients and their families first. Trusting, caring and ongoing relationships between the workforce, Indigenous peoples, their families and communities enhances and supports health and wellness journeys. In addition, the Department will take a strength based approach to community collaboration and work with and build off the positive work already happening in the communities.

Indigenous peoples have a voice in the health and social services system. Ensuring those voices are

acknowledged, heard and respected is a priority. Ways to do this include increasing client awareness of rights and responsibilities, developing mechanisms for client feedback and complaints and providing resources and services to support clients in their care journey.

Good client and community collaboration is built on mutual respect and trust and supports the inclusion and participation of all peoples. Honouring the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous peoples and communities is critical to define issues of concern and to inform policies and programs. Ongoing collaboration is vital to ensuring that cultural safety is integrated throughout all aspects of the health and social services system.

## Areas of Action

In 2019, the Department will:

- Formalize a territorial compliments and complaints process to better understand client experiences to inform quality improvement.
- Enhance client feedback mechanisms including a client experience survey that reflects cultural safety.
- Create resources and tools to improve client experiences when accessing programs and services in health and social services facilities, including information on cultural safety and relationship-based care initiatives.

In 2020, the Department will:

- Review the existing Client Rights and Responsibilities and make revisions to promote awareness and encourage mutual respect and trust in relationship-based care between clients and staff.
- Improve system navigation services to support and track clients in their health and wellness journey.
- Conduct a needs assessment of interpreter and translation services in facilities, including whether these services are available to clients during complaints processes and provide recommendations.
- In the year 2020, conduct an assessment on signage in facilities that includes a review of Indigenous language and plain language needs and provide recommendations to help create welcoming environments.





Photo GNWT

To promote cultural safety in the knowledge sharing sessions that informed the development of this Action Plan, cultural objects were brought into each engagement. This soapstone carving, birchbark basket, and Métis sash were used to help create culturally safe and respectful spaces for people to share their wisdom and stories.

## Monitoring Progress

The Department will continue to partner with Indigenous and Northern residents to help shape our approach to cultural safety and best respond to current needs. Progress towards achieving the actions committed to in the *Action Plan* will be monitored and measured through a number of methods:

- Provide a status update on the progress and achievements to date in the Department of Health and Social Services' Annual Report;
- Monitor trends in client reported experiences through the administration of the Patient Experience Questionnaires for Health Services; and
- Monitor trends in client reported experiences through the administration of the Community Counselling Program.

## Moving Forward

This *Action Plan* has set out the vision, goal and objectives for the NWT health and social services system for the next two years. These are the beginning steps. The Department is committed to action beyond the lifetime of the *Action Plan* and is dedicated to working in partnership with residents, families, communities, Indigenous governments and non-government organizations to further the advancement of cultural safety in the health and social services system.



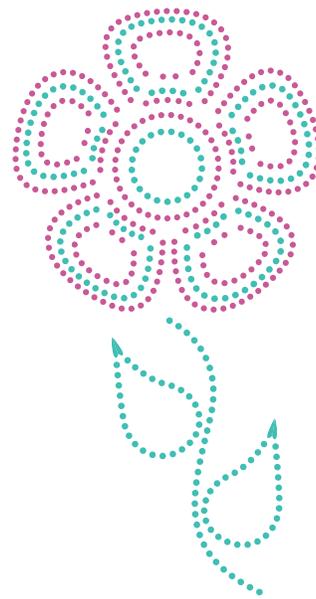
Photo by Tawna Brown

# Giving Thanks

Thank you to everyone who has inspired, guided and shared their experiences, knowledge and stories with the Department to create a thoughtful and meaningful *Action Plan* including:

- Indigenous and Northern health and social services clients;
- Indigenous governments of the NWT;
- Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Leadership Council;
- Regional Wellness Councils;
- Department of Health and Social Services staff;
- Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority staff;
- Hay River Health and Social Services Authority;
- Tẖchq̱ Community Services Agency;
- Canada School of Public Service;
- British Columbia First Nations Health Authority;
- British Columbia Northern Health Authority;
- Indigenous Reconciliation Group;
- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health;
- Native American Connections;
- Southcentral Foundation's Nuka System of Care; and
- Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health.

A special thank you to Indigenous Services Canada for generously supporting this work.



Mársı | Kinanāskomitin | Thank you |  
Merci | Hąj' | Quana | Qujannamiik |  
Quyainainni | Máhsı | Máhsı | Mahsì



Photo GNWT

# Appendix 1- Glossary of Terms

**Access** is the responsibility of the health and social services system to meet the unique and diverse needs of Indigenous and Northern residents by providing welcoming, respectful and caring programs, services and facilities.

**Authorities** are operational branches of the NWT health and social services system. There are three authorities: Northwest Territories Health Social Services Authority, Hay River Health and Social Services and Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency.

**Cultural Safety** is an outcome where Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, free of racism and discrimination, when accessing health and social services care.

**Cultural Safety Champions** are staff members who foster the development and promote awareness of culturally safe care throughout the health and social services system.

**Cultural Competency** refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes of staff members and reflects the process of building effective relationships with Indigenous patients.

**Equity** in health means that everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and recognize that differences in social determinants of health impact peoples' ability to achieve their highest potential of health. Achieving equity requires allocation of resources and designing policies and programs that target populations with the most disproportionate disparities.

**Indigenous Peoples** in this document refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples collectively and is used interchangeably with Indigenous residents.

**Inequity** refers to disparities or differences in the social determinants of health that are largely beyond the control of those experiencing the disparities. Factors such as low educational attainment, access to food, racism in health care and a legacy of colonialism can create disparities in health outcomes and access to care.

**Racism** categorizes groups of people as inferior based primarily on physical characteristics like skin colour. Racism can be expressed in many ways, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

**Relationship-Based Care** is an approach that puts the needs of clients and families first and results in a health and social services system that prioritizes relationships while removing barriers to achieving those relationships.

**Social Determinants of Health** are economic and social conditions that influence the health of people and communities. These conditions are shaped by the amount of money, power and resources that people have, all of which are influenced by policy choices. Social determinants of health affect factors that are related to health outcomes and include early childhood experiences; level of education; being able to keep a job; the kind of work a person does; having food, or being able to get enough food; access to health services and the quality of those services; housing status and physical environments; amount of money earned; gender; and discrimination and social support.

**Systemic Racism** occurs when institutions, such as health and social services, give space to discrimination whether it is intentional or not.

**Traditional Healing** are practices and approaches rooted in Indigenous knowledge that maintain and restore the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness of Indigenous peoples, their families and communities.

**Traditional Knowledge** refers to the knowledge, practices and innovation emerging from Indigenous worldviews, or ways of understanding the world since time immemorial. Traditional knowledge continues to be applied to current day contexts and is expressed in many ways, including traditional healing, storytelling, hunting and trapping and food gathering.



Photo by Tawna Brown

## Appendix 2- References

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