

syilx Okanagan territory | Kelowna, BC

Interior Health Indigenous Engagement Forum: Summary Report

February 28 and 29, 2024





Acknowledgements

It is with great respect and gratitude that Interior Health (IH) Indigenous Partnerships acknowledges the syilx Nation and the traditional and unceded territory on which we gathered for the Indigenous Engagement Forum (IEF).

We also acknowledge Westbank First Nation, Okanagan Indian Band and Okanagan Nation Alliance and offer thanks to Virginia Gregoire, Kacey Miller and Grouse Barnes for welcoming us in a good way to the community both days.

Thank you to the Indigenous Health Care Advocates who led our Advisory Committee for the collaborative effort and partnerships, which contributed to the success of the event. We are grateful to the Elders, keynote speakers, panelists, presenters, and event supporters for providing their time, knowledge, expertise and thoughts on various topics.

We sincerely appreciate [Shelanne Justice Photography](#) for the visual storytelling captured in the stunning photographs featured in this report. Shelanne possesses a keen eye and ability to convey narratives through the lens. We are honored to showcase her work.

The wisdom shared during the event was outstanding, contributing immensely to the enrichment of our knowledge and perspectives.

Overview

The inaugural IH Indigenous Engagement Forum was held in syilx territory (Kelowna, BC) on February 28 and 29, 2024. The event saw a diverse mix of Indigenous community members and partners, as well as IH staff, totaling 210 attendees over two days despite snowy conditions around the Interior. The event's intent was to provide an open-forum-style engagement opportunity to alleviate and respond to the often-times numerous requests for engagement on projects and initiatives. In the morning of February 28, we were welcomed to the territory by Okanagan Indian Band elder, Virginia Gregoire and drummer, Kacey Miller, followed by a few words by IH CEO, Susan Brown and VP, Indigenous Partnerships, Addie Pryce.

The event began with an Elders Panel, guiding attendees with teachings that followed them throughout the rest of the two days. Then, Kim Montgomery of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) led us through her keynote on Spaḡá Engagement. The afternoon focused on breakout sessions where both IH leadership and staff and Indigenous community partners were able to engage in dialogue, providing feedback on various programs and services.

On the evening of the first day, attendees gathered to share a meal and honor the late Dr. Doug Cochrane, IH Board Chair who had utilized his position and relationships to make incredible strides with the health authority's relationship with Interior region Nation partners.

Day two began with a keynote from Jared Basil of the Ktunaxa Nation, followed by a panel of IH's Indigenous Patient Navigators (IPN). In a surprise blanket ceremony, IH staff honored the incredible people in IPN roles. The afternoon brought much of the same as day one, splitting off into breakout sessions and wrapping up the two days spent together.

The Forum ended with so much gratitude for the speakers, presenters, and guests, excited to move forward with new connections and a plan to meet again in 2025.

Attendance

The forum had a robust turnout with 210 attendees. The self-identification from registration shows a variety of backgrounds and perspectives that contributed to the constructive and meaningful dialogue during the event:

- 72 First Nations community members
- 39 Métis community members
- 95 IH staff
 - 21 who identified as First Nations or Métis
- 4 individuals from external organizations

Speakers and Presenters

Cara Basil was entrusted as the event facilitator and moderator. Cara is a member of the Bonaparte First Nation (Secwépemc Nation) and planner for Sanala Planning, who has extensive community and Nation-level experience at facilitating, planning and relational work.

Presentations and Multimedia

Event speakers shared copies of their presentations and information for event participants to access. A [Dropbox](#) is available to access files for information purposes for those who attended.

The IH Communications Team created a 1-minute video capturing key moments of the event that can be viewed [here](#). Thank you to IH multimedia consultant Peter Verge for your thoughtfulness that went into creating this short video of the event.

Event photos taken by Shelanne Justice can be found here: [2024 Indigenous Engagement Forum \(pic-time.com\)](#)

Opening

Elder Virginia Gregoire and drummer, Kacey Miller, from Okanagan Indian Band opened the first day with a prayer and song. On the second day, Elder Grouse Barnes from Westbank First Nation started our day with nsylxcən teachings and encouraged laughter throughout the event. These honored guests were each given a gift of thanks for their attendance and participation and for sharing their culture with the attendees at the Engagement Forum.



Keynote Speakers

Kim Montgomery

Kim Montgomery led the Forum's first Keynote Presentation called Spaʔá Engagement. Kim shared a heartfelt message that was informed by who she is relationally, culturally, and spiritually as a sqilx^w woman and through her 30 years of trauma work. She currently works as the Mental Health Team Lead for the Okanagan Nation Alliance.



One of Kim's key messages highlighted the importance of honoring Nation protocols, getting to know the people and learning how to set the table for partnership and collaborative work. Conversations and presentations like hers are good starting points for developing relationships, but real changes need to be felt and accounted for in community.

Jared Basil

Jared Basil, a member of the Yaqan Nukiy band of the Ktunaxa Nation, presented on the Ktunaxa Nation Council Social Sector Framework. He shared stories of relationality – reminding attendees that one of us is never as smart as all of us and to work together and have empathy for one another. Jared has presented this framework around the Interior region, highlighting the importance of Nation-driven cultural safety education, and generously brought his presentation to the Engagement Forum.



Breakout Sessions

Day 1

Opportunities for Collaboration Amid Disasters and Climate Change

Presenters:

Kady Hunter, *Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation, IH*

Tamara Sommer, *Health Emergency Management, PHSA/IH*



Tamara Sommer provided an introduction about what the disaster and emergency response in the Interior and subsequently in BC looks like. Responding to disasters and emergencies is an inter-agency collaborative; while this often can help streamline approaches, it can also leave gaps in services and funding needs. This engagement session utilized anonymous *Mentimeter* questions and polls seeking to find out how improvements can be made to the health response system.

Three questions were brought to participants:

- What are your main health concerns during an emergency or disaster?
- What are your main health concerns during a community evacuation?
- What has been done well in previous emergency responses specific to health needs?
- What opportunities for improvement do you see in health emergency response?

Kady Hunter provided information about the IH Climate Change & Sustainability Roadmap that was released in October 2023, designed to address climate change impacts. Examples of work and community partnerships addressing Heat Resilience Planning and Food Security and Climate Change were shared:

- MNBC – partner
- T'ti'q'et and Xeni Gwet'in – partner
- IH Heat Response Planning Toolkit – resource
- Interior Region Indigenous Food Forum – Nation-focussed education and engagement

Capping the session off, Kady asked participants to share:

- How has your community responded to climate change?



Penticton Indian Band and South Okanagan MHSU Team Partnership

Presenters:

Jacki McPherson, Penticton Indian Band
Jeanette Gordon and Scott Jacobson, South Okanagan MHSU team

The partnership between the Penticton Indian Band and the South Okanagan MHSU team started by coming together to talk about shared vision and shared clients. After hearing about community members who were not receiving culturally safe care through the emergency department, and through Jacki's many invitations to come to community and meet people, IH staff attended a community supper for dialogue and exchange. This started a continuous commitment to work together.

This partnership has led to a lot of enhancements and/or developments to other programs, ultimately benefiting people and families who access MHSU care in the South Okanagan region.



Take Charge (Stroke Care Network)

Presenters:

Dr. Aleksander Tkach and Dr. Vivian Fu

The purpose of this session was to share information and key learnings of the stroke care, **Take Charge** program.

Dr. Tkach and Dr. Fu acknowledged that in health care the concept of how people are cared for as being “patient-centered” but, while new ways of doing things may occur, patient-centred practice often remains authoritative and continues to put health care workers as the professional providing expert advice to the person and/or family. The **Take Charge** program utilizes facilitators to work with patients so they can lead their own stroke care rehab by determining priorities and goals for recovery, what they need to do to achieve those and who

they want to help support them to support necessary intrinsic motivation for people and families. Facilitators of the program are not required to be health care professionals; they are taught to listen and not pass judgement on goals or provide ideas on how an individuals can achieve goals.

Having been utilized in New Zealand, significant improvements in overall stroke recovery in communities emerged leading to the program being adapted and used in many countries around the world.

Métis Nation BC and Interior Health Partnerships

Presenters:

Ripley Burd, Becca Britton, Katina Pollard, Charlene Hafner, *Métis Nation BC*
Danielle Kreutzer and Nicole Taylor-Sterritt, *Interior Health*

The presenters shared what the IH-MNBC partnership looks like and how it has evolved over the years. Working in tandem on aligned priorities has led MNBC to create an Interior region-focused health and wellness plan with specific actions and intended outcomes.

As the work and partnership evolves, using a Métis distinctions-based approach and centering the Métis health experience will continue to guide development of further health and wellness actions to address health outcomes for Métis people.

Toxic Drug Response Strategy

Presenters:

Kirsten Ellingson, *Interior Health*

Kristen Ellingson provided an overview of the journey and the draft purpose around the need to develop a toxic drug response strategy. The two key priorities within Interior Health's Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy that the toxic drug response aligns with are:

- Indigenous Mental Wellness;
- An IH Toxic Drug Supply Response Framework

By cross-examining other response frameworks across Interior Health, British Columbia, Canada and internationally, an understanding of key proponents of a strategy was established. The purpose of this engagement session was to collect comments from participants to build an Interior-focused strategy with Nation and community input through an open discussion. Overall, funding was a common theme along with human service workers having the skills and knowledge to support people in a safe way.

Indigenous Employee Experience

Presenters:

Janessa Collins, *Interior Health*

Janessa shared the journey to building the Employee Experience alongside partners and collaborators and walking through the key goals of the Indigenous Employee Experience Strategy. There has been various engagement work completed that has shaped the document.

While the strategy is still in draft form, the intent of this session was to garner individual and employee feedback, as this is a key step involved in creating something reflective of those who IH serves. A final draft of the strategy is scheduled to be presented to IH senior leadership team in March and finalized in April 2024.

There was opportunity to participate in small table discussions; Janessa offered the following discussion points/questions:

- Share one word to describe Interior Health.
- Describe what a positive work environment looks like.
- Share what Interior Health could do differently to support Indigenous staff.

The session ended with a group exercise to start prioritizing the most important pieces of the strategy based on what participants identify as needing to be done immediately, needing to be done in the next year or two, and needing to be done in a longer timeline.

Day 2

2024-2027 IH Strategic Priorities

Presenters:

Amanda McDougall, Health System Planning, Interior Health

Kris Murray, Indigenous Health and Wellness, Interior Health

Amanda McDougall and Kris Murray shared a joint presentation focused on Interior Health's new 2024-2027 Strategic Priorities and how IH's Indigenous Health and Wellness Strategic Action Plan aligns with the new and refreshed priorities.

Nation and community members who were present highlighted the need for engagement tables to share escalation processes and procedures that optimize information-sharing and communication to ensure Nation-focused priorities are reflected in IH's overall strategies.



The purpose of this session was to:

- Share information about the newly refreshed 2024-2027 IH strategic priorities – process and content.
- Share and discuss the continued strategic priority of advancing Indigenous Health and Wellness.
- Engage in dialogue about feedback, next steps and opportunities with Nation and community members.

Open discussion questions posed to session participants were:

- What does or doesn't resonate with you in the refreshed 2024-27 IH Strategic Priorities?



- How do the IH Strategic Priorities support your and your communities' priorities? What will be important to consider in next steps and implementation of the strategic priorities?



Indigenous Maternal Health Partnerships

Presenters:

Jessi Minnabarriet, Sherri Di Lallo & Unjali Maholtra, Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA)

Jessi, Sherri and Unjali welcomed participants into a circle format with the intention of sharing with those in attendance what their roles are and how they collectively work together.

The values and teachings that have been embedded into maternal health programs and services at the Provincial Health Services Authority come from the local Nations to honour the First People's ways of being and to re-establish ancestral health care practices within the current colonial system.

Information was shared about PHSA's children's and women's Indigenous Health commitment to uphold person, family and community safety, accessibility, equity, innovation, sustainability, and improved outcomes by aligning with Indigenous-led policies, calls to action and teachings – these learnings and approaches can also help to advance other health authorities work.

The session closed with a circle sharing of what current things are happening at Nation and community levels to address maternal care.



Interior Health Quality, Engagement and Research

Presenters:

Dr. Devin Harris, Interior Health

Dr. Devin Harris highlighted the value of connection within healthcare. There are provincial-wide campaigns done in partnership that have been designed to encourage connection with people, such as the Patient Voices Network 'What Matters to You?' conversations.

Dr. Harris also addressed the linkages between ecological determinants of health and the overall health of people and communities.

When it comes to the health care system and the policies that regulate how things are done, it must be acknowledged that these can be changed.

Relational Security Officer Program, Safety and Protection Services, Interior Health

Presenters:

Michael Moyer, *Interior Health*

The intent of the session was for Mike Moyer, Manager of Protection Services, to share information about Interior Health's new Relational Security Program. The program was introduced and developed as a way to bring security personnel who are trained to anticipate, de-escalate and prevent aggression. Those who are employed in the program will undertake trauma-informed and cultural safety training. The program supports IH's commitment to Indigenous employment, anti-racism and cultural safety, and Indigenous employee experience goals and outcomes.

Indigenous Patient Care Quality Program

Presenters:

Shari McKeown, Jaymi Chernoff and Norissa Mongrain, *Interior Health*

Shari and Jaymi provided information on the PCQO Pathway, that includes:

- Engage and build relationships
- Co-design follow-up process
- Share concerns and resolution goals with leadership
- Gather information and review
- Share Findings



Open discussion questions were asked for participants to share experiences and/or feedback. Drawing on whether individuals, family or community members have concerns about care they received:

- What matters most regarding the way(s) concerns are handled?
- What would it take to rebuild or restore trust?
- If harm was experienced, what does healing together involve?

Seniors/Elders Care (Home Support & Palliative Care)

Presenters:

Aaron Miller and Mona Hazel, *Interior Health*

The purpose of this session was to share information and to commit to further engagement on palliative care frameworks and actions, ensuring Indigenous health experiences and voices are part of the journey.

There are many opportunities for more formal partnerships due to the number of community based, non-governmental or private organizations and mental health services that exist.

Aaron invited participants into large group sharing by asking:



- How can we support your communities to return to the traditional ways for the end of life?
- How does your community and health team want to be involved as we continue to move our strategy forward?
- How can we continue to provide updates on progress and tangible activities to support care in your community?

The feedback and sharing from participants are valued areas of opportunity to improve palliative care for Indigenous persons, families, communities and Nations.

Panel Discussions



Elders Panel

The Elders panel started the Forum in a good way by grounding everyone in attendance. The Elders discussed Indigenous health and wellness from their experiences and perspectives.

They answered questions like, what does traditional wellness look like and mean to you; What makes your spirit sing?

Thank you to:

- Randy Jim, northern St'át'imc
- Jean York, Nlaka'pamux
- Dorothy Myers, T'silhqot'in
- Helene Wilson, Métis Nation BC

Indigenous Patient Navigator Panel

The purpose of this panel was for Indigenous Patient Navigators (IPNs) supporting acute settings, Primary Care Networks and Mental Health and Substance Use to present on their roles and demonstrate how their positions differentiate from one another. Each panel member presented, and a Q&A from the audience followed.

IH staff and Indigenous partners had the opportunity to meet the IPNs and gain an in-depth understanding of who they are and how they are supporting Indigenous patients, families, and communities within the Interior.

Thank you to:

- Deb Donald – Royal Inland Hospital, Kamloops
- Sheri Fleming – Primary Care Network, 100 Mile House
- Carmen Chelsea – Mental Health & Substance Use, Kamloops
- Penny Ecker – Mental Health & Substance Use, Williams Lake
- Jacqueline Mattice – Cariboo Memorial Hospital, Williams Lake



IPN Honoring Ceremony

Blanketing someone holds special significance in many Indigenous cultures. The blanketing ceremony shows respect for those who have made an important contribution to a community

in some way. The respected person is draped with a blanket before witnesses, and the blanket becomes theirs to keep.

The work of the IH IPNs often goes unseen by leadership. They are frontline staff that work directly with Indigenous patients in acute and community settings. The planning and advisory committees felt it was important to honour the work that IPNs do for communities. It was also important to invite them to the Engagement Forum, so they felt supported and uplifted.

IPNs are heroes who bear the weight of decolonizing clinical and hospital practices, all while navigating the system as Indigenous people. They carry significant caseloads, cover vast areas, and make real changes for Indigenous recipients of care – lives have been saved, and healthcare outcomes improved because of the resilience and compassion of IPNs.

Nora Billy from Xaxl'ip (northern St'át'imc) honored the IPN's by singing the women's warrior song, and IH staff and leadership helped blanket each IPN that was in attendance. The ceremony was beautiful and emotional and was a highlight to many attendees.



Health Fair

Twelve Interior Health departments and services had the opportunity to host booths showcasing their work, programs and services. This gave attendees an opportunity to visit the booths on their own time, engaging with teams and providing feedback to IH staff.

- Health Career Access Program
- Toxic Drug Supply (Mental Health & Substance Use)
- Indigenous Employee Experience
- Healthy Communities
- Indigenous Patient Navigators
- Indigenous Digital Health
- Métis Nation BC
- Patient Care Quality Office



- 2024-2027 Interior Health Strategic Plan
- Toxic Drug Supply Strategy
- Communications
- Harm Reduction & Decriminalization

Feedback Summary

"Many, many thanks for the opportunity to attend. We learnt, laughed/cried, sang, and walked beside each other for 2 full, wonderful days!"

Feedback was collected through various channels, including:

- Post-event surveys distributed electronically to attendees.
- On-site feedback forms were provided during the event.
- Direct communication with attendees at the event.

Such feedback included:

- Diversifying the event format to include more experiential learning, networking, ceremony, and additional cultural activities and supports.
- Implement shorter, recurring breakout sessions to ensure all participants can fully engage without missing out.
- Inclusion of Indigenous youth at future events.
- More time for IH presenters to answer questions and receive feedback.
- A follow-up report into how the information that IH receives from the forum is immersed/acted upon and implemented into the system.

"The forum was fantastic, your commitment to sharing knowledge and your approach to Indigenous health care are inspiring and respectful of my family's way of being. Thank you once again for your exceptional support and the valuable insights and teaching that were shared."

We would like to extend our gratitude to all who shared their invaluable feedback with us following the forum. Your insights and perspectives are crucial in guiding and enhancing future events.



Elders and Wellness Supports

The planning committee ensured there were cultural, and wellness supports for participants and facilitators in place at the event. Leon Louis, a syilx Nation member, and Jean York, an Nlaka'pamux Nation member were asked to be cultural support people available to attendees. Unfortunately, Leon was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances, and northern St'át'imc Elder, Randy Jim, stepped in. The knowledge keepers provided smudging, brushing off and debriefing for participants. Thank you to Gloria Big Sorrel Horse, Randy Jim, Jean York, Dorothy Myers, and Helene Wilson for sharing their knowledge and wisdom. Thank you, Grouse Barnes from Westbank First Nation, and Virginia Gregoire from Okanagan Indian Band, for providing the opening prayers. Thank you, Kacey Miller, from Okanagan Indian Band for providing an opening song.

Advisory Committee

A huge thank you to Alanna Cowan (Nlaka'pamux), Brian McLean (Secwépemc), Becca Britton (Métis Nation BC), June Lulua (Ulkatcho & Tšilhqot'in), and Menno Salverda (Okanagan Nation Alliance) who guided the organizers throughout the planning process. The Engagement Forum would not have been as successful as it was without their input.

Planning Team

The Indigenous Engagement team led the event's organization with the support of Julie John, an external, Secwépemc event planner.

Thank you to Nicole Big Sorrel Horse, Jade Chaboyer-Kondra, Ashley Cruickshank, Nicole Taylor-Sterritt and Kaelyn Elfert for your perseverance through a short timeline to execute an incredible event.





Final Words

As we continue to gather summaries from the engagement sessions, the Indigenous Engagement team will compile a 'What We Heard' document to be shared with partners and attendees in the coming months. Interior Health is grateful for the opportunity to be in collaboration with Indigenous Nations and community partners, and these sessions will help inform programs and services over the coming years.

The intent of the forum was to enable sharing, dialogue and learning in a good, safe, and meaningful way. Meaningful engagement requires us to go beyond asking partners to participate in corporate tasks such as filling out surveys and reading through short briefs followed by answering a series of questions. Rather, it is a synchronous action dependent on establishing trusting relationships first, before moving into the often-times colonial nature of organizational engagement work.

Working together to make advancements toward creating healthier futures with Nations requires pause and reflection on what is shared to truly understand why we come together, to build more understanding and ensure we make meaningful changes to a colonial health system.

Indigenous people, in their generosity and goodwill, enter engagement and collaborative spaces by being vulnerable and sharing their experiences for the purpose of a healthier future for all generations to come.