



Partnering to Enhance MHSU Environments

INDIGENOUS MENTAL WELLNESS

BACKGROUND

The Indigenous Mental Wellness Plan (IMWP) is based on the voices of Indigenous peoples, families, communities, and those who work with them in the Interior of British Columbia (BC). As such, guiding principles for the IMWP were influenced firstly by Indigenous worldviews that set the foundation for action. These Indigenous worldviews embed a strong focus on patient, family and community centeredness, consensus, equity, meaningful engagement, interconnectedness, and impact.

Five areas of focus emerged through the review of available information, evidence based and/or promising practice literature, and the engagement of key stakeholders. **The review of Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU) environments was part of Focus Area 3 to “build trauma-informed, culturally safe MHSU services.”**

The identification of areas for improvement to support the enhancement of MHSU environments to be more welcoming and safer was achieved through involvement and input by Indigenous partners, clients, and families (Patient Voices Network volunteers). This was done through “walk-throughs” of MHSU sites, hearing from care providers who have accompanied or supported Indigenous community members in accessing IH services, as well as feedback provided through other engagement opportunities i.e. forums, Letter of Understanding (LOU) meetings, etc.

THE CHALLENGE AND THE OPPORTUNITY

Within the IH region, there are seven distinct First Nations, fifty-four First Nations communities and sixteen Métis Nation BC chartered communities representing an Indigenous population that is approximately 8.8 percent of IH’s total population¹. Language, cultural beliefs, and practices differ widely between Indigenous partners and communities, so it is important for MHSU care providers, programs, and operational leads to be aware and sensitive to, the unique and diverse qualities of the Indigenous recipients of care in their area. A welcoming environment in a health service organization is about creating a place where Indigenous people feel safe, comfortable, accepted, and confident that they will be respected, listened to, and receive high-quality care. Negative experiences can lead to reluctance to access services and disengagement with clinicians and care in these settings which, in turn, can negatively affect health outcomes and further increase health disparities.

The IH funded Indigenous Art initiative (2015) provided Indigenous partners with small grant funding and support in developing artwork to be displayed within IH facilities within their territories. The project was aimed at being Indigenous-based and providing Indigenous partners with the autonomy, financial resources and IH support to assist in creating safer, more accessible, and relevant healthcare spaces. An additional project occurred earlier in 2013, when IH retained the Tk’emlups te Secwépemc community to develop “Cultural Art and Healing Shadow Boxes” referred to as the project “Welcoming Spaces”. The art from this project is currently displayed in three Kamloops MHSU sites. This report is intended to build on that momentum, highlight the work that has been accomplished and spur movement forward in improving MHSU environments through meaningful consultation and collaboration with Indigenous partners.

MHSU services are delivered in rural, urban, and outreach settings creating some challenges for small grant funding provided to date for Indigenous Art initiatives to address the need for MHSU environment enhancements. Additionally, the varying locations of MHSU services—some co-located with other IH community health services, some connected to acute care or hospital services, and others situated in buildings shared with government agencies such as social services and courts—further limit MHSU’s ability to independently create reflective and safe spaces for Indigenous peoples. Lastly, several MHSU sites clinicians see clients in private offices in an environment that the clinician designs, and some clinicians utilize common treatment spaces for

¹ Taken from the IH Aboriginal Identity Population by LHA Map

both groups and individual sessions.

The descriptions of MHSU sites from Indigenous partners reflect their diverse nature, ranging from large urban sites perceived as clinical, cold, and sterile, to smaller sites viewed as inviting and welcoming.

In the feedback received from Indigenous partners around improving MHSU physical environments, several recommendations consistently surfaced. Although they are not directly within the scope of this report, they are important to acknowledge and serve to highlight the importance of enhancing welcoming and honoring spaces.

- Mental health and wellness approaches must be designed based on an understanding of the deep and ongoing impacts of colonialism, including experiences of intergenerational trauma and racism.
- The need for relationships and the delivery of trauma informed, culturally safe care is paramount to the uptake of IH MHSU services alongside the physical environment of MHSU sites.
- Some Indigenous peoples face significant barriers to accessing IH MHSU services due to the geographic isolation of their communities, stemming from displacement onto remote reserve lands where the Federal government historically restricted movement. Additionally, social determinants of health, such as limited transportation, further exacerbate these challenges. These barriers not only impede access to services but also limit opportunities for these communities to provide input on the safety of MHSU environments.
- The services provided within an MHSU site may not align with the needs of the population being served, such as prioritizing a medical model over Indigenous models of care and approaches

Compared to western medicine, where the goal is typically to cure disease and illness, the overall goal of traditional medicine integrated in mainstream care is to improve quality of life with an emphasis on the healing journey. Moreover, there is a more holistic approach taken to healthcare that includes the individual, family, elders, and community members.

(National Assembly of First Nations, 2005; Alberta Health Services, 2009; NAHO, 2002; Health Canada, 2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the feedback received the following are the main recommendations for IH and MHSU leadership to consider in the ongoing work to enhance MHSU care environments.

Physical – Design, Layout and Appearance

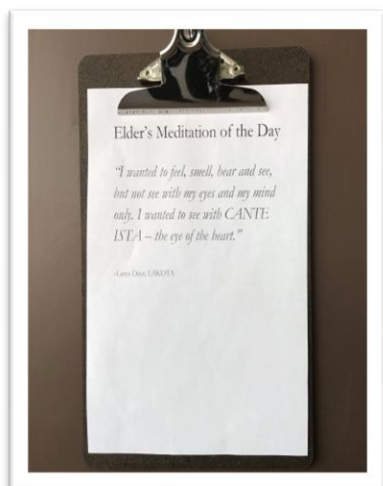
The physical, emotional, and relational aspects of spaces are all critical components of creating welcoming environments (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare, 2019):

- Warm lighting (less fluorescent lighting)
- Comfortable seating
- Private spaces (especially when co-locating with other services)
- Softening spaces with elements of nature
- Need for spaces to be seen as healing rather than medical or clinical
- Recognized space within MHSU sites for cultural/ traditional practices



Emotional – The feeling of being supported and cared for within the health service organization

- Welcome signs, general signage, and waiting room resources in the language(s) of the Indigenous peoples in the area; as well as acknowledgement of the traditional territory of the local First Nations
- The acknowledgement of Métis and Inuit accessing the space
- Indigenous clients and families seeing themselves and their Nations represented in the environment through art and other culturally relevant items i.e. feathers, rocks,
- A map of the area First Nations and Métis Nation BC Chartered Communities
- A friendly reception and support to navigate the building



An Elders message displayed in the Kamloops MHSU site (left) and the Traditional Territory in the Secwepemcstín language displayed on a front facing window.



An example of a land acknowledgement statement developed in collaboration with the Indigenous community.

Hamilton Health Sciences



Métis Sash-Kelowna Health Centre



Map of the 3 First Nations and 13 Communities in the Cariboo Chilcotin

Relational – the quality of the relationship (for i.e. understanding, validation, recognition)

- The need for spaces to reflect the holistic nature of the Indigenous worldview
- Art and knowledge shared on the walls that represents the distinct Indigenous communities in the territory the MHSU site is situated on
- Consider representation of the circular or interconnectedness nature of Indigenous cultures

“Circles have been used by many Indigenous peoples around the world as an egalitarian method of sharing power and sharing decisions inclusively. In politics and justice, circles provide a space for truth, reflection, and decision or reconciliation. In the medicine realm, healing circles have been a traditional alternative to western psychotherapy and drug treatments” (First Nations Health Authority, Province of BC. and Government of Canada, 2013, p.15)
- Displaying commitments made to Indigenous partners such as framed copies of LOU's, Partnership Accord, Declaration of Commitment to Cultural Safety and Humility
- When co-locating or leasing a space, it is crucial to consider existing relationships with other government organizations in the building, particularly given the historical and ongoing oppression associated with systems such as legal and child protection services.



Sheldon Pierre Louis' artwork at KGH entitled Pica, which is a Syilx word meaning digging stick, points to the importance of returning to the land.

Adapted by artist Jay Havens from the mural he created for Makayla's Room at McMaster Children's Hospital.

*The painting was commissioned by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) to commemorate a long-standing effort on the parts of the ONA and Interior health to foster a positive partnership.
(Penticton Regional Hospital)*



Display of the Medicine Wheel in MHSU Environments: It was suggested to think of the Medicine Wheel as a grounding mindfulness tool; it is an opportunity to check in with mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being. It is important to be mindful that not all Nations use the Medicine Wheel (no First Nations in BC ever used the Medicine Wheel before contact, so ensure client leads the use of cultural tools). This is an Eastern tool, largely Ojibwe; many have adopted it as settlement took place. It was easy to adopt as many BC First Nations have circular world views that are demonstrated through foundational stories.

Sheila Lewis, Former Indigenous Mental Wellness Practice Lead

Spiritual - relationship between spirituality and mental wellbeing, including spiritual growth, open-mindedness, self-actualization

- Opportunity for clients and families to practice ceremony i.e. smudging, brushing off
- Hosting culturally safe ceremonies, circles, and land-based teachings with Indigenous partners
- Access to traditional healers and Elders
- Access to sacred spaces (most IH Acute sites have such spaces)

Currently provided at multiple health centres across Canada and internationally i.e. Windsor Health, Selkirk Mental Health Centre, etc.

SPOTLIGHT-WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE WELCOMING SPACES

Kamloops Community Mental Health and Substance Use Services and Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and Lii Michif Otipemisiwak



Welcome sign on entry to Kamloops MHSU

Kamloops Community Mental Health was able to support a term position of a Community Health Facilitator for MHSU held by Cathy Collinge. One focus of the role was to improve the environment to make it more welcoming for Indigenous people accessing service. All work has been led by an advisory group consisting of members of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and service users. Much of this work has also been shared with IH MHSU Tertiary site (South Hills) and Health Sciences Centre. It is important to acknowledge the support and leadership of the Royal Inland Hospital Foundation in providing funding and investing in this important work led by MHSU and partners.

"The purpose of this information gathered through the committee is not to offer a "prescription" for creating welcoming spaces. The intent is to offer information, tools, and potential strategies; the committee is hopeful that staff will use this information to help guide them in developing their own authentic spaces and relationships with individuals accessing care. Judy (Former Director of Indigenous Mental Wellness) encouraged me to take a step back and have this work led by an advisory group. This group has been instrumental in providing solutions not just about our physical spaces, but about service delivery (i.e. Elders providing land-based activities as well as cultural activities)".

From Cathy Collinge – Former Community Health Facilitator

Kamloops MHSU Welcoming Spaces Work to Date

Welcome Signage	Welcome sign in Secwepemctsin created and installed over reception areas of all Community MHSU sites in Kamloops (see attached photo).
Territory Welcome Sign	Template previously approved by the local First Nation for the Urgent Care Clinic installed on exterior doors of MHSU to provide a consistent look for IH sites on Secwépemc Territory (photo below). When messaging information to all community MHSU staff on signage, recordings were also provided by the First Nation with proper pronunciations.
Elders/Knowledge Keepers	Received a grant from the RIH Foundation to move forward with this work. Grant funds were used to provide honoraria to Elders/ Knowledge Keepers (using IH Honoraria and Gifting Guide) for time at meetings as well as delivering workshops. Additional funds were used for signage, workshop supplies and furniture for workshop space as recommended by advisory group.

Workshops	Hosted a tobacco ties workshop offered by local Knowledge Keeper (photos of ties below). A Drum Making workshop scheduled with a Cultural Education Coordinator (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society) was postponed due to Covid pandemic. Additional land-based workshops were also recommended to be offered in the future.
Medicine Ties	A local Knowledge Keeper created cedar and sage medicine ties to be offered to marginalized individuals during the pandemic. Staff reached out to local supportive housing provider to distribute to residents in supportive housing units.
Staff Development	Information updates are regularly provided to MHSU staff with learning/teachings along the way as well as resources shared. Topics have included signage, workshops, tobacco, Indigenous cultural safety training, Orange Shirt Day, Indigenous harm reduction, Elder feedback on culturally friendly spaces, and the medicine wheel. The Indigenous Mental Wellness Team provided color-printed medicine wheels for staff to display in offices and group rooms, receiving a very positive response.
Partnership with Secwépemc Museum	Collaborating with the Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park in developing items to loan to the MHSU site (photos/ information on plants and their traditional medicinal use as well as information about different bands that make up Secwépemc Nation).
Fish Basket	The traditional fish basket previously gifted to MHSU has been relocated to a more prominent location. Staff have contacted the Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park for details such as its name in Secwepemctsin, its use, and other relevant information. This information will be displayed alongside the basket to educate the public (see photo below).
Resources in Waiting Rooms	Placed Indigenous communications and resources in the MHSU waiting area i.e. Spirit Magazine, Indigenous community publications, etc.
Mural	Received concept drawing from a local artist ("Turtle Island") and gained approval from the Property Management Company to paint a mural on walls in the main staircase. Artist is also currently working on large medicine wheel art piece for MHSU.



*Territory welcome sign (above),
Fish Basket (left) and tobacco ties (right).*

NEXT STEPS

In bringing the commitments IH made with Indigenous partners to life and fulfilling the Declaration to Commitment for cultural safety and humility, continued action is required in improving cultural safety of MHSU services and environments. Work currently occurring at various MHSU sites provides frameworks and opportunities for other sites to consider when looking to enhance their environments to be safe, reflective, and welcoming for Indigenous peoples. This work is an important piece in the journey and makes these written commitments tangible and an action-focused visual measure of that verbal commitment. Regular MHSU site walkthroughs, open houses, feedback collection, and sharing the 'Art in IH Facilities' policy are vital ongoing activities to support site cultural safety across the region.²

Additionally, there are few barriers to this work, as it aligns with the Indigenous Mental Wellness Plan (IMWP) and supports IH's strategic goals and objectives to:

Improve Health & Wellness

Section 1.1: Work with First Nations and Indigenous partners to plan and deliver culturally sensitive health care services.

- To meet this IH goal the IMWP was created in partnerships with Indigenous partners and Indigenous Patients Voice Network volunteers.

Deliver High Quality Care

Section 2.2: Implement health improvement strategies for targeted populations across the continuum of care.

- To meet this IH goal the IMWP has a dedicated focus to improve the health of Indigenous populations, a priority for all levels of government. Enhancing MHSU environments is a key action within the IMWP and supports IH's goal of delivering high-quality care.

Ensure Sustainable Health Care by Improving Innovation, Productivity, and Efficiency

Section 3.5: Develop and enhance relationships with key external stakeholders.

- To meet this IH goal there is great value placed on the understanding and recognition that Indigenous populations are key external stakeholders. Therefore, implementation of the IMWP is operationalizing a key commitment to these stakeholders. Implementation of the IMWP will involve working with Indigenous partners and building/enhancing our relationships to be successful.

As we identify MHSU site renovations and new builds, we need to seize the opportunity to collaborate with Indigenous partners to learn, design and equip the spaces to reflect the traditional territories and Indigenous partners which our services are delivered. Yet reflecting on the recent work being completed in Kamloops it outlines that much can be done to deliver safer, more reflective, and welcoming MHSU environments. With the additional benefits and outcomes of improving and developing meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples, partners, and communities.

² IH Art in Facilities Policies retrieved from <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/policies/admin/AW%20-%20Facilities%20Management/Art%20in%20IH%20Facilities.pdf>

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