

# Generations of Healing: Culturally-Informed Responses to Address Intergenerational Trauma



Conference Handouts for Educators, Mental Health Professionals, and Community

# Learning Objectives

By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

O1

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## Recognize

the impacts and mechanisms of intergenerational trauma among Indigenous communities in Canada

O2

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## Understand

Indigenous frameworks of wellness and community healing, including land-based and cultural approaches

O3

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## Apply

culturally-informed principles in education and mental health practice

O4

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## Integrate

community-driven, relational approaches that support resilience and collective recovery

O5

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## Strengthen

partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers rooted in reconciliation and cultural safety



# Understanding Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

## Origins of Intergenerational Trauma

### Historical Context:

- Residential schools operated in Canada from the 1880s to 1996, forcibly removing over 150,000 Indigenous children from their families
- Colonial assimilation policies systematically disrupted cultural transmission, family structures, and community wellness
- The Indian Act and other legislation restricted cultural practices, language, and traditional governance



### Defining Intergenerational Trauma:

- The transmission of unresolved trauma across generations through biological, psychological, and social pathways
- Affects descendants of those who directly experienced traumatic events
- Manifests in disrupted attachment, mental health challenges, and compromised coping mechanisms

### Current Mental Health Disparities:

- Indigenous peoples in Canada experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use disorders
- Suicide rates among First Nations youth are 5-7 times higher than non-Indigenous youth
- These disparities are rooted in historical trauma, ongoing systemic racism, and lack of culturally appropriate services

### Key Mechanisms:

- Disrupted parent-child attachment patterns
- Loss of cultural identity and traditional knowledge
- Normalized violence and survival-based coping
- Biological changes (epigenetic modifications)
- Community-level disconnection from land and traditional practices

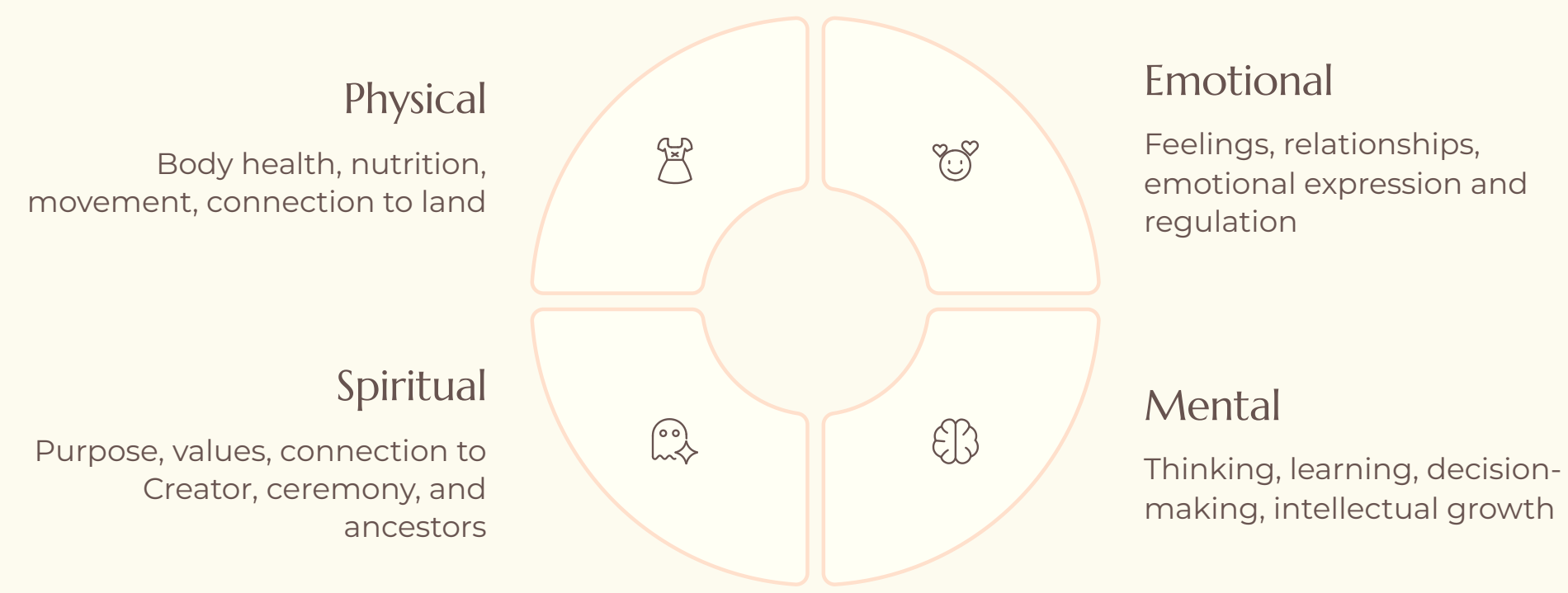
### References for Hour 1

- Hoffart, R., & Jones, B. (2018). How Residential Schools Led to Intergenerational Trauma
- Bombay, A., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2014). The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools
- First Nations Health Authority (2025). Traditional Wellness and Healing
- Health Canada (2015). Indigenous Mental Health Disparities

# Indigenous Healing Frameworks and Approaches

## The Four Dimensions of Indigenous Wellness

### Holistic Framework:



**Key Principle:** All four dimensions are interconnected and equally important; healing requires addressing all aspects simultaneously.

## The Naandwe Miikan Model

### "The Healing Path" - Integrative Approach:

- Combines Indigenous healing practices with biomedical approaches
- Respects both traditional knowledge systems and Western medicine
- Emphasizes patient choice and cultural autonomy
- Recognizes Indigenous healing practices as legitimate, evidence-based interventions

### Core Components:

- Elder guidance and traditional teachings
- Ceremony and spiritual practices
- Herbal medicine and traditional remedies
- Community-based healing circles
- Integration with clinical mental health services when appropriate

## The Role of Language, Ceremony, and Elders

### Language Revitalization:

- Indigenous languages carry cultural worldviews, values, and healing knowledge
- Language loss is linked to identity confusion and disconnection
- Reclaiming language supports cultural identity and mental wellness

### Ceremonial Practices:

- Smudging, sweat lodges, drumming, and seasonal ceremonies
- Rites of passage for youth transitioning to adulthood
- Healing circles and community gatherings
- Connection to ancestral knowledge and spiritual protection

### Elders as Knowledge Keepers:

- Hold traditional teachings and cultural wisdom
- Provide guidance, mentorship, and cultural validation
- Bridge generations and transmit healing practices
- Essential for culturally grounded mental health support

## References for Hour 2

- First Nations Health Authority (2025). Traditional Wellness and Healing
- The Healing Path (2023). CMAJ Open - Reconciling Indigenous Health Practices
- Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (2023). Culture as Medicine
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada (2018). Redress and Healing



# The Role of Land, Storytelling, and Community

## Land-Based Healing

### The Centrality of Land:

- Land is not property but relationship - a source of identity, teaching, and wellness
- Displacement from traditional territories is a root cause of intergenerational trauma
- Reconnection to land supports healing at individual and community levels



### Land-Based Healing Practices:

- Traditional harvesting (hunting, fishing, gathering medicines)
- Seasonal ceremonies tied to the land
- Nature immersion and wilderness programs
- Gardening and food sovereignty initiatives
- Teaching youth traditional ecological knowledge

### Evidence of Effectiveness:

- Reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD
- Strengthens cultural identity and self-esteem
- Rebuilds community connections and collective efficacy
- Provides purpose, meaning, and spiritual connection

## Storytelling as Healing

### Indigenous Oral Traditions:

- Stories transmit values, teachings, and cultural knowledge across generations
- Narrative is a tool for making meaning of experiences
- Reclaiming narratives counters colonial storytelling that positioned Indigenous peoples as victims or problems

### Healing Through Story:

- Sharing personal and community stories of resilience
- Witnessing and being witnessed in safe, supportive spaces
- Breaking silence around trauma while honoring survivors' agency
- Celebrating survival, resistance, and cultural resurgence

### Storytelling in Practice:

- Story circles and sharing circles
- Digital storytelling projects
- Theatre and performance
- Written narratives and community archives

## Community as the Context for Healing

### Relational Worldview:

- Indigenous cultures emphasize interconnection and collective wellbeing
- Healing is not an individual process but a community journey
- "We heal together" - trauma impacts communities; recovery must be communal

### Community-Driven Approaches:

- Indigenous-led programs designed by and for community members
- Integration of traditional practices in mainstream services
- Peer support and mentorship programs
- Family and multi-generational healing initiatives

## References for Hour 3

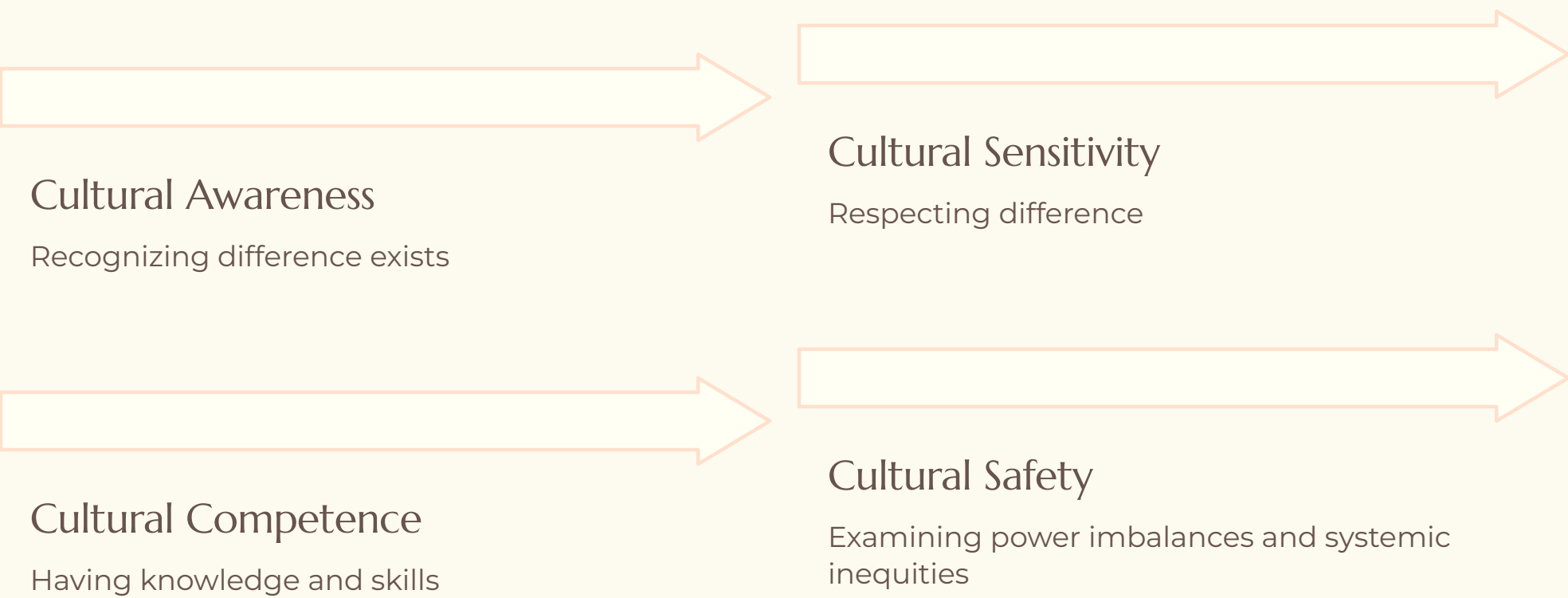
- Sage Publications (2024). Land-Based Healing Research
- AJPH (2025). Developing Indigenous-Centered Healing Frameworks
- Culture as Medicine (2023). Canadian Partnership Against Cancer
- Journal of Australian and New Zealand Literature Studies (2023). Land and Storytelling
- Ecology and Society (2023). Pathways to Healing through Family-Based Practice



# Cultural Safety in Schools and Health Practice

## From Cultural Awareness to Cultural Safety

**Understanding the Progression:**



**Cultural Safety Defined:**

- An environment free from racism, discrimination, and micro-aggressions
- Where Indigenous peoples' cultural identities, values, and knowledge are respected
- Requires non-Indigenous practitioners to reflect on their own culture, biases, and power
- Accountability to communities served

## Addressing Epistemic Racism

**What is Epistemic Racism?**

- The dismissal or devaluation of Indigenous knowledge systems
- Privileging Western science as the only valid form of knowledge
- Occurs in education, healthcare, research, and policy

**Integrating Traditional Knowledge:**

- Recognizing Indigenous knowledge as legitimate, evidence-based, and sophisticated
- Creating space for Elders and knowledge keepers in professional settings
- Using Two-Eyed Seeing: honoring both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems
- Allowing Indigenous peoples to determine how their knowledge is shared and used

## Cultural Safety in K-12 Education

**Trauma-Informed and Culturally Safe Schools:**

- Understanding how historical and intergenerational trauma impacts learning
- Creating culturally affirming curricula that include Indigenous history and perspectives
- Supporting Indigenous language programs and cultural activities
- Partnering with Indigenous communities, families, and Elders



**Practical Strategies for Educators:**

- Build authentic relationships with Indigenous students and families
- Create classroom environments that reflect Indigenous cultures
- Address racism and bullying immediately and effectively
- Recognize that behavior often communicates unmet needs or trauma responses
- Provide flexible, strengths-based approaches to assessment
- Collaborate with Indigenous education coordinators and support workers

## Indigenous Engagement in Mental Health Practice

**Best Practices for Clinicians:**

- Understand your own cultural location and biases
- Learn about the specific Indigenous communities you serve
- Create space for clients to share cultural practices that support their wellness
- Collaborate with traditional healers and Elders when appropriate
- Adapt therapeutic approaches to align with Indigenous values (e.g., relational, holistic, strengths-based)
- Advocate for systemic changes that support Indigenous access to services

**Trauma-Informed Care Principles:**

- Safety (physical and emotional)
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer support and mutual self-help
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice, and choice
- Recognition of cultural, historical, and gender issues

## References for Hour 4

- The Healing Path (2023). CMAJ Open - Epistemic Racism and Indigenous Health
- University of Western Ontario (2022). Cultural Safety as Professional Standard
- McConnell Foundation (2020). Mental Health in Education - Systemic Approaches

# Building Culturally-Informed Systems

## Collaborative Care Models

### Interdisciplinary Integration:

- Bringing together Western healthcare providers, traditional healers, Elders, and community workers
- Shared care planning that respects client autonomy and cultural preferences
- Cross-training opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners
- Co-located services that reduce barriers to access

### Key Features of Effective Models:

- Indigenous governance and leadership
- Flexible funding that supports traditional practices
- Holistic intake and assessment processes
- Family and community involvement in treatment
- Outcome measures that reflect Indigenous definitions of wellness

## Indigenous-Led Initiatives

### Examples of Success:

- First Nations Health Authority (BC) - First province-wide health governance partnership
- Naandwe Miikan - Integration of traditional healing in hospital settings
- Community-based wellness programs led by Indigenous organizations
- Land-based healing camps and cultural immersion programs
- Youth suicide prevention programs grounded in cultural identity

### Common Elements:

- Designed and delivered by Indigenous peoples
- Rooted in specific cultural traditions and languages
- Address social determinants of health alongside individual healing
- Emphasize prevention and wellness, not just crisis response
- Build on community strengths and resilience

## Addressing Systemic Barriers

### Institutional Challenges:

- Funding models that don't support culturally specific programming
- Lack of Indigenous representation in leadership and decision-making
- Credentialing systems that don't recognize traditional knowledge
- Bureaucratic processes that conflict with Indigenous values and practices
- Racism and discrimination within institutions

### Strategies for Transformation:

- Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action
- Create Indigenous advisory committees with decision-making power
- Allocate dedicated funding for Indigenous-led programs
- Require cultural safety training for all staff
- Develop policies in partnership with Indigenous communities
- Measure success using culturally appropriate indicators
- Hold institutions accountable for outcomes

## Building Sustainable Partnerships

### Principles for Ethical Collaboration:

- Indigenous communities set the agenda and priorities
- Non-Indigenous partners bring resources and support, not solutions
- Relationships are long-term, not project-based
- Knowledge is shared according to Indigenous protocols
- Communities maintain ownership of their stories and data
- Success is defined by communities, not funders

### Practical Steps:

- Invest time in relationship-building before program development
- Engage Elders and community leaders from the beginning
- Provide fair compensation for Indigenous expertise and participation
- Be willing to change institutional practices, not just add programs
- Celebrate successes and learn from challenges together

## References for Hour 5

- PMC (2022). Integrating Indigenous Healing Practices within Collaborative Care
- First Nations Health Authority (2025). Traditional Wellness and Healing
- AJPH (2025). Indigenous-Centered Healing and Wellness Frameworks
- Health Canada (2015). Systemic Barriers and Transformation Strategies
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). Calls to Action



# Hope, Resilience, and Collective Healing

## Revitalizing Family-Based Healing Traditions

### The Central Role of Family:

- Family is the foundation of Indigenous communities and cultures
- Intergenerational trauma disrupted family structures and parenting practices
- Healing must include restoring healthy family relationships and cultural transmission



### Family-Based Healing Approaches:

- Multi-generational healing programs that engage Elders, parents, and youth
- Teaching parenting skills rooted in cultural values
- Family ceremonies and activities that strengthen bonds
- Addressing family violence with culturally informed interventions
- Supporting kinship care and extended family involvement
- Healing historical trauma together as families

### Cultural Transmission:

- Elders teaching youth traditional skills, languages, and values
- Families participating in cultural activities together
- Creating new traditions while honoring old ones
- Healing through shared experience and mutual support

## Indigenous-Led Success Stories

### Naandwe Miikan (The Healing Path):

- Hospital-based integration of traditional healing practices
- Collaboration between Indigenous healers and medical staff
- Patient choice in combining Western and traditional approaches
- Positive outcomes for Indigenous patients' physical and mental health

### First Nations Health Authority:

- First province-wide partnership transferring health governance to First Nations
- Culturally safe service delivery across BC
- Integration of wellness and prevention programs
- Community-driven health planning and implementation

### Community Wellness Programs:

- Land-based healing camps reducing youth suicide rates
- Language revitalization programs strengthening cultural identity
- Traditional parenting programs improving family wellbeing
- Cultural mentorship reducing justice system involvement

### Key Success Factors:

- Indigenous leadership and self-determination
- Long-term, sustained funding
- Integration of cultural practices throughout services
- Strong community engagement and ownership
- Addressing root causes (colonialism, poverty, discrimination)
- Measuring success holistically

## Collective Responsibility and Reconciliation

### Truth and Reconciliation:

- Recognition that healing requires acknowledging historical and ongoing harms
- Non-Indigenous Canadians have a responsibility to support Indigenous healing
- Reconciliation is not just apology but action and systemic change
- Healing colonial relationships benefits everyone

### Cultural Resurgence:

- Indigenous peoples reclaiming languages, ceremonies, and governance systems
- Asserting sovereignty and self-determination
- Rebuilding what colonialism attempted to destroy
- Creating new futures rooted in cultural strength

### Moving Forward Together:

- Supporting Indigenous-led initiatives with resources and solidarity
- Challenging racism and discrimination in all settings
- Learning accurate Indigenous history and current realities
- Building authentic relationships based on respect and reciprocity
- Recognizing that Indigenous wellness contributes to the wellbeing of all Canadians

## Hope and Resilience

### Reframing the Narrative:

- Indigenous peoples are not defined by trauma but by resilience and strength
- Survival itself is resistance and an act of hope
- Cultural practices, languages, and communities persist despite centuries of oppression
- The next generation will be healthier because of healing work happening today

### Sources of Hope:

- Increasing Indigenous youth leadership and activism
- Language and cultural revitalization efforts
- Growing non-Indigenous awareness and support
- Indigenous-led healing programs showing positive outcomes
- Stronger Indigenous governance and self-determination
- Communities healing and thriving

### Your Role in Healing:

- Whether educator, mental health professional, or community member, you can contribute to healing
- Start where you are with what you have
- Center Indigenous voices and leadership
- Continue learning and unlearning
- Build relationships and take action
- Believe in the possibility of healing across generations

## References for Hour 6

- Ecology and Society (2023). Pathways to Healing: Indigenous Revitalization through Family-Based Practice
- First Nations Health Authority (2025). Traditional Wellness and Healing
- The Healing Path (2023). Naandwe Miikan Model
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada (2018). Redress and Healing - Cultural Resurgence



# Key Takeaways: Principles for Practice

## Core Principles



### Healing is holistic

Address physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions



### Culture is medicine

Indigenous cultural practices are evidence-based healing interventions



### Relationships matter

Healing happens in connection, not isolation



### Land is central

Reconnection to land supports individual and collective wellness



### Communities lead

Indigenous peoples must determine their own healing pathways



### History matters

Understanding intergenerational trauma is essential for effective support



### Language carries culture

Supporting language revitalization is supporting mental health



### Systems must change

Individual cultural competence is not enough; institutions must transform



### Elders are essential

Traditional knowledge and guidance are irreplaceable



### Hope is realistic

Healing is happening; resilience is evident; futures are being rebuilt

## Action Steps for Participants

### As an Educator:

- Create culturally safe classrooms
- Integrate Indigenous perspectives throughout curriculum
- Build relationships with Indigenous families and communities
- Recognize trauma responses and respond with compassion
- Advocate for systemic changes in your school

### As a Mental Health Professional:

- Examine your own biases and cultural assumptions
- Learn about Indigenous healing practices and worldviews
- Collaborate with traditional healers and Elders
- Adapt interventions to align with Indigenous values
- Advocate for accessible, culturally appropriate services

### As a Community Member:

- Educate yourself about Indigenous history and current realities
- Support Indigenous-led organizations and initiatives
- Challenge racism when you encounter it
- Build authentic relationships with Indigenous peoples
- Take action toward reconciliation in your sphere of influence