



**CANADIAN COLLEGE OF HEALTH LEADERS:
COMMITMENT TO IMPROVE HEALTH SERVICES LEADERSHIP
FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH IN CANADA**

BACKGROUND

After several years of episodic engagement with issues related to Indigenous health, and in light of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in 2019 the Board of Directors for the Canadian College of Health Leaders and management felt it was time to show a clearer commitment to Indigenous health and determine the College's role. In 2019 and early 2020, several discussions were held with Indigenous leaders and other subject matter experts. A draft working plan was put forward but was somewhat compromised by the pandemic.

Despite the pandemic, we were able to focus on internal actions (getting our house in order) from 2020 to 2023. This included:

- Creation of a CCHL version(s) of a land acknowledgement and use at internal and external (member and public) activities and programs
- Completion of San'yas cultural humility and safety training by all staff
- Staff workshops and retreats on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (Orange Shirt Day) 2021 to 2023
- Delivery of several partnered webinars on related topics

In addition, we accomplished the following actions:

- We participated in the Indigenous cultural safety and humility advisory committee of Healthcare Excellence Canada
- We developed a nurse leadership program with the Canadian Nurses Association that includes Indigenous health perspectives
- We are incorporating Indigenous topics and presentations in our various conferences

In 2023, the Board of Directors expressed a strong desire to move beyond these initial actions and develop a strong Board - led foundational commitment and principles with a fresh workplan, which has resulted in this commitment.

Two Board workshops were conducted. The first, in October 2023, was led by Rose Lemay. The second, in February 2024, was led by Debbie DeLancey. These workshops supported the Board to focus its attention on where CCHL has the potential to be a leader for change in addressing Indigenous health inequities.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian College of Health Leaders (CCHL) has long recognized the need to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) *Calls to Action*. We recognize the need to address the legacy of colonization, residential schools, and on-going systemic racism that has led to inequitable population health outcomes for Indigenous peoples in Canada. To this end, and after much internal reflection, we are sharing with you today, our public commitment to improving First Nations, Metis and Inuit health outcomes in Canada by creating the space and support our leaders need to develop their new ways of being.

As humble and reflective lifelong learners, we recognize we are not able to achieve this goal without the guidance of Indigenous healthcare leaders and partners. We also recognize that making this commitment represents the first step on a journey that will transform how CCHL delivers on its mandate to provide the leadership development, tools, knowledge, and networks that members need to become high impact leaders in Canadian healthcare.

CONTEXT

The health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in Canada has been impacted by centuries of colonization and oppression. The multi-generational impacts of forced displacement from traditional lands, multiple disease epidemics, and removal of children through residential school and child welfare policies, continue to have an impact on Indigenous health outcomes today. In addition, many Indigenous people continue to experience racism at both the systemic and individual level in their interactions with healthcare systems, which results in poorer quality of care and creates a disincentive for Indigenous peoples to access needed care.

A culturally safe health system is one in which Indigenous people have meaningful relationships with their health care professionals, based on mutual respect and reciprocal accountability, grounded in an understanding and acceptance of Indigenous concepts of health and wellness, and achieving a balance of power between healthcare professionals and the people they serve. Establishing culturally safe and trauma-informed healthcare services is an essential and foundational step to improving Indigenous health outcomes.

In order to create culturally safe spaces, non-Indigenous healthcare leaders must embrace cultural humility. This refers to a process of self-reflection where one explores personal and systemic biases, understands their own position of privilege, and acknowledges their role as a humble learner when it comes to understanding another's experience.¹

As a national organization that focuses our efforts on leadership development within the healthcare sector, CCHL has a unique opportunity to ensure that present and future non-Indigenous health leaders develop an understanding of the impacts of inter-generational trauma and the importance of creating culturally safe programs and services – and, through our certification, professional development, and advocacy programs, we have the opportunity to ensure that healthcare leaders are equipped with the knowledge and skills to do so.

¹ Definitions of cultural safety and cultural humility are adapted from "A Vision for a Culturally Safe Health System", First Nations Health Authority, B.C.

PRINCIPLES

Our commitment to action is grounded in the existing CCHL Values:

- *Compassion* – committed to responsive and compassionate support;
- *Accountability* - accountable to our peers and the public we serve;
- *Inclusion* – promote inclusive, respectful, and ethical practices,
- *Trust* – be a trusted ally, convenor, and voice,
- *Collaboration* – innovation through collaboration and partnership,
- *Courage* – think differently and act with courage.

Building on these core values, as we develop our action plans to advance cultural safety, we will be guided by the following principles:

- *Respect and humility*: We acknowledge our role as humble learners, and understand that we cannot do this work without seeking the guidance of Indigenous knowledge holders and healthcare leaders.
- *Focus on building relationships*: We will reach out to Indigenous knowledge holders and health leadership organizations with open minds and hearts and take the time that is needed to build partnerships that enable CCHL to become a trusted ally.
- *Distinctions-based approach*: We recognize that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples across Canada have unique political structures, cultural traditions, and priorities; and we will strive to respect and accommodate these as we develop our action plan.
- *Partnership with CCHL Chapters*: As a national organization, we will balance our leadership role with the needs, priorities, and regional insights of our Chapters and members.

OUR VISION

As we continue to seek wisdom through consultation and connection with our Indigenous communities, we will work towards ensuring cultural humility and cultural safety as core leadership skills for our members, and that Canadian healthcare leaders are committed to delivering trauma-informed, culturally appropriate care. We will equip our leaders with the tools, resources and relationships to promote culturally safe, equitable and quality care for Indigenous peoples across Canada.

COMMITMENTS

Our organization is in the early stages of our journey, and we want to take the time required to realise progress. For these reasons, we have developed a Commitment to Action. This commitment outlines the areas where we know we have work to do, and it will evolve over time with the guidance and support from Indigenous partners and others.

To begin this journey, we have identified six priority areas for action:

We will engage our community

CCHL will work closely with members and chapters, seeking extensive consultation with First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples nationally.

We will embed on-going reflection and learning in our organization for our Board and staff

CCHL strives to be a learning organization, and we will continue to explore our own role in advancing reconciliation. This will include providing on-going learning opportunities for Board and staff members, and Chapters, in ensuring culturally safe policies and practices within our organization, and identifying opportunities to bring Indigenous perspectives to Board deliberations.

We will provide our members access to tools and resources for on-going reflection and learning

CCHL has numerous channels for informing and educating healthcare leaders in Canada, and we will explore how we can most effectively use these channels to provide on-going voluntary learning opportunities. These might include highlighting Indigenous health issues at our national conferences and Chapter events, profiling best practices in the *Healthcare Management Forum*, or creating on-line opportunities for sharing and learning via the CCHL Circle.

We will embrace an environment for change in the Canadian healthcare ecosystem

We are committed to leveraging CCHL's national profile and resources to advance capacity for delivering culturally safe and appropriate care in health systems across Canada. Our members are health leaders in all regions and at all levels – this provides an incredible opportunity to influence leadership for change.

We will build cultural safety and humility competency requirements into CCHL certification programs

CCHL is the only national organization that provides certification for healthcare leaders, through our Certified Health Executive and Fellows programs. In addition, we are launching a new Certified Leadership Organization program at the institutional level in the near future. We will work with Indigenous partners and healthcare experts to incorporate learning requirements related to Indigenous health, cultural safety, and trauma-informed care into our certification programs.

We will share our resources and learning opportunities with partners and others

CCHL is not on this journey alone. We can learn from the experiences of other organizations who are working to implement action plans to respond to the TRC *Calls to Action*, and to implement culturally safe approaches to healthcare delivery. We aspire to become a trusted partner and ally, using our resources to address gaps and respond to needs and priorities that may not yet have been addressed by others.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND NEXT STEPS

This expresses our commitment to action, outlines principles for how we will do this work, and identifies the broad areas where we will act. Over the coming year, we will begin the critical work of building relationships with others who are on this journey, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, in order to identify priorities for action, areas where CCHL's skills and resources can make a difference, and potential partnerships.

This foundational work will set the stage for reflecting commitments to specific actions in future strategic plans. These will include a performance measurement component which will provide the basis for annual reporting on progress.

We recognize that as we seek guidance and build partnerships, we may identify additional areas of focus, and need to reconsider our priorities in light of what we learn about the current Indigenous health landscape in Canada and where we can have the most impact. These learnings will be embedded in our Strategic Plan as we progress in our journey over the coming years.