



A Message from Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

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First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework and COVID-19: A Message of Hope to support Mental Wellness

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework continues to be relevant as we think about our own mental wellness in the context of COVID-19. A place to start is using the themes of the FNWMC to guide our planning and actions. For example, one of the gaps in all the information available on COVID-19 is information on “culture as the foundation”. Culture is the key theme of the FNWMC. The workforce, such as yourselves, who are responding to First Nations across Turtle Island are wondering “how do we apply culture in our efforts to support COVID-19”.

Hope - we need to have hope for tomorrow and hope has to be anchored to something to make it concrete and real. Hope comes from identity and worldview and values... these are the anchors for hope. Applied to COVID-19, we have to remember that every generation of people who have walked the earth have faced a pandemic. Each generation have had their specific response based on what they had available to them at the time. But the consistent element of the response from a culture-based or Indigenous knowledge perspective is belief. The story of creation is the foundation of our evidence and that evidence says:

“The Great Spirit ensured everything we would need, forever and all time was placed within Creation from the very beginning.” (Elder Jim Dumont)

This means that the possibility of what is needed for each generation of people to address the pandemic of their time is available and accessible to us as a people. The answer requires that we have belief and that we use our Indigenous intelligence to critically think about what we have already to help us access the answers we need.



Many people are talking about the use of the sweat lodge because it is a place of healing used across the country by many Indigenous nations. That's what we know and believe in. But we are also told that we should not test the spirit ... we should not act without care for the balance between physical and spiritual knowledge. We cannot go into a sweat lodge during COVID-19 because we will be too physically close and because COVID-19 can be passed on by our breath. To go into the sweat lodge, claiming the spirit will protect us, is the same as testing the spirit, acting without care for ourselves and others. We have to act with care for the precious breath of life.

We have to adapt our thinking to the context of the time we are living within. Focus on staying healthy and life-giving relationships. For example, we can still connect with the spirit for answers about our stress, worry and fear without going into a sweat lodge and we can do that through prayer or just being on the land among Creation and talking about our hopes for the future... what we want to ensure for our children and our grandchildren for generations to come. That is exactly what our ancestors did for us... the proof of that is that we still exist as Indigenous people today with our languages and connection to land still intact. Even though our ancestors didn't have all that we have today, they had belief and they had their relationship with Creation and the land. It's up to us now, to extend our hopes into the future... not our fears, but our hopes. We can be clearer about hope if we give expression to our fears in a safe way... through prayer or on the land. The land and our relatives in Creation always listen with care and hold our hope for the future to discover.

Be well and nurture your hope.

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