

# Connecting with Culture

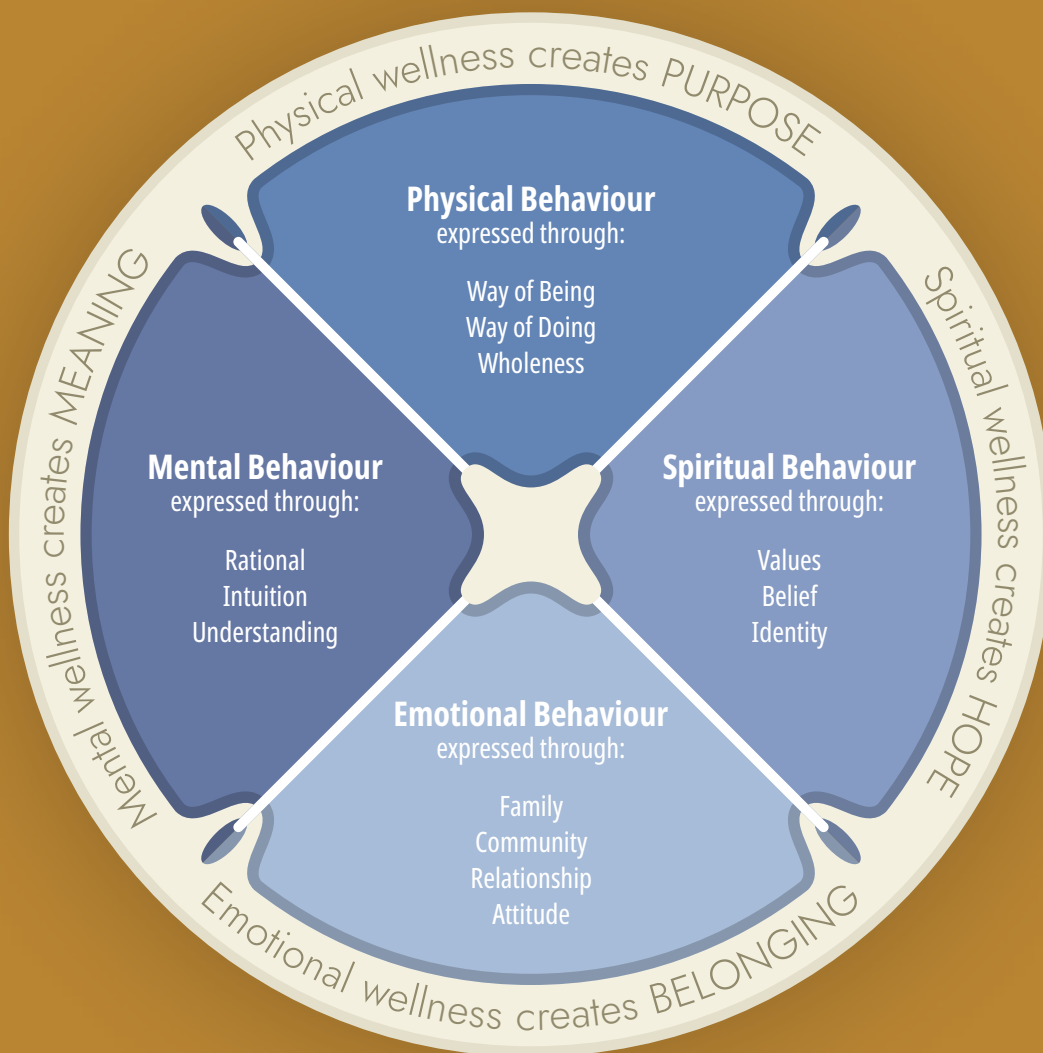
**GROWING OUR WELLNESS**

Facilitator's Handbook



*“Wellness from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one’s connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment.”*

*Elder Jim Dumont, Definition of Wellness\**



The Indigenous Wellness Framework® was developed under the guidance of Elders and community members as part of the Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment project. We built on the knowledge shared through the Indigenous Wellness Framework to develop hands-on activities with a flower as a central and accessible image.

\* Excerpt from “Elder Jim Dumont, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment Project - University of Saskatchewan. (2014). Definition of Wellness©. Bothwell, Ontario: Author. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Funding Reference Number AHI-120535.”

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## Introduction

Thank you for picking up the *Connecting with Culture: Growing our Wellness Facilitators' Handbook*. It will introduce you to a step-by-step process to help your clients think about Indigenous culture and what it means to their wellness. We'll share some of the research that led to the development of *Connecting with Culture: Growing our Wellness* and suggest some ways you can use the material with your clients and other individuals or groups, including your workplace colleagues.

The companion Activity Guide provides simple step-by-step exercises to encourage your clients to think about culture and wellness, either individually or as a group.

*Connecting with Culture: Growing our Wellness* is one of the outcomes of a three-year study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research titled Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment. Led by a partnership between the Assembly of First Nations, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation\* and the University of Saskatchewan, the study examined the strengths of First Nations culture in drug and alcohol treatment.

The Indigenous Wellness Framework (*inside the front cover and at the end of the handbook*) was developed under the guidance of Elders and community members as part of this project and draws on Indigenous teachings, such as the Medicine Wheel. We built on the knowledge shared through the Indigenous Wellness Framework to develop hands-on activities with a flower as a central and accessible image.

The flower activities are based on Indigenous culture and are specifically designed to meet the needs of individuals in addiction treatment programs. The teachings can, however, be applied across cultures and may be a useful way for you to start a conversation about culture with other groups and individuals.

\* As of June 2015, the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF) changed its operating name to the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, a division of NNAPF Inc.

Greetings!

Aanii!

Tansi!

Kwe!

Metaloltiog!

Shé: kon!

### Flowers and Culture

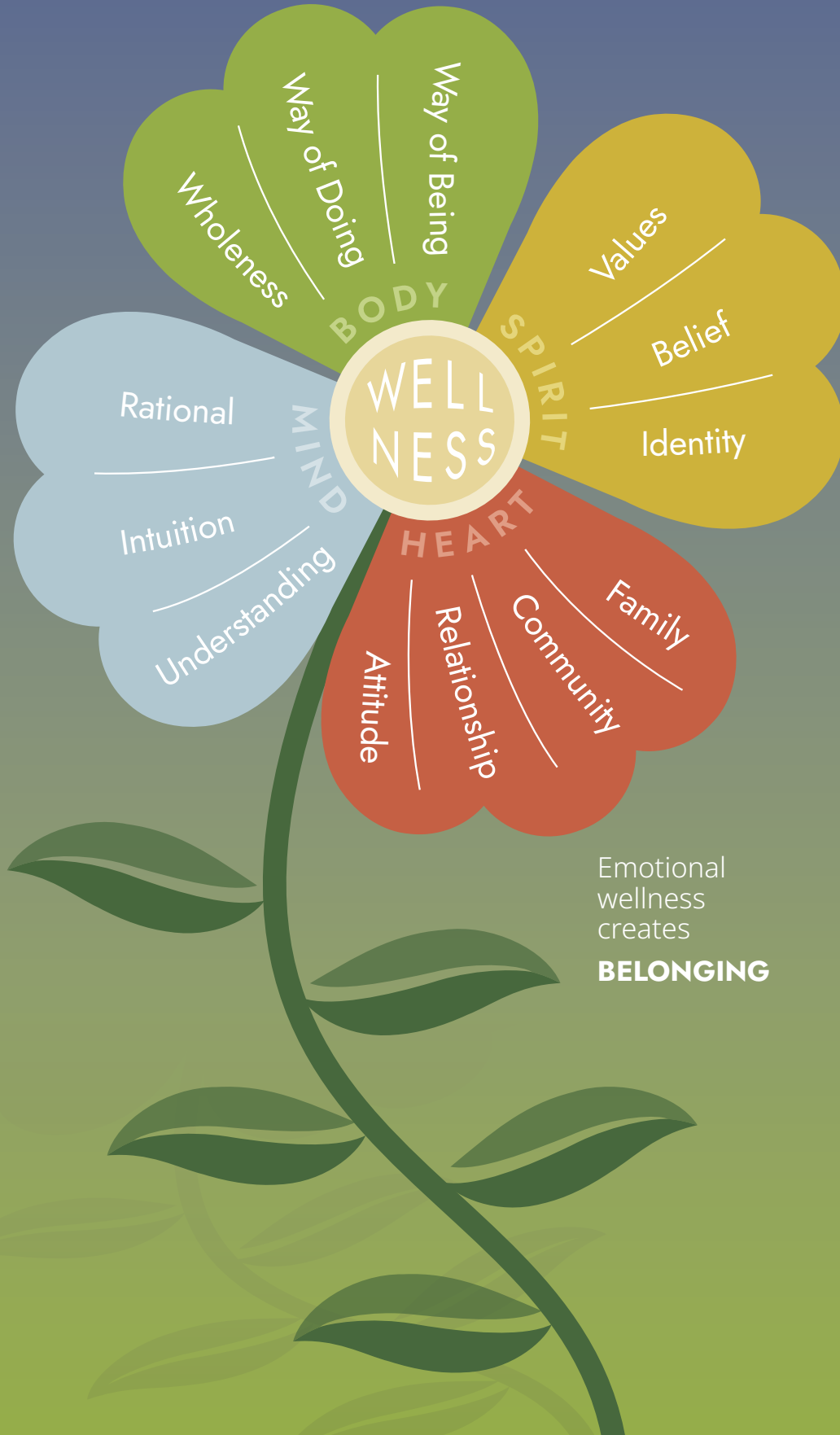
*Flowers are a part of Indigenous cultures around the globe as both food and medicine. They are powerful symbols and used by Indigenous peoples across the country. Flowers remind us of our connectedness to the land and specifically our Nation. They teach us about the life cycle and the patience that is required for life changes. The growth and beauty of a flower is like the renewal of culture and wellness for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.*

Physical wellness creates  
**PURPOSE**

Spiritual wellness creates  
**HOPE**

Mental wellness creates  
**MEANING**

Emotional wellness creates  
**BELONGING**



## Connecting with Culture

As Indigenous people, it's important to our wellness that we connect with our culture. Through no fault of our own, many of us have been separated from our cultural practices, traditions and ceremonies (also known as cultural interventions) for a long time.

No matter where First Nations, Inuit and Métis live in Canada, we understand that our individual cultures have common ways. For example, we all agree that spirit is at the centre of our being and of those we are related to, including the animals, the earth and our ancestors. We recognize that all of life is interconnected, a circle striving for a balance that promotes kindness, caring and respect for all.



## How we Connect

The Indigenous Wellness Framework explains that we can connect with our culture in many ways. For example, we can spiritually connect with culture by offering prayer or participating in a ceremony. To emotionally connect with culture we can start a relationship with the living world, including plants and animals. Learning and thinking about Creation stories allows us to mentally connect with culture. We can physically connect with culture by touching the land and thanking Mother Earth for her gifts.

**Wellness is a balance of the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical.**

**This balance is enriched as we find:**

- **Hope** for our future and the future of our families that is grounded in a sense of identity, unique values and a belief in spirit;
- A sense of **belonging** and connectedness within our families, our community and our culture;
- A sense of **meaning** and an understanding of how our lives and the lives of our families and communities are part of creation and a rich history; and
- **Purpose** in our daily lives, whether it is through education, employment, caregiving activities or cultural ways of being and doing.



## Cultural Differences

It's important to remember that there is not "one" culture because culture is defined by the land, language and Nation of people. Treatment centres offer culture through their programs based on the culture of the people where the treatment centres are located.

There are no directions (North, South, East, West) attached to the Indigenous Wellness Framework and, likewise, the flower. Although the sacred directions are always present, their meanings can differ from one part of the country to another. Talk to a local Elder or Knowledge Keeper to find out how the directions are used in your community.

The flower is only one of many ways we can connect with our culture. We chose to use the flower as we believed it would be meaningful to a broad audience.

We have used the word Indigenous throughout the material. We also use the term First Nation(s) in order to differentiate this group from the Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada.

## Role of Service Providers

As service providers, we have not been trained to offer cultural interventions. This is the responsibility of Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

We encourage you to involve Elders and Knowledge Keepers in your program in order to share teachings to inform your discussions around healing and wellness. Perhaps they could be invited to join your session and to share their knowledge about the local culture.

For more information, take a look at the wellness wall cards (*Definition of Culture, Definition of Wellness, Indigenous Wellness Framework, Common Cultural Interventions*) at the end of this handbook and under the Culture as Intervention tab on the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation website at:

<https://thunderbirdpf.org/nnapf-document-library/>

*There are many ways to practise culture, and preparing traditional foods is an important one. Each of the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program and National Youth Solvent Abuse Program treatment centres involved with this project, along with our research team, have shared a recipe with you that showcases the beauty of First Nations foods and culinary traditions. You can find them under the Culture as Intervention tab of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation website at: <https://thunderbirdpf.org/nnapf-document-library/>*

# Conversations about Indigenous Culture

The Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment study started off with visits to 12 National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) and National Youth Solvent Abuse Program (NYSAP) treatment centres where members of the research team hosted community conversations. The conversations addressed the offering of cultural interventions in treatment, the challenges facing cultural practices in treatment and the ways that those challenges might best be addressed.

The visits were led by Elder Jim Dumont. He pointed out at each treatment centre that our community conversation about Indigenous culture in Canada and around the world is just beginning.

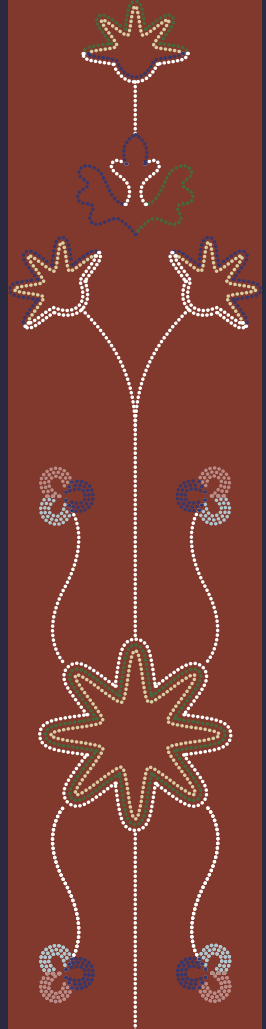
Elder Gladys Wapass-Greyeyes shared the story of a growing flower. She explained that flowers are a part of our Indigenous culture, teaching us about renewal and patience. Working with clients to develop a flower that is grounded in the Indigenous Wellness Framework is one way to ensure that the conversation about culture and wellness continues to grow.

The original NNADAP and NYSAP collaborators on this project are all happy to offer you guidance should you need it. They include:

- ✦ Carrier Sekani Family Services
- ✦ Ekweskeet Healing Lodge
- ✦ Leading Thunderbird Lodge
- ✦ Nelson House Medicine Lodge
- ✦ Nenqayni Wellness Centre
- ✦ Nimkee NupiGawagan Healing Centre
- ✦ Rising Sun Treatment Centre
- ✦ Sauteaux Healing and Wellness Centre
- ✦ Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society
- ✦ Wanaki Centre
- ✦ White Buffalo Youth Inhalant Treatment Centre
- ✦ Wolastoqewiyik Healing Lodge

NNADAP originated in the mid-1970s to address alcohol and drug abuse in First Nations communities. It is funded by Health Canada and largely controlled by First Nations communities and organizations. There are currently 52 residential treatment centres offering over 550 prevention programs across the country.

NYSAP originated in 1995 with a commitment by Health Canada to develop several First Nations treatment centres geared toward adolescent solvent abuse. Established between 1995 and 2005, there are now 10 residential centres offering services across Canada.





# National Wellness Initiatives

You can access information on national wellness initiatives related to this project online:

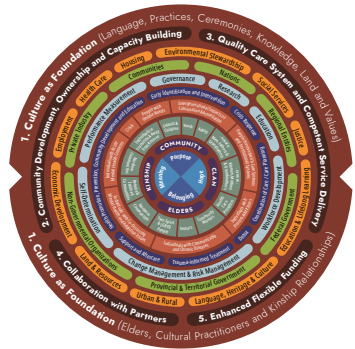
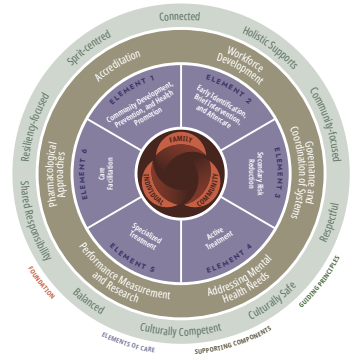
Led by the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in Canada outlines a continuum of care to support strengthened community, regional and national responses to substance use issues. It is designed to provide a framework for a comprehensive approach to mental health and addictions programming in NNADAP and NYSAP centres. (<https://thunderbirdpf.org/hos-full>)

Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in Canada recommended recognizing culture in addictions treatment. Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment was initiated to provide the supporting research. See the Indigenous Wellness Framework Reference Guide for more information. (<https://thunderbirdpf.org/IWF-ref-guide>)

The Native Wellness Assessment™ is one of the tools developed as part of this project. It can be used among Indigenous peoples who will benefit from feedback on their state of wellness as seen from a Indigenous cultural perspective at a specific point in time. (<https://thunderbirdpf.org/nwa-info>)

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum (FNMWC) is a joint initiative of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, First Nations partners, including First Peoples Wellness Circle, the Assembly of First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada. (<https://thunderbirdpf.org/fnmwc-full>)

The Continuum focuses on the broader concept of mental wellness rather than mental illness. It uses the Indigenous Wellness Framework, developed through the Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment research. (<https://thunderbirdpf.org/IWF>)



## Assistance and Resources

Some of the ideas and terms in the Activity Guide are abstract and complex. Your clients will probably require assistance in understanding and interpreting them. You may want to schedule one-on-one sessions or you may find that a group discussion is more appropriate as different perspectives can assist with explanations.

You might want to include cultural music, pictures or videos in your clients' sessions. You may also want to associate other activities at your treatment facility with the making of the flower, such as growing medicinal plants and nature walks.

# Growing a Flower

The growth of a flower is like the renewal of culture and wellness for Indigenous people. The clients' *Activity Guide* outlines five steps to growing a flower and includes both discussion questions and activities.

## There are five steps to growing a flower:

- STEP 1 MY FLOWER'S CENTRE**  
What does wellness mean to me?
- STEP 2 MY FLOWER'S STEM**  
What does Indigenous culture mean to me?
- STEP 3 MY FLOWER'S LEAVES**  
What cultural activities are important to me?
- STEP 4 MY FLOWER'S PETALS**  
What cultural activities will I get involved in?
- STEP 5 THE GROUND MY FLOWER GROWS IN**  
What cultural supports do I have in my life?



We have included a package of seeds with each Activity Guide so that clients can continue their journey towards wellness at home by planting the seeds in their own community.

## Design Options

Encourage participants to be as creative as they want in growing their flower. At the end of the Activity Guide are two pages with the parts of the flower to cut out or trace onto some other material, like foam, to work with. They can also work on the paper copy with markers or crayons or draw their own flower on one of the blank pages provided at the end of the Activity Guide. *(We've included some examples from past clients at the end of the handbook.)*

Participants should feel free to make the petals different sizes to share a specific meaning. Or they can try using clay, paint, felt pieces or sand to design and grow their flower. Flowers can be three-dimensional; for example, clients could gather objects from nature (stones, feathers, twigs) to create an image.

If the idea of a flower doesn't work for your clients, that's no problem at all. Maybe they want to choose an animal, a tree or a person?

It may take your clients no time at all to grow their flower or they may work on it each and every day. You may choose to work with them to do one step a week or all five steps in one day. They should be encouraged to grow their flower in whatever way makes sense for them to achieve balanced wellness that is cultivated from an understanding of Indigenous culture.

## Additional Resources for Step 4

Step 4 contains some complicated ideas and your clients may not find it easy to understand them. We encourage you to review the wall cards at the end of this handbook to familiarize yourself with the concepts underlying Step 4.

Our wellness as Indigenous people has four interrelated parts – spiritual, emotional, mental and physical. The Activity Guide asks participants to consider cultural activities in one or all of these areas that could increase their wellness. These four areas are broken down even further into different types of cultural actions or behaviours.

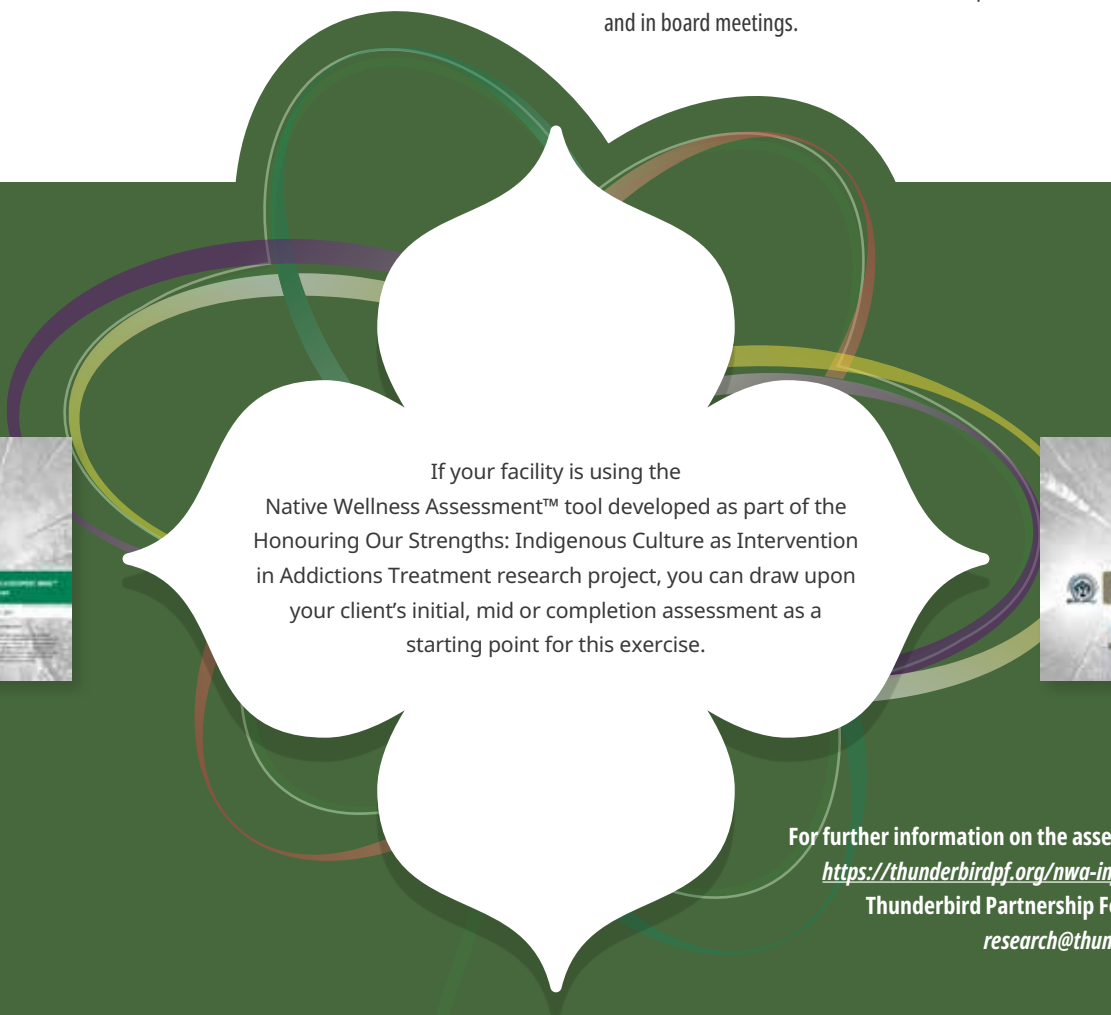
Suggest to clients that they start with one activity that interests them based on their responses to Step 3. Some clients will only complete a few petals. Others may want to add 13 petals to their flower based on the 13 different cultural actions identified in the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical areas.

Encourage your clients to choose activities that are achievable (*"I would like to walk for 10 minutes a day"* rather than *"I want to run a marathon"*).

Don't hesitate to approach an Elder or a cultural Knowledge Keeper for assistance during this step. This is their area of expertise and they have the understanding and skills needed to serve as a cultural resource.

We are all at different stages of wellness. Some of us will be early in our growth process (new seedlings) while others are further along (mature flowers). No matter which stage we are at, we can always learn more through participation and action.

- ✚ Share the Indigenous Wellness Framework at community gatherings to raise awareness about the important role of culture in wellness for Indigenous people healing from substance use issues.
- ✚ Use the flower to review the cultural interventions you offer at your treatment centre and discuss them, for example, at staff retreats and in board meetings.



If your facility is using the Native Wellness Assessment™ tool developed as part of the Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment research project, you can draw upon your client's initial, mid or completion assessment as a starting point for this exercise.

For further information on the assessment, visit <https://thunderbirdpf.org/nwa-info> or contact Thunderbird Partnership Foundation at [research@thunderbirdpf.org](mailto:research@thunderbirdpf.org)

## Ways of Using the Flower with your Clients

- ⌘ Before you initiate a conversation with your clients about culture, invest some time in finding the cultural resources in your area, such as an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. Once you've identified local cultural resources, have a conversation with them about the common cultural practices in your area and how they can be accessed.
- ⌘ Consider ways of facilitating client access to cultural resources, such as an Elder. Is it possible to provide an honorarium or a secure space within your service setting for them? The Document Library of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's website can provide you additional suggestions: <https://thunderbirdpf.org/napf-document-library/>
- ⌘ Share the idea of a flower with your clients to facilitate a conversation about the relationship between culture and wellness. If your clients aren't interested in a discussion of culture, just do Step 1 (*What Does Wellness Mean to Me?*). There are also a number of items in the list of cultural interventions that are translatable across faiths and some that are less directly connected to ceremonies.
- ⌘ Assist clients with developing a flower as part of other activities at your treatment centre that emphasize understanding culture and wellness and putting it into practice.
- ⌘ Share this guide with Knowledge Keepers and Elders where your treatment centre is located to deepen your clients' conversations about culture and to enhance the broader community's learning. How do the Elders understand culture, wellness and the Indigenous Wellness Framework? What cultural interventions are specific to your community?
- ⌘ Bring this guide to community meetings your clients are involved in, such as local schools and health centres. How do your community partners understand the Indigenous Wellness Framework and its parts? What steps might be taken to continue a community discussion about culture and wellness that includes your clients?

## Other Ways you can use the Flower

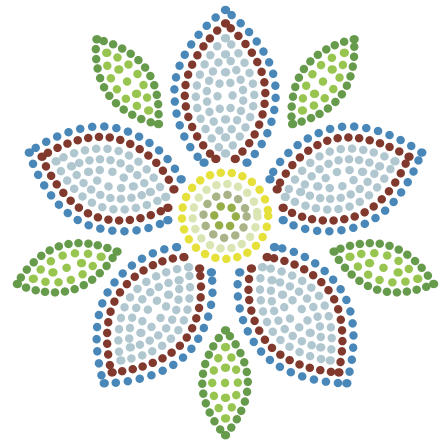
- ⌘ Share the Indigenous Wellness Framework at community gatherings to raise awareness about the important role of culture in wellness for Indigenous people healing from addictions.
- ⌘ Use the flower to review the cultural interventions you offer at your treatment centre and discuss them, for example, at staff retreats and in Board meetings.
- ⌘ Use the flower with strategic planning, review and evaluation of your programs. Are there parts of the flower that you cover well in your treatment centre and others that require more resources? Are there parts of the flower that identify cultural activities or philosophies that you might want to expand upon?
- ⌘ Introduce the flower to community organizations you work with, such as a Friendship Centre or Wellness Committee. Host a discussion about strategic planning with these organizations. Sometimes organizations work in isolation from one another; the flower may be useful as a tool for opening up culture-based discussions for developing partnerships.



# Acknowledgements

Our work was inspired by the leadership of Elder Jim Dumont and our treatment centre project partners to walk with First Nations' people on the path to wellness guided by cultural interventions. We gratefully acknowledge the work of all of our team members, past and current, and all whose paths we have crossed and who have impacted our work.

To find out more about the **Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addiction Treatment** project, please see the Indigenous Wellness Reference Guide on our website at <https://thunderbirdpf.org/IWF-ref-guide>



Members of the **Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention Research Team** include:

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# Definition of Wellness

## WELLNESS

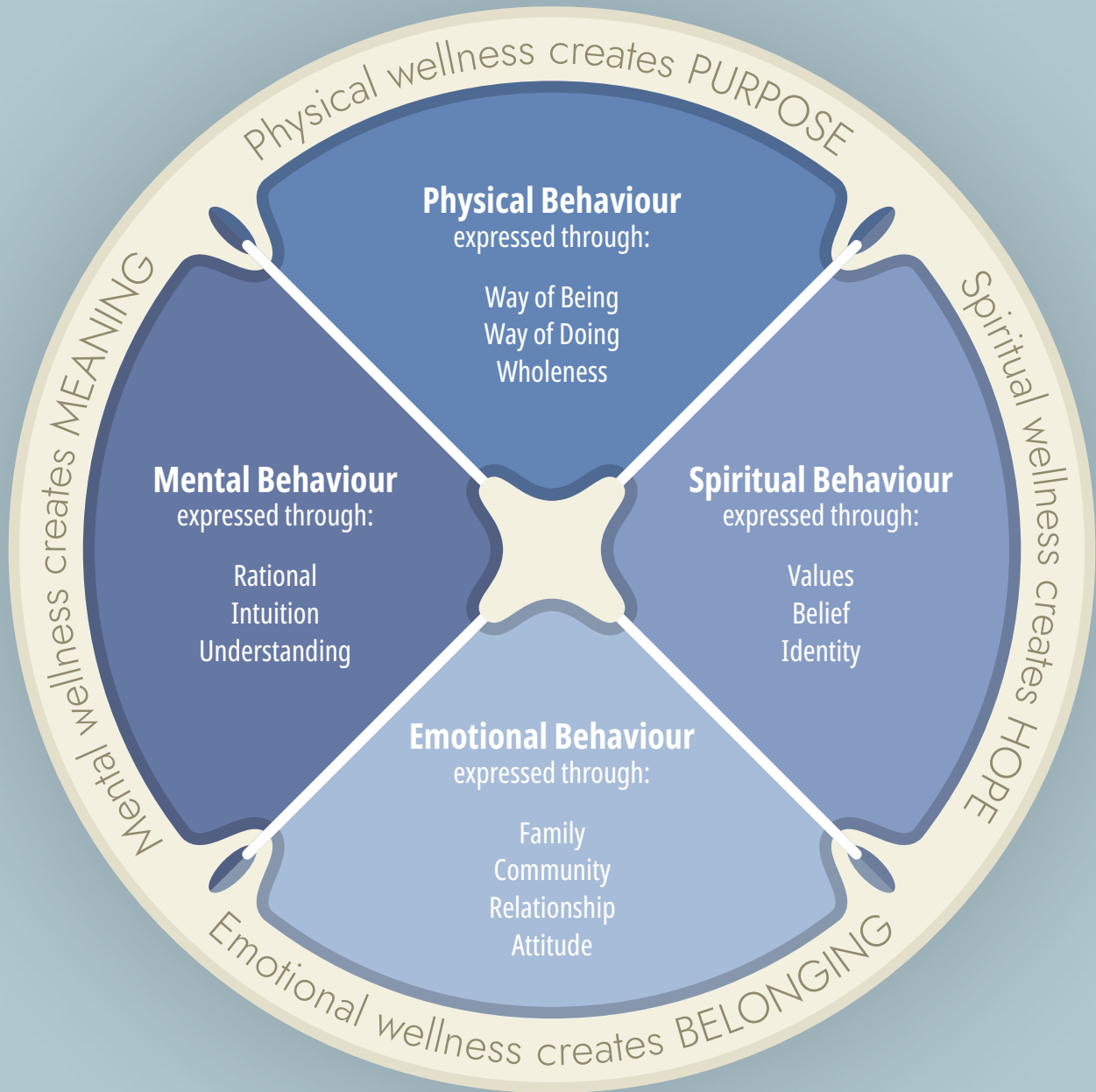
from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one's connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment. The spirit causes us to live, gives us vitality, mobility, purpose and the desire to achieve the highest quality of living in the world. **Spiritual** wellbeing is the quality of being alive in a qualitative way. Spirit is central to the primary vision of life and worldview and thereby facilitates hope. Within an Indigenous worldview, being rooted in family, community and within creation as extended family is the foundation of belonging and relationships. At this heart level of one's being, **emotional** and relational wellbeing is nurtured by one's belonging within interdependent relationships with others and living in relation to creation, including beings in creation. The mind operates in both a rational and intuitive capacity. **Mental** wellbeing is the conscious and intelligent drive to know and activate one's being and becoming. Having a reason for being gives meaning to life. The body is the most outer part of our being and is comprised of the most immediate behavioral aspects of our being. **Physical** wellbeing is that way of behaving and doing that actualizes the intention and desire of the spirit in the world. This and the knowledge that the spirit has something to do in the world generates a sense of purpose, conscious of being part of something that is much greater than they are as an individual.



Elder Jim Dumont, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment Project - University of Saskatchewan. (2014). Definition of Wellness©. Bothwell, Ontario: Author. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Funding Reference Number AHI-120535.



# Indigenous Wellness Framework



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## Definition of Culture

Although there are many ways by which culture is expressed amongst the various First Nations, there are principal, foundational beliefs and concepts that are commonly held that support a unified definition of “Indigenous culture”. In what follows are these primary concepts of the Indigenous worldview.

**The Spirit:** The most fundamental feature of the Indigenous worldview is the spirit. Within this reality the spirit is housed within an inclusive concept of body-mind-heart-spirit. In our life within this earth realm these work together in such a way as to be inseparably functioning as a whole. The spirit is always central and always works in relationship to the other levels of being. Spirit is in all things and throughout all things. In the Indigenous worldview we live in a spiritual universe and within a spiritual relationship.

**The Circle:** The circle, more than any other symbol, is most expressive of the Indigenous view of the world. The circle is primary to all of life and life process, and, is also of primary significance in relating to and understanding life itself in all its dimensions and diversity. Human beings, amongst other beings, are in harmony with the life flow and grow to their greatest fulfillment when they too operate in a circular fashion. The Circle, then, being primary, influences, in every way, how we see the world. The Circle is synonymous with Wholeness. Wholeness is the perception of the undivided entirety of things. To see in a circular manner is to envision the interconnectedness and the interdependence within life. The Wholeness of life is the Circle of life. Harmony and Balance: Desire for harmony is the pre-disposition of all of the created world. Harmony is a central value of the Indigenous worldview, which pre-supposes that all of life consciously cares for one another, and while respecting the individual's autonomy, strives to achieve and maintain an interrelationship that

assures quality of life for the collective whole. Balance is a fundamental principle within the way that harmony in interrelationship works. A worldview that presumes a disposition toward balance causes people to see the dynamic character of their “real world” as always striving to maintain an equilibrium and symmetry in all aspects of the total economy of its ecology. Simply put: the Indigenous person sees the world as always and naturally striving to maintain an equilibrium and symmetry – everything will ultimately try to achieve a balanced solution. The value of harmony works well within such a worldview because it assumes that people lean toward this same balance, and therefore, desire to be in harmony with one another.

**“All My Relations”:** All that is created consciously cares about the harmony and well-being of life; all things are regarded as “persons” and as “relatives”. Personhood not only applies to human persons, but plants, trees, animals, rocks, and visible and unseen forces of nature are also considered as “persons”. Because they are persons, they have the range and qualities of personhood that are commonly attributed in western ideology exclusively to human persons. Once this is accepted, it elevates the prevailing view of other-than-human beings to a higher quality of being and moves the nature of relationship to an all-inclusive ethical level. We are all related to one another as persons, and are responsible for maintaining good and harmonious relationships within the “extended family” of persons.



**Kindness/Caring/Respect:** Another key to understanding the Indigenous worldview is the recognition of the fundamental precept: the universe cares. The Creator cares for his creation. The Earth cares about her off-spring and all of earth-life. The beings within creation care about each other and about how they relate to one another within the interconnectedness and interdependence of the web of life. In that the creation originated in this way, it sustains itself and thrives by means of an underlying orientation toward kindness. The key to harmony in a life that is conceived as “all my relations” is respect. Respect is understood as the honouring of the harmonious interconnectedness of all of life, which is a relationship that is reciprocal and interpersonal. The Indigenous person is predisposed to have in his or her interest both the greatest good for the Individual as well as the collective good.

**Earth Connection:** We are all relatives because we have the same Mother. In the Indigenous mind, the human person is of the earth and from the earth. Like all of the created world, the human being is part of the balance of nature and must find a special yet interconnected place within the created whole. The human person is a relative to all other “persons” of the Earth, and, along with all creatures calls the Earth, Mother. The Earth herself is a living, breathing, conscious being, complete with heart/feeling, soul/spirit, and physical/organic life, as it is with all the relatives of creation. Indigenous identity and relationship is defined by the land and the connection the natural world.

**Path of Life Continuum:** The experience of living in this world is understood as a journey of the spirit moving progressively through stages that are interconnected and continuous. In the same way, lives are connected inter-generationally as “strings of lives” connecting us to our ancestors and to those yet unborn.

**Language:** The original language is the most expressive communication of the spirit, emotions, thinking, behaviour and actions of the people. Language is the “voice” of the culture and therefore the true and most expressive means for the transmission of the original way of life and way of being in the world.

Culture is the expression, the life-ways, and the spiritual, psychological, social, material practice of this Indigenous worldview.



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**Cultural Interventions specific to my community include:**

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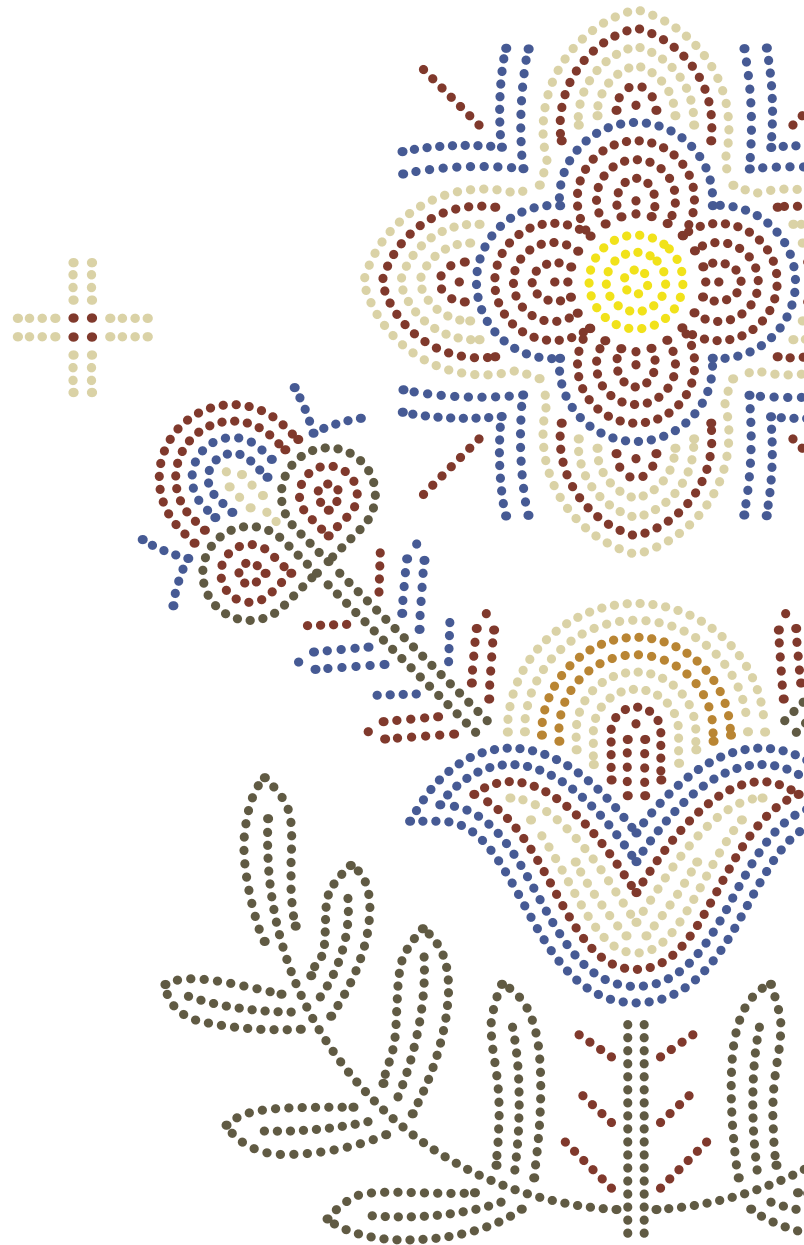
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# Common Cultural Interventions

It is said that what the Great Spirit gave to his/her children to live in this physical world in a good way, was given forever. This means that the answer to addressing substance use issues exists within Indigenous culture.

Culture is the facilitator of spiritual expression. One's spirit desires to live life to the fullest. A connection to spirit is essential and primary to wellbeing. Cultural interventions are therefore essential to wellness. Cultural interventions such as ceremonies attend to the whole person, while other interventions may have more specific focus. Cultural interventions are facilitated by individuals who have sanctioning of their skills and knowledge in culture because they live the culture and have been recognized by both the cultural teachers/community and the spirit to lead or facilitate a certain cultural activity.

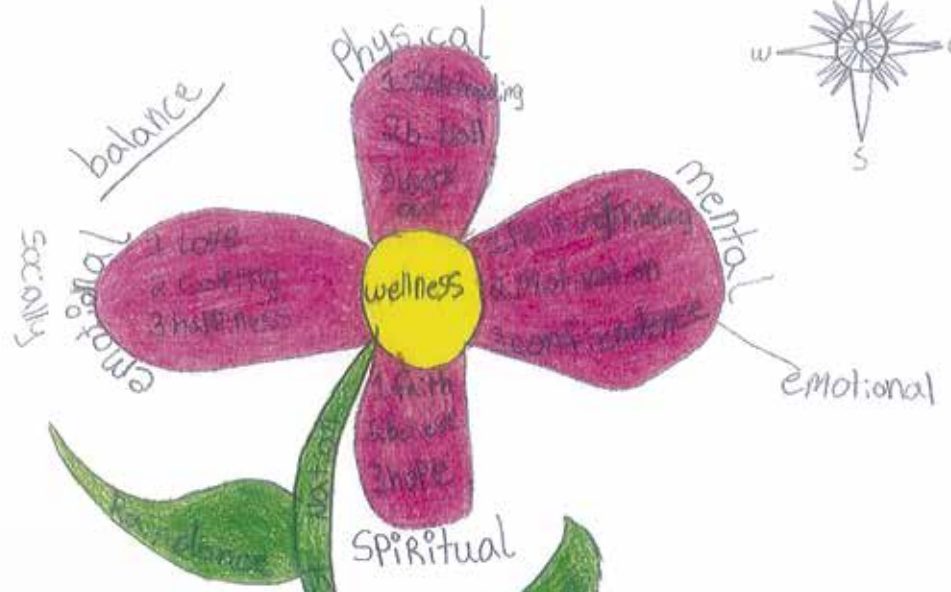
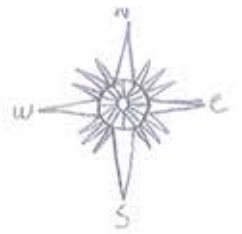
However, some cultural interventions, generally those that are not ceremonial, do not require this level of expertise. An example is the use of sacred medicines for smudge, although this differs across cultures. All cultural interventions require a level of cultural competency that is in compliance with the culture of the people on that land. Critically important is to know that there is not "one" culture because culture is defined by the land, language and nation of people. Treatment centres offer culture through their treatment programs based on the culture of the people where the treatment centre is located. Clients participating in the treatment programs may experience cultural interventions different from their own culture. Cultural interventions then become an introduction to culture and are always facilitated with an encouragement to clients to "go home and find their own way".



Elder Jim Dumont, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment Project - University of Saskatchewan. (2014). Definition of Culture©. Bothwell, Ontario: Author. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Funding Reference Number AHI-120535.













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