

# Cultural Safety Primer and Resource Guide for Nurses working with Indigenous Communities

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## OVERVIEW

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To provide effective, quality health care in Indigenous communities, nurses must understand and integrate principles and practices of cultural humility and safety. The provision of culturally safe health care aligns with and supports wider goals of reconciliation and healing as called for by the 2015 [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#) and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). Cultural safety can also directly contribute to improved well-being and health outcomes for individual clients. When practices that support cultural safety are implemented, clients have more control and inclusion in health care decisions, better compliance with health care recommendations, and increased likelihood of return for follow up appointments and implementation of treatment (Rand et.al, 2019).

The [Indigenous Cultural Competency Learning Policy \(ISC\)](#) (2020) requires all ISC staff to take cultural competency training and integrate cultural competency learning objectives into their learning plans. In nursing, all FNIHB and agency nurses must take cultural safety training as part of their mandatory onboarding, and are expected to engage in lifelong, continued learning in this area. This Primer summarizes key concepts and definitions related to cultural safety; lists practices and actions that can be taken by nurses; and provides a list of accessible resources and links for continued learning in this area.

## DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

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Cultural safety moves beyond concepts of cultural sensitivity, awareness, and competence by integrating an understanding of power and seeking to redress imbalances through the health delivery process. However, these concepts are still relevant, important aspects of a culturally safe environment, and are defined by Indigenous Health (2017: p. 5) as follows:

- **Cultural awareness** involves recognizing that differences and similarities exist between cultures. Learning about the histories that impact Indigenous peoples in Canada is an important part of developing cultural awareness
- **Cultural sensitivity** grows when we start to see the influences of our own culture and acknowledge that we have biases. Cultural sensitivity is NOT about treating everyone the same
- **Cultural competency** is about developing practical skills for interacting in respectful ways with people who are different from us. Cultural competency does not require us to become experts in cultures different from our own
- **Cultural Humility** is defined by the First Nations Health Authority (2016) as: “a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience”. Cultural humility has also been called a building block for cultural safety (Indigenous Health, 2017).
- **Cultural Safety** is defined by the FNHA (2016) as: “An outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the healthcare system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.” (First Nations Health Authority, 2016). Indigenous Health also emphasizes that “culturally safe health services are free of racism and discrimination and that People are

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supported to draw strengths from their identity, culture and community” (Indigenous Health, 2017).

Importantly, cultural safety – or whether an environment feels culturally safe – is always defined by the client. Each client is different and this means nurses need to be open and flexible to the experiences, needs and priorities of each client if they are to support a culturally safe environment.

Cultural safety adds an explicit analysis of power and involves approaches aiming to reduce power imbalances and inequities. To promote cultural safety, nurses must have cultural humility and self-reflect on their own biases, privileges and power and work to balance power differentials in the nurse-client relationship, where possible. They must also strive to recognize, address and mitigate, where possible, any barriers clients may face in accessing health care or following the care plan.

### LEARNING AND ACTION

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The following are concrete actions that nurses can take to support a culturally safe experience and environment for clients:

- Trauma-informed approach: Recognize the pervasiveness of trauma among clients and the risk of re-traumatization through the health encounter, and learn appropriate approaches and strategies for providing care. *Trauma Informed: The Trauma Toolkit*, developed by Klinik Community Health Centre is a resource for service organizations and providers to deliver services that are trauma-informed.
- Learn about the histories of Indigenous people and the community(s) in which you work, and reflect on the ongoing impacts of oppressive colonial policies and systemic racism
- Reflect on your own biases and privileges learn about and embrace an approach of cultural humility
- Take a relationship-based approach to care, rooted in cultural humility and safety:
  - Approach every encounter with a client from a place of respect, dignity, compassion and empathy.
  - Recognize and honour cultural differences and Indigenous ways of knowing and approaching wellness and health care.
  - Provide open communication and encourage dialogue. Encourage client input and decision-making with regard to their health experience, priorities and care plan.
  - Ask for and listen carefully to client input and questions about the health history / assessment process, management and client education components, and discharge and follow-up plan. Tailor the care plan to reflect the client’s health priorities and needs to the greatest extent possible while still reflecting the health objectives.
  - Build trust, rapport and reciprocity
- Recognize and consider the systemic barriers or challenges that affect health and access to health care for clients, and address these through the management / care plan process (as appropriate/possible) - for example:
  - Previous negative experiences with the health system or health workers (personal and intergenerational)
  - Previous negative experiences with other sectors / workers in authority positions – police, social services, government (personal and intergenerational)
  - Previous trauma (personal and intergenerational)
  - Financial means to access various supports, supplies and goods
  - Access to transportation; access to referrals or services outside the community
  - Access to family, community support systems after discharge
  - Family and community responsibilities that may influence health access or decision-making

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- Language and/or literacy barriers; ensure community translator for elders and any other community members whose first language may not be English or French
- Outside travel barriers / stresses – if Medevac or outside referrals are needed, understand this can be stressful and challenging for families. Provide open and clear information on the reasons for the transfer, what is needed and what may be expected; take time to answer concerns and questions.
- Environmental conditions - housing safety and health risks; overcrowding; access to clean, potable water; access to sanitation and waste disposal; food insecurity and access to healthy foods and traditional foods.
- Engage in on-going learning and reflection on Cultural Safety. See the next section for a list of free, accessible resources.

### CULTURAL SAFETY TRAINING AND RESOURCES FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

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**Onboarding Training:** All FNIHB and agency nurses are required to take cultural competency training as part of their mandatory onboarding. Some Regions deliver their own training, while others require nurses to register for and complete specific courses like the [Cancer Care Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety Courses](#) or [San'yas: Indigenous Cultural Safety \(ICS\) Training](#) (details below)

**Indigenous Cultural Competency Learning Policy (ISC, 2020):** Nurses are expected to continue their professional and personal learning and development in the area of cultural humility and cultural safety. The [Indigenous Cultural Competency Learning Policy \(ISC\) \(2020\)](#) requires all ISC staff to take cultural competency training and integrate cultural competency learning objectives into their learning plans.

The following learning resources can be added to nurses' continuing learning and development plans and can complement the initial training received during their onboarding training.

#### ***Canada School of Public Service***

##### **[Canada School of Public Service - Indigenous Learning Series](#)**

Learning series for Government of Canada employees through GC Campus (Canada School of Public Service). Focus on historical relationship between government of Canada and Indigenous peoples; historical and on-going impacts of colonialism, colonial policies and practices, and the current realities and cultural and political contexts of First Nations, Metis and Inuit in Canada. Cultural self-reflection as a tool for working towards cultural safety is the focus of one module.

#### ***Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada – Indigenous Health Committee***

##### **[Indigenous Health Primer](#)**

An excellent resource (2019) for clinicians with chapters specific to Indigenous science, knowledge and rights, Indigenous health policy, trauma-informed care (Ch. 3) and cultural safety approaches in health care (Ch.4). Also provides a detailed overview of historical colonial and on-going legislative and policies issues impacting Indigenous peoples' health and experience in the health system.

##### **[Cultural safety guidance for clinicians during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)**

Online resource released in October 2020, which provides succinct advice on cultural safety when organizing and providing assessment and care of Indigenous patients during the pandemic.

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## **Klinic Community Health Centre**

### **Trauma-informed: The Trauma Toolkit, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2013**

This toolkit aims to provide knowledge to service providers working with adults who have experienced or been affected by trauma. It will also help service providers and organizations to work from a trauma-informed perspective and develop trauma-informed relationships that cultivate safety, trust and compassion. The toolkit describes all types of trauma including historic trauma and the legacy of residential schools, as well as cultural teachings and healing practices.

## **BC First Nations Health Authority (FNHA)**

### **Cultural Safety and Cultural Humility Webinars**

FNHA has published 11 webinars related to the improvement of cultural safety and cultural humility among health professionals. These webinars are available, free online. They were created to shed light on issues faced by Indigenous people accessing health care in efforts to improve health care services for Indigenous peoples in British Columbia (BC). While these webinars were created for health care in British Columbia, they are applicable to Indigenous care across Canada.

### **#itstartswithme - Creating A Climate for Change: Cultural Safety and Humility in Health Services Delivery for First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia**

FNHA published a guidebook on improving professional relationships for First Nations people and the health care system. Published in 2016, this booklet also highlights the Declaration of Commitment made by the British Columbia Health Authority to advance cultural humility and cultural safety within the health care system. This guidebook also provides examples of discrimination and bias experienced by Indigenous people in the health system.

## **BC Provincial Health Services Authority - Indigenous Health**

### **National Indigenous Cultural Safety Collaborative Learning Series – Webinar Series**

This national webinar series consists of a series of videos from a variety of different presenters on topics related to strengthening Indigenous cultural safety in health and social services. Participants are encouraged to participate in webinars along with other individuals and groups in their regions, to inspire shared learning and discussion in the context of their program area and communities.

### **San'yas: Indigenous Cultural Safety (ICS) Training**

*\*This training is available at cost and as available/offered*

This on-line training has been created to promote self-awareness and improvement of skills for those working both indirectly and directly with Indigenous people. Focusing on individual competencies and promotion of a positive relationship with Indigenous clientele, this 5-course training program is very beneficial for health care professionals. This program is offered in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario. Nurses from Quebec and Atlantic regions can access the online Ontario course and French language course materials are available.

## **BC Northern Health Authority – Indigenous Health**

### **Cultural Safety: Respect and Dignity in Relationships**

Indigenous Health of the Northern Health authority published a unique and well-designed reference (2017) for Cultural Safety. Practical in its succinct and well stated definitions of cultural safety, humility,

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and sensitivity, this booklet provides a useful resource for those looking for more information on cultural safety.

## **Cancer Care Ontario**

### **Indigenous Cultural Safety Courses**

Cancer Care Ontario developed 13 specific courses related to the care of indigenous people. Chosen for its in depth review of the issues surrounding health care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and its ease of use. These courses provide historical background on First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people as well as methods for culturally sensitive, client sensitive care. These courses are for any health care professional and are accredited professional development courses. At the end of each course, individuals are provided with a certificate of continuing professional development.

## **BC Ministry of Children and Family Development**

### **Cultural Safety Resource Guide**

A resource guide was developed by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development “Early Years Indigenous Cultural Safety Resource Guide, March 2019 and provides valuable information on a wide range of issues related to cultural safety and competency definitions, context with respect to when two cultures interact within in the same space. The guide provides a comprehensive listing of on-line training, experiential learning, websites, printed resources, podcasts on cultural competency, Fact Sheets on numerous topics, definitions – what does Indigenous mean, explores legal terminology, descriptions of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples, provides background on the Indian Act, Residential Schools, Sixties Scoop, Intergenerational Trauma (background, impact, resilience), Structural intervention (reduce the presence of risks and barriers hidden in rules policies, operational procedures of organizations), Background on Cultural Safety, Key Terms and References

## **University of Alberta**

### **Indigenous Canada Course**

Indigenous Canada is a 12-lesson Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) from the Faculty of Native Studies that explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada. From an Indigenous perspective, this course explores key issues facing Indigenous peoples today from a historical and critical perspective highlighting national and local Indigenous-settler relations. Topics for the 12 lessons include the fur trade and other exchange relationships, land claims and environmental impacts, legal systems and rights, political conflicts and alliances, Indigenous political activism, and contemporary Indigenous life, art and its expressions

## **University of Victoria**

### **Cultural Safety Modules**

The University of Victoria’s Nursing program offers three free, open to the public, interactive Cultural Safety modules. The purpose of these modules is to reflect on Indigenous peoples’ experiences of **colonization** and **racism** as these relate to health and health care. The modules are designed for nurses, nursing students, and nursing instructors, as well as other health and human service workers, to explore the concept of **cultural safety** as it relates to nursing practice.

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