November 2025

Supporting Agency, Facing Equity:

An environmental scan of Indigenous cultural safety training for primary care providers

Executive summary

Anti-Indigenous racism in primary healthcare is deeply rooted in historic and ongoing system discrimination. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples continue to face long-standing barriers to accessing equitable healthcare and practicing self-determination, and this results in significant health disparities[1,2].

There is a need for transformative change in the way the healthcare system operates to promote health and health equity for Indigenous peoples.

This environmental scan identifies and analyzes existing programs and frameworks that aim to mitigate anti-Indigenous racism within primary healthcare services in Ontario at organizational, clinical and individual levels. It was produced for Wellesley Institute by an Indigenous-led research team at Unity Health Toronto, in line with OCAP® principles[3].

The scan[4] identified and summarized effective **toolkits and webinars** developed by nine organizations, and effective **training programs and courses** from six other organizations. Collectively, they can be applied to diverse audiences within primary healthcare including nurses, social workers, community mental health workers and physicians. They range in cost, time commitment and how their effectiveness is assessed.

Foundational to all the resources were the principles of understanding and identifying biases and stereotypes, reviewing Indigenous history, and understanding the current impacts of colonization on Indigenous healthcare systems and outcomes.

However, deeper cultural awareness is needed to address anti-Indigenous racism in healthcare. Effective programs identified the diversity of Indigenous nations and populations, built understanding of Indigenous traditional perspectives toward health, reinforced the inclusion of Indigenous ceremony, culture and community in healthcare, and provided further resources to advance knowledge.

Most cultural safety programs that were analyzed focus on individual-level education, with some focusing on training for clinical teams. Because individual and clinical team efforts towards Indigenous cultural safety can only go so far, institutional-level efforts are also needed to support them. This scan includes several institutional-level suggestions for Indigenous cultural safety including supportive policies, supportive leadership, spaces for Indigenous engagement and training, ongoing relationships with Indigenous community leaders, and community oversight and protection of data.

Collectively, the resources in this scan highlight three important themes in addressing anti-Indigenous racism in primary care: a need for an integrated approach, the value of community-led initiatives, and the importance of continuous learning.

From a policy perspective, these resources also highlight that cultural safety for Indigenous populations should be a core component of healthcare education moving forward. Responsive, profession-based skills training to support and advance cultural safety principles should continue to be developed to ensure appropriate application across settings. Policymakers should also engage in training.

The solutions to decreasing anti-Indigenous racism already exist within the First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, as supported by existing research, community partnerships and community practices. As trainings become increasingly mandated and more widely available, it will be crucial that their delivery and effectiveness be continually assessed and guided by Indigenous voices and researchers. Evolving Indigenous education is essential to ensuring safe, equitable healthcare.

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[1] Barker, A. J. (2009). The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State. *American Indian Quarterly, 33*(3), 325–351. https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.0.0054

[2] Loppie, C., & Wien, F. (2022). *Understanding Indigenous health inequalities through a social determinants model*. National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. https://www.nccih.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/10373/Health_Inequalities_EN_Web_2022-04-26.pdf

[3] First Nations Governance Information Centre. The First Nations Principles of OCAP®. (1998). https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/

[4] Gabriel, M., & Giulianelli, A. (2025). Supporting Agency, Facing Equity: An environmental scan of Indigenous cultural safety training for primary care providers. Wellesley Institute and Unity Health Toronto. https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/publications/Supporting-Agency-Facing-Equity/

About this document

This document is an executive summary of the research document entitled “Supporting Agency, Facing Equity: An environmental scan of Indigenous cultural safety training for primary care providers.” (ISBN: 978-1-998595-09-9)

Visit www.wellesleyinstitute.com to view the research report on which this executive summary is based.

All documents were funded by the Ministry of Health of the Province of Ontario, Grant #739. The views expressed in these publications are the views of Wellesley Institute and the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

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Acknowledgement of Traditional Land

We wish to acknowledge this land on which Wellesley Institute operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

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