Identifying Grand Challenges in Indigenous mental health using the

THREE-STRANDED BASKET APPROACH
INDIGENOUS MENTAL HEALTH IN CANADA

Ongoing and unresolved trauma due to colonial policies and practices in Canada has created a large difference in the mental health and well-being of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, especially for youth. For example, Indigenous people experience higher rates of fear, anxiety and depression, and suicide rates are up to 11 times higher than non-Indigenous populations, especially among youth aged 15 to 24.¹,²

Even though there are Indigenous-focused mental health services and programs available across Canada, the well-being of Indigenous communities continues to suffer. Despite this, Indigenous peoples are resilient, creative and innovative. Many of these challenges can be solved using actions that are created for and by Indigenous peoples, and that are rooted in Indigenous knowledge, values and lived experience.

HOW WE ARE RESPONDING

In 2018, the Indigenous Innovation Initiative started the Indigenous Mental Health Project. Through this project, we developed a new approach, called the Three-Stranded Basket, to help us identify Grand Challenges in Indigenous mental health. Visit the website below to watch a video, created by Indigenous youth artist Patricia Eve Martin, to learn more about Grand Challenges and the Three-Stranded Basket approach.

Access the video at https://youtu.be/2c-lTwx1Rms

One of the main reasons for identifying these Grand Challenges is that they could help to inform a program that supports the development of Indigenous innovation for mental health.
WHAT WE LEARNED

Between November 2018 and October 2019, we surveyed and gathered with almost 100 academics, service providers and Indigenous youth from across Canada. Each group represented a strand of the basket.

Strand 1: academics

Strand 2: service providers

Strand 3: Indigenous youth

Across all strands, we identified 231 barriers related to Indigenous mental health and, using the Three-Stranded Basket approach, these were translated into a list of Grand Challenges. From this, **four Grand Challenge areas were identified as the most important to address:**

- Disconnection from Indigenous culture and identity
- Fear and anxiety about the impacts of climate change
- Limited or no access to culturally relevant, self-determined and safe services and programs
- Limited or no access to community role models for Indigenous youth
**STRAND 1: ACADEMICS**

**Gathering date:** November 2018

**Gathering location:** Tkaronto (Toronto, Ontario)

**Who participated:** 10 researchers, professors and other thought leaders. Most were Indigenous, and all had experience or expertise working in Indigenous mental health.

**Number of barriers identified:** 24, over 3 priority areas. See below for examples.

**Disconnection from culture and identity, including limited or no access to:**

- Traditional ceremony
- Culturally relevant and safe services and programs that support Indigenous identity, complex trauma and wholistic health and well-being
- Learning and speaking traditional languages

**Limited community leadership capacity, including:**

- Limited or no resources to create long-term, community-led services and programs
- Limited supply of Indigenous service and program providers
- Not usually being engaged as true experts, based on lived experiences and Indigenous knowledge

**Limited community control of local knowledge, information and data, including:**

- Not usually being informed of or deciding how their knowledge, information and data is collected, shared and used
- Indigenous-focused services and programs not usually being designed by Indigenous people based on Indigenous knowledge and lived experiences
**Gathering date:** March 2019

**Gathering location:** Kisiskaciwan (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan)

**Who participated:** 13 service and program providers. Many were Indigenous, and all had experience or expertise providing Indigenous mental health services or programs.

**Number of barriers identified:** 57, over 2 priority areas. See below for examples.

---

**Inaccessible programs and services, because:**

- People usually have to travel to other communities to access them
- They are not available in many Indigenous languages and are hard to navigate, especially for youth
- They are not usually culturally relevant and safe, and do not support wholistic health and well-being

- There is limited or no access to community role models to encourage people to access them, especially for youth or people facing stigma
- There are not enough Indigenous providers, like doctors, nurses, counselors and psychiatrists
- They are not usually focused on prevention, especially for youth

---

**Lack of Indigenous service and program providers, because:**

- Community leadership does not always advocate for it
- Elders and people with lived experiences are not usually included in planning for services and programs
**Gathering date:** October 2019

**Gathering location:** Tiohtià:ke (Montréal, Québec)

**Who participated:** 19 youth. All were Indigenous. Many had personal lived experience with mental health barriers, and all had connection to family and/or community with lived experience. Forty eight other Indigenous youth were surveyed to identify barriers - they were not able to attend the gathering, and were surveyed in advance to start the list of barriers.

**Number of barriers identified:** 150, over 4 priority areas. See below for examples.

**Disconnection from Indigenous culture and identity, because of:**

- Limited or no access to traditional ceremony and languages, Elders and land-based education, especially in schools and urban places

**Fear and anxiety about the impacts of climate change, due to:**

- Its impact on being able to participate in cultural activities, like fishing and hunting, and for the community to grow and access food

**Lack of mentorship, because of:**

- Limited or no access to positive and trusting role models in the community
- Strong Indigenous people not usually being represented in mainstream media or culture
- Isolation and separation from friends, family and community members

**Inappropriate and inaccessible programs and services, because:**

- People usually have to travel to other communities to access them
- They are not usually culturally relevant and safe, especially for 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals and women
- They are hard to navigate and are hard to find, especially for older youth and adults
- People face racism and discrimination
THE GRAND CHALLENGES

After considering all 231 barriers that were identified across the three strands, strand 3 (Indigenous youth)* identified the following as the Grand Challenges in Indigenous mental health:

- Disconnection from Indigenous culture and identity
- Limited or no access to culturally relevant, self-determined and safe services and programs
- Fear and anxiety about the impacts of climate change
- Limited supply of Indigenous mental health service providers or caregivers
- Limited or no access to community role models for Indigenous youth
- Limited or no access to services and programs in Indigenous languages
- Racism from friends, community members and service and program providers
- Family separation because of child protective services
- Limited or no access to services and programs for vulnerable Indigenous groups, like 2SLGTBQQIA+ individuals and women

*Because Indigenous youth are particularly impacted by community mental health barriers, they voted on the list of Grand Challenges, including the four priority areas noted on the second page.
WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Innovation and collaboration are key to solving Grand Challenges. Furthermore, for Indigenous peoples this needs to be done in a way that is self-determined and grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. To support this, we are using the findings of this project to develop a mental health innovation program.

Program development

We are working to secure funding to support development of a dedicated program that would fund Indigenous peoples to develop and test self-determined, culturally safe and innovative solutions to the mental health Grand Challenges in their communities.

Email us at info@indigenousinnovate.org if you are interested in funding this initiative.

RECIPIROCITY AND SHARED LEARNING

Indigenous communities are encouraged to use the information within this report to inform their own policy, program planning and decision-making, including funding requests. Non-Indigenous policy makers, service providers and program managers are encouraged to use this information to inform and co-create policy and Indigenous programs and services in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Please reference this report, and any information within it, using the citation on the second to last page.
ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND

We would like to acknowledge the diverse lands from which our project participants came from. From these places, participants brought the knowledge and experiences of their communities, which helped us create a list of Grand Challenges that are common to communities across Canada.

The map below shows where our participants (red icons) came from, and where each of the three gatherings (blue icons) were hosted. Visit our interactive map at http://bitly.ws/9xDF to explore it in more detail.
WITH GRATITUDE

We are grateful for the kindness and wisdom of everyone who shared their experiences, stories and journeys with us during this project, and for the project participants who informed, supported development of and reviewed this report.

We are also grateful to Grand Challenges Canada and our donors from the McConnell Family Foundation, Johnson & Johnson and the Royal Bank of Canada Foundation for funding this project and/or supporting development of the Three-Stranded Basket approach.

CITATION

PHOTOS

All photos used in this report were taken by and are the property of the Indigenous Innovation Initiative and Grand Challenges Canada.

Project participants consented to these photos being taken and used.

REFERENCES


HAVE QUESTIONS?

Visit our website at indigenousinnovate.org for more information about the Indigenous Innovation Initiative, including how to become a donor.

Email us at info@indigenousinnovate.org

Call us at 1+ 416-583-5821
August 2020

Indigenous Innovation Initiative
MaRS Centre, West Tower
661 University Avenue, Suite 1720
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1M1

Located on the Indigenous territory of the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and the Mississaugas of the Credit, which is part of the Dish With One Spoon Treaty.