



INDIGENOUS WELLNESS CORE

Integrated Provincial Program

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KEY PARTNERS

Indigenous communities
Indigenous organizations
Indigenous Services Canada

AHS Clinical Operations

Primary Care Networks
Alberta Medical Association
Alberta Universities (UA, UC, UL)

Major initiatives and achievements, 2021-2022

The Indigenous Wellness Core (IWC) continues to work to better integrate, coordinate and advance Indigenous health within AHS in alignment with health-related recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Partnering with Indigenous communities, organizations, health and community stakeholders, health care professionals, researchers, and others throughout the province, the IWC is helping advance and positively impact patient care and health outcomes with Indigenous Peoples. A few examples from 2021-2022 are highlighted below.

Extension for Community Health Outcomes (ECHO+)

Since 2019, the **ECHO+ program** has provided innovative Hepatitis C screening, treatment and specialist care to Indigenous Peoples in their communities. Funded by a Health Innovation Implementation and Spread (HIIS) grant and operating in all five zones, ECHO+ connects a specialist to practitioners that serve Indigenous communities using technology and a hub-and-spoke approach. ECHO+ is underpinned by ongoing community engagement and support from local health providers and community leaders.

In the project's final full year of operating, there have been significant impacts and improvements related to Hepatitis C:

1. Partnership and co-design with healthcare teams within Indigenous communities to tailor and implement the ECHO+ model has increased awareness and access to hepatitis C treatment. Engagement with Indigenous communities increased to 92% (49 out of 53) from 11% (6 out of 53) at project initiation.
2. Hepatitis C patient resources were co-designed with community members. These include an informative, pocket-sized booklet that has been translated into 5 local Indigenous languages.
3. Ongoing co-design of educational events and opportunities with Indigenous stakeholders, collaboration on living experiences stories, inclusion of Indigenous Elders on the advisory council, and collaboration with community organizations.
4. Qualitative methods were utilized to gather feedback on the model and approach through interviews, world café sessions, surveys, and frequent communication with community healthcare teams.
5. The ECHO+ program framework and implementation approach was presented at the 2021 Canadian Liver Meeting and published in the [Canadian Liver Journal \(2022\)](#).

"We have only good things to say about ECHO+. The bi-weekly sessions are very helpful, we learn so much from the other communities and about the disease itself, and the unique history and presentation of each patient so we learn how to navigate it for our patients."

Feedback from ECHO+ community surveys



Enhancing Indigenous patient experience through navigation and cultural supports

The **Four Winds Project** helps Indigenous patients and their families navigate the complexities of the health system and supports them through transitions in their care journey. The project involves an Indigenous Patient Navigation (IPN) model that has been co-designed with Indigenous communities and partners.

The ability to host Steering Committee and Working Group meetings was inhibited by COVID-19; however, Four Winds has since regained momentum and evaluation activities are underway. The evaluation focuses on key informant interviews, a population-based survey, and sharing promising and replicable practices of Indigenous community engagement to effectively partner on reducing Indigenous health inequities.

Cancer prevention and improved health screening for Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable populations

The IWC led the **Indigenous Health Innovation and Cancer Prevention (HICP)** Grant Program, working in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations to develop and fund 12 community-led cancer prevention and screening projects across the province (totaling nearly \$3.5 million over 3 years).

Through this Grant Program, Indigenous Cancer Screening Pathways for breast, colorectal and cervical cancer were developed, providing Friendship Centre communities with culturally safe, preventative screening practices. Work continues on developing targeted materials based on Indigenous worldviews, communication methods, and understanding; building trusting and reciprocal/sustainable relationships between grantees and healthcare providers; and using Indigenous pedagogy to support education around cancer and chronic disease prevention and screening.

Other highlights

All My Relations: Funding for the Food Rx RCT

A collaboration with colleagues from the University of Calgary, the Food Rx study explores the impact of a financial incentive in helping people with Type 2 diabetes experiencing food insecurity. A subgroup of Indigenous participants and an Indigenous Advisory Board will ensure the study is culturally safe and impacts of the incentive on health and wellbeing are evaluated from the perspective of Indigenous participants, beyond western health measures.

Honouring Life Grant Program

Launched in 2018, this program addresses risk and protective factors and builds community capacity to support Indigenous youth resiliency and suicide prevention through community-based holistic wellness programming. To date, the program has funded 54 urban and rural Indigenous communities and organizations.

Indigenous Addiction & Mental Wellness Grants

A commitment of \$4.9M over two years from Alberta Health will be dedicated to new community-based addiction and mental health and wellness initiatives to increase access to recovery-oriented and culturally-safe addiction and mental health services for Indigenous Peoples and communities throughout Alberta.

Impact on health and care in Alberta



Listening, co-design and active engagement and collaboration are key factors in successfully developing and refining programs and practices to improve Indigenous health outcomes and experiences. Over the past year, this work has included:

- Funding and working with numerous Indigenous communities and organizations to address youth mental health crises and life promotion activities; offering ongoing operational funding
- Improving culturally safe, preventative community-based cancer screening practices for Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable populations
- Implementing new community-based addiction and mental health and wellness initiatives; increasing access to recovery-oriented and culturally-safe addiction and mental health services for Indigenous Peoples and communities
- Ongoing relationship building and maintaining efforts through targeted engagement and knowledge exchange

Actions and areas of focus

- **People:** Building a workforce equipped with the mindset and tools to listen, understand, act, and be so we can support Indigenous health and wellness and advance reconciliation.
- **Processes:** Listening to and understanding the specific priorities and needs of Indigenous communities and developing clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities to respond to these needs.
- **Wise practices:** Working with Indigenous people and communities to develop and advance culturally routed quality programs, services and policy, and undertake research and evaluation initiatives.
- **Quality outcomes:** Identifying and securing sustainable investments in culturally competent programs and services across AHS; supporting capacity within Indigenous organizations and communities.

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Grants and Publications		Engagement		Outcomes and Impact	
	3 Peer-reviewed Publications		14 Workshops & Presentations	12	Community-led cancer prevention & screening projects supported across Alberta, resulting screening pathways that incorporate culturally safe practices.
	\$0.8M Research Grants		96 Research Members	54	Community-led urban & rural initiatives supported focused on Indigenous youth resiliency & suicide prevention

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