



INDIGENOUS WELLNESS CORE

Integrated Provincial Program

Contact

[Leadership team](#)

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Key Partners

Indigenous communities

Indigenous organizations

[Indigenous Services Canada](#)

AHS Clinical Operations

AHS Wisdom Council

[Primary Care Networks](#)

[Alberta Medical Association](#)

Alberta Universities (UA, UC, UL)

Major initiatives and achievements, 2022-2023

The Indigenous Wellness Core (IWC) continues to work to better integrate, coordinate and advance Indigenous health within AHS in alignment with the [Indigenous Health Commitments: Roadmap to Wellness](#) based on health-related recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Partnering with Indigenous communities, organizations, health and community stakeholders, healthcare 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 2022-2023 are highlighted below.

The Honouring Life Program: Building community capacity to support Indigenous health

Honouring Life helps build community capacity to support Indigenous youth through life promotion and suicide prevention programming, developing protective factors grounded in culture. Following the end of its initial grant funding (Alberta Health, 2018-2022), the program is now operationally funded and able to offer multi-year grants to communities that support continuous programming for youth. Honouring Life 2.0 has also introduced a crisis funding stream, providing short-term funding to address acute mental health emergencies, as well as financial support for community-based program evaluation.

Since 2018, the program has funded 61 communities and organizations across the province. In fiscal year 2022-23, Honouring Life executed 17 contracts. These included four new communities that had not accessed the program previously, and two communities were assisted through crisis funding. The program also sponsored four youth to participate in the University of Calgary's Patient and Community Engagement Research (PaCER) program, where they received foundational research training and conducted qualitative research projects.

Enhancing Indigenous patient experience through navigation and cultural supports

The **Four Winds Project** was co-designed with Indigenous partners to support Indigenous patients and their families in navigating the complexities of the health system and help them through transitions during their journey in and out of care in South Zone. The Indigenous Patient Navigation (IPN) service supports:



Members of the Four Winds core team

- ▶ Pre-admission – access to health-related programs and to support continuity of care
- ▶ Emergency or hospital admission – assisting the healthcare team provide medical translation of diagnosis and hospital process
- ▶ Inpatient stays – providing culturally safe support, medical translation and education to patients and families
- ▶ Discharge – assisting Indigenous patients navigate services and programs between hospital and community

The IPN service was “soft re-launched” in October 2022, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Two full-time IPNs were hired, and a formal media re-launch occurred in January 2023 in Lethbridge. Regular meetings with the Four Winds Steering Committee (including Elders, community managers, and AHS stakeholders) are ongoing to progress planned deliverables and adjust service implementation. Building hospital and community settings into the IPN job description has been an impactful success that expanded the scope to be able to meet Indigenous patients where they are on their healing journey, which sometimes extends beyond AHS facilities.

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A total of 266 Indigenous patients have been directly supported by the navigators from October 2022 to March 2023 in hospitals as well as through discharge/transitions, emergency departments or hospital admission, post-discharge supports, and community referrals.

Indigenous Support Line Innovation



Through advocacy and efforts of the Wisdom Council that began in 2022, the culturally safe toll-free **Indigenous Support Line (ISL)** is now available in the South, North and Central Zones and plans to expand to Calgary and Edmonton Zones in 2024. The ISL provides the opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to navigate appropriate health services. Since the ISL launched in June 2022, listeners have fielded 2,021 inbound and outbound calls in nine months (to March 2023).

Early evaluation results indicate that callers are very satisfied with the ISL and feel that it improves healthcare access and builds trust. This service continues to be recognized provincially and nationally, receiving numerous awards for innovation and patient experience. These include the 2023 Health Quality Council of Alberta's Patient Experience Award (provincial), the 2023 Healthcare Excellence Award Canada-Virtual Care Award (national), and the 2022 i4 Innovation in Diversity & Equity Award (national).

Other quality and outcome improvements

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

The IWC has continued to lead the **Indigenous Health Innovation and Cancer Prevention (HICP) Grant Program**, in close partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations across the province. Twelve community-led cancer prevention and screening projects in 25 urban, rural, and remote Indigenous communities were carried out since the program began. Evaluation efforts employed a mixed qualitative, collaborative participatory-action methodology to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impact of HICP programs in reducing the burden of cancer. Eight overarching themes emerged from this evaluation: 1) Health Promotion, 2) Health Prevention, 3) Social Justice, 4) Organizational Capacity, 5) Partnerships, 6) Self-Determination, 7) Access & Equity, and 8) Mental Health. Selected outcomes and deliverables to date include:

- ▶ Provided cancer education and screening to more than 5,000 Indigenous people, ranging from children to Elders.
- ▶ Referred 158 people to programs, supports or services.
- ▶ Established and strengthened a network of 89 relationships with service providers and cultural supports.
- ▶ Developed the Métis Model and Indigenous Cancer Screening Pathways for breast, colorectal and cervical cancer.
- ▶ Developed eight infographics and 14 digital stories.

Indigenous identity disclosure within AHS

In collaboration with colleagues from the University of Calgary, the IWC has undertaken research to advance the response to Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action and the priority areas of the Roadmap to Wellness. A series of studies are being carried out with diverse Indigenous subject matter experts and health system partners to identify best practices for, and potential consequences of, collecting Indigenous self-identifiers as part of accessing health services. Secondary questions have also emerged around possibilities for data linkage between AHS and First Nations in Alberta and potential barriers. These questions are being examined in collaboration with Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council Health Department and supported by a CIHR Planning Grant.

Indigenous Addiction and Mental Wellness Grant Program

Supported by Alberta Health, flexible funding was made available through the Indigenous Addiction and Mental Wellness Grant Program (IAMW), which seeks to increase capacity to support the design and delivery of a holistic continuum of healing and strengths-based, culturally rooted mental health and wellness services, as well as support recovery-oriented practices. A total of 24 communities were notified of successful applications.

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Grants and Publications	Engagement	Outcomes and Impact
 6 Peer-reviewed Publications	 28 Workshops & Presentations	2,000+ callers supported through the Indigenous Support Line in its first nine months
 \$5.0M Research Grants	 102 Research Members	5,000+ Indigenous people (children to Elders) received cancer education and screening through community-led cancer prevention initiatives in 25 urban, rural and remote communities

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