

INDIGENOUS HEALTH

# Cultural Safety

RESPECT AND DIGNITY IN RELATIONSHIPS



**northern health**  
the northern way of caring

## WHY CULTURAL SAFETY?

Indigenous peoples thrived on the lands of present day Canada for thousands of years. About 500 years ago, Europeans began to arrive. By the 1900s, an explicit colonial agenda to control and assimilate Indigenous peoples was in place.

The impacts of this are still felt today and show up as a larger burden of ill health, loss of language and culture, dislocation and marginalization.

This history is part of Canada and we all share a responsibility for healing relationships.

How do we do this? Creating an environment of cultural safety in health care settings is one step toward healing these relationships.



## DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

In 2015, all BC Health Authorities signed a Declaration of Commitment to advance cultural humility and cultural safety in the health care system.

We all share a responsibility to provide the best quality care possible. Cultural humility and cultural safety are an important part of quality health care.

At Northern Health, our values include empathy, respect, collaboration and innovation. When we put these values in action, we strive to honour diversity, genuinely care, and build trust through understanding.

Cultural safety grows when these values are applied to the context of cultural differences.



## WHAT DO THESE TERMS MEAN?

**Cultural humility** is a lifelong journey of self-reflection and learning. It involves listening without judgment and being open to learning from and about others. It involves learning about our own culture and our biases. Cultural humility is a building block for cultural safety.

**Cultural safety** is when all people feel respected and safe when they interact with the health care system. Culturally safe health services are free of racism and discrimination. People are supported to draw strengths from their identity, culture and community.

The journey often starts with **cultural awareness** – 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 safety improves as we proceed along this path of self-reflection and learning.





## CULTURALLY SAFE HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

Many factors contribute to a culturally safe health care system, including:

- training on cultural safety and humility;
- reviewing and developing organizational policies for cultural safety;
- articulating a clear and accessible complaints process;
- fostering a commitment to evaluation, reporting, and continuous improvement of cultural safety and humility across the system;
- making efforts to ensure the workforce representatively includes Indigenous leadership and staff across all levels;
- ensuring physical environments reflect local Indigenous communities and cultures;
- supporting leadership's commitment to cultural safety and humility; and
- partnering with local Indigenous communities and organizations.

## CULTURALLY SAFE PRACTICES

We all share a responsibility to develop culturally safe practices with Indigenous people. Having culturally safe practices means that you:

- recognize and learn about the role of history and culture in shaping health and health care experiences;
- foster caring relationships with the people you serve based on mutual respect and trust;
- increase your understanding of what wellness means for the people you serve;
- engage in self-reflection to learn about your biases and assumptions;
- reflect on the inherent power dynamics in the health care system; and
- honour people's experiences of the health care system.





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Turtle, dragonfly, bear and hummingbird are from artwork by Carla Aubichon Joseph, an Indigenous artist in Prince George, BC.  
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