



Tip Sheet: Indigenous Access to Ceremony during COVID-19 (in-person and virtual supports)

Toronto Central Indigenous Cancer Program

SITUATION

No Visitor Policy and Indigenous Access to Ceremony

- Many hospitals have implemented a 'No Visitor' policy to address the pandemic
- No visitor policies may partially restrict access to Indigenous Ceremonies (*see Appendix A*) for patients while attending hospital for care
- As a result, many hospitals are struggling with supporting their Indigenous patients and enabling ceremony

BACKGROUND

- Indigenous peoples (*see Appendix A*) approach wellness with a holistic view (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) that often includes the individual, the family (immediate and extended), and the community
- Indigenous ceremonial practices are a critical aspect of healing
- Healthcare institutions that fail to facilitate requests for these practices are in direct contravention of provincial legislation and may be subject to sizable penalties for each infraction

ASSESSMENT

- Restricting access to ceremony detrimentally affects the overall care and wellbeing of Indigenous patients
- Supporting and enabling Indigenous Ceremonial Practices can contribute to reducing barriers Indigenous people experience within the healthcare system and makes a statement that Indigenous people are welcome within institutional space (which for many have been a source of trauma), creating a culturally safe environment

RECOMMENDATION

- The Toronto Regional Indigenous Cancer Program will support institutions in working towards accommodations for Indigenous Ceremony
- Patients can participate in ceremony on their own if they choose
- Requests for family (immediate and extended) and community to visit and/or participate in ceremony should be accommodated where possible, while keeping public health in mind and maintaining safety measures
- If not possible in-person, seek telephone or virtual supports (*see 'Appendix B' for supportive services*)
- It is recommended that any denial of requests be reported to Patient Relations to help mitigate and advance future efforts to accommodate
- **Please circulate to front line staff/unit managers**

ATTACHMENTS

Please refer to Appendices below for more information:

- Appendix A: Who are Indigenous Peoples and what are Indigenous Ceremonial Practices?
- Appendix B: How to Access Indigenous Ceremonial Supports during COVID-19
- Appendix C: List of Indigenous Organizations Providing Supports

Appendix A

Who are Indigenous Peoples and what are Indigenous Ceremonial Practices?

Who are Indigenous Peoples?

In Canada, the term Indigenous peoples is a collective name used for the original inhabitants (and their descendants) of Turtle Island (North America), which includes three distinct groups of Indigenous peoples:

- First Nations
- Inuit
- Métis

Toronto Statistics

2016 Canadian Census

- Estimates Indigenous population in Toronto = **23,065**

2016 Well Living House (Our Health Counts Toronto)

- A more comprehensive study that did not require a fixed address
- Estimates Indigenous population in Toronto upwards of **70,000**.

The Indigenous Population is the fastest growing and youngest population in Canada.

What are Indigenous Ceremonial Practices?

Indigenous peoples are very diverse and each carry their own unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. The Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) does not specifically define “Indigenous Spirituality”, as it recognizes this diversity and Indigenous peoples’ right to define and determine this for themselves.

Though spiritual beliefs and practices can vary significantly, there are commonalities, such as an overarching view that it is a “way of life” and “way of knowing” (worldview) that is centered on a relationship with the creator, the land, and “all our relations” (including all beings and forms of life that are seen to have a spirit or soul).

Indigenous Ceremonial practices are a human right and refer to the spiritual beliefs and practices that the Indigenous peoples identify as being “traditional” or “customary”. Some examples in our region may include (but are not limited to):

- Prayer
- Smudging
- Pipe Ceremony
- Water Ceremony
- Drumming
- Singing
- Cedar Tea/Water
- Use of sacred medicines (such as Cedar, Sweetgrass, Tobacco, Sage)
- Medicine Bundles (including medicine ties, medicine pouches)
- EOL preparations

Note: Patients or family may conduct the ceremony on their own, or request cultural supports to assist, such as community, Elder, Knowledge Keeper, etc.

Appendix B

How to Access Indigenous Ceremonial Supports During COVID-19

If a patient requests assistance with attaining traditional Indigenous medicines:

- Most hospitals have traditional Indigenous medicines available on site.
- If you are not sure if your hospital has traditional medicines on site, consult one of the following for guidance:
 - Hospital Policy or Procedure on accessing Indigenous Ceremonies/Smudging/etc.
 - Indigenous Health team
 - Indigenous Council
 - Spiritual Care Team
 - Security department
- If your hospital does not carry a medicine bundle, the following Indigenous organizations within the city may be contacted to assist with attaining traditional Indigenous medicines for your patient (see 'Resources' for contact information):
 - NWRCT
 - TO Council Fire
 - TASCC
 - NCFST
 - NCCT

To arrange a telephone visit with an Elder, the following organizations can offer support:

- Anishnawbe Health Toronto
 - Contact the Traditional Services team to arrange a telephone consultation with an Elder.
Edna Carswell, Traditional Team Coordinator
Tel: 416-920-2605 ext. 329
- Women's College Hospital
 - Senator Constance Simmonds, Métis Knowledge Keeper, Elder-in-residence, Indigenous Education Dpt.
 - Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM
 - Tel: 647-378-2411 or Email: indigenoushealth@wchospital.ca
- NWRCT Support Hotline
 - In collaboration with the Waakebiness-Bryce Institute for Indigenous Health, NWRCT has opened a hotline to meet the needs of existing and new NWRCT clients for access to Traditional Healers/Elders/Knowledge Keepers
 - Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 12:00 AM
 - Tel: 647-951-9691
- Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)
 - A team of Elders are available to provide support during COVID-19.
 - Available Monday – Friday, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
Elder Roseann Martin-Wysote, 888-996-2818 Elder Madeleine Condo, 888-996-4808
Elder Annie S. Mullin, 888-996-5808 Elder Roberta Oshkawbewisens, 888-664-7808
 - Visit the NWAC COVID-19 Support page for more information: <https://www.nwac.ca/covid19-support/>

If you are supporting an Indigenous cancer patient, contact the Toronto Central Regional Indigenous Cancer Program:

Leonard Benoit, Indigenous Cancer Patient Navigator
Tel: 416-864-6060 ext. 2422 or 647-309-1794
Email: Leonard.Benoit@unityhealth.to

Appendix C

List of Indigenous Organizations Providing Supports

Call Auntie: A community information line (Indigenous COVID Pathways Hotline) run by the Baby Bundle Project and Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto available to the Indigenous community in the GTA.

Tel: 437-703-8703 (Daily from 4:00 PM – 9:00 PM)

Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto (NWRCT): The Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto (NWRCT) is a community-based organization dedicated to providing resources and support to urban Indigenous women and their families. NWRCT delivers culturally relevant programs and services that empower and build the collective capacity and self-sufficiency of Indigenous women.

Tel: 416-963-9963

Email: info@nwrct.ca

Website: <http://nwrct.ca>

OR: NWRCT Support Hotline: 647-951-9691 (Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 12:00 AM)

Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre (TO Council Fire): A member of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC), TO Council Fire is a cultural agency that involves and serves the Indigenous community with confidence for and commitment to their well-being by providing counselling, material assistance and other direct services to First Nations people as well as to encourage and enhance spiritual and personal growth.

Tel: 416-360-4350

Website: <https://www.councilfire.ca/>

Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASCC): A not-for-profit research, policy, and advocacy organization that addresses the social determinants of health to improve and enhance the socio-economic prospects and cultural well-being of Aboriginal peoples living in the City of Toronto. TASCC strives to build a healthy and vibrant environment while increasing the capacity of Aboriginal people to create a self-sufficient community in Toronto and to guide future generations as strong carriers of Aboriginal culture while achieving socio-economic success.

Tel: 647-957-8372 or 647-748-6100

Email: Support@tassc.ca or info@tassc.ca

Website: <https://www.tassc.ca>

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST): Strive to provide a life of quality, well-being, caring and healing for our children and families in the Toronto Native Community by creating a service model that is culture-based and respects the values of Native people, the extended family and the right to self-determination.

Tel: 416-969-8510

Email: info@nativechild.org

Website: <https://nativechild.org>

Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT): A charitable organization offering a wide range of programs and services based on Indigenous cultural traditions and teachings to empower the Indigenous community and support their spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being.

Tel: 416-964-9087

Email: Reception@ncct.on.ca

Website: <https://ncct.on.ca>

Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT): Works to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal People in spirit, mind, emotion and body by providing Traditional Healing within a multi-disciplinary health care model (includes access to: Traditional Healers, Elders and Medicine People, Physicians, Nurses, Chiropractors, Naturopaths, FASD Workers, Massage Therapists, Traditional Counsellors, Enaadamged Kwe, Circle of Care Workers, a Psychiatrist, Chiropodist and Dentist.

Tel: 416-920-2605

Email: info@aht.ca

Website: <https://www.aht.ca>

Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC): Committed to helping support First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse peoples with the support they need. Founded on the collective goal to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women. NWAC is an aggregate of thirteen Native women's organizations from across Canada that collectively recognize, respect, promote, defend and enhance our Native ancestral laws, spiritual beliefs, language and traditions given to us.

Tel: 1-800-461-4043

Email: reception@nwac.ca

Website: <https://www.nwac.ca>

Na-Me-Res: Began as an emergency shelter to Toronto-based Aboriginal men who were without a place to live that meets the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs of their clients wherever they are on their journey. Have since expanded to offer a variety of programming and supports such as: Traditional Elders & teachers, case managers, counsellors, client care and support workers, street outreach workers, housing support and aftercare workers, Registered Nurses, Oshkabaywis (spiritual helpers), and life skills support.

Tel: 416-651-6750

Email: general@nameres.org

Website: <https://www.nameres.org>

Talk4Healing: Provides 24/7 culturally sensitive counselling, advice, support and resources for Indigenous women, by Indigenous women, all across Ontario. Talk, text or chat. Languages available: Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree, English, French

Tel: 1-855-554-HEAL (4325)

Website/Online services: www.talk4healing.com

Indigenous Services Canada COVID 19 Info sheets (available in various Indigenous languages): https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1586548069915/1586548087539?fbclid=IwAR3dnHZGQVKucX7xbnjTi0u-tiOANyv_pA1d4NkQNMdskC2HreesRPK5i7U

WCH Indigenous Wellbeing in the Times of COVID-19 information page:

<https://www.womenscollegehospital.ca/research,-education-and-innovation/indigenous-wellbeing-in-the-times-of-covid-19>

Note: WCH COVID-19 Assessment Centre provides culturally safe care to the Indigenous community by: (a) Providing a safe place to stay while awaiting test results (b) Providing transportation and immediate referral to culturally safe healthcare with Indigenous physicians.

TRCP Indigenous Cancer Program Memorandum and Resource sheets (circulated April 29, 2020):

- Memorandum – Considerations for EOL ceremonies for Indigenous peoples



MEMORANDUM -
Considerations for €

- Indigenous resources amidst COVID-19



Indigenous
Resources - COVID (

University of Toronto Libraries – Indigenous Health Resources: Indigenous COVID-19 Information and Resources Guide
<https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/indigenoushealth/covid19>

For Indigenous specific programming and events, please visit the social media pages of the above organizations.