

Tip Sheet: Indigenous Cultural Safety during COVID-19

Situation 'No Visitor' policies and limitations to culturally safe care

- Many hospitals have implemented 'No Visitor' policies to address the pandemic
- No visitor policies may limit feelings of safety for Indigenous patients, who rely on family and community caregivers (such as Elders, doulas, and traditional healers) to enhance cultural safety and access to ceremony in healthcare settings
- As a result, many hospitals are struggling to provide culturally safe care to Indigenous patients, particularly during birth and end-of-life transition

Background

- Indigenous peoples (see Appendix A) approach health from diverse and holistic (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) worldviews that similarly value the importance of balanced relationships (including to self, immediate and extended family, community, and the land) to wellness
- Indigenous peoples experience prevalent racism in healthcare settings, which negatively impacts health outcomes and healthcare accessibility
- Cultural safety (see Appendix A) aims to reduce harm at the hands of service providers and is determined by recipients of care

Impacts

- Restricting access to visitors negatively impacts overall experiences of care and wellbeing for Indigenous patients, and may put Indigenous patients at risk of harm, such as racism, child welfare interventions, and obstetric violence
- Health staff and systems can take a number of actions to enhance Indigenous cultural safety (see Appendix A). In particular, practices and policies that increase patient access to Indigenous caregivers, health staff, and ceremony can boost feelings of safety in healthcare settings, and may be health promoting

Recommendations

- Requests for access to Indigenous health staff, family (immediate and extended) and non-medical caregivers (such as doulas, Elders, and healers) to visit and/or participate in ceremony should be accommodated where possible, while keeping in mind public health and maintaining safety measures (see Appendix B & C for supportive services)
- If not possible in-person, seek telephone or virtual supports
- Requests for access to human remains and tissues, such as the placenta, should be accommodated where possible, while maintaining safety measures
- 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 is Cultural Safety?

Appendix B: How to Access Indigenous Wellness Supports During COVID-19

Appendix C: List of Indigenous Organizations Providing Supports

Created by the [Ekw'í7ł Indigenous Doula Collective](#) in partnership with the [BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres Doulas for Aboriginal Families Grant Program](#).

We raise our hands to the Toronto Central Indigenous Cancer Care Program, who created a similar document for Ontario.



Who are Indigenous Peoples?

The term *Indigenous* refers to the original inhabitants of the lands currently referred to as Canada. Indigenous peoples have constitutionally protected and legally affirmed rights arising from their relationships to land, which predate European contact and settlement. Indigenous peoples may belong to one or more culturally distinct groups: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

British Columbia Statistics

The 2016 Canadian Census recorded 270,585 Aboriginal people in British Columbia, making up 5.9% of the population. Of this group, approximately 80% reside in urban and off-reserve areas.¹

What is Indigenous Cultural Safety?

Indigenous patients experience prevalent racism in healthcare settings, and this has deleterious effects on Indigenous population health.² Overt racism, implicit bias, and access barriers to healthcare services all diminish Indigenous peoples' ability to feel safe in healthcare settings.

Research, reports, and public inquiries into healthcare racism continually recommend policies, practices, and training to enhance Indigenous cultural safety. Indigenous cultural safety initiatives focus on building clinician and health staff awareness of the systemic power relations that produce disproportionately poorer health outcomes for Indigenous populations. Cultural safety initiatives aim to prevent individuals and institutions from reproducing systemic harms. Indigenous cultural safety also involves improving patient access to Indigenous community services, health care providers, and caregivers, such as physicians, midwives, nurses, Elders, doulas, traditional healers, and family members.

Why is Indigenous Cultural Safety important during COVID-19?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many hospitals in British Columbia have implemented policies that restrict patient access to visitors, including during labour and delivery, postpartum, neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and end-of-life. 'No Visitor' policies limit patient access to nonmedical caregivers such as immediate and extended family, doulas, Elders, and traditional healers, who fill critical gaps in culturally safe healthcare. Restricting patient access to Indigenous community and family caregivers may compromise Indigenous patient safety within health systems. 'No Visitor' policies may also decrease patient access to health-promoting traditional foods, medicines, languages, and ceremonies.



What actions can be taken to enhance Indigenous Cultural Safety during COVID-19?

Hospitals and other healthcare settings can consider implementing policies and practices that:

- Increase patient access to Indigenous caregivers, such as immediate and extended families, Elders, doulas, and healers (for example, by developing clear guidelines around PPE for visitors and nonmedical health staff, or by conducting visits in outdoor common spaces).
- Prioritize hiring and retention of Indigenous health staff (medical and non-medical) and that promote culturally safe work environments.
- Support rural patient experiences, which may be complicated by long distance travel to urban centres, isolation from family and community due to relocation, navigating an unfamiliar health system, and managing with less resources, clinicians and access to care.^{3, 4}
- Meaningfully involve Indigenous patients, families, communities, and stakeholders in service planning and delivery.
- Increase patient access to ceremony and traditional medicines in healthcare settings through partnerships and collaboration with families and Indigenous health staff and organizations (for examples, see Appendix C: List of Indigenous Organizations Providing Supports). Indigenous ceremonial practices in this region may include:
 - Prayer
 - Cedar bough or eagle fan brushing
 - Sweeping of the room using traditional medicines
 - Smudging
 - Use of traditional medicines, for example cedar, spruce, hemlock, sage, sweetgrass, tobacco
 - Drumming and/or singing
 - Facing a certain direction for birth or death
 - Water and/or pipe ceremonies
 - Placenta and umbilical cord ceremonies
 - End-of-life preparations

Additionally, all health staff can enhance Indigenous cultural safety by:

- Promoting acceptance and inclusion of diversity and difference, rather than “colour-blindness.”
- Building self-awareness and reflexivity around personally held biases, particularly with respect to race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and ability.
- Respecting and affirming patient self-identification of cultural, gender, and sexual identities.
- Honouring patient rights to informed consent. This is particularly important given the long and ongoing history of colonial policies and practices that undermine Indigenous consent.
- Taking the time to learn why decolonized care is the ultimate goal of Indigenous cultural safety.



References

1. Statistics Canada. (2017). Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-494-X2016001. Ottawa, Ontario. Data products, 2016 Census.
2. Allan, B., & Smylie, J. (2015). First Peoples, second class treatment: the role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In *Wellesley Institute*. <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Summary-First-Peoples-Second-Class-Treatment-Final.pdf>
3. Schill, K., & Caxaj, S. (2019). Cultural safety strategies for rural Indigenous palliative care: A scoping review. In *BMC Palliative Care* (Vol. 18, Issue 1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-019-0404-y>
4. Kolahdooz, F., Launier, K., Nader, F., Yi, K. J., Baker, P., McHugh, T.-L., Vallianatos, H., & Sharma, S. (2016). Canadian Indigenous women's perspectives of maternal health and health care services: A systematic review. *Diversity and Equality in Health and Care*, 13(5), 334–348.

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

If a patient requests assistance with accessing cultural supports:

- Most hospitals have Indigenous staff and/or support teams who can assist patients with accessing Indigenous ceremony, traditional medicines, and access to Elders
- 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/Brushing/Smudging/etc.
 - Indigenous Health team or Aboriginal Patient Liaison
 - Elders-in-residence
 - Spiritual Care Team
 - Security department

To support patient access to culturally safe care, ceremonies and traditional medicines, or to arrange a visit with an Elder, the following Indigenous patient services and organizations can offer support:

BC First Nations Health Authority (FNHA)

First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day

The First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program enables members of BC First Nations with limited or no access to their own doctors to make virtual appointments.

Website: <http://ow.ly/VVDq50AAAop>

FNHA First Nations Health Benefits

Phone (Toll Free): 1-855-550-5454

This FNHA document, "Mental Health & Cultural Supports available during the COVID-19 Pandemic" lists a variety of resources available to Indigenous peoples in BC, including telephone and online supports, mental wellness and counselling, Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support, and First Nations Health Authority Treatment and Healing Centres: <http://ow.ly/iSSg50AAAsq>

Métis Nation BC

24/7 Métis Crisis Line (Toll Free): 1-833-638-4722

Website: <https://covid19.mnbc.ca>

Indigenous Midwives of BC Midwives Association of British Columbia

Phone: (604) 736-5976

Evelyn George, Indigenous Lead

Email: evelyn.george@bcmidwives.com

Website: <http://ow.ly/O2e850AAu5>

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC)

Contact information for all Friendship Centres in BC, offering community services and programming to Indigenous peoples in urban locations:

<https://bcaafc.com/about-us/friendship-centres/>

List of financial supports, emergency, and health resources for Indigenous peoples during COVID-19:

<https://bcaafc.com/help/covid-19/>

BCAAFC health and wellness resources:

<https://bcaafc.com/help/health/>

BCAAFC Doulas for Aboriginal Families Grant Program

Supports healthy birth outcomes for Indigenous families by providing Indigenous families living in BC up to \$1,000.00 (maximum) of coverage for doula support with each pregnancy.

Phone: 1 (250) 388-5522 ext.267

Email: doulaprogram@bcaafc.com

Website: <https://bcaafc.com/dafgp/>



Vancouver/ Coastal Region

Ekwi7tl Indigenous Doula Collective

Indigenous doulas serving Indigenous families in Vancouver, North Vancouver, and Burnaby through the full-spectrum of pregnancy related outcomes, including abortion and pregnancy loss.

Email:

ekwi7tldoulacollective@gmail.com

Website: <http://ow.ly/u3Po50AAyUB>

L'uma Medical Centre

A culturally integrated primary care clinic. Patients can access support from medical practitioners, counsellors, social navigators, Elders and knowledge keepers over the phone during the pandemic.

2970 Nanaimo St., Vancouver

Phone: 604-558-8822

Website: <http://ow.ly/p1nR50AAyRh>

Kilala Lelum Urban Indigenous Health and Healing Cooperative

Offers a primary care clinic in partnership with Indigenous Elders, physicians and allied health professionals in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Specializes in supporting individuals with HIV, Hep C, and addictions.

626 Powell St., Vancouver

Phone: 604-620-4010

Vancouver Native Health Society

Provides medical and dental services for residents of the Downtown Eastside and Aboriginal people from anywhere.

449 East Hastings Street, Vancouver

Phone: 604-255-9766

Website: www.vnhs.net/

Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA)

Phone or email for information and support for Indigenous youth. In addition to a variety of programs and services, UNYA operates a health & wellness clinic for Indigenous youth ages 12-30.

Phone: 604-254-7732

Email: info@unya.bc.ca

Website: <https://unya.bc.ca>

UNYA 2-Spirit Collective provides support, resources, and programming for Indigenous youth, ages 15 to 30, who identify as 2-spirit or LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, along with many other identities), and for those who are questioning their sexual or gender identities. Contact the 2-Spirit Collective at 604-254-7732 or 2spirit@unya.bc.ca

Vancouver Coastal Health Aboriginal Patient Navigator Program

Phone (Toll Free): 1-877-875-1131

Email: info.aboriginalhealth@vch.ca

Website:

<http://ow.ly/RAMk50AAyPq>

BC Women's Hospital Indigenous Patient Liaisons

Tammy Price, Indigenous Patient Liaison

BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre and BC Children's Hospital

Tel: 604-875-2348

Work cell: 778-875-2558

Email: tammy.price@cw.bc.ca

Huckleberry Midwives

Midwifery team working towards the prioritization of culturally safe and humble care for Indigenous urban families and Indigenous people who have been evacuated to give birth away from their community.

Phone: 604-558-1701

Email: huckleberryteam@shaw.ca

Website: <http://ow.ly/I34n50AAyTA>



Vancouver Island Region

Island Health Aboriginal Liaison Nurses

Website: <http://ow.ly/JH2U50AAyVm>

Nesting Doula Collective

Nesting Doula Collective provides care and support to Indigenous womxn and womxn of colour (including immigrants and refugees) at all stages of their reproductive journey. Serving the Greater Victoria area.

Phone: 778-223-4605

Email: nestingdoula@gmail.com

Website: <http://ow.ly/zcRw50AAyXn>



Interior Region

Interior Health Aboriginal Patient Navigators

Website: <http://ow.ly/13ou50AAz5t>

Contact information by location:

<http://ow.ly/nqT150AAz68>

Cedar Sage Health and Wellness Centre

Provides support with mental health and substance use. Accepts self-referrals.

505 Doyle Avenue, Kelowna

Phone: 250-469-7070 (x13555)

Website: <http://ow.ly/u6P850AAz7o>



Fraser Region

Fraser Health Aboriginal Health Liaisons

Phone (Toll Free): [1-866-766-6960](tel:1-866-766-6960)

Kla-how-eya Healing Place

Provides culturally safe and holistic primary health care services for urban Aboriginal clients without regular primary care providers, or for those who use walk-in clinics or emergency departments for primary care needs.

Guilford Public Health Unit
100-10233 153 St. Surrey
Phone: 604-587-4774

Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Birth Keeper Program

Providing culturally relevant doula care and prenatal program to Indigenous families in Surrey and the Fraser region.

Phone: 604-595-1170 x118
Email: corina.bye@fracfca.org
Website: <http://ow.ly/USQ850AAz0Z>

Seabird Island Midwifery

Provides care to low-risk women and their families during pregnancy, labour, and up to 6 weeks postpartum.

Phone: 604-796-2177
Email: midwives@seabirdisland.ca
Website: <http://ow.ly/PtPQ50AAz2H>

Sto:lo Services Agency – Family Empowerment Team

The Family Empowerment Team is a collaboration of the Parent Child Assistance Program, Growing Great Kids Parenting Program, Traditional Parenting, Indigenous Doulas and advocacy services.

Phone: 604-824-3200
Email: Catherine.Finney@stolonation.bc.ca
Website: <http://ow.ly/MnTo50AAz3r>



Northern Region

Northern Health Aboriginal Patient Liaison Program

Website: <http://ow.ly/kIFG50AAz8g>

Central Interior Native Health Society

A primary health care clinic dedicated to Aboriginal health

365 George Street, Prince George
Phone: 250-564-4422
Email: info@cinhs.org
Website: <http://ow.ly/QygU50AAza0>



Other Resources

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line and On-line Counselling Service

The Hope for Wellness Help Line offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous people across Canada.
Toll-Free: 1-855-242-3310
Hope for Wellness Chat Line:
www.hopeforwellness.ca

The First Nations Public Services Secretariat

has a comprehensive directory of information related to COVID-19 for Indigenous peoples and businesses in BC, including links and summaries of resources and benefits available from federal and provincial organizations to Indigenous people, regardless of Indian Status:

<http://ow.ly/411d50AAzjO>
<http://ow.ly/Z0Es50AAzjP>

KUU-US Crisis Services

The KUU-US Crisis line is available 24/7 to provide support to Indigenous people in BC.

Phone (Toll Free): 1-800-KUU-US17 (1-800-588-8717)
Adult/Elder: 1-250-723-4050
Child/Youth: 1-250-723-2040
Website: <http://ow.ly/3vLz50AAzh5>

MMIWG Crisis Line

Service languages: English, French
Provides 24/7 support to family, friends and community members who are being impacted by the loss of a missing or murdered Indigenous woman, girl or Two-spirit person.
Phone: 1-844-413-6649

National Indian Residential School Crisis Line

Indigenous Services Canada offers a national Indian Residential School Crisis Line to support former Residential School students. The crisis line provides emotional and crisis referral services 24 hours per day.
Phone (Toll Free): 1-866-925-4419

BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society

Website: <https://www.bcands.bc.ca>
(includes text to voice option)
Phone (Toll Free): 1-888-815 -5511
Capital Region: (250) 381-7303
Email: rsw@bcands.bc.ca

Indigenous Services Canada COVID-19 info sheets (available in various Indigenous languages):
<http://ow.ly/CRm950AAzkM>

Two-Spirit Resources provided by the Provincial Health Services Authority Trans Care BC:

<http://ow.ly/82Za50AAzI8>

Providing Diversity Competent Care to Two-Spirit Clients: A Handbook for Health Care Providers created by Fraser Health Diversity Services:
<http://ow.ly/55Nz50AAzIO>

University of Toronto Libraries – Indigenous Health Resources: Indigenous COVID-19 Information and Resources Guide
<http://ow.ly/SBb250AAzmg>