A JOURNEY WE WALK TOGETHER:

Strengthening Indigenous Cultural Competency in Health Organizations

A Primer for Health Organizations on Building and Enhancing Indigenous Cultural Competency

About FNHMA

The [First Nations Health Managers Association (FNHMA)](#) provides leadership in First Nations health management activities by developing and promoting quality standards, practices, research, certification, networking and professional development to expand capacity for our members and First Nations communities.

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About CFHI

The [Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement](#) is a not-for-profit organization funded by Health Canada. CFHI identifies proven innovations and accelerates their spread across Canada by supporting healthcare organizations to adapt, implement and measure improvements in patient care, population health and value for money.

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INTRODUCTION

Many health care organizations are familiar with the Donabedian[1] model of healthcare quality – incorporating structure, process, and outcomes. This model recognizes that to see better outcomes and improvements in the quality of health services, there needs to be considered and purposeful improvements in structures (facilities, equipment, qualifications, care settings) and processes (care has been appropriate, acceptable, accessible, complete, competent).

The same approach can be applied when exploring cultural competency in organizations. To achieve the outcome of becoming more culturally competent organizations, we need to have culturally competent *individuals* who are supported by intentional *structures* and effective *processes*.

It's no longer a question whether organizations need to consider Indigenous cultural competency a priority. Indeed, no organization can provide safe, high-quality services without it. Cultural competency requires an ongoing commitment to understanding and assessing the attitudes and actions of its individuals (leadership, management, and employees) and its own structures and processes – and then taking concrete and deliberate steps to improve.

This report examines cultural competency from both the perspective of the individual and of the organization. What stages of change does an individual go through on their cultural competency journey? And what can the organization implement to support their clients, leaders, managers and employees? Consider where your organization is on its journey toward cultural competency and explore how you can improve your structures and processes to see better outcomes.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

It is important when discussing cultural competence to begin with the basic definitions, to build our understanding from the ground up.

We can unbundle the term and examine the two components – *culture* and *competence*.

Culture represents "patterns of being" for a group of people and how those patterns are expressed. Culture shapes individuals' experiences, perceptions, decisions and how they interact with others. It's essentially how groups of people believe, think and act.

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> Culture is the expression, the life-ways, and the spiritual, psychological, social, material practice of this Indigenous worldview.
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> (Indigenous Wellness Framework)
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1 http://www.nursingworld.org/DocumentVault/Care-Coordination-Panel-Docs/background-docs/Jun-4-Mtg-docs/The-Quality-of-CareHowCanItBeAssessed-Donabedian1988.pdf

2 Colleen Anne Dell, Debra Dell, Jim Dumont, Barbara Fornssler, Laura Hall and Carol Hopkins [in alphabetical order] (2015). *Connecting with Culture: Growing Our Wellness*. Facilitators' Handbook. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, Research Chair in Substance Abuse.

For this report, we are exploring Indigenous culture. The Indigenous Wellness Framework of the Addictions Partnership Foundation[2] shares the following insights on culture:

Although there are many ways by which culture is expressed amongst the various First Nations, there are principal (sic), foundational beliefs and concepts that are commonly held that support a unified definition of "Indigenous Culture". In what follows are these primary concepts of the Indigenous worldview.

The Spirit:
The most fundamental feature of the Indigenous worldview is the Spirit. Within this reality, the spirit is housed within an inclusive concept of body-mind-heart-spirit.

The Circle:
The circle, more than any other symbol, is most expressive of the Indigenous view of the world. The circle is primary to all of life and life process, and is also of primary significance in relating to and understanding life itself in all its dimensions and diversity.

Harmony and Balance:
Desire for harmony is the pre-disposition of all the created world. Simply put, the Indigenous person sees the world as always and naturally striving to maintain equilibrium and symmetry.

"All my Relations":
All that is created consciously cares about the harmony and well-being of life; all things are regarded as "persons" and as "relatives." Personhood not only applies to human persons; plants, trees, animals, rocks, and visible and unseen forces of nature are also considered as "persons."

Kindness/Caring/Respect:
Another key to understanding the Indigenous worldview is the recognition of the fundamental precept: the universe cares. The Indigenous person is predisposed to have in their interest the greatest good for the individual as well as the collective good.

Earth Connection:
We are all relatives because we have the same Mother. In the Indigenous mind, the human person is of the earth and from the earth. The Earth herself is a living, breathing, conscious being, complete with heart/feeling, soul/spirit, and physical/organic life, as it is with all the relatives of creation.

Path of Life Continuum:
The experience of living in this world is understood as a journey of the spirit moving progressively through stages that are interconnected and continuous.

> As an organization, cultural competency means we are seen as a safe place for care by those we serve. They trust us, from a clinical and relationship perspective.
>
> Leader, Health Region

Language:
The original language is the most expressive communication of the spirit, emotions, thinking, behaviour and actions of the people. Language is the "voice" of the culture and therefore the true and most expressive means for the transmission of the original way of life and way of being in the world.

Culture is the expression, the life-ways, and the spiritual, psychological, social, material practice of this Indigenous worldview.

Competence describes the ability to do the right thing successfully, implying that the person or organization has the skills (do the right thing) and the ability (do it successfully). Competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours and attitudes that underpin the competence.

Pulling it together, **Cultural Competence** means to know and behave in a way that respects and honours the beliefs of others. Although most documents reference the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services definition "*a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations*," essentially it means, how you act based on what you know and what you believe.

Cultural competency requires an alignment between all three elements. If you believe and know but don't act, you're not culturally competent. If you act but don't know or believe, you're not culturally competent. Cultural competency requires that you act based on what you know and what you believe.

THE CULTURAL SPECTRUM

Often cultural competence is explained using a spectrum that shows it as a process that individuals and organizations follow. It is also clear that society's understanding of the concept has evolved over time. Whereas in the past the discussion began with cultural destructiveness and aimed for cultural awareness, we now start the spectrum at cultural awareness with the goal to become culturally competent, culturally safe, or culturally humble.

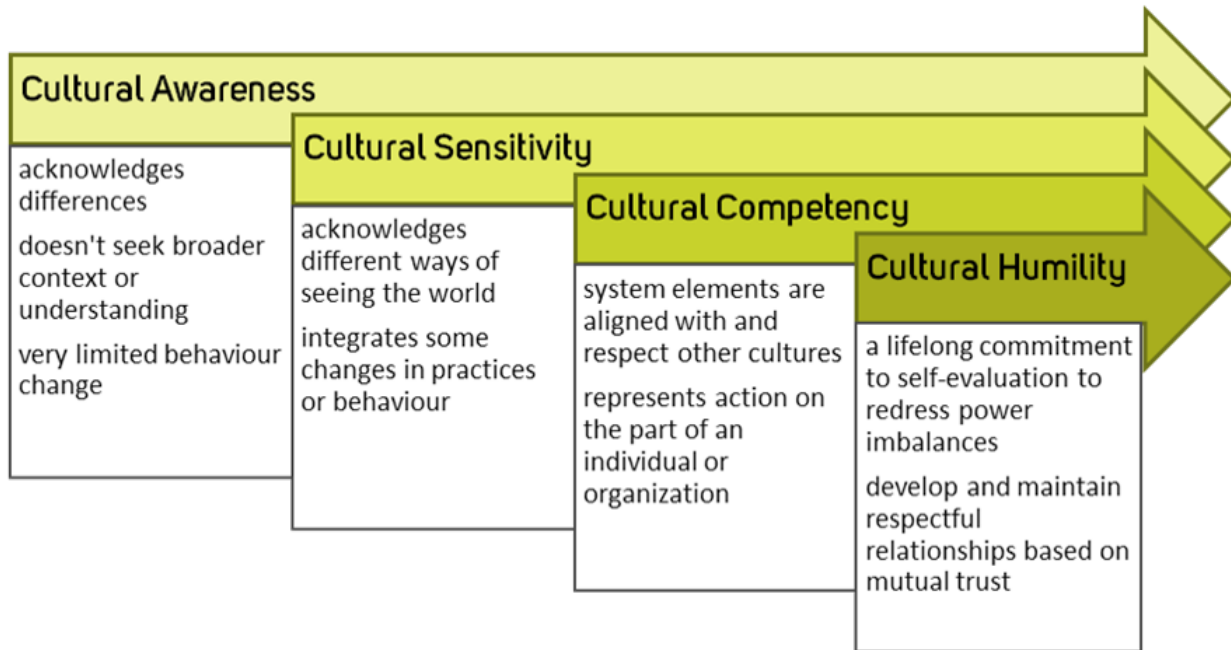The contemporary spectrum can be represented like this:

Cultural Awareness

acknowledges differences

doesn't seek broader context or understanding

very limited behaviour change

Cultural Sensitivity

acknowledges different ways of seeing the world

integrates some changes in practices or behaviour

Cultural Competency

system elements are aligned with and respect other cultures

represents action on the part of an individual or organization

Cultural Humility

a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation to redress power imbalances

develop and maintain respectful relationships based on mutual trust

Figure 1 —The above figure includes cultural humility and represents a more "evolved" approach; it is included here for consideration as a goal for individuals and organizations.

There is another element of the spectrum that is often added: one that represents cultural safety. The most compelling explanation for cultural safety uses the voice of the patient or client —the receiver of the services determines whether they feel culturally safe, rather than the care provider deciding that safe care was delivered. This turns the paradigm on its head, as all other points on the spectrum are directed either by the care provider or the organization. Culturally safe care hears from the receiver. Intuitively, this just makes sense and is another indication of how far the system has progressed.

As part of the British Columbia Tripartite agreement, the BC Tripartite Committee on First Nations Health created a Declaration of Commitment in July 2015 that was signed by the members of the Leadership Council and included the following guiding principle:

> "Cultural safety is defined by each individual clients' health service experience"

In this way, cultural safety is being embedded as an essential element in the spectrum of cultural competency or cultural humility.

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> Cultural competency and cultural safety is 'meeting them where they're at', being able to blend western and Indigenous cultures and traditions in a way that works for each person
>
> Leader, Health Region
>
> "

Understanding what cultural competence means is the first step; now, it's time to do some assessments and find out where your people and your organization are on the spectrum and where improvements could be made.

Very few organizations have achieved their cultural competence goals, so don't be alarmed if your organization isn't there yet. With a purposeful plan and concrete steps, you can help your organization move forward on its journey toward becoming more culturally competent.

However, before that, a brief review on change models will set the context.

CHANGE

Unless your organization and all employees are already culturally competent (and none of us are!), there will need to be some change processes applied. Knowing your organization's appetite, readiness and capacity for change is crucial to having positive outcomes. What is your organization's culture when it comes to change?

In helping organizations work with change in general, and becoming more culturally competent specifically, many different approaches can be applied. Below is a brief synopsis of some of the most well-known models which, although they feature different steps, all demonstrate common stages of change in individuals and organizations.

John Kotter's 8 Steps[3] : Outlines 8 steps to follow when implementing organizational change.

1. Create urgency – Stress the necessity of making the change NOW.
2. Form a powerful coalition – Enlist strong leadership and visible support from key people.
3. Create a vision for change – Link ideas and solutions to overall vision that people can easily grasp.
4. Communicate the vision – Share the message frequently and powerfully.
5. Remove obstacles – Continually check for and remove barriers.
6. Create short-term wins – Ensure "quick wins" early in the process that people can see.
7. Build on the change – Keep looking for improvements and build on what has worked.
8. Anchor the changes – Ensure changes become part of organizational "DNA".

William Bridges Three Stages of Transitions[4] : Acknowledges that understanding and managing the transitions of people are critical to a successful change outcome.

1. Ending, Losing, Letting Go – people have to accept that something is ending before they can accept the new idea.
2. The Neutral Zone – the bridging stage between the past (old way) and the future (new way).
3. New Beginning – people accept and begin to adopt the change as they build knowledge and skills and see positive outcomes.

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3 http://www.kotterinternational.com/the-8-step-process-for-leading-change/

4 http://www.wmbridges.com/

ADKAR Model[5]: Based on five milestones an individual must achieve for change to be successful.

Awareness of the reasons for change and the expected outcome of the change.

Desire to engage and participate in the change.

Knowledge about how to change.

Ability to implement the change at the expected performance level.

Reinforcement to ensure the change sticks.

Prochaska and Diclemente[6]: The Transtheoretical Model looks at the stages people move through when modifying behaviour.

1. Precontemplation – people are uninformed or not ready and won't take action in the foreseeable future.
2. Contemplation – people are more aware and intend to change within the next six months.
3. Preparation – people have started taking action or will in the immediate future.
4. Action – people have made specific and measurable modifications.
5. Maintenance – people are more confident about their changes and are less tempted to relapse.
6. Termination – people are no longer tempted by the "old way" as the new habit is now automatic.

Connor and Patterson[7] : This model proposes a series of milestones that are collated into three phases.

1. Preparation:
   a. Contact – engage with all stakeholders.
   b. Awareness – build awareness of the need for the change and the benefits of the change.

2. Acceptance:
   a. Understanding – ensure all stakeholders understand the change.
   b. Positive Perception – build a positive understanding about the change, ensure clarity.

3. Commitment:
   a. Adoption – create the environment for success, remove barriers.
   b. Institutionalization – integrate the change into organizational processes and practices.

5 https://www.prosci.com/adkar/adkar-model

6 http://www.prochange.com/transtheoretical-model-of-behavior-change

7 http://www.connerpartners.com/

A Journey We Walk Together: Strengthening Indigenous Cultural Competency in Health Organizations

Although the models above vary, they all recognize that there are key phases of change – preparing for the change, adopting the change, and ensuring the change is sustained. Applying those phases to cultural competency, Figure 2 shows an overview of the key stages that an individual moves through and how the organization can provide support. These are expanded upon in the upcoming sections.
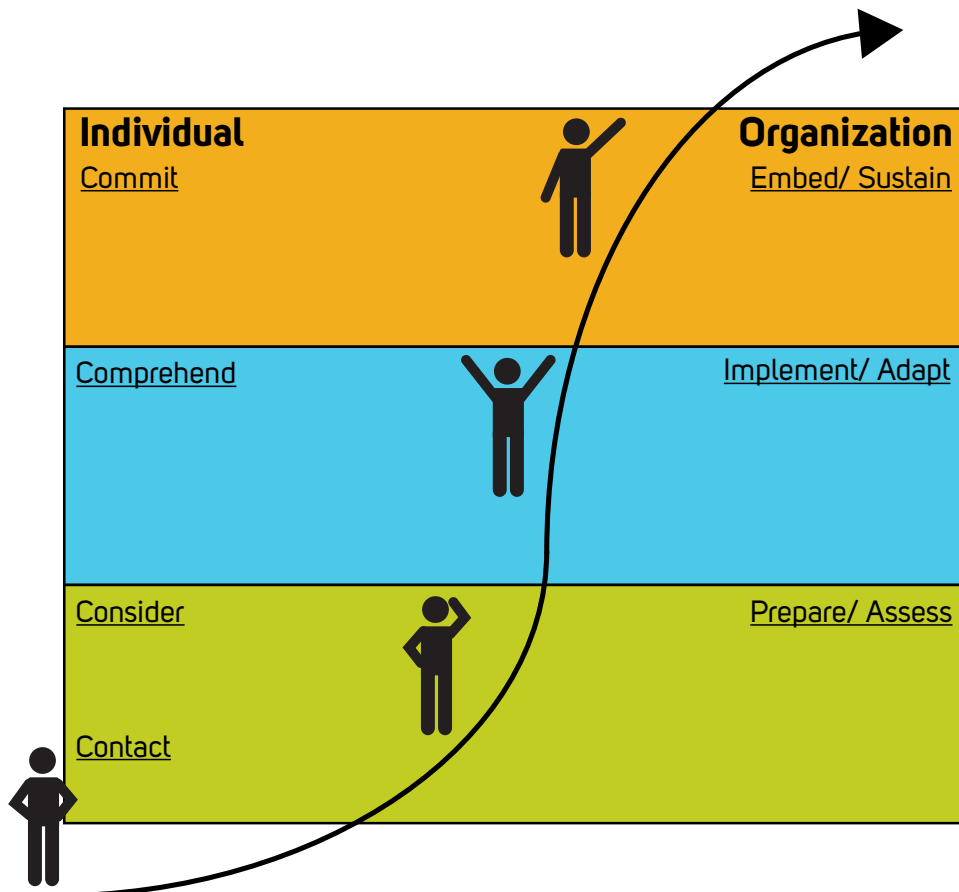

Figure 2

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Although cultural competency is most often applied to individuals, the organization also has a very important role: to be committed and to purposefully provide the processes and structures – the "infrastructure" – that will support the employees in becoming more culturally competent.

The following activities are examples of purposeful infrastructures that organizations can implement to support cultural competency. These have been gathered from a range of organizations across a spectrum of services.

Ensure Indigenous employees, clients, and stakeholders are involved in all aspects of the cultural competency plans and activities.

- Create a shared definition of cultural competency or cultural safety.

- Dedicate resources (human, financial, other) to ensure all activities can proceed.

- Clarify your organization's mission, values and principles.
  o Articulate cultural competency commitments in your mission statement
  o Create a shared vision. Embed this in all policies and practices

- Ensure governance and leadership are on board.
  o Recruit board members that are representative of your Indigenous clients and stakeholders

- Create a structure, such as a workgroup, to determine how to integrate cultural competency within the organization. Conceptualize, plan and frame how cultural competency can be improved. Ensure the workgroup includes Indigenous employees and clients.

- Review existing policies and practices to identify strengths and gaps.
  o Include data from evaluations, performance appraisals, exit interviews, surveys
  o Identify barriers or unintended negative impacts of existing structures, policies and practices

- Establish a policy that outlines the organization's commitment to cultural competency and clarifies requirements and expectations.
  o Ensure Indigenous participation in the planning
  o Implement specific policies and procedures into all core functions of the organization

- Create a logic model or framework. Create a visual or diagram that helps explain and summarize the approach.

- Create a plan that includes objectives, timelines, accountabilities, indicators and expected outcomes.

- Review all policies and procedures and adjust where necessary to ensure compliance with the cultural competency policy.

- Assess the entire organization to determine where improvements need to be made in cultural competency.

- Recruit champions at different levels within the organization.

- Develop training and development programs for all levels within the organization – leadership, management, employees – and include different approaches such as lunch and learn, workshops, orientation, mandatory training.

- Integrate cultural competency requirements in Human Resources.
  o Ensure cultural competency is assessed as part of the hiring process
  o Include cultural competency goals in performance

> It's hard to separate the personal responsibility from the organizational responsibility. Can't have one without the other
>
> Leader, Health Region

appraisals
- o Incorporate cultural competency training and development in the onboarding or orientation processes
- o Recruit, hire, retain Indigenous employees

- Monitor how the plan is proceeding, using the indicators in the plan.

- Use the results to improve performance.

- Report back regularly on progress.
  - o Include leadership, management, employees, clients, stakeholders, funders, and others.

ENABLING FACTORS

To implement the above activities, there are enabling factors that provide a supportive environment that is needed for successful change. These are:

- A supportive and committed governance and leadership
  - o Board of Directors, senior administration, management
  - o Set goals and objectives to achieve cultural competence
  - o Allocate sufficient resources

- A compelling and clear rationale for change.
  - o Why cultural competency is valued
  - o Why it's necessary to implement

- Adequate resources to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the activities.
  - o Human resources – time, expertise, other
  - o Financial resources – budgets for training, assessments, workshops

- Full and ongoing involvement of Indigenous leadership, staff, clients, and stakeholders.
  - o Developing a common vision
  - o Planning
  - o Implementing
  - o Evaluating
  - o Communicating

- Accountability – to clients, leadership, management, staff.
  - o Concrete mechanisms to monitor and report back
  - o The right information to the right people
  - o Timely reporting

- Strong and concrete plans.
  - o Ensure scope of work is manageable
  - o Integrate into current activities where possible
  - o Set realistic timelines

> "
> We set up an Aboriginal Health Improvement Committee that hosted day-long workshops that connected health practitioners with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers. It strengthened the understanding of each others' systems, built respect, and increased knowledge.
>
> Leader, Health Region
> "

o Ensure change management fundamentals are incorporated

o Keep up the momentum but don't burn people out

SUPPORTING CULTURAL COMPETENCY AT ALL LEVELS

A culturally competent organization recognizes that all levels of an organization – governance/leadership, management, and service delivery – share responsibility for creating a strong and respectful working environment. Working together, they can create a comprehensive approach that integrates cultural competency into all aspects of the organization.

At the governance/leadership level (e.g., Board of Directors, Health Committee), cultural competency is supported by the following:

- The mission of the organization reflects its commitment to cultural competency.

- The values, principles, and strategic direction are provided to the organization.

- There is Indigenous representation on the Board or Committee.

- There are clear membership guidelines and expectations.

- Policies reflect and include cultural competency expectations.

- There is Board or Committee training and ongoing professional development on Indigenous cultures.

- The Board or Committee sets the example and demonstrates commitment to being a culturally competent organization.

At the management level, cultural competency is supported by:

- Selecting or training Indigenous managers

- Incorporating personnel policies and procedures that promote cultural competency

- Ensuring a representative workforce

- Including cultural competency requirements in hiring and interviews

- Ensuring cultural competency is required and discussed in performance appraisals

- Creating and maintaining partnerships and relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations

- Ensuring all policies reflect Indigenous perspectives where relevant and possible

- Incorporating opportunities for learning about Indigenous cultures in professional development and training, including orientation of new employees

- Providing Indigenous Liaison staff where needed

- Modeling cultural competency and respect

At the service delivery level, cultural competency is supported by:

- Hiring or training Indigenous employees
- Reaching out to Indigenous communities to understand their needs
- Incorporating the ways in which Indigenous communities wish to be served, including language, style of communication, involvement of family
- Being advocates for Indigenous clients, with other service providers
- Attending cultural events
- Participating in ongoing training and development
- Holding all staff accountable for culturally competent behaviour through ongoing performance appraisals and discussions

Being a culturally competent organization means that the structures and the processes will support all individuals in becoming more open, tolerant and respectful.

INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL COMPETENCE

When cultural competence is rooted in an organization, it is expressed through the actions of individuals. This is where the concept of cultural competency is brought to life.

In your organization, are individuals demonstrating that they are "*professionals that work effectively in cross-cultural situations*"? This might look like:

- Respecting cultural diversity within your organization
- Being conscious of assumptions and pre-conceived ideas related to Indigenous cultures
- Recognizing gaps in knowledge about Indigenous cultures and seeking to learn more
- Understanding and using effective and appropriate communication styles
- Actively networking with Indigenous cultures
- Seeking ways to integrate Indigenous cultures into the work environment

What determines how individuals understand and demonstrate their cultural competency? There are two important factors: behaviours and mindset.

Behaviours are the observable actions based on the expressed, and unexpressed, mindset.

Mindset refers to the mental and emotional constructs that guide perceptions, interpretations and actions. Because mindset drives action, it is at the root of any change. It also explains why focusing on actions alone won't lead to sustainable change. For individuals to change, their mindset should be modified, meaning that perceptions and interpretations need some adjustments.

As seen in Figure 2, there are stages that a person goes through when adapting to change.

The stages include:

1. Contact – having a first exposure to an idea, concept or experience
2. Consider – exploring what it would mean
3. Comprehend – understanding the implications
4. Commit – integrating changes

Because your employees are at different stages and bring different experiences that have shaped their mindsets, your organization needs to offer a range of activities that promote and support cultural competency – wherever your employees are in their journey.

The following section describes each stage and what the individual may be feeling or exhibiting, and includes specific actions that your organization can do to help support individuals to move toward culturally competency and a more respectful working environment. Each stage also includes a box entitled "Leading Practices – This is what we're doing…" that provides real examples from organizations, in their own voices.

CONTACT

During this stage, individuals may be completely unaware of Indigenous cultures, may not understand their own biases, may be curious, or may jump to conclusions based on earlier experiences.

What an organization can do for someone in this stage:

- Communicate clearly about the plan, initiative, action, and/or activity that is intended to improve cultural competency in your organization.
- Explain the reasons for the plan, initiative, action, and/or activity and why it's necessary for your organization.
- Show how the clients, the employees and the organization as a whole will benefit from cultural competency being improved.
- Be cognizant that there may be some unconscious prejudices in your employees, not because they are malicious but because of unrecognized societal biases.
- Approach issues with clarity and without judgement.
- Provide varied opportunities for individuals to learn about Indigenous cultures.

Leading Practices – "This is what we're doing" …

We provide opportunities for practitioners to interface directly with communities, to give exposure to culture, history, practices, etc.

We provide experiential placements for new doctors. It's been transformational.

We've provided funding to local groups to produce resources that answer the question "If I was a new practitioner, what would you like me to know about you?" This has resulted in excellent

resources such as DVDs, info cards, documents on ethical practices, etc.

We've helped communities create guidelines to share with practitioners, that explain where cultural practices are important, such as discharge planning, end-of-life care, having a baby, etc.

We've ensured we have welcoming spaces that include Indigenous art, accommodate traditional practices, and help the clients feel comfortable.

We've been proactive about explaining how our organization works and ensuring practitioners understand how the Indigenous communities work. What services exist where, how the processes work, who to talk to, and how to access services etc.

CONSIDER

During this stage, individuals are reviewing the information and, depending on their mindset, may be very open to learning more about Indigenous cultures. Conversely, they may find that their previous assumptions about Indigenous culture and the new expectations of cultural competency are in conflict.

What an organization can do for someone in this stage:

- Allow safe forums for individuals to ask questions and get answers.
- Support opportunities for introspection and gentle challenges to formerly-held beliefs.
- Provide examples of other organizations that provide culturally competent services.
- Identify attitudes, knowledge and skills that enable people to work cross-culturally.
- Ensure leadership models culturally competent behaviours.
- Share timelines and expectations so everyone knows what to expect.
- Provide information several times and in different ways, as individuals have different learning styles and may not retain it all the first time.

Leading Practices – "This is what we're doing" …

We've incorporated an Indigenous lens when creating or revising all our policies. Our policies enable good practices.

We've added requirements for cultural competency into management job descriptions. We feel responsible for being culturally competent.

We've been intentional and selective in our interview questions and always confirm that candidates understand culturally safe environments.

We've clarified what the expectations are for all partnerships and collaboratives.

We've asked "How would you like your care to be organized?" It's important to enquire and not to assume. This has been received well as clients feel that their perspective is welcomed.

We've added a position, VP Aboriginal Health, to help enable good practice.

We've included a VP Indigenous Services to our Executive team to focus on bringing the Indigenous lens to our planning and decision-making.

We've hired Aboriginal Liaison staff members to help in the provision of care in a culturally safe manner. They support clients in health centres and in the communities (where possible), they help translate where required, and they build and develop cultural safety with other staff members.

We've established a part-time physician Health Liaison position which engages with staff.

We've hired settlement nurses and cultural health workers to work in Métis settlements.

We've established partnerships with education and post-secondary institutions to help incorporate culturally competent learning and coursework.

We've ensured that we have a representative workforce, so our employees represent the Indigenous population that we serve.

COMPREHEND

During this stage, individuals are internalizing new concepts and seeing how they can be applied in their work and their lives. They understand the value, the intent and the benefits. For many, this is an "aha!" moment, when they are able to move past previous beliefs and begin to change their mindset and their actions.

What an organization can do for someone in this stage:

- Clarify the desired behaviours when required.
- Recognize "quick wins" and small improvements.
- Have "open door" policies and visible supportive leadership.
- Ensure leadership models the behaviours expected of the staff.
- Be consistent in how the policies and practices and expectations are applied.
- Involve the staff who are already demonstrating cultural competency and have them mentor others.
- Offer many and different training opportunities, such as lunch and learn sessions, cultural sensitivity training, visits to Indigenous communities, learning from Elders.
- Be aware of and provide extra supports for those that are skeptical or resistant, to help address issues.
- Get staff involved in planning activities.
- Share the successes and communicate often.

Leading Practices – "This is what we're doing" …

We've provided regular and ongoing training to all employees about Indigenous cultures. Training needs to be ongoing, based on a constant spirit of learning and growing.

We've supported the development and delivery of cultural competency training – either online or face-to-face. We hope to have it mandated that all employees take this training.

We've offered cultural competence training as part of our orientation process.

We've trained our managers in communication styles and using appropriate language.

We've made sure that cultural competency is driven from the top. There are Board expectations with indicators and leadership needs to be accountable to the Board. The Board sets the direction which is driven down to the organization.

We've created champions that relate well to others and share the word.

We've trained all our Board members in cultural competency.

We've ensured there is an Indigenous leadership voice at our executive table.

We've created formal agreements, and enhance them with collective learning. We must engage to learn how to work together in meaningful ways. No tokenism.

We've very intentionally engaged with First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities. Gone out and met them. Engaged with the Chief and met the Council.

COMMIT

During this stage, individuals are demonstrating that they are culturally competent; they interact with respect, are non-judgemental, and seek opportunities to engage with and learn more about Indigenous peoples and cultures.

What an organization can do for someone in this stage:

- Ensure employees are feeling comfortable, be alert to any concerns that can be addressed.
- Reinforce the culturally competent behaviours.
- Communicate often about the improvements and the successes.
- Monitor progress and communicate any issues to leadership.
- Communicate the resolution of issues to underscore the leadership commitment to become a culturally competent organization.
- Reward and celebrate the successes.
- Continue to hold individuals accountable and link individual behaviour to the success of the organization's efforts.
- Engage the employees in planning on how the organization can do better.

Leading Practices – "This is what we're doing" …

We've ensured that we have formal MoUs, accords and other guiding documents that are signed off by the governance of our organization and our Indigenous partners. This demonstrates commitment at the highest levels.

We've made sure that our strategic and guiding documents, such as mission and values, "say it", meaning that our commitment is part of our planning.

We've included "actionable" outcomes to hold us accountable.

We've made a commitment that all staff will take the cultural competency training.

We've made sure that we celebrate our successes. We hold annual gatherings where people can tell their stories and share their accomplishments.

We've moved toward "cultural safety" now, instead of "cultural competency". It's about creating environments where people feel safe. Understanding the things that staff and management need to do differently. We don't have the expectation of achieving cultural safety, but we're always moving forward, always on the trajectory.

We've committed to supporting practitioners who work with Indigenous communities through leadership, education, and partnerships. A combination of education and experiences. We want them to be the best that they can be.

Now, the earlier diagram can be updated with the individual feelings and what the organization can do to provide support.

Individual   **Organization**

Commit
"I'm going to make this happen!"

Embed/ Sustain
support
empower
reward

Comprehend
"I get it, it's a good thing!"

Implement/ Adapt
educate/ train
model behaviours
find champions

Consider
"Why do I need this?"

Prepare/ Assess
address concerns
answer questions
communicate
share the vision
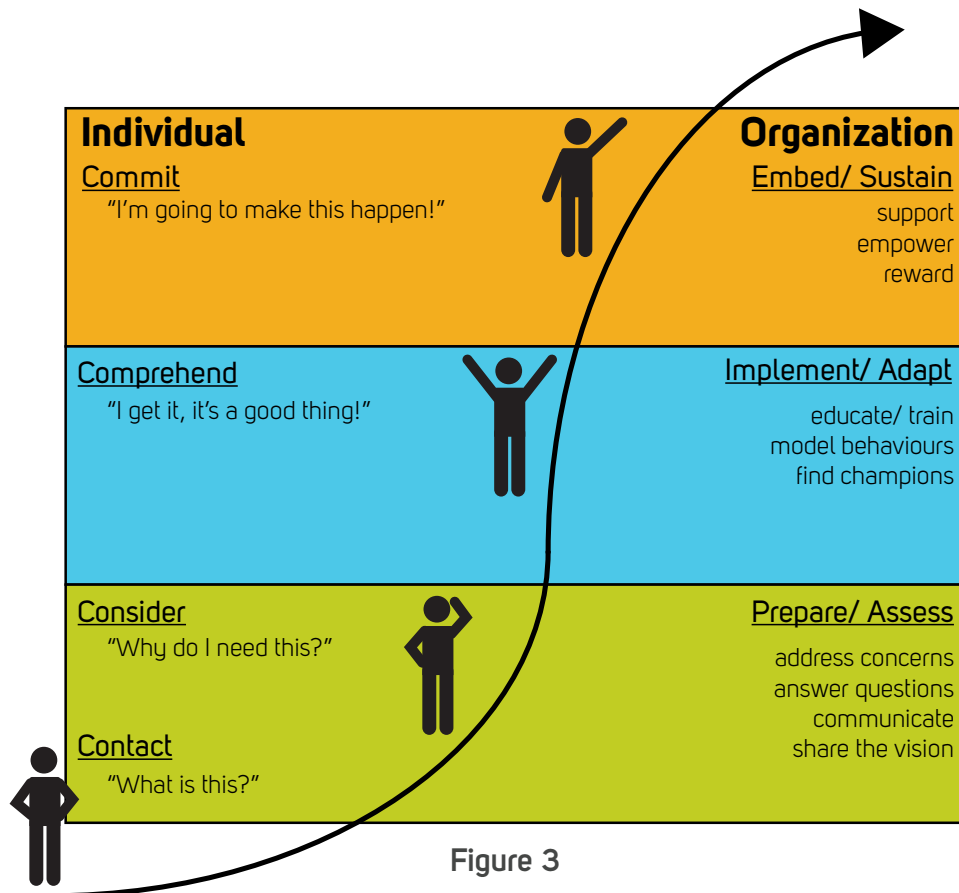
Contact
"What is this?"

Figure 3

Some considerations:

- The stages can pertain to all levels – governance/leadership, management, and employees.
- At any given time, your organization will have individuals at all the stages, so ensure activities are provided for each stage.
- Ensure activities are in place to help individuals as they move through each stage. (i.e., don't leave someone in the "consider" stage without providing support to move to "comprehending").
- Always ensure a welcoming and non-judgemental environment to help individuals as they progress.

CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

If we recall, in the earlier section of the report, competency was described as:

"the ability to do the right thing successfully; implying that the person or organization has both the skills (do the right thing) and the ability (do it successfully). Competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours and attitudes that underpin the competence."

Therefore, it's valuable to provide some examples of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support cultural competency. This can be helpful when creating or updating job descriptions, conducting performance appraisals and developing training plans. An individual who demonstrates cultural competency has the following:

Knowledge of:

- Indigenous history and traditions
- Indigenous views and approaches to health and wellness
- Indigenous practices related to family and community
- Indigenous community structures and protocols
- Indigenous connection to and stewardship for the land
- Indigenous cultural taboos and ceremonies
- Appropriate communication styles for Indigenous clients, employees and stakeholders
- The factors that impact health and well-being

Skills in:

- Planning and conducting assessments
- Communicating effectively with Indigenous clients, co-workers, and stakeholders
- Reaching out to Indigenous communities to find out their needs

> "
> We need the right staff at the right time in the right place to do the right thing
>
> Leader, Health Region
> "

- Involving Indigenous clients and stakeholders in planning and implementing programs and services
- Facilitating change within an organization or team
- Establishing training and mentorship
- Maintaining a calm and open demeanor in the face of challenges
- Modelling culturally competent behaviours

Attitudes:

- Understands that cultural biases may be conscious or unconscious
- Recognizes that perceptions of Indigenous individuals and communities have been influenced by their own personal experiences
- Understands that there may be health disparities between cultures
- Can self-reflect on their own feeling and perceptions
- Is tolerant and open to new cultures
- Can see the world through different cultural lens

ASSESSMENTS

As noted earlier, an early step in the process of becoming more culturally competent, as individuals and as organizations, is to do assessments. For individuals, it's important to assess attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, to realistically move forward. For organizations, it's critical to know where your organization stands in terms of cultural competency. Are you as far along as you think? And how would you know?

Complete the individual assessment[8] found in Appendix A, to determine the strengths and challenges of individuals in your organization. Providing time for individual introspection can set the stage for mindset change.

And do the same for your organization as a whole using the assessment in Appendix B. Every level of the organization should complete the assessment. This provides you with a broad range of perceptions on whether your organization is culturally competent, and clearly shows whether individuals are even aware of the efforts at the organizational level. This gives valuable insights so you can proceed to make a concrete plan to improve, based on a solid understanding of where your people and your organization are now.

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8 The assessments are user-friendly tools to help launch personal introspection and organizational planning. Organizations are encouraged to adapt the tool based on their own needs.

CONCLUSION

Cultural competence is both simple and complex. It's simple in that it essentially represents people being open with other cultures and relating in a non-judgemental way, without prejudice or stereotypes. But it is also complex, as it requires individuals to move past previously-held, and sometimes unconscious, assumptions and beliefs, and learn new ways of perceiving and interacting.

Thankfully many organizations have progressed beyond simply wishing to be "culturally aware" of Indigenous cultures and recognize that the aim is to be culturally competent or even culturally humble.

Through the voices of several organizations, this report proposes that cultural competency is not a destination but a journey – one that is travelled by people embracing change and supported with organizational "infrastructure." And that culturally competent people and organizations don't actually "arrive," but instead are always seeking to learn and reinforce their new insights.

It is only when Indigenous clients express that they feel culturally safe that individuals and organizations know that they are "walking in a good way" on the journey toward becoming culturally competent.

> "
> We're in this together, the more time we spend with the people, the more we can learn about each other
>
> Leader, Health Region
> "

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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Colleen Anne Dell, Debra Dell, Jim Dumont, Barbara Fornssler, Laura Hall and Carol Hopkins [in alphabetical order] (2015). *Connecting with Culture: Growing Our Wellness. Facilitators' Handbook*. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, Research Chair in Substance Abuse.

Interviews:

Helga Bryant, CEO, Northern Health Region, MB. Telephone

Cathy Ulrich, CEO, Northern Health Region, BC. Telephone

Margo Greenwood, VP, Northern Health Region, BC. Telephone

Donna Koch, Executive Director, Population, Public and Indigenous Health, Addiction and Mental Health, North Zone, Alberta Health Services. AB. Telephone

APPENDIX A: SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

This tool will assist in a guided introspection of your perceptions, experiences and beliefs related to Indigenous peoples. Complete it honestly and assess your perceptions candidly. The value of this tool is not to compare against others, but to assess yourself over time and to reveal whether there has been personal change.

Put a checkmark in the column that most honestly captures your experience	I always do this	I occasionally do this	I don't do this
I examine my values, behaviours, beliefs and assumptions			
I don't impose my beliefs and values on others			
I am comfortable with cultural differences			
I am open to acknowledging where there are gaps in my own cultural competency			
I recognize prejudice and how it could be manifested in an organization			
I understand how past experiences can affect current interactions			
I want to learn more about Indigenous cultures			
I engage in activities (training, etc.) that help me understand Indigenous perspectives			
I familiarize myself with cultural elements of Indigenous communities that I serve			
I seek to understand the history of Indigenous experiences			
I understand the impacts of Indigenous experiences on health			
I seek out those who can help me understand Indigenous practices			
I work to develop a relationship of trust with Indigenous clients and co-workers			
I seek to use effective communication styles with Indigenous clients and co-workers			
I seek clarification if necessary when working with Indigenous clients and co-workers			
I model respectful ways of working with Indigenous clients and co-workers			
I integrate Indigenous community and cultural wisdom where possible			

APPENDIX B: ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

This tool can help you understand your organization and assess where you are doing well and where more efforts are needed. Adapt the tool so it is relevant for your organization; remove statements that don't apply or add statements that better reflect your work. Having individuals in different roles complete the tool can also demonstrate how well the organizational commitment to Indigenous cultural competency is understood across the organization. This is helpful in highlighting where more efforts are needed.

Remember that Indigenous cultural competency is a journey, and all organizations are somewhere on the path as they seek to create safe spaces for care.

Put a checkmark in the column that best describes your organization at this time	Yes	No	Some what	In Progress
Organizational Culture				
Our organization discusses what culture means in the context of our work				
Our organization understands the difference between cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural competency, cultural humility, and cultural safety, in the Indigenous context				
Our organization understands which Indigenous communities are in our service area				
Our organization has completed an Indigenous cultural competence assessment				
Our organization has created a plan for improving Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization understands the benefits of Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization has incorporated Indigenous cultural competency into our guiding documents (vision, mission, values, principles, etc.)				
Our organization considers Indigenous cultures when developing quality improvement processes				
Our organization provides training and learning opportunities to improve Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization celebrates the Indigenous cultures with which we work				
Our organization has created an environment that reflects Indigenous culture, including art, music, foods, etc.				

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Our organization provides opportunities for employees to share with their colleagues, what has been learned and experienced in Indigenous cultures				
Our organization provides incentives for the improvement of Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization evaluates its Indigenous cultural competency on a regular basis				
Governance				
Our organization's leadership models Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization includes Indigenous members on its Board				
Our organization provides training in Indigenous culture for leadership and management				
Our organization ensures that new Board members receive an orientation in Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization ensures that Board members are evaluated on their knowledge and skills pertaining to Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization has targeted positions, held by Indigenous people, that promote Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization's leadership models cultural competency				
Our organization has a group/committee that is responsible for strengthening Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization has goals related to improving Indigenous cultural competency				
Our organization regularly assesses our progress in achieving our Indigenous cultural competency goals				
Our organization has targeted resources to enhance and improve Indigenous cultural competency				
Partnerships and Relationships				
Our organization fully includes Indigenous clients and stakeholders in planning programs and services				

Our organization understands the social and cultural strengths of the Indigenous communities in our service area				
Our organization understands which languages and dialects of the Indigenous communities are in our service area				
Our organization understands how illness and wellness are perceived by the Indigenous communities in our service area				
Our organization understands the natural networks of support in the Indigenous communities in our service area				
Policies				
Our organization has a policy on cultural competency				
Our organization applies an Indigenous lens when we create and update policies				
Our organization communicates the Indigenous cultural competency policy to staff, community and stakeholders				
Human Resources				
Our organization has a staff complement that includes Indigenous employees across all levels of the organization				
Our organization actively recruits Indigenous employees				
Our organization provides opportunities for leadership development and advancement for Indigenous staff				
Our organization provides space for Indigenous cultural practices				
Our organization includes cultural competency in job descriptions				
Our organization includes cultural competency elements in performance appraisals				
Service Delivery				
Our organization advocates on behalf of our Indigenous clients and stakeholders				
Our organization regularly asks the Indigenous communities we serve what we can do better				

Our organization regularly reviews procedures to ensure they are relevant to the Indigenous communities we serve				
Our organization identifies barriers that may prevent Indigenous clients from accessing services				
Our organization uses assessment or diagnostic protocols that are adapted for the Indigenous communities we serve				
Our organization integrates traditional healing where possible and when requested by the Indigenous communities we serve				
Our organization uses Indigenous interpreters to help provide information to clients when necessary				
Our organization posts signs and creates materials in the Indigenous languages of the communities we serve				
Our organization uses different communication styles based on the preferred approach of the Indigenous communities we serve				
Our organization includes clients, and families when requested, in determining treatment				
Our organization has a respectful approach to data collection and usage following the OCAP®[9] principles				
Change Readiness				
Our organization actively seeks ways to improve				
Our organization recognizes that change is necessary for growth				
Our organization's leadership have demonstrated commitment to change activities				
Our organization's managers have demonstrated commitment to change activities				
Our organization communicates the need for change clearly, regularly and often				
Our organization provides opportunities for employees to ask questions or offer feedback on change activities				

9 Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. See www.fnigc.ca for more information.

Our organization answers questions and responds to feedback honestly and in a timely way				
Our organization makes decisions in a timely way				
Our organization provides training and coaching for employees to adapt to change				
Our organization allows for "intelligent" risk and doesn't punish realistic and genuine attempts to improve				
Our organization reinforces the notion that "we're all in this together"				