

# **A PATH TOWARD MENTAL HEALTH CARE WITH NORTHERN AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA**

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**Background:** Northern and Indigenous communities of Canada have been deeply affected by colonization, which created the historical traumatic conditions leading to mental health issues in Northern populations. Racism underpinned the societal structures leading to systematic discrimination. The pandemic has further revealed the disparities experienced by Indigenous communities.

**Objective:** To determine the most useful and sustainable approach to improving mental health in Northern and Indigenous populations.

**Methodology:** A review of literature was conducted as part of the effort to generate a book chapter for a larger collaborative publication.

**Results:** Cultural safety, idioms of distress, conceptions of the ecocentric self, and social conditions must be considered. Mental health practices must be rethought and adapted to the local social and cultural realities of the North. Clinically, the DSM 5 Cultural Formulation offers a practical tool for clinicians. Northern institutions play a pivotal role in empowering and facilitating long term change, which is equitable, responsive and innovative. There is a paucity of academic literature documenting the impact of racism on Northern Indigenous communities.

**Discussion:** Pluralism in mental health care offers greater choice and opportunity to draw upon different traditions for health and healing. Engaging with Indigenous knowledge with genuine curiosity and openness will facilitate progression from mere tolerance of other forms of knowing to the integration of health systems. Ultimately, all mental health practice is cultural, all healing is spiritual. Anti-racist policies and practices must be developed. Listening to communities and facilitating them to direct their own services will help them to be most responsive to their own needs. Successful initiatives tend to be those that are sustainably funded, community driven, creative, infused with Northern and Indigenous skills, and value culture as the foundation of healing. The pandemic has limited remote and northern travel but has opened opportunities to enhance virtual care.

## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Apply principles of culturally informed care, cultural safety, social determinants of health, equity, pluralism and trauma-informed care, including in virtual spaces, with Northern and Indigenous patients.
2. Appreciate the evidence that demonstrates the importance of historical trauma, culture as treatment, integrated approaches and multi-sector systemic change for mental health care with Northern and Indigenous peoples.