

Evaluating Mental Wellness Initiatives Using Culture as Foundations

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FIRST PEOPLES
WELLNESS CIRCLE

Introduction

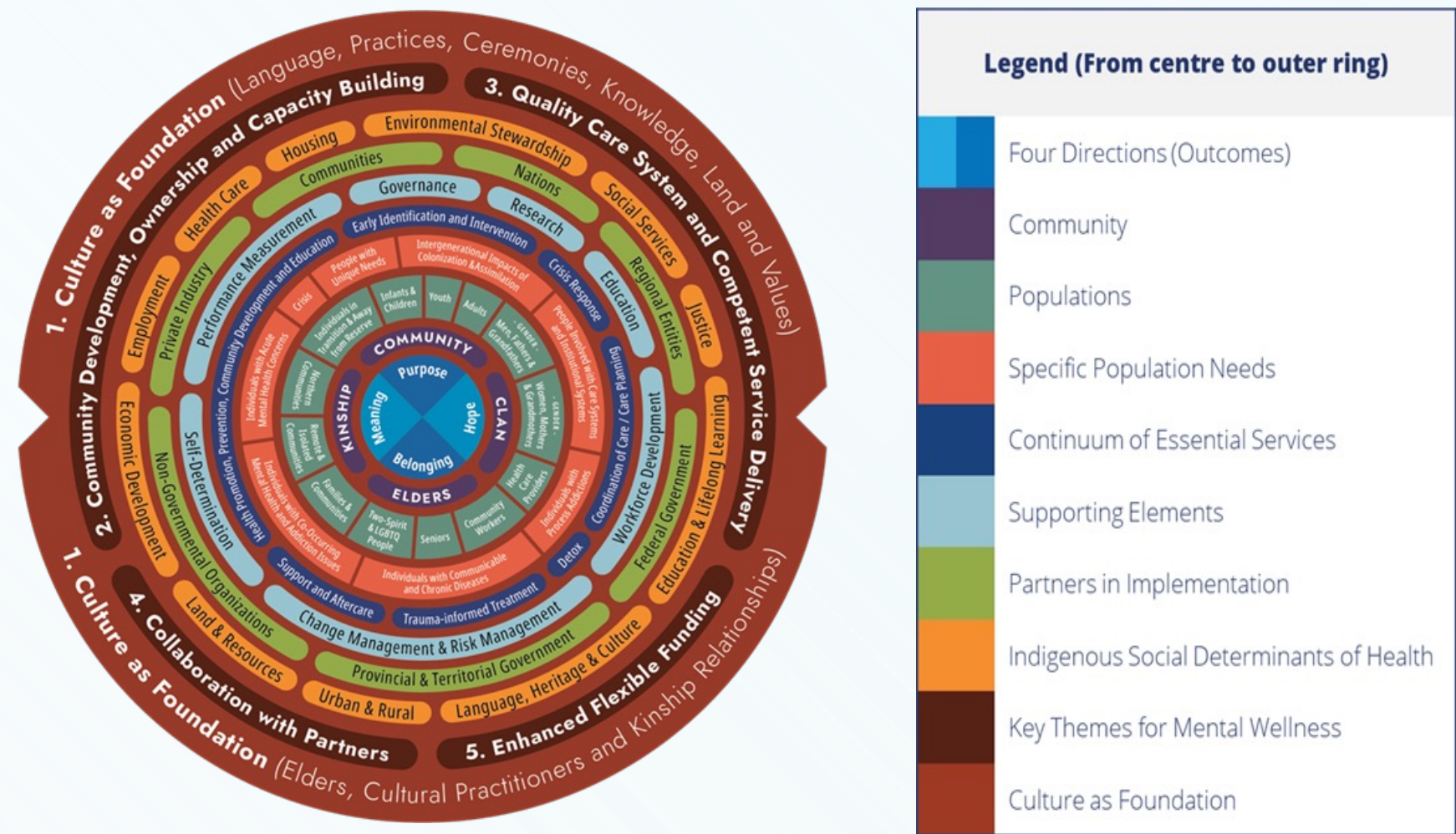
After several years of development, the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (FNMWCF) was published in 2015. It was a joint initiative that included the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (TPF), First Nations, Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada (FNIHB), and First Peoples Wellness Circle (FPWC). Since that time, this core group of partners has worked to collectively advance the Framework, which centres culture as a foundation and “presents a shared vision for the future of First Nations mental wellness programs and services and practical steps towards achieving that vision.” This work has included the development and delivery of training and orientation tools and more recently has included the development of a draft evaluation model that seeks to support communities, organizations, and others to monitor and evaluate the work that they do using the framework. Like the Framework, the evaluation model centres culture as a foundation and seeks to support transformative change at the community and systemic levels.

The preliminary goal of the model is to support those working in or with First Nations communities and organizations to:

- Become familiar with the evaluation process and understand its role in the planning and implementation process.
- Develop and implement plans for evaluating local projects using methods that are grounded in local cultures and ways of knowing.
- Effectively participate in the third-party evaluation of larger projects, strategies, initiatives, and programs.

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (FNMWCF)

“The FNMWC is a foundational framework that deals with mental wellness among First Nations people in Canada and outlines a wellness approach that is grounded in culture. It is based on the idea that we all have a responsibility to support wellness. It provides a continuum of care, attending to wellness through all stages of life.”



To learn more about the FNMWCF, please visit thunderbirdpf.org/fnmwcf

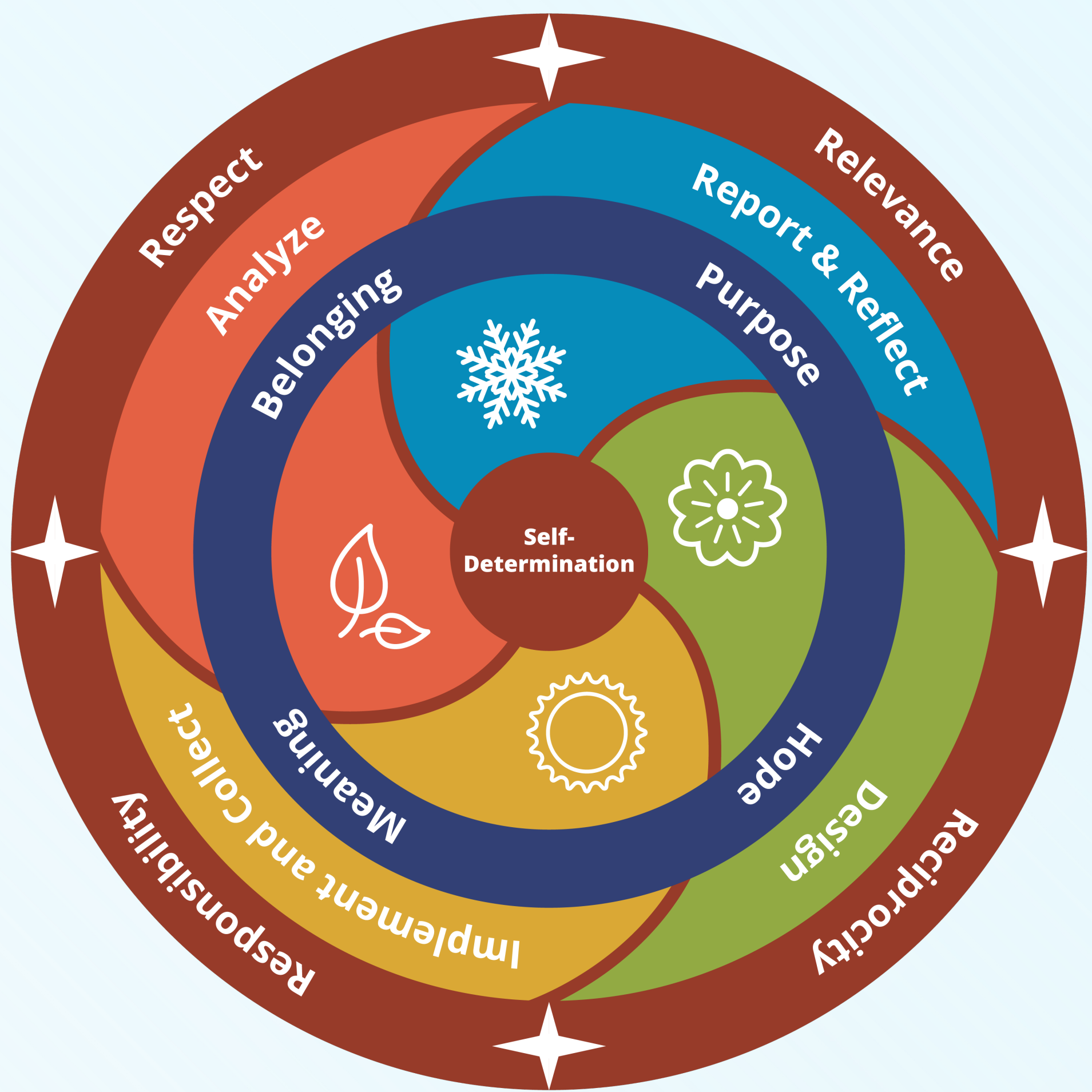
Culture as Foundation

Culture is at the centre of mental wellness:

It goes beyond the creation of culturally safe and relevant programs and services by ensuring that interventions are holistic.

- It is a key social determinant of health.
- It is the foundation for meaningful and transformative evaluation practice.

Draft Graphic Model



Principles and Values

Centering self-determination as a core principle in evaluation ensures that communities can use evaluation outcomes to reassert jurisdiction over the delivery of programs and services.

Respectful Evaluation:

- Is **Relational**.
- Centres **First Nations as experts**.
- Acknowledges the **diversity** of First Nations cultures and worldviews.
- Is **flexible and fluid**.
- Promotes **data sovereignty** as one of the cornerstones to **self-determination**.

Relevant Evaluation:

- Employs **decolonized** methods and measures wherever possible.
- Focuses on **First Nations priorities**.
- Ensures that outcomes are **relevant and meaningful** to First Nations.
- Utilizes **flexible and iterative processes** to accommodate changing environments.
- Is **transformative**.

Reciprocal Evaluation:

- Fosters **mutual accountability**
- Fosters and supports **reconciliation**.
- Supports **equity**.
- Supports the building and sustainability of **community capacity**.
- **Benefits community**.

Responsible Evaluation:

- Is **strengths-based whenever possible**.
- Is **culturally safe** and applies **trauma-informed** approaches.
- Builds upon a **whole-of-society** approach.
- Is **inclusive**.

Measuring Hope, Belonging, Meaning and Purpose

The Indigenous Wellness Framework that Thunderbird Partnership Foundation developed with the guidance of Elders and Knowledge Keepers describes mental wellness as **a balance of the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional**.

This balance is enriched as people have:

- **HOPE** for their future and those of their families that is grounded in a sense of identity, unique Indigenous values, and having a belief in spirit;
- A sense of **BELONGING** and connectedness within their families, to community, and to culture;
- **MEANING** and an understanding of how their lives and those of their families and communities are part of creation and a rich history
- And finally, a sense of **PURPOSE** in their daily lives, whether it is through education, employment, caregiving activities, or cultural ways of being and doing.

Within these broad outcomes are a series of 13 indicators, as displayed in the graphic below. The specific measures that will be applied to each of these indicators are dependent on the type of evaluation that is being conducted and how a community or organization envisions the indicators within the scope of their own cultures, ways of knowing, reporting requirements, and existing indicator frameworks. This approach ensures that evaluation outcomes are meaningful to organizations and communities and result in opportunities for transforming the mental wellness landscape at the local level.



To learn more about the Indigenous Wellness Framework, please visit:

<https://thunderbirdpf.org/?resources=indigenous-wellness-framework-reference-guide>

A Seasonal Approach

Seasons present themselves to us in different ways depending on our geographic location and our interactions with them. Metaphorically, seasons can represent many things such as transformation, progress or process and these representations are often grounded in our understandings of the world around us as told through stories and teachings. Despite the seasons meaning different things to different people, there is a mutual understanding in the contemporary world of what they are and what they represent. By grounding the graphic model in the four seasons, we are drawing upon these mutual understandings to create an ethical space where people from diverse backgrounds can come together and work collaboratively to lead, support, or contribute to First Nations-centred evaluation processes.

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