



**FIRST PEOPLES  
WELLNESS CIRCLE**

# Annual Report

Building Sustainable Wellness  
for the Mental Wellness  
Workforce and Communities

**2023-24**

## **Front Cover: Finding the Light on the Land**

**A painting of FPWC's Strategic Plan by artist Perry McLeod-Shabogesic:**

*"The picture speaks about helping find our light through the darkness of mental health struggles across Turtle Island using cultural teachings and land based approaches. The Eagle represents the collective work being done through the strategic plan and the tail (representing FPWC's fan/logo) is the group that guides the Eagle in flight and in the work. It represents strength in the collective. Although there appears to be darkness or chaos, as you move across Turtle Island from east to west, there is a calmness when returning to the land and water. The observer is encouraged to travel into the picture and explore all of the teachings embedded within the picture to represent FPWC's strategic plan."*

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# Message from the Chair

## TAANISHI

As Chair of First Peoples Wellness Circle, it is my great honour to share with you to the 2023-2024 annual report. This report is a showcase of the commitment of our hard-working Indigenous staff and allies who every day support the individuals working within our communities across turtle island to support the Wellness of our community members. This past year FPWC continues to expand our work to implement the *First Nation Mental Wellness Continuum Framework*. We continue to work on building the competency of the workforce and have included the Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program workforce in our capacity building activities. We are particularly proud of a very successful IRS Gathering we co-hosted with the Assembly of First Nations that brought together survivors and the workforce to highlight the work on healing and to envision the sustainability of the program. We are committed to elevating the focus on Indian residential school resolution health support and anti-indigenous racism.



FPWC is committed to a culturally safe, quality system and have engaged in several projects and campaigns on addressing anti-Indigenous racism. With our Sister Organizations we co-lead the *Rise Above Racism* campaign, we co-hosted roundtables to understand what racism looks like in the mental wellness system and we partnered with Mental Wellness Teams in New Brunswick to design a curriculum on cultural safety that addresses racism, privilege and bias targeted at psychologists and social workers. It has been our pleasure to co-lead these initiatives with our Sister Organizations, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and First Nations Health Managers Association.

We continue to learn about the innovation, strengths and needs of the mental wellness workforces and with our learning and data advocated for IRS program sustainability and the need for equitable program and workforce investments. We've created a strategy to ensure worker wellness which we are using to design resources and a toolkit for use by the workforce and, are engaged in research on equity for the mental wellness workforce.

As I reflect on the last 5 years, I'm struck by the amount of learning that has occurred within FPWC as well as with FPWC. We continue to gather and listen to the voice of the workforce

about their needs, priorities and challenges to better design our services for them while also doing our best to advocate for the sustainability and equity of the workforce. Whether it is working on curriculum and resources, gathering data and designing research, our efforts are all aimed to improve wellness in First Nation communities. We continue to be inspired by the incredible work occurring across Turtle Island and are humbled by the opportunity to play a small role in supporting the work they do.

On our learning journey at FPWC we have worked to forge collaborative partnerships that encapsulate the key elements of the Framework. I am particularly excited about the Reciprocal Relationship that was signed with our Sister Organizations – Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and First Nation Health Managers Association – as we all hold values of centering First Nation knowledge and ways of doing in our work. This has ensured we work as sisters in the creation of a National Mental Wellness Workforce Association as well as addressing anti-Indigenous racism. FPWC is excited for the newly created National Youth Council that has brought together strong youth leaders from across Turtle Island to support our work (and that of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation) and to provide opportunities for training and mentorship in mental wellness.

Finally, I would like to thank our funders Indigenous Services Canada who continue to believe in the work we do and are grateful for the 5-year extension of funding. We also gratefully acknowledge funding from Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Ontario Network Environment of Indigenous Health Research, Mitacs Research Grant, School Mental Health Ontario and Canadian Heritage. I wish to extend my appreciation to my fellow Board Members, our Thought Leader and staff for your dedication and commitment to this work. Most importantly, to our stakeholders who continue to guide us in all our initiatives and continue to see value in the services we offer, we are humbled and grateful to work alongside you to achieve wellness for our nations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Denise McCuaig', written over a horizontal line.

**– Denise McCuaig, Chair**



# Executive Summary

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I am thrilled to present the First Peoples Wellness Circle (FPWC) annual report for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. This year FPWC has taken on new projects and initiatives while continuing to work alongside the Mental Wellness Workforce to increase their capacity to meet the growing mental wellness needs of First Nations. Our team has worked hard to deliver some key documents and resources while fostering relationships that ensure collaborative efforts to improve the overall well-being of First Nations people.



Our work with the Mental Wellness Teams (MWTs) continues to focus on developing quality opportunities for knowledge translation (KT) through learning and care facilitation sessions and creating resources to support their work. Perhaps the greatest effort has been the implementation of the Workforce Wellness Strategy, which outlines a three-pronged approach to worker wellness that defines activities targeted at the individual, organizational, and systems levels. Coupled with the strategy, FPWC offered regular training on worker wellness that focused on identifying as well as addressing compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma.

FPWC is honoured to have the opportunity to expand this work with a vital workforce in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities - the Indian Residential School (IRS) Resolution Health Support Program (RHSP) workforce. We are grateful for the funding from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) that has allowed us to continue building relationships and providing support to this workforce. In the last year, we have completed a Formative Analysis that shares a national picture of the lack of equitable investment for this workforce that continues to provide valuable services to Indian Residential School (IRS), Indian Day School, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and Sixties Scoop survivors and their families. The analysis highlights that the need has increased, the work demands are high, and challenges with recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce. The analysis calls for an infrastructure to support worker wellness, use of mentoring and coaching to build skills and improve retention as well as equitable investments for recruitment and retention. Building on identified capacity building needs FPWC has begun to offer training to address these needs.

As FPWC identified worker wellness as a key priority, we were able to secure funding through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to build a toolkit for the workforce to support




wellness. This toolkit will equip the workforce with resources that they can use to assess their own wellness needs, identify strategies to improve wellness for themselves as well as for the communities they serve. This is work that will be ongoing for the next year.

In February 2024, FPWC partnered with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to host an IRS Gathering in Vancouver, BC, that welcomed survivors, their families and the workforce to share successes and innovations and to plan for ongoing priorities in addressing trauma. We were grateful to welcome over 750 people to the Gathering, where they had the opportunity to hear from keynote speakers, panel presentations, and workshops that highlighted the incredible work that has happened and continues to be offered. Messages of resiliency were a central theme of survivors as well as the workforce who continue to demonstrate excellence and expertise in trauma and healing-centred care that is centred on Indigenous Knowledge and evidence. They continue to do their work supporting the ground-penetrating searches occurring across Turtle Island. FPWC has felt compelled, through our work with the IRS workforce, to submit a response to the Office of the Special Interlocutor (OSI) as well as 2 Pre-Budget Submissions (PBS) in advance of the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 budgets calling on the urgency to provide equitable and sustainable investments in the IRS workforce.

FPWC continues to work on implementation of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (the Framework, or FNMWCF) with our partners including co-developing an orientation program that consists of high-level 1-day training and the creation of a place-based monitoring and evaluation model. With Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, we are also investing in Regional Implementation Coordinators to support regional work in mental wellness workers, having already hired 3 and seeking to hire another 3. National Implementation Coordinators will also support this work, linking these coordinators together to define regional and national priorities while supporting the implementation of the Framework.

Our value in relationships remains a key cornerstone of our work. This past year we signed a Reciprocal Relationship Agreement with our sister organizations, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (Thunderbird) and First Nations Health Managers Association (FNHMA). This agreement outlines our commitment to work collaboratively on





initiatives and projects that advance wellness in First Nations communities. Together with Thunderbird, we are also exploring the creation of a National Indigenous Mental Wellness Workforce Association and the creation of a National Youth Council to provide direction and guidance to both our organizations. We continue to invest in other relationships such as those with our research partners through the Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR), Western University and Anishinabek Nation, Healthcare Excellence Canada, School Mental Health Ontario, and Mental Wellness Teams.

FPWC was fortunate to receive funding from Health Canada and Indigenous Services Canada to examine and address anti-Indigenous racism. We had the opportunity to host roundtable discussions on racism in the mental wellness system while focusing on the creation of a local curriculum in New Brunswick to improve outcomes for First Nations.

Our team has been involved in seeking policy change and improving access to services. We are part of many Advisory Tables and committees that focus on data, standards of care, cultural safety indicators, identifying inequities and helplines to name a few. We have made many presentations on our work and the highlight was facilitating more than 10 presentations at Healing Our Spirit Worldwide (HOSW) to an international audience in September 2023 in Vancouver, BC, and over 3,700 attendees.

It has been a productive year internally as well with the creation of a comprehensive communication strategy inclusive of processes to make our work more efficient and ensure it is promoted well. We have worked diligently on internal processes and policies and continue to evolve as an organization. I encourage you to read through the highlights to learn more about the many projects and initiatives we have underway.



**- Dr. Brenda Restoule, CEO**

# Growth

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## Strategic Plan and Priorities

With the launch of [FPWC's 5-year strategic plan](#) in early 2023, efforts were made to advance each of the four strategic priorities - **Growth, The Framework, Relationships and Collective Intelligence** during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. This year, learning activities to build the capacity of the workforce focused on both improving skills and knowledge while ensuring their health and well-being through the creation of the Worker Wellness Strategy. This Strategy outlines a Worker Wellness Framework that focuses on the individual (worker), organizational and environmental as well as systemic and political levels. Building on this, FPWC partnered with Mental Wellness Teams (MWTs) in New Brunswick to address anti-Indigenous racism in the mental health system through training and developing a tool for First Nations to assess the cultural safety of service providers.

FPWC expanded its efforts to support the workforce by embarking on furthering our relationship with the Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP) workforce. A number of activities were carried out with the IRS RHSP workforce including the completion of the *Formative Analysis* that provides data on current realities, needs and priorities in delivering programs and services, the development of a crisis debriefing model using First Nations evidence and Knowledge to support the workforce, and designing learning opportunities to enhance their capacity. Along with our partner, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), we successfully co-hosted a gathering of the IRS survivors, descendants and the workforce to highlight wise practices as well as to celebrate and envision the longevity of the IRS program.

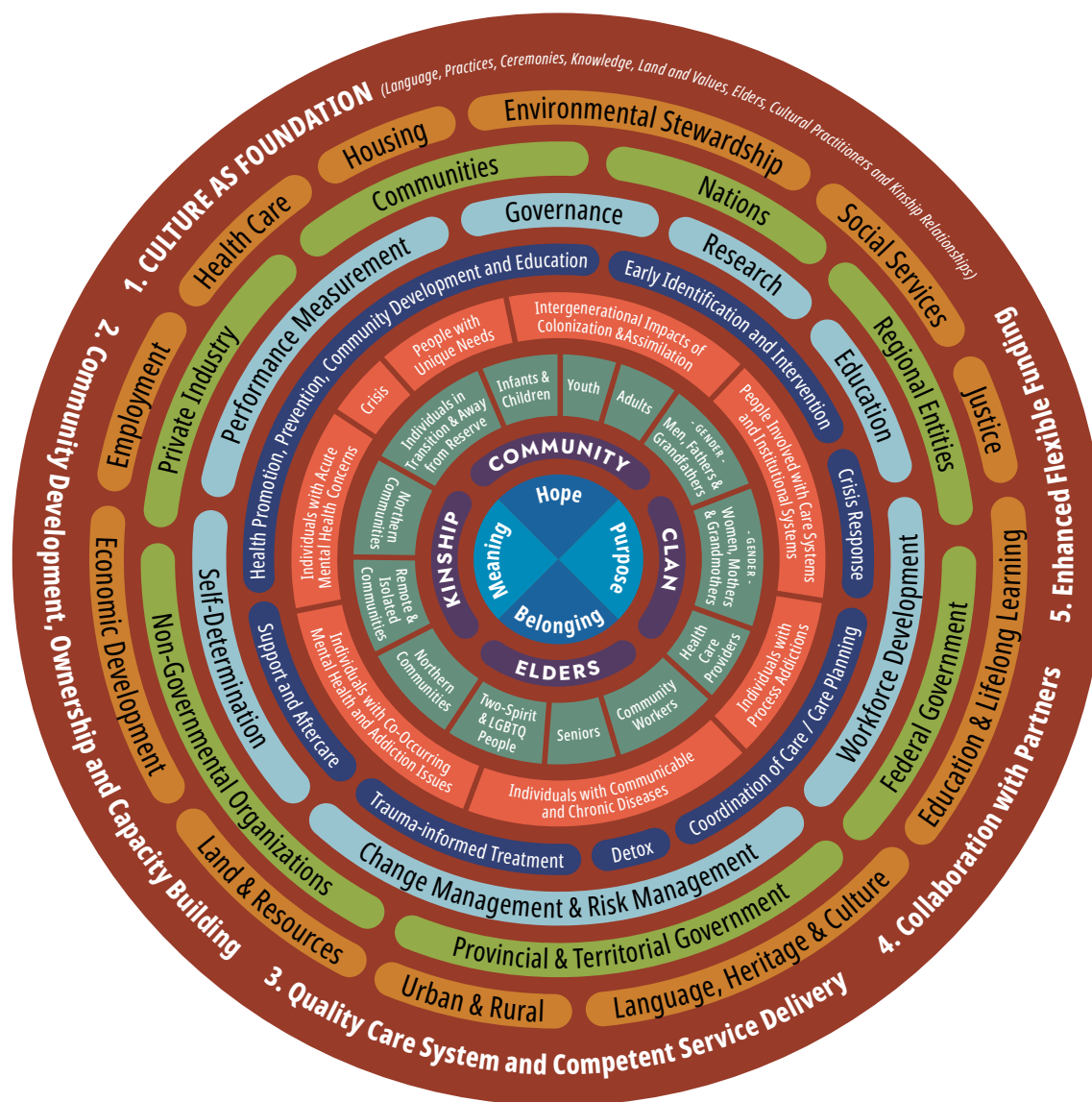
We continue to work alongside our partner, [Thunderbird](#), on several projects including exploring the creation of a National Indigenous Mental Wellness Workforce Association and a National Youth Council. FPWC was thrilled to sign a [Reciprocal Relationship Agreement](#) with Thunderbird and the First Nations Health Manager Association (FNHMA) in September 2023 that outlines our commitment to collaborating on projects and initiatives to improve the health and well-being of First Nations.

This year, FPWC developed a training curriculum for orientation on the Framework in collaboration with partners, an evaluation model of the Framework and a research agenda.





## FNMWC Framework



## Organizational Wellness

Similar to FPWC's efforts to facilitate the growth of the workforces we support, FPWC also seeks to build a strong and resilient organization by investing in infrastructure and its employees. This year we invested in improving the technological capacity of FPWC, which increased the organization's efficiency. We continue to build internal structures that support

key aspects of the organization such as finance, policies, membership and employee wellness. Ensuring policies and processes meet organizational and employee needs was a priority of Senior Management. Important processes developed this year have included a communications strategy, a process to acknowledge authorship, engagement of staff on internal committees with Terms of Reference, and a variety of administrative forms to improve efficiency with projects and within the organization.

Both members of the Board of Directors (Board) and employees gather annually to explore areas of organizational growth. The Board met for its annual retreat in December 2023 to further expand processes for Board recruitment, to finalize the Thought Leader descriptor including role, responsibility and recruitment processes, as well as recruitment processes for a National Advisory Circle and National Youth Council.

The Board is keen to continue to seek interested and qualified individuals to fill vacancies on the Board. Following the inaugural year of a Thought Leader role that Dr. William Mussell has held, the Board is now in a position to see interested and qualified individuals to fill the role of a Thought Leader and will be seeking to fill 3 positions (female, member of the 2SLGBTQAA+ community, and youth).

The National Youth Council is intended to provide guidance and direction on projects and programs for FPWC and Thunderbird while providing mentorship and knowledge-building opportunities to the youth. Recruitment of youth from across Turtle Island was our focus this past year and we look forward to their input and projects in 2024-2025. The National Advisory Circle (NAC) will bring together mental wellness professionals with a variety of skill sets to provide guidance and advice on FPWC projects to ensure they consider the unique needs of First Nations and other Indigenous groups. Recruitment for the NAC will occur in 2024. Both of these groups will help support organizational growth and development that considers the voice of youth and community-based mental wellness workers.

FPWC and Thunderbird also held a collaborative planning meeting related to shared projects and created Maamawi Kanaakiimi, which acts as a project charter to help guide the collaborative work of our 2 organizations in order to meet the goals and deliverables of the project including communication, planning as well as roles and responsibilities.



# The Framework

## Framework Implementation

FPWC continues to work on a variety of initiatives and projects that ensure implementation of the Framework. Implementation activities to centre First Nation knowledge and ways of being and doing that create culturally meaningful programs and services and seek system change are key components of the work being done through the secretariat, research, evaluation, and through FPWC projects and programs.

## Secretariat

Dr. Brenda Restoule is one of four co-chairs leading the **First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Implementation Team Secretariat (the IT Secretariat)**. The IT Secretariat is a group of representatives from Indigenous organizations and government partners that meet bi-weekly to work collaboratively to promote health and mental well-being among First Nations communities by advancing the implementation of the Framework. One of the IT Secretariat's primary projects is the ***First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Orientation Training***. This training was designed to provide diverse groups with a high-level overview of the Framework. Throughout 2023-2024, the training was piloted with four organizations. 94% of participants reported that they would recommend it to colleagues, and 87% found it very or extremely valuable to their work. FPWC looks forward to finalizing and promoting this training in the upcoming year.

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## Program Highlights and Project Summaries

### Special Projects Team

The Special Projects Team (SPT) continued to work toward strengthening implementation of the Framework. Throughout 2023-2024, SPT worked collaboratively internally with FPWC teams as well as externally with partners and stakeholders to support projects focused on Anti-Indigenous Racism. The team also offered capacity building opportunities to the Indian Residential School Workforce. The SPT initiated the Gathering Our Bundles Project, which collected invaluable feedback, in order to further support and strengthen the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce (including IRS RHSP, MWTs, and Crisis Response Teams).

SPT's projects work to advance equity for the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce (FNMWW) as well as to support their capacity, knowledge, and holistic wellness. This was accomplished by working collaboratively with partners through the delivery of training and through the development of resources.





## Mental Wellness Teams Supports Team

It was once again a busy year for the MWTs Supports Team, which undertook a comprehensive approach to support the Mental Wellness Workforce. This included, among other activities, the development of resources and tools, building capacity, hosting virtual learning circles, supporting regional gatherings, attending conferences, as well as facilitating workforce wellness workshops.

Recognizing the benefits of hosting virtual learning sessions, the team was happy to be able to continue successfully hosting FPWC Learning Circles. These Learning Circles provided a platform for the Mental Wellness Workforce from different regions to come together and engage in open and facilitated discussions on various topics related to mental wellness. These sessions proved to be highly beneficial in promoting knowledge exchange and collaboration among participants.

In addition to the Learning Circles, our team also supported two regional gatherings (one for the Alberta region and one for the Québec region), which brought together Mental Wellness Teams from diverse areas. These gatherings provided an opportunity for professionals to connect with each other, share experiences and wise practices, as well as discuss common challenges and opportunities.

Attending conferences and workshops has always been an essential part of the Team's engagement efforts and activities to connect with the Mental Wellness Workforce. This year, we were able to participate in multiple conferences and workshops to stay up to date on the latest developments in the field of mental wellness. These events provided valuable insights and knowledge, enabled significant internal and external network expansion, and established as well as strengthened connections with other professionals in the field.





## Research, Evaluation, and Policy

The Research, Evaluation, and Policy Team (REP) works collaboratively to advance FPWC's strategic plan. Throughout 2023-2024, the team focused on gathering, sharing, as well as learning from diverse Knowledge to enhance holistic wellness for the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce, and First Nations communities more broadly. Undertaking innovative research along with comprehensive evaluations and policy recommendations was central to the Team's efforts.

FPWC's policy initiatives work to advance equity for the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce and enhance the quality of, and access to, mental wellness programs and services for First Nations communities from coast to coast to coast. Throughout 2023-2024, significant work on policy-related recommendations and resources was undertaken. This includes comprehensive briefing notes, pre-budget submissions, and a report to the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor.

**Briefing notes** to Indigenous Services Canada highlighted the critical need for enhanced and flexible funding for MWTs and program permanency for the IRS RHSP workforce.

- **Two pre-budget submissions** focusing on advancing funding, equity, and wage parity for the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce. The most recent submission can be found on [FPWC's website](#).
- **Report to the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor** highlighting the critical work of the IRS RHSP in supporting workers who locate missing children and unmarked burial sites.





# Relationships

## Partnerships

Throughout the past year, FPWC continued to grow and strengthen relationships with Sister partnership organizations, and collaborators.

In September 2023, FPWC together with Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and the First Nations Health Manager Association signed a **Commitment to Reciprocal Relationship Agreement**. This represents our shared commitment to honour, empower, and unite our diverse strengths as we champion a shared vision of Indigenous mental wellness from coast to coast to coast.

FPWC also became a dedicated member of the **Canadian Network in Health in All Policies**. This included participating in the inaugural meeting, helping to develop a strategic plan and presenting on how to work with First Nations organizations in relational and reciprocal ways through a presentation entitled *Mental Wellness: First Nations Governance and Priorities*.

Sister Organizations remain central to FPWC's work, as the organization continues to build and strengthen relationships that empower a collective of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis voices. For example, collaborative work was undertaken with the *Anishinabek Nation, Assembly of First Nations, Chiefs of Ontario, Feather Carriers, and Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations*.

In addition, FPWC pursued partnerships with non-Indigenous organizations from coast to coast to coast and has continued our collaborations with, among others, *Healthcare Excellence Canada, the Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) Ontario, and School Mental Health Ontario*. FPWC also worked closely with government partners including *Indigenous Services Canada, Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, and Canadian Heritage* on a variety of projects.



## NEIHR Projects

FPWC is a community partner member of the Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) program funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The NEIHR program consists of nine centres located across the country focused on community-based and Indigenous-led research to address distinctions-based health needs. FPWC has ongoing collaborations with both the Ontario and Saskatchewan NEIHRs. Within the Ontario NEIHR, FPWC has been working with research partners from the Healing from Trauma and Reducing Addiction group, together with Dr. Alanaise Goodwill (University of British Columbia - Okanagan) and Dr. Holly Graham (University of Saskatchewan).



**pihtikwê** VISITS WITH  
FIRST NATIONS  
PSYCHOLOGISTS

Based on these collaborative efforts, FPWC is launching a first-of-its-kind **podcast series**, [pihtikwê: Visits with First Nations Psychologists](#), in which conversations with noted and experienced First Nations mental wellness practitioners discuss strengths-based and cultural approaches to healing and care.

## Research Partnerships

In 2023-2024, FPWC continued to lead and contribute to various ongoing research projects with Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and noted Canada Research Chairs. These include, among others: First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce Realist Review (Dr. Victoria Smye - University of Western Ontario; FNHMA; Thunderbird), Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (Dr. Suzanne Stewart - Waakebiness Institute for Indigenous Health, University of Toronto; Dr. Bobby Henry - University of Saskatchewan), Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos (University of Toronto) and Dr. Renee Linklater (Shkaabe Makwa, Centre for Addictions and Mental Health), Anishinabek Nation Dementia Project (Dr. Jennifer Walker - McMaster University) as well as Aaniish Naa Gegii: the Children's Health and Well-being Measure (Dr. Nancy Young - CHEO).

Recognizing the distinct gifts that each organization brings, FPWC is excited to use our collective intelligence and diverse knowledge to continue forging a stronger future for Indigenous health and wellness.



FPWC continues to be an active member of several national groups. For example, FPWC has been central to the **First Nations Mental Wellness Data Working Group** and their efforts. Members of the Working Group, which include representatives from the AFN, Thunderbird, FNHMA, National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC), First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), ISC as well as Dr. Amy Bombay (Dalhousie University) and Dr. Chris Mushquash (Lakehead University), work collaboratively to advance the use of data to support the self-determined, community mental wellness goals of First Nations. In spring 2023, FPWC led the coordination of the Working Group's first face-to-face gathering where members were able to come together in ceremony to develop strategic objectives, a set of values and principles, as well as an agreement to align its work with the FNMWCF.

FPWC is also a member of the **Task Group on Mental Wellness**, part of the *COVID-19 Public Health Working Group on Remote and Isolated Communities*. This group developed a [series of 4 reports](#), which provide recommendations and wise practices to support and promote mental wellness during and post-COVID-19 among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, with a focus on northern communities.

In April 2023, FPWC was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the **Indigenous Integrated Youth Services Network**. This network helps ensure that youth have equitable access to the mental health and substance use services they need. Building on this, FPWC was invited to, and subsequently joined, a CIHR-funded team lead by Dr. Chris Mushquash (Lakehead University) and Dr. Srividya Iyer (McGill University) to undertake and support research on youth mental wellness services.

## Joint National Youth Council

Throughout 2023-2024, FPWC and Thunderbird Partnership Foundation established a new joint National Youth Mental Wellness Council to lead and support the work of our organizations. The Council includes diverse and passionate Indigenous youth leaders aged 18-29 from coast to coast to coast. This group of changemakers will provide perspective, guidance, advice, and lead projects related to Indigenous youth mental wellness as well as gain personal and professional training, skills, and experiences. The inaugural meeting was held in March 2024. The participating youth were encouraged to reflect on what they would like to accomplish and develop through their participation on the Council, as well as what key activities would be helpful to guide these aims.

Going forward into 2024-2025, FPWC is excited about new opportunities driven by the strengths and expertise of the Council to enhance its work and specifically to reflect the voices of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth.



## Canadian Heritage Project

FPWC was one of several organizations that supported Canadian Heritage to collect feedback regarding commemoration activities for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Two key objectives drove this project, including:

- Identify activities that create awareness and commemorate the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or honour residential school survivors, their families, and communities.
- Identify and develop programming for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

FPWC hosted focus groups with survivors, their families, and community members to learn how commemoration funding can best meet the priorities and needs of Indigenous communities. The information collected will be used to inform how Canadian Heritage structures their future funding opportunities.



November 7th, 2023 - St. John's, Newfoundland





## **School Mental Health Resources**

FPWC continued the development of school-based resources to support Indigenous student mental wellness. These resources will provide school administrators, teachers, and support staff with tools, strategies as well as resources to build capacity to support Indigenous students. An additional resource is being developed for Indigenous parents and caregivers, which aims to enhance their knowledge and skills to advocate for, as well as to support, their children in the education system.

Inuit and Métis partners supported the review of each resource to ensure representation was reflected. In addition, FPWC is working with School Mental Health Ontario to develop visuals and graphics to enhance the resources' accessibility and efficacy. Together, we will be looking to implement these resources in provincial and federal schools in Ontario in the upcoming year.

## **Indigenous Crisis Debriefing**

Guided by an advisory committee of Indigenous leaders in culturally-based mental wellness services, FPWC developed an Indigenous Crisis Debriefing approach to support workforce wellness. The approach is built on cultural strengths and an understanding of spiritual wellness.

Five focus groups were held with Elders, Knowledge Carriers, and language speakers from coast to coast to coast. This enabled us to learn about traditional methods of caring for the community in times of need. The focus groups' discussions informed the development of a strengths-based approach, incorporating the importance of being grounded in place and on the land. This resource on crisis debriefing will assist First Nation community frontline workers, support staff, natural helpers, Elders, and knowledge carriers in managing emotional distress following the response to a critical incident. The model will be disseminated to communities for implementation among Mental Wellness Teams and service providers.

# Collective Intelligence

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## Research Agenda

This year, FPWC undertook significant collaborative efforts to develop a **Research Agenda** with the view to determine where and how to best focus the organization's research and knowledge-sharing strategies and support the four main objectives of our Strategic Plan. This Agenda outlines FPWC's primary research interests as well as a corresponding research strategy to guide current and future work to ensure Indigenous Knowledge and evidence is at the forefront of each project and study on which FPWC works and contributes. The five broad research priority areas include: 1) Collective Intelligence; 2) Wise Practices; 3) Indigenous Voices; 4) Strengths-Based Approaches; and 5) Knowledge-Sharing

Using a strengths-based approach grounded in Indigenous research principles, such as OCAP, FPWC has been operationalizing its research priorities through two research streams. *Stream One: Collective-Intelligence Scholarly Contributions* focuses on scholarly contributions, while *Stream Two: Research Support, Reporting, Empowering, and Advocating* focuses on the use of research as a vital means of supporting, reporting, empowering, as well as advocating for change. These streams aim to empower the workforce, groups, and organizations that FPWC serve through knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Through new and ongoing research activities, the Research Agenda has been driving unique cross-sectional work to enhance wise practices and capacity of the Indigenous mental wellness workforce as well as strengthen Indigenous mental wellness more broadly.

**Stream 1**  
Collective-  
Intelligence  
Scholarly  
Contributions

**Stream 2**  
Research Support,  
Reporting,  
Empowering, and  
Advocating



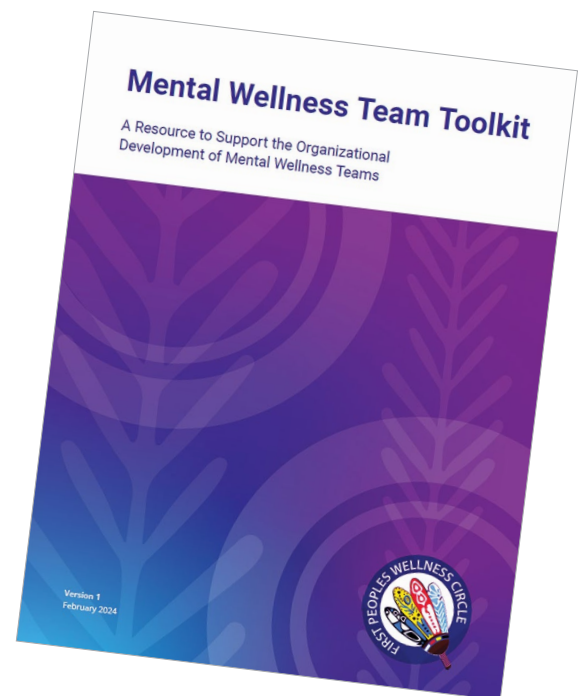
## Evaluation

In 2018, the FNMWCF Implementation team identified the need to evaluate the use and impact of the Framework. As a result, an Evaluation Sub-Committee, led by FPWC, was formed, to develop an evaluation model. Since then, FPWC has engaged more than one hundred individuals, including Elders and Knowledge Carriers to support this evaluation. As a result of this work, *Telling Our Stories and Celebrating Our Successes: A Model for Place-Based Monitoring and Evaluation* was approved by the sub-committee in the winter of 2024. The model grounds the practice of monitoring and evaluation in culture and local knowledge systems in a way that empowers communities to drive the process. It is premised on the understanding that good monitoring and evaluation begins and ends with the development and nurturing of meaningful relationships. This ensures the process is grounded in the values of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, with self-determination as the ultimate goal.

In the next year, FPWC will be working with our Sister Organizations to link indicators and community-based evaluation and to pilot this work. FPWC believes that the approved model has potential beyond its applicability to the FNMWCF and that its broader application could help to reduce the administrative burden faced by First Nations while supporting them to use evaluation outcomes to achieve systemic change.

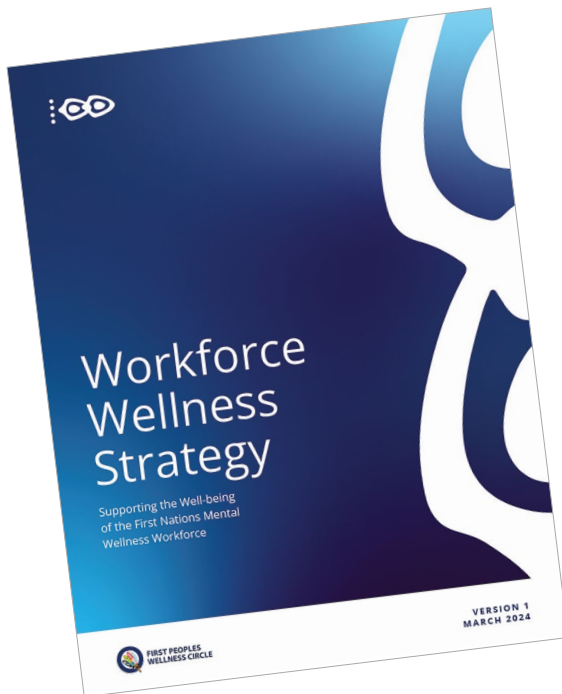
## Mental Wellness Team Toolkit

The *Mental Wellness Team Toolkit: A Resource to Support the Organizational Development of Mental Wellness Teams* supports the ongoing development of the over 60 MWTs that support the well-being of individuals, families, and Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast. Guided by the elements of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose, found in the *First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework*, this resource is perfect for a team that is looking to further grow and develop. It is also an excellent resource for any worker or team planning to create or build a new program, as well as for wellness workers that are looking to expand their understanding of ongoing design, development, implementation, review, and evaluation.



## Workforce Wellness Strategy

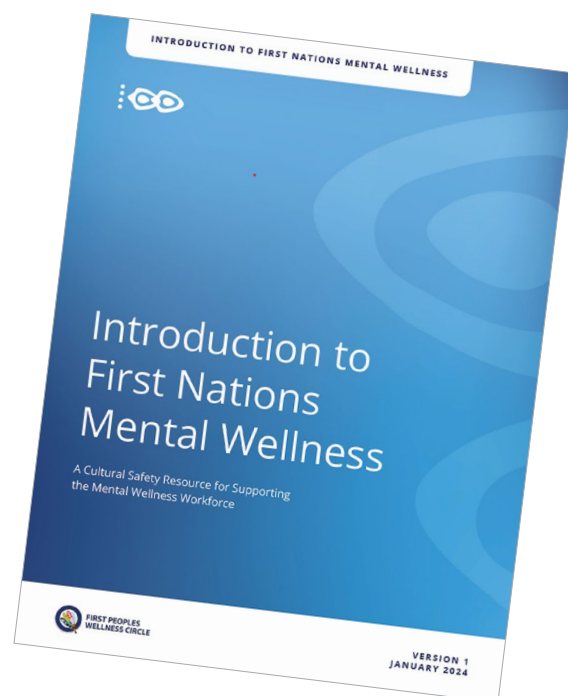
Informed by its own experienced workers, the *Workforce Wellness Strategy: Supporting the Well-being of the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce* provides pathways, strategies, and recommendations to enhance the well-being of the Mental Wellness Workforce that serves First Nations communities. This strategy identifies the shared responsibility we all have to support worker wellness as well as recognizes Wellness Focus Areas, which are further explored within different themes, descriptions, and specific strategies. The strategies listed in each theme support the wellness of the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce and the overall implementation of the Workforce Wellness Strategy.





## Introduction to First Nations Mental Wellness

The *Introduction to First Nations Mental Wellness: A Cultural Safety Resource for Supporting the Mental Wellness Workforce* provides important and foundational information on mental wellness from a First Nations lens in an accessible and concise format. Wellness workers have shared that workers and organizations often have an onus to provide foundational information to external partners about who they are, what they do, and why they do it. It can support relationships with, among others, partners (including governments, regulatory bodies, Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations) as well as new leadership in the community.



These resources are being shared with the Mental Wellness Workforce through ongoing dialogue, regional gatherings, workshops, booths at events, meetings, and presentations. FPWC has received significant interest in these resources, as well as additional feedback and suggestions on their content and the most impactful ways to share these with the workforce. Beginning in Spring 2024, these resources and initiatives will be made available to the Mental Wellness Teams, which will introduce them to the individuals, teams, and communities they aim to support.



## Gathering Our Knowledge Bundles Project

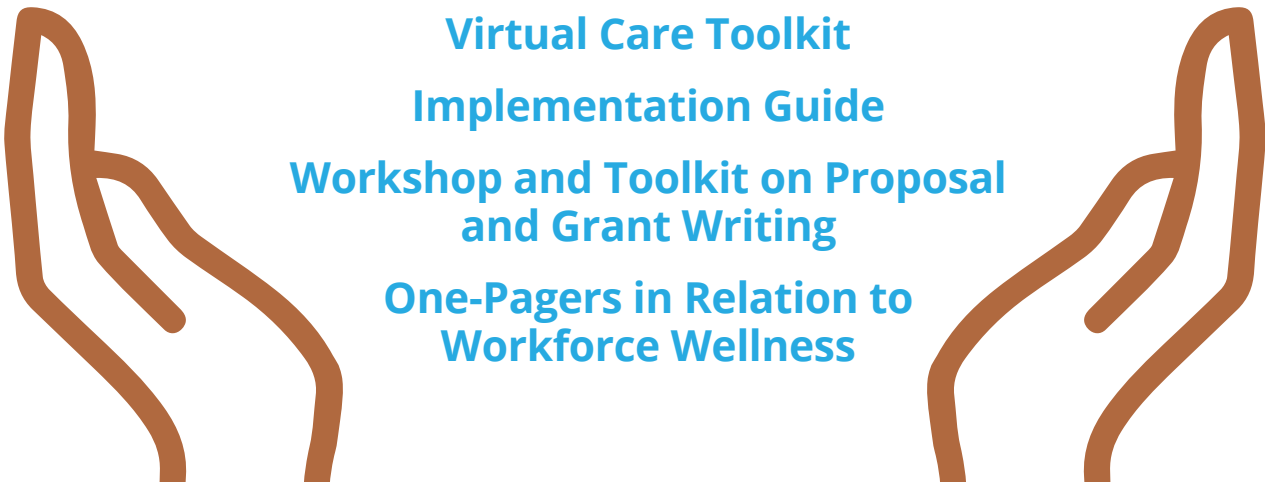
The Gathering Our Knowledge Bundles project is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, and focuses on engaging Mental Wellness Teams, IRS Workers, and Crisis Response Workers. The project aims to support the development and mobilization of community-owned, self-determined, and culturally relevant mental wellness tools and resources.

The outcomes have included the development and distribution of surveys that determined priority resource areas and preferred methods of delivery. An advisory committee, established in 2024, has

been helping to provide feedback on project deliverables. Members include representation from First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce, FPWC staff, partner organizations (such as Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and First Nations Health Managers Association), as well as an Elder.

Other outcomes include the delivery of Networking and Community Conversations, which gave participants the opportunity to gather and discuss the project. These discussions provided the team with cultural insights and feedback in terms of resources that will be developed. The outcome of these conversations will result in “Knowledge Bundles.”

### Identified “Knowledge Bundles” include:



**Virtual Care Toolkit**  
**Implementation Guide**  
**Workshop and Toolkit on Proposal**  
**and Grant Writing**  
**One-Pagers in Relation to**  
**Workforce Wellness**

Date	Location	# of Participants
November 22-23, 2023	Southern Chiefs’ Organization 2nd Annual Wellness Gathering – Winnipeg, MB	200
February 13-15, 2024	National Gathering for Indian Residential School Survivors (FPWC & AFN) – Vancouver, BC	93
March 25th, 2024	Community Conversation – Fort Frances, ON	20
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>313</b>

## Training and Development

### FPWC Learning Circles

Throughout 2023-2024, FPWC continued to use virtual platforms to host interactive Learning Circles for the workforce. These Learning Circles served as invaluable forums for sharing insights, discussing wise practices, and fostering innovation. By embracing virtual communication tools, we transcended geographical barriers and facilitated meaningful exchanges that enriched our collective expertise and collective intelligence. In total, FPWC hosted 6 Learning Circles. The Learning Circles integrated Traditional Indigenous perspectives and shared knowledge as well as approaches to help the workforce care for themselves, each other, and their communities. They provided interactive spaces for connection and peer support, as well as created opportunities to engage with expert facilitators to share knowledge and wise practices.

Topics included Self-Care, Crisis Response, Vicarious Trauma, Complex Grief and Loss, Messages from Spirit, as well as Indigenous Perspectives on Grief and Loss.

### *FPWC Virtual Learning Circles Attendance*

**Self-Care:  
Mindfulness &  
Sharing Wise  
Practices**



**36 Attendees**

**Crisis Response:  
An Indigenous  
Perspective**



**42 Attendees**

**Vicarious  
Trauma:  
An Indigenous  
Perspective**



**79 Attendees**

**An Indigenous  
Perspective  
on Complex  
Grief & Loss**



**88 Attendees**

**Messages from  
Spirit & Traditional  
Knowledge  
Sharing**



**18 Attendees**

**Indigenous  
Perspectives on  
Grief & Loss**



**90 Attendees**



Evaluation and feedback from the Learning Circles are invaluable to ensure we are meeting the needs of the workforce. This is what we heard:

**90%** of respondents reported that the learning circles are “very valuable” to their work

**86%** shared that the learning circles are a “very valuable” use of their time.



**88%**  
said the Learning  
Circle achieved  
the advertised  
learning objectives

**96%**  
would recommend  
the Learning Circle  
to colleagues





## Thunderbird Partnership Foundation Training

FPWC has also been promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing through our sister organization, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (Thunderbird), by promoting their training opportunities with the workforce. A total of 302 mental wellness participants registered for Thunderbird training, which is an increase in participation of over 50% from the previous year. Community Crisis, Trauma Informed Approaches, and Pharmacology were the most attended training opportunities.



SPT was involved in several initiatives that focused on training for the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce. Training included the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Training in Treaty Three Territory (Fort Frances), with the goal of furthering the implementation of the Framework in rural and remote communities.

Continuing efforts to enhance workforce wellness, SPT delivered a Workforce Wellness for Managers workshop in St. John's, NL, for the First Nations Health Managers Association. A Virtual Event was undertaken that focused on interacting and exploring grief and loss through traditional Indigenous perspectives. Two and a half days of Workshops and knowledge sharing were also delivered at a National Gathering in Vancouver for IRS Survivors and for the First Nations Mental Wellness Workforce.

**After participating in the training, respondents had the following feedback:**

**100%** agreed that the training was useful to their work

**94%** rated their understanding of how culture contributes to wellness as improving

**100%** rated their understanding of the benefits of applying culture to wellness as improving

**94%** rated their understanding of how culture contributes to wellness as improving

**93%** shared that that they would recommend the training to others

## Committees

FPWC actively participates in and contributes to various Advisory Tables and Committees. These collaborative efforts are crucial in advancing our Strategic Priorities. Listed below are the key Advisory Tables and Committees in which FPWC is involved.

- \* AFN Mental Wellness Committee
- \* Canadian Institute on Health Information - Cultural Safety Measurement Collaborative
- \* Canadian Network for School Mental Health
- \* First Nations Data Working Group
- \* FNMWCF Secretariat & Implementation Team
- \* ISC Mental Wellness Program Evaluation Advisory Committee
- \* Mental Health Inequity Report Steering Committee
- \* Professional Indigenous Council Advisory Table on Depression and Anxiety Related Disorders
- \* Standards Council of Canada - Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative Working Group and Child & Youth Working Group
- \* The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Pan-Canadian Health Inequalities Reporting Initiative (HIRI) Steering Committee
- \* 988 Implementation Advisory Table
- \* 988 Equity Task Team
- \* 988 Indigenous Reference Groups

Purpose, Hope, Meaning, Belonging



#FPWC



FIRST PEOPLES  
WELLNESS CIRCLE



# Anti-Indigenous Racism & Equity

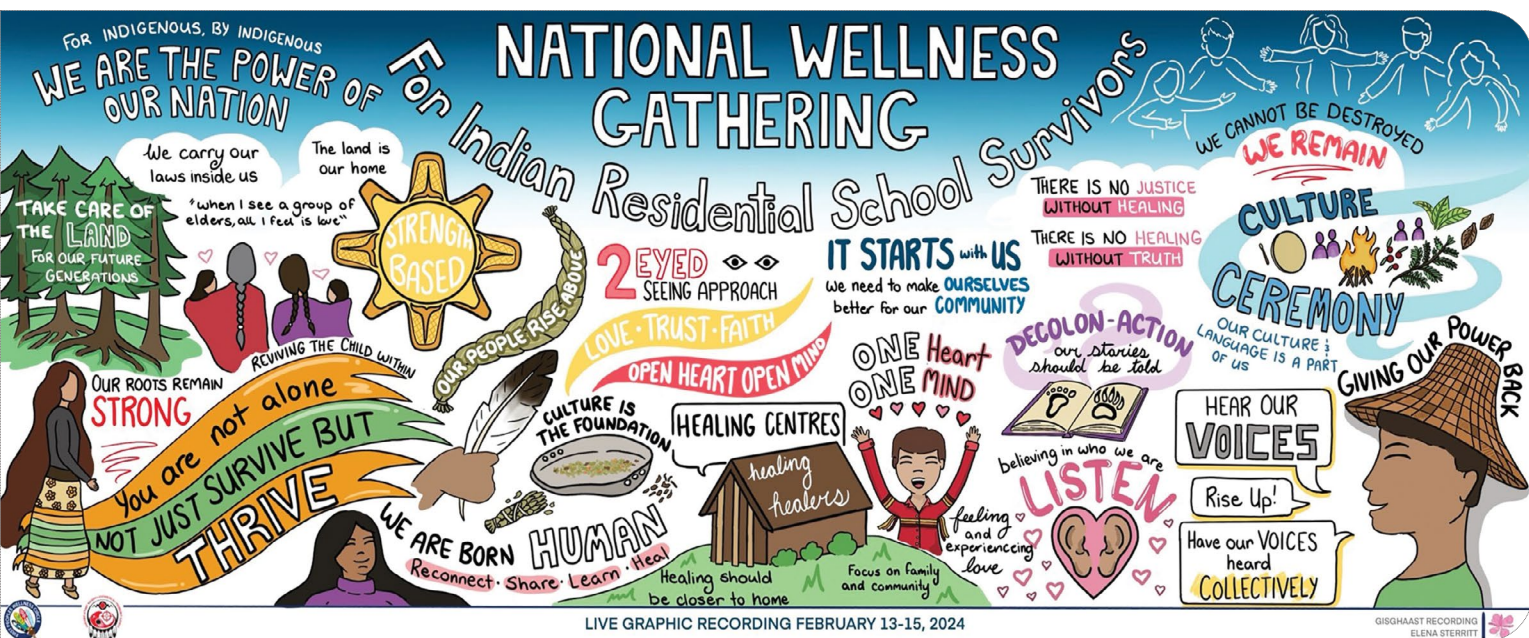
## National Wellness Gathering for Indian Residential School Survivors and Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program Workforce

From February 13-15, 2024, the National Wellness Gathering for Indian Residential School (IRS) Survivors transformed the Vancouver Sheraton Wall Centre on the unceded territory of xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, into a vibrant hub of connection, reflection, and healing.

Co-hosted by FPWC and the AFN, the Gathering saw an incredible turnout with **754 attendees**, and **999 registered participants**. This demonstrates the increasing interest in, and significant need for, more IRS survivor-focused events, gatherings, and support.

**754**  
Attendees

**999**  
Participants



**"You gave the answer:  
We're not paper. They  
can destroy all the  
paper they want, but  
that doesn't destroy  
us. We remain. And  
we sustain."**

*– Dr. Ed Connors, Vice-Chair,  
FPWC Board of Directors*

The Gathering was especially valuable in its capacity to spark deep conversations, create safe spaces for healing and connecting, as well as providing cultural activities for healing and wellness. Some of the Gathering's most profound and lasting moments were the sacred reunions it facilitated (some survivors reconnected for the first time since childhood). These powerful and moving reunions were stark reminders of the Gathering's significance and the need for long-term funding to continue supporting survivors, thrivers, and their families. These moments of reconnection amid shared grief and strength underscored the sacredness of our collective journey toward healing and reconciliation.

A recurring theme throughout the gathering was the crucial need for funding permanency for the IRS Resolution Health Support Program (RHSP). With funding set to end in 2024, the urgency to secure ongoing support was a consistent theme of discussion.

An expert panel featuring FPWC's Dr. Brenda Restoule, CEO, Dr. Ed Connors, Vice-Chair, FPWC Board of Directors, and Dr. Carol Hopkins, CEO, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, also discussed the IRS RHSP and the importance of Indigenous-led data collection and data sovereignty.

The Gathering offered survivors and members of the RHSP workforce opportunities to connect in person, receive support, and participate in needed cultural and wellness activities. It also enabled workforce members to participate in activities and breakout sessions facilitated by Indigenous experts and Elders, which built on their strengths and gifts.

The Gathering was a powerful reminder of the ongoing need to support survivors and their families. It especially underlined the importance of securing permanent funding solutions to ensure that the path to healing and reconciliation continues to be supported in a way that fosters understanding, respect, and progress. Moving forward, FPWC remains committed to fostering connections, promoting wellness, and advocating for the resources needed to honour and support Indigenous communities on their journey toward healing and resilience.

**"What we know is  
critical information  
that tells us about our  
stories of trauma, but  
more importantly,  
tells us about our  
stories of survival and  
resilience and how  
our culture, identity,  
language and  
practices, knowledge,  
are what sustains  
us, and what will  
sustain us into the  
future. It's our turn to  
identify the data; it's  
our turn to say this  
is what matters, and  
the government can't  
take that from us."**

*– Dr. Brenda Restoule, CEO*

Thank you to the mental wellness workforce and RHSP workforce, who continue to support our communities on the frontline. In addition, thank you to our Elders and children who have so much to teach us about our past, our future, and how important it is to walk on the path of healing together.

FPWC and AFN released a report offering a detailed account of the Gathering, including planning and preparations, event proceedings, and participant feedback. One of the key themes that emerged from the gathering was the need for permanent, sustainable support for IRS survivors. The discussions emphasized that healing is an ongoing journey, and survivors require continuous spaces to share their stories and receive support. The **National Wellness Gathering report** sheds light on these critical conversations and offers recommendations for ensuring the longevity of the IRS RHSP program.

## Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP) Formative Analysis

Following the completion of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP) Qualitative Assessment, the working group called for a Formative Analysis to explore the current and projected needs of the RHSP workforce. The purpose of the Formative Analysis has been to explore the impact of these identified program needs, offer recommendations to address these impacts, and support advocacy efforts regarding the sustainability of the program. Using a two-pronged approach, FPWC began documenting these emergent service pressures in 2022. This included:

- A survey among Contribution Agreement holders to determine how these events have affected the service needs and use patterns from the perspectives of managers and administrators.
- Focus groups to document the service needs from the perspectives of front line workers.

The working group was instrumental in developing the survey and focus group questions, identifying and inviting participants, identifying venues, and advising on the appropriate scheduling and timing of sessions.

**“My dream world is not [focused on] eradicating racism within the healthcare system or within the education system. My dream world is stepping outside of that and allowing or creating space and funding and opportunities for Indigenous children, youth, and Elders to come together and build that up themselves”**

*– AIR Roundtable Participant, September 22, 2023*



Contribution agreement holder surveys were completed in the Fall 2022. Focus groups were conducted between November 2022 and October 2023 to give all regions an opportunity to participate. Data collection concluded in the fall of 2023, with the completion of **32 contribution agreement holder surveys and seven focus groups**.

Data analysis was conducted in the winter of 2023 and a final report, outlining recommendations for the RHSP going forward, was prepared. The final report will be publicly available Summer 2024.



## Advocacy and Systems Change

FPWC has focused on the health and well-being of the mental wellness workforce and engaged in a variety of activities to support this objective. FPWC, along with our Sister Organizations and Western University, is engaged in a Realist Review to do a systematic review of funding inequities in First Nations health and mental wellness to explain outcome patterns to health, its impacts to systems and make policy recommendations for systems-level change.

This year, FPWC submitted 2 Pre-Budget Submissions in August 2023 and February 2024 advocating for the enhanced, sustainable and equitable funding of the mental wellness workforce and particularly the Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program (IRS RHSP). The first PBS outlines the critical significance and success of the program to initiate and maintain collective healing for those with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) such as IRS survivors and their descendants, as outlined in FPWC's Qualitative Assessment and data from the Formative Analysis. The second PBS utilized FPWC's Workforce Wellness Strategy, which identified recommendations on systems-level change to improve funding, access and equity to the mental wellness workforce.

Using these same FPWC reports, we also submitted a response to the Office of the Specialist Interlocutor (OSI) to advocate once again for the significant importance and need of the IRS RHSP workforce and the need for enhanced, sustainable and equitable funding. The response calls for the permanency of the program to support the long-term need of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people to address intergenerational and complex trauma from colonial acts of violence.

FPWC has also initiated work to examine systems-level change to address anti-Indigenous racism in the mental wellness system this past year. In the fall of 2023, FPWC partnered with Thunderbird to co-host 5 dialogue sessions to examine anti-Indigenous racism in the mental wellness system. We heard from almost 100 First Nations and Métis people who work in the system, trained as social workers, psychologists, addiction workers, community mental wellness workers as well as youth.

## **First Nations Knowledge and Evidence: Taking Action on Systemic Racism Through Cultural Safety**

In partnership with the Wolastoqey and Oeliantasoltigo Mental Wellness Teams of New Brunswick, FPWC co-led and co-developed a cultural safety initiative targeted at the mental health system. This project, funded by Health Canada, supported New Brunswick First Nations communities to ensure that professionals and paraprofessionals who deliver mental wellness supports and services meet minimum community driven standards. This includes their readiness, ability, and suitability to deliver services in a culturally safe manner.

Guided by a project working group with mental health leaders in New Brunswick, and supported by a consultant group, this project resulted in the development of a curriculum to increase mental health providers' awareness of privilege, racism, cultural competence, and cultural safety. An environmental scan to better understand the status of mental health services, systems, and existing cultural safety learning opportunities was conducted to help inform curriculum development. Focus groups with community members and non-Indigenous service providers were also held to understand gaps and concerns, as well as to receive direction on where and how learning needed to be tailored.

**“They do a lot of performative things to make it seem like they are doing the work, but on the ground, there [are] continued racism, stereotypes, and assumptions that [are] built into the education and health systems that have not been properly addressed. There is lots of “box checking”, but no real transformative change.”**

*– AIR Roundtable Participant,  
September 18, 2023*



The curriculum was led by carefully selected First Nations community Mentors. Learners (non-Indigenous mental wellness providers) engaged in a reflective learning process to understand the status of mental health services and systems for First Nations peoples in New Brunswick. The curriculum included three in-person learning sessions and a community site visit with their Mentors. A final project gathering was held in Fredericton, NB, on March 20-21, 2024, where Mentors and Learners came together to reflect on their learning journey.

While some communities may have cultural safety standards, goals, and expectations that exceed the work of this project, FPWC is excited to share the experiences and lessons learned from this work to support other regions in their goals for anti-Indigenous racism. Along with the working group FPWC intends to explore further funding to advance this work which is still in its infancy in New Brunswick and will continue to engage the professional associations on strategies to address anti-Indigenous racism.

## Rise Above Racism

In response to the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan in Québec, FPWC, Thunderbird and the FNHMA launched the [Rise Above Racism \(RAR\) campaign](#). This campaign brings to the forefront the issue of anti-Indigenous racism within the Canadian health care system where Indigenous people experience racism on an ongoing basis. Using TV and radio commercials, posters, educational resources, and social media campaigns, the RAR calls upon allies in the healthcare system to create a culturally safe, equitable, and accessible healthcare system. In 2023, the RAR achieved the first phase of the campaign, and a second phase is in discussion to continue amplifying the issue of anti-Indigenous racism in healthcare.

### Taking Action on Anti-Indigenous Racism through Cultural Safety



In partnership with New Brunswick Oeliantasolito  
and Wolastoqey Mental Wellness Teams



The campaign secured  
over **\$3M** in pro  
bono advertising space  
resulting in over  
**200 million**  
**impressions**  
through various outlets  
(television, digital  
advertising, print).



## Anti-Indigenous Racism Roundtables

In Fall 2023, FPWC and Thunderbird partnered to facilitate national dialogues to better understand First Nations, Inuit, and Métis experiences of anti-Indigenous racism within the mental health and addictions services sector regarding both training and practices contexts. Five roundtable discussions were held, and 96 participants including members of the Indigenous mental wellness workforce, addictions workers, health directors, cultural workers, youth workers, health counsellors and Indigenous scholars undertook comprehensive surveys. Participants shared challenges they experience working within communities and navigating inequitable and colonial systems of care. These challenges included themes of absence of services is racism, hiding behind jurisdiction ambiguity, colonialism via funding policies, racism generates avoidance, and racism leads to poor care. From these conversations emerged wise practices and potential interventions or approaches to prevent and respond to anti-Indigenous racism in mental wellness and addictions programs and services. Grounded in the lived experiences and evidence gathered, the report "[What Justice Looks Like](#)" was shared with Indigenous Services Canada with recommendations to advance individual, institutional, and systems-level change to address anti-Indigenous racism and promote culturally-based and Indigenous-led mental health and addictions services. These recommendations can best be identified as systems transformation, resistance and reclamation.



### ***What Justice Looks Like Report***

#### ***Confronting Anti-Indigenous Racism and Building Safe and Comprehensive Mental Health & Addictions Systems for Indigenous Peoples***

Together, FPWC and Thunderbird Partnership Foundation hosted 6 roundtables with 96 First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and non-Indigenous workers to hear about experiences of anti-Indigenous racism within mental health and addictions systems.

Anti-Indigenous racism in health care has been both a source of, and a reflection of colonial violence for decades. Recent events, such as the tragic deaths of Brian Sinclair and Joyce Echaquan, have brought this issue to the forefront, sparking public conversation and calling for systemic change.



## FPWC's Position on Racism in Mental Wellness

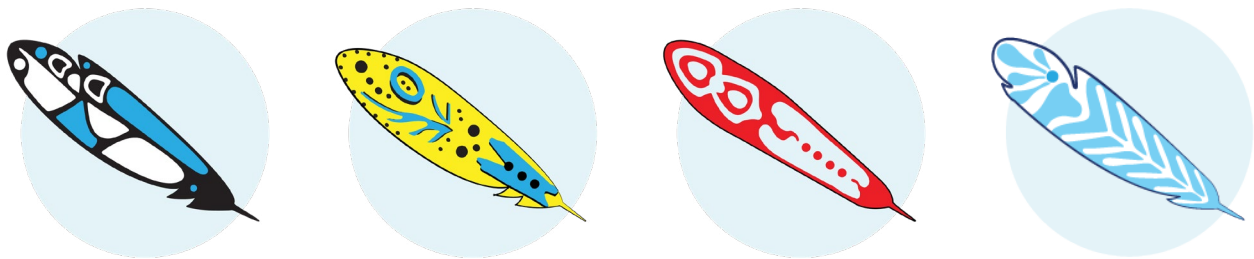
As a national leader in advancing holistic healing and wellness, built for, and governed by First Nations and Métis people, FPWC is committed to combatting racism, discrimination, and oppression in all forms. Based on the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (the Framework), FPWC defines mental wellness as being inclusive of mental health and addiction. Truth must come before reconciliation; thus, our commitment is based on the following foundational truths:

- \* Anti-First Nations racism exists at the systemic, institutional, and interpersonal levels within healthcare settings;
- \* First Nations peoples hold unique, inherent, constitutional and Treaty rights within Canada, which include legal, political, social, cultural, and economic rights;
- \* The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms Indigenous rights to free, prior, and informed consent over all matters impacting our rights, and affirms our right to self-determination;
- \* First Nations peoples, as with all peoples, have a right to live a life free from racism and discrimination, including intersecting oppressions of ableism, ageism, misogyny, and homophobia/transphobia, among others;
- \* First Nations cultures are diverse, complex, and are intimately connected to place and language. These ways have sustained First Nations peoples flourishing on these lands since time immemorial;
- \* The current resulting inequality in health outcomes between First Nations and non-First Nations people in Canada is a direct consequence of historic and on-going colonialism; and
- \* Colonial harms are rooted in the disconnection from First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing. Thus, healing colonial harms includes rebuilding and reinvigorating First Nations ways.



**Based on these foundational truths, FPWC asserts the following rights and responsibilities in responding to anti-First Nations racism in mental wellness:**

- Combat bias and prejudice in our own interactions with others, as well as in our organizations and communities;
- Defend our inherent, Treaty, constitutional, international, and human rights;
- Centre First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing in all work. These ways provide valuable direction in living a good life for First Nations and non-First Nations alike. This work needs to be led by Indigenous peoples and organizations, to actively confront and rebalance unequal relationships of power; and
- Celebrate the languages, wisdom, practices, gifts and sustainability of First Nations peoples.



**We call upon federal and provincial governments, health and mental wellness agencies, and non-First Nations peoples to:**

- Work in partnership with First Nations and other Indigenous organizations and governments to confront, explore and create strategies to combat anti-First Nations racism that exists in healthcare, particularly mental health and addictions;
- Confront the inequality perpetuated and maintained by systems of colonization and racism that continue to cause services to be inaccessible and unavailable to First Nations people;
- Acknowledge that cultural safety can only be achieved through cultural competence and humility, which is a necessary first step to address racism; and
- Provide sustainable and equitable funding to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by historic and systemic racism.





# Looking Forward

In the next year, we are eager to build collaborative efforts to meet our Strategic Priorities. Building regional capacity with the Regional and National Implementation Coordinators to address mental wellness priorities across regions and to improve visibility of the Framework will ensure FPWC is being responsive to the needs of its stakeholders - the workforce and the regions. FPWC is also looking inward to create mechanisms that can support the development of responsive services. We are eager to bring forward a National Advisory

Circle (NAC) made up of experts in the areas of mental wellness, culture, research, policy, data, and evaluation. The NAC will offer guidance and direction on initiatives and programs of FPWC. We will also be working alongside Thunderbird to host a National Youth Council that will provide insight and recommendations regarding how to meet the needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis young people. This relationship will be a reciprocal one where we will provide opportunities for mentorship, leading projects and supporting these young people to build their skills and knowledge in mental wellness.

As always, FPWC's core work will continue to build the capacity of the workforce by offering accredited training and access to a resource hub that will provide the workforce with tools that can increase their abilities to meet the needs of those they serve. We plan to continue to build a curriculum that seeks to improve skills and knowledge in working with children and youth, addressing trauma and managing the health emergency management needs of Indigenous communities. Implementation of the Worker Wellness Strategy will define both worker and leader tools that can be implemented to support the retention and health of our workforce. It is our intention to support both Mental Wellness Teams as well as the IRS workforce in these areas



as a way to improve competency and increase skills. We believe our project, Gathering Our Knowledge Bundles with PHAC funding, will build on the strategy by identifying, designing and delivering tools that support our workforce. In the coming year, we will bring together the workforce regionally and nationally to strengthen networks, collaborate and share, as well as to support their future work.

We believe strongly in the work we have begun on anti-Indigenous racism and are committed to working with our First Nations partners in New Brunswick to continue to advance this work. We will identify pathways to create change within the provincial mental health professional associations while strengthening our relationships with these groups.

By the end of the next fiscal year, it is our hope to have a path forward that defines the parameters of a National Indigenous Workforce Association with a strong governance model and operational plan. FPWC has also worked diligently to create a crisis debriefing model that can support worker wellness and is eager for its release in the upcoming fiscal year. We plan to pilot this work with our workforces along with other initiatives such as our evaluation model and student well-being resources targeted to schools and caregivers.

Lastly, we look forward to gathering more data on the efficacy of the Mental Wellness Workforce. This year we turn our focus to Ontario and examine the Mental Wellness Teams to learn about the innovation and the efficacy of their work. We are eager to understand how the shared funding model has improved access to services and supported communities to better meet their needs and priorities. Through all of this we anticipate another year of finding space at national, regional and perhaps, international tables that seek to change policy and systems that can improve health outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.



Ministerial Announcement for FPWC funding with PHAC and Health Canada. *Nipissing First Nation*

# Financial Report

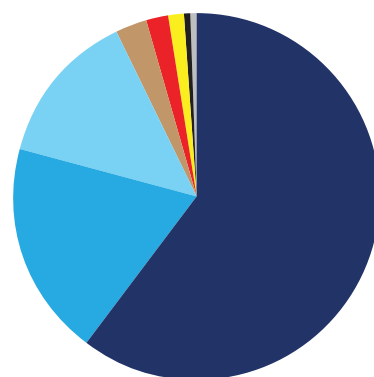
The financial health and stability of FPWC is supported by our main funders: Indigenous Services Canada, Health Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Their contributions have been instrumental in enabling us to deliver tools, resources, and training that support wellness and are tailored to the needs of First Nations communities. Over the past year, we have carefully managed our resources to maximize our impact and advance our strategic plan and priorities. We remain committed to transparency and accountability and are deeply grateful for the trust and support of our funding partners.

## Revenue

FPWC's largest funder remains ISC who, in addition to providing core funding to work with the mental wellness workforce, has also funded our work with the IRS RHSP workforce, supported work of First Nation Data Working Group and anti-Indigenous racism roundtable discussions. FPWC was also awarded funding by ISC – Ontario region to conduct an analysis of MWTs in Ontario to identify successes, ongoing needs and wise practices on mental wellness of a shared funding model to support First Nations in Ontario. This project began in January 2024 and will continue until March 2025. FPWC will be gathering data to learn more about the experiences of MWTs in Ontario in order to plan for continued investments and sustainability.

Funding from Health Canada on the anti-Indigenous racism project in New Brunswick was enhanced in 2023-2024 resulting in greater revenue from HC for FPWC this year. PHAC is a new funder on the Gathering Our Bundles project. This project began in April 2023 and will culminate in March 2025. Canadian Heritage project began in August 2023 and will culminate in August 2024.

Additional smaller revenue streams have been received from our partners such as Thunderbird, SMHO and ON-NEIHR on collaborative projects as well as self-generating funds from memberships and speaking/consultation fees from our CEO.



- ISC
- Health Canada
- PHAC
- Thunderbird
- Canadian Heritage
- SMHO
- NEIHR
- Self-Generating



## Expenses

The bulk of our expenses are directed to salaries & benefits, project activities, and travel and meetings that are spread out across our many projects and initiatives. The smaller expenses related to conferences and professional development largely aims to make our resources accessible, provide knowledge transfer activities about our projects and to network with the stakeholder workforce and like-minded organizations working on mental wellness. FPWC also engages other professionals such as graphic designers and translation services to promote our projects as well as professionals who provide organizational support such as IT, legal and financial (audit) services.



## Audit

FPWC has re-engaged Mr. Tony McGregor of Freeland Caldwell Reilly (FCR) who will be conducting the annual audit for all financial transactions between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024. It is expected that the audited financial statements will be presented to the Finance committee and to the Board of Directors and General Membership for the Annual General Meeting scheduled for August 21, 2024. For those interested in FPWC's audit financial statements, please direct your inquiries to [finance@fpwc.ca](mailto:finance@fpwc.ca).

## Future Outlook

FPWC is pleased to have negotiated a new 5-year extension on our funding agreement that provides some sustainability opportunities to plan for meeting the ongoing needs of our stakeholders, the mental wellness workforce. FPWC will continue to look for financial efficiencies to improve financial management and reduce financial risks while seeking additional funds to further advance our strategic priorities in the coming year.



# Acknowledgements

First Peoples Wellness Circle extends our sincere gratitude to all those who have supported and contributed to our work and efforts over the past year. We are thankful for the dedication and hard work of our staff, the invaluable guidance from our Advisory Tables and Committees, and the support of our community partners, funders, and stakeholders. Your collective efforts and investments have been instrumental in advancing mental well-being for First Nations communities across Canada. We also acknowledge the communities we serve, whose wisdom and experiences continue to inspire and inform our work. Thank you all for your continued commitment to advancing mental wellness and building a brighter future for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

## Partners:

- Thunderbird Partnership Foundation
- First Nation Health Managers Association
- Ontario Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research
- Healthcare Excellence Canada
- School Mental Health Ontario
- Feather Carriers
- Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN)
- Assembly of First Nations

## Funders:

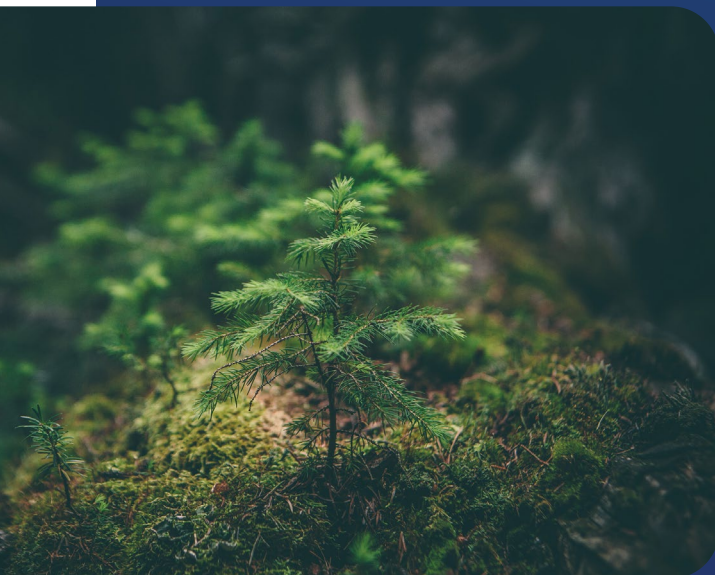
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Health Canada
- Public Safety Canada

## Stakeholders:

- Mental Wellness Teams
- Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program workforce
- First Nation regions and Political and Territorial Organizations

## FPWC:

- Staff
- Board of Directors



# Gatherings, Conferences, & Presentations



Our CEO and staff delivered keynotes, panel presentations, and workshops, and attended numerous conferences across the country, engaging with diverse groups. For a detailed list of these events, please refer to the table on the following page.



Gatherings, Conferences, & Presentations	Location
Establishment of Network of Integrated Youth Services Networks	Montréal, QC
Family Violence impacts from COVID-19: Mental Wellness Task Force for Northern Public Health Working Group	Virtual
Supporting Mental Wellness in an Organization. Presentation to Anishinabek Nation Senior Leadership	Virtual
Panel presentation at Symposium on Child and Youth Trauma	Virtual
CCOH presentation on the Mental Wellness and Accessibility Act	
Presentation at Canadian Psychological Association on Cultural Safety Training of Psychologists in New Brunswick	Toronto, ON
Ministerial Announcement for FPWC funding with PHAC and Health Canada	Nipissing First Nation
Presentation to Public Safety Canada on Overview of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework	Virtual
Keynote address at the Atlantic Summer Institute	Virtual
National Gathering for IRS Survivors: Breaking the Colonial Mindset	Winnipeg, MB
Cultural Safety presentation	West Nipissing, ON
National Gathering on Unmarked Burials: Supporting the Search and Recovery of Missing Children (Participant)	Montréal, QC
Healing Our Spirit Worldwide - The Ninth Gathering (panel and workshop presenters)	Vancouver, BC
Grand Council Treaty 3 workshop	Virtual
National Summit on Indigenous Mental Wellness	Ottawa, ON
Issues of Substance Conference workshop	Vancouver, BC
ISC ON Joint Gathering	Toronto, ON
First Nations Health Managers Association's 11th Annual National Conference	St. John's, N.L.
Southern Chiefs' Organization Second Annual Wellness Conference: Caring for the Caregiver	Winnipeg, MB
TVO interview on addressing trauma	
Anishinabek Nation Dementia Conference, keynote and panel	Rama, ON
National Wellness Gathering for Indian Residential School Survivors, panels and workshops	Vancouver, BC
Knowledge Development and Exchange (KDE) Hub Gathering	Vancouver, BC
Alberta Regional Mental Wellness Crisis Response Team	Banff, AB
Chiefs of Ontario - First Nations Community Wellness Conference	Toronto, ON
Québec Mental Wellness Team Regional Gathering hosted by Chisasibi Mental Wellness Team	Montréal, QC





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First Peoples Wellness Circle  
857 Yellek Trail, Nipissing First Nation  
North Bay, ON, P1B 8G5  
[www.fpwc.ca](http://www.fpwc.ca)

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