



Culturally Safe Engagement: What Matters to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) Patient Partners?

Companion Guide







About the BC Patient Safety & Quality Council

Our work leads to better health care for British Columbians. We deliver the latest knowledge from home and abroad to champion and support high-quality care for every person in our province. This system-wide impact requires creativity and innovative thinking, which we combine with evidence-informed strategies to shift culture, improve clinical practice and accelerate our partners' improvement efforts.

We also understand that meaningful change comes from working together. We are uniquely positioned to build strong partnerships with patients, care providers, health leaders, policymakers, senior executives, academics and others. These connections enable us to nurture networks, recognize the needs of our health care system and build capacity where it is needed the most.

If you want to improve BC's health care system, visit **BCPSQC.ca** to access programs and resources that can help you start today.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Gitxsan Hereditary Chief Sim'oogit Ma'os, Bill Blackwater Jr. for co-designing and co-chairing this session, to Indigenous patient partners for sharing their knowledge and to health care partners for respectfully listening.

We also thank **Bert Azak** for the creative insight and inspiration his work provided to the development of these cultural safety and humility guides. His unique artwork and designs embody the spirit of cultural safety, humility and foundational message of collaboration.

Bert's log cabin design on the cover page depicts the four main crests of the Nisga'a Nation within the tribal houses. The log cabin is a representation of unity and a house of healing (Wilp Haldawks). Orange was added to the background to recognize the 215 initial children found and the Every Child Matters cultural and spiritual movement.

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Reflections from Sim'oogit Ma'os, Bill Blackwater Jr.

"Yes, time did fly by, but our message, important to the beginning of improving the relationship between Indigenous patients and health care providers, was brought forward through the work by BCPSQC and was successful. My biggest hope is that the witnesses and partners were convinced by the message to the extent that they continue seeking ways for their organizations to improve relationships with Indigenous patients, through collaboration with BCPSQC."

Patient Partners

- Victoria English, Blackfoot
- Duane Jackson, Gitanmaax
- Bill Blackwater Jr., Gitxsan
- Morris Amos, Haisla
- Patient Partner, Inuit
- Patient Partner, Kwantlen
- Christine Hunt, Kwakiutl
- Lee Cameron, Métis
- Linda Nelson, Métis
- Cherie Mercer, Nisga'a
- Tina Miller, Nisga'a
- Stanley Namox, Wet'suwet'en
- Carla Christman

Health Care Partners:

- BC Cancer
- BC Renal
- Doctors of BC
- First Nations Health Authority
- Fraser Health
- Interior Health
- Island Health
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions
- Northern Health
- Providence Health Care
- Provincial Health Services Authority
- Vancouver Coastal Health



Executive Summary

This guide to creating culturally safe engagements was created from the voices of Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) patient partners. The BC Patient Safety & Quality Council hosted an event centred around "What Matters to You in Indigenous Culturally Safe Patient Engagements?", where we heard from Indigenous patient partners about what makes them feel comfortable and safe during engagements.

From these meaningful discussions, eight key principles emerged along with a series of recommended actions to help and encourage health care partners to provide culturally safe patient engagement opportunities. The eight principles of culturally safe engagement are: awareness and understanding, learning and education, build relationships, prepare, kindness and empathy, respect, value and listen.

As you consider your role in creating a culturally safe space, please be curious and open to learning and listening as you engage Indigenous voices.

Download the at-a-glance resource, Culturally Safe Engagement: What Matters to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) Patient Partners?, at **BCPSQC.ca.**



Introduction

We often hear from health care partners who want to engage Indigenous patient partners but are unsure how to do so in culturally safe ways. To understand how to support them to do this in a good way, we invited Indigenous patient partners to tell us what matters to them when participating in a culturally safe patient engagement opportunity. We also invited health care partners to **witness** the event.

The event was held as part of our work leading "What Matters to You?" in British Columbia. The international initiative started in Norway in 2014, with the goal of encouraging meaningful conversations between patients, caregivers, families and their health care providers. It's a simple question that can have a big impact on care. When providers have a conversation about what really matters to the people they care for, it helps ensure that care is aligned with patient preferences, builds trusting relationships between patients, families and their health care providers and advances person- and family-centred care.

WITNESS:

To act as a witness to a patient partner's story is about being a compassionate and silent observer, giving attention to others without judgement and providing a space for partners to speak their truth.¹



Background & Context

This guide, and the at-a-glance resource it accompanies, supports health care partners to put cultural safety and humility into practice when engaging with Indigenous Peoples. The aim is to help partners understand what culturally safe engagements might look like while providing tips and suggestions on how to strengthen engagement approaches through a cultural safety lens.

To support the decolonizing of health care and ensure equitable access to high-quality care, Indigenous perspectives must be included in health care decision-making. Meaningful engagement with Indigenous patient partners is foundational to obtaining this perspective. In June 2021, Indigenous patient partners came together and shared what matters to them in making engagement opportunities more safe, meaningful and comfortable. This event was co-designed by Gitxsan Hereditary Chief Sim'oogit Ma'os, Bill Blackwater Jr., as well as Cathy Almost and Tammy Hoefer from the BC Patient Safety & Quality Council. Preparation meetings were held separately, before the event, for both patient partners and health care partners. These meetings were opportunities to build relationships, to clarify the purpose of the event, to clarify concepts and to explain the rationale and role of attending an event as a witness. Health care partners attended the event as witnesses so they could reflect and share learnings back to their respective organizations.



A series of key messages, recommendations and suggested actions emerged and have been pulled together into a framework within this guide. It aims to support the decolonizing of patient engagement and advance health and wellness through a high-quality health system that has cultural safety and humility embedded into its engagement practices. This understanding of cultural safety and humility in engagement practices is useful for anyone engaged in the health system – including administrators and practitioners – for planning, assessing and improving engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

When you're ready to start planning an engagement opportunity to hear Indigenous voices, it could be helpful to start with some self-reflection. The following questions may be useful prompts to begin your process in a meaningful way.

- Where do I start in my knowledge of leading culturally safe patient engagements with Indigenous Peoples?
- How can I approach this with the right self-awareness and humility?



Key Terms

The term **Indigenous** is used throughout this document to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. It's an inclusive and international term to describe individuals and collectives who consider themselves as being related to and/or having historical continuity with "First Peoples."²

Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience.³

Cultural safety is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.³

Using this Resource

This guide represents a shared vision of quality for culturally safe engagement which supports the practice of safe, meaningful and comfortable engagement activities.

This understanding of cultural safety and humility in engagement practices is useful for anyone engaged in the health system – including administrators and practitioners – for planning, assessing and improving engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

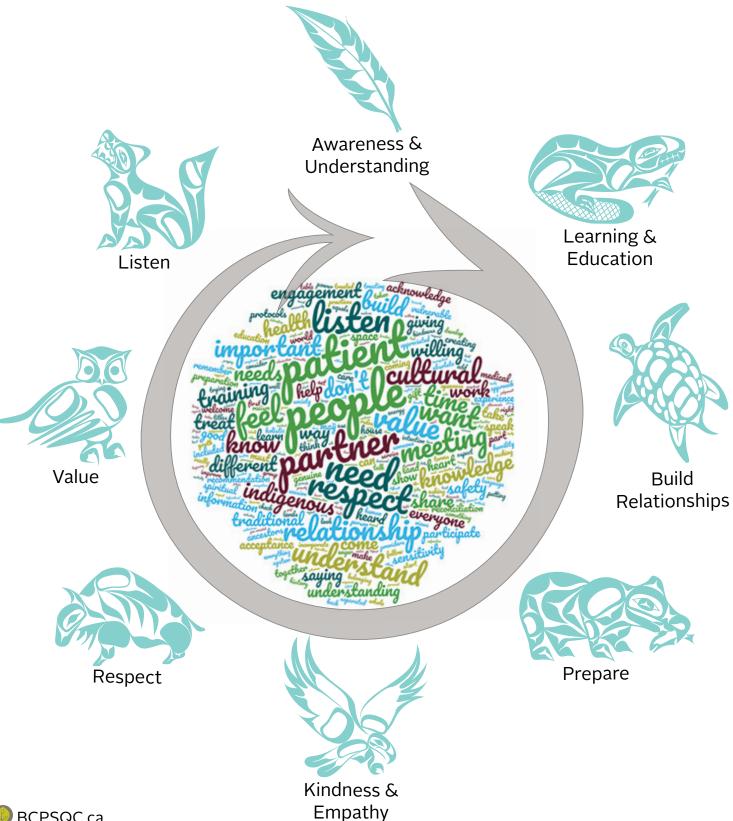
Indigenous communities follow different protocols and customs. We encourage you to discover the protocols of the land you live, work and play on.

As part of your journey in learning about cultural safety and humility, it's important to acknowledge the history of colonization and its impact on racism in health care.

Knowing the history of the health system, and how its institutions, relationships and processes came to be, is necessary to understanding people's experiences of care. How colonialism in Canada is recognized, represented and addressed profoundly affects the health and wellness of Indigenous Peoples and communities.⁴

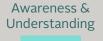


Key Principles in Culturally Safe Engagement



1. Awareness and Understanding

Key Message	Acknowledge the history of racism in Canada and the impact of systemic racism on us. Have a level of cultural awareness and sensitivity.			
Recommendation	Work to eliminate biases and stigma. Remember, relating health care experiences puts a patient in a vulnerable position and it may be triggering. Include questions about point-of-care aspects (individual interactions with health care partners) to better understand our experiences.			
Action	Start off well: Provide a meaningful land acknowledgement. Research it, write it down and incorporate it into meetings. Get to know people from the territory you live, work and play on. Be a learner, read about the Indigenous culture in your area, attend local Indigenous events and activities. Make a commitment to cultural safety and humility. #ItStartsWithMe Get to know Métis history and culture in BC. Avoid translation exhaustion so that you have some cultural competence. It's not Indigenous Peoples' job to educate you. We come with our own biases, it takes self awareness and time to understand our own biases. Spend time considering your biases.			





Learning &

Education

Build Relationships



Prepare

Kindness & Empathy



Respect

Value

Listen





2. Learning & Education

Key Message	Humility is the key to being influenced by Indigenous culture and open to learning.	
Recommendation	Be open to learning from Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge. Learn about cultural practice, protocols and how to appropriately engage with Indigenous peoples.	
Action	Complete training before working with us. View BC Patient Safety & Quality Council and First Nations Health Authority Learning Series. Research local cultural practices and protocols. Required reading: In Plain Sight Recommendations, Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, Jordan's Principle, Joyce's Principle.	



Learning & Education





Prepare

Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value

Listen

3. Build Relationships

Key Message	Get to know us to balance the power dynamic, enable collaboration and build trust.			
Recommendation	Prioritize building relationships with us. Consider ways to learn about culture and connect with Indigenous Peoples. Work with us to understand what is needed to create a balanced power dynamic - an equal relationship.			
Action	Connect with us. Develop a personal introduction so we get to know you beyond your business card. Include: Who you are as a person, what is your background, why are you in health care? Include time for relationship-building throughout the project. Always take extra time for introductions and check-ins. Be aware of sensitivities in building relationships due to generational trauma. We suggest you consider the need to create an action plan for trauma-informed practice.			



Learning & Build Education Relationships



Prepare S







Value

Listen

Respect

4. Prepare

Key Message	Provide documents well in advance of the meeting and allow opportunity for questions to be asked.			
Recommendation	Provide information before the meeting to set and manage expectations. Create an environment of sharing and inclusion. Think about safety, the value in sharing our experiences and valuing everything and everyone around us.			
Action	Be aware of cultural impacts on timing. Be prepared to be flexible. Creating safer spaces takes time. Make pre-meetings and debrief standard practice so we are prepared for meetings and know where to focus energy. Ask us if email communication is ok or if mailing printed materials is preferred. Check if we're able and comfortable using video conferencing/Zoom and what other support we might need to participate.			







Prepare





Respect







5. Kindness & Empathy

Key Message	Always be human first. Take a moment to ask yourself: Am I being empathetic, patient and compassionate?			
Recommendation	Leaving the table with a good feeling on both sides means we've achieved cultural safety.			
Include enough time at the start of a session for a meaningful welcomintroduction and set group guidelines with us. Greet everyone individually at the beginning of the session to welcom set the stage. Ask yourself: How else can I be kind, patient and comparduring this engagement?				









Prepare









Value Listen

6. Respect

Key Message	Show respect for Indigenous Peoples, cultures and nations, and understand we hold our ancestors close.			
Recommendation	Consider how patient partners can add value in engagement sessions to help ensure their role is not tokenistic. Show respect by ensuring this is a mutually beneficial partnership. Are everyone's needs being met as best as possible?			
Action	Set clear expectations for our role as patient partners and where we're able to contribute. Do not engage with us if solutions have been pre-determined. Have a pre-meeting with us to discuss our role and the engagement's purpose. Ask what matters to us and discuss how we want to work together.			







Prepare







Value

Listen

7. Value

Key Message	Acknowledge traditional expertise as well as our experience and knowledge. Self-determination has brought us to the health system in spite of challenges.			
Recommendation	Make space for sharing and learnings from traditional knowledge, grounding and traditional medicine.			
Action	Remind participants how challenging it is for us to share health experiences. Value our time and contribution by staying on point and acknowledging our input. Thank us for coming and explain next steps in follow up.			









Prepare









Value

Listen

8. Listen

Key Message	Have a sense of vulnerability, openness and humility. Come prepared to listen respectfully and actively.			
Recommendation	Test understanding by summarizing what was shared.			
Action	In person: Set the seating up in a circle or U-shape so participants will be facing each other while sharing.			
	Virtual: Do not multi-task. Stay focused with active listening.			
	Use breakout groups to allow room for us to participate.			
	Provide a private coaching setting to other participants and create a safe space for sharing & listening.			
	Reflect back to ensure understanding.			



Learning &

Build Relationships



Prepare





Value

Listen





Respect

Closing

We are grateful to our Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) patient partners for giving their time, thoughts and suggestions for a safer, kinder and more empathetic way in engaging Indigenous patients. Thank you for your generosity and your commitment to system change, for the greater good and for future generations. Thank you for being part of the Patient Voices Network and reminding us to always be human first.

References

- 1. Knowledge Nudge. Trauma-informed engagement, part 4: Bearing witness [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2019 Mar 12]. Available from: https://medium.com/knowledgenudge/trauma-informed-engagement-part-4-bearing-witness-7bfb6d4d922e
- 2. Allan B, Smylie J. First peoples, second class treatment: the role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Toronto: Wellesely Institute; 2015
- 3. First Nations Health Authority. Cultural humility [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Jan 1]. Available from: https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/cultural-humility
- 4. BC Patient Safety & Quality Council. BC Health Quality Matrix [Internet]. 2020. [cited 2021 Sep 1] Available from: https://bcpsqc.ca/matrix





Appendices

Appendix A: Discussion Summary

The following tables summarize the outcomes of the discussions held in June 2021 with Indigenous patient partners at the *Culturally Safe Engagement: What Matters to Indigenous Patient Partners?* event. These outline key messages, recommendations and suggested actions based on the principles developed by the patient partners.

These full recommendations were used to develop an at-a-glance resource which can be downloaded from BCPQSC.ca for further information.

Discussion 1

What matters in culturally safe engagement? What we heard:

The table provides a summary of the discussions, outlining key messages for creating a safe space, recommendations for change and actions to implement the proposed changes.



	Awareness & Understanding	Learning & Education	Build Relationships	Prepare
Key Message	Acknowledge history of racism in Canada and impact of systemic racism. Be aware and understand patients are being vulnerable when sharing their stories. Experiences tie into what we are trying to say. Have a level of cultural awareness and sensitivity.	Humility is the key to being open to learning Traditional medicine has value - be open to learning about these practices and the value it brings. There is value in learning from others.	Take time to become familiar with the people you are working with. This will enable collaborative working, a balanced power dynamic and empower a patient partner to engage. Building relationships is key to helping make everyone feel included and fully participate.	There should be info provided before the meeting so patient partners are prepared. I feel like I need a one-to-one with a health care partner so I can add more to the work.



	Kindness & Empathy	Respect	Value	Listen
Key Message	We all need to be treated as human beings first. Indigenous Peoples are speaking from both their head and their heart at the same time. Show genuine compassion. Appreciate a warm welcome, not just jumping into the agenda.	Show respect for our culture, nation and people. Show respect for our ancestors and understand we hold our ancestors close. Don't make our role tokenistic. Treat people respectfully – do not treat them like they are incompetent. Understand that Indigenous patient partners may or may not speak on behalf of other Indigenous patient partners.	Our traditional knowledge is valuable and important and it needs to be acknowledged. Coming into meetings, some people have their titles and their power. I may also have a title and I come with a world of experience and knowledge that is beneficial.	Partners around the table should come prepared to respectfully and actively listen to each other. This requires partners to have a sense of vulnerability, openness and humility.

	Awareness & Understanding	Learning & Education	Build Relationships	Prepare
Recommendations	Work to eliminate your own systemic biases and stigma. Take into consideration spiritual, economic and social aspects and their impact. Remember that health care experiences put a patient in a vulnerable position.	bring great knowledge. Be open to learning from them. Training for health care partners to learn	Prioritize building a relationship with patient partners. Take time to discover their strengths and needs. Work to create a balanced power dynamic - an equal relationship.	Send relevant documents ahead of time, host a pre-meeting before the engagement and debrief learnings.



	Kindness & Empathy	Respect	Value	Listen
Recommendations	Greet everyone individually at the beginning of the session to welcome and set the stage. Be human first. Offer things that are kind gestures to makes us feel at home and well taken care of.	Consider how patient partners can add value in engagement sessions to help ensure the role is not tokenistic. Show respect.	Make space for sharing and learnings from traditional knowledge and grounding, traditional medicine. How can I ensure a feeling of equality to everyone else as a patient partner?	Test understanding of what was shared. This demonstrates if you were listening and if you grasped the message that was conveyed.

	Awareness & Understanding	Learning & Education	Build Relationships	Prepare
Actions	Start off well: Genuine land acknowledgements include questions about point of care aspects to better understand partner experiences. Self-awareness to understand your own biases.	Health care partners to complete cultural safety and humility training before working with patient and public engagement, including cultural practices and protocols. Required reading: In Plain Sight Recommendations, Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations, Jordan's Principle and Joyce's Principle.	Include time for relationship building, not just at the start of the project but throughout. Make time for connecting with patient partners at and after meetings. Trauma informed: Do you need a safe space or counselling support if triggered?	Make pre-meetings and debriefs standard practice so patient partners are prepared for meetings and know where to focus energy. Consider mailing printed materials or ask if email is ok.



	Kindness & Empathy	Respect	Value	Listen
Actions	Include enough time at the start of the session for a meaningful welcome/introduction. Speak with the patient partner beforehand to understand what they may need to feel comfortable at the meeting.	Stay on point. Make sure there is a decision to be made that needs patient input. Set clear expectations for the patient partner role and where they will contribute. Create an action plan for trauma-informed practice on how to intervene and safeguard patient partners, if necessary. (Having support, follow-up). Don't make the role tokenistic or treat people like they are incompetent.	In planning, consider embedding a traditional knowledge lens. Follow up after the meeting to thank partners for coming and explain next steps.	Include time for "teach backs" when planning agendas. Provide coaching for the meeting chair to create a safe space for sharing and listening.

Appendix A: Discussion Summary

Discussion 2

What single message is important for you to give a health care partner leading engagement? What we heard:

The table provides a summary of the discussions, outlining key messages on what matters in Indigenous health care engagements, recommendations for change and proposed actions to implement the recommended changes.

	Awareness & Understanding	Learning & Education	Build Relationships	Prepare
Key Message	Be aware of historical aspects that created the need for Indigenous health care engagement. Understand the value of traditional knowledge. Be aware there are different protocols all over BC with 200 different tribes. Be familiar with the protocols of where you're visiting.	Cultural sensitivity training is an absolute must for non-Indigenous folks at these tables. Plan and prepare to make this a safe space.	Increase sense of belonging. Develop partnerships /relationships. Create a space for shared learning. Respect me when I come into the meeting, take time to get to know me and build a relationship with me. Break down the "us" and "them". Partners want to be equals at the table.	Planning, preparation and intention needs to be there for a safe space – bring something to welcome Indigenous partners in (sage pouches, etc.). Treat them as important, prepare the space, welcome in a good way and use language that is accessible. In order to create safe space, appropriate time needs to be included for cultural safety to be accomplished.



	Kindness & Empathy	Respect	Value	Listen
Key Message	Remember that health care is a service industry. Aim to help. It's important to have acceptance to enable a safe space for giving and sharing. Leaving the table with a good feeling. It's important to not lose sight of the human aspect. Humility is key. We speak with our hand on our hearts.	This isn't a third-party message. This is coming directly from our own experience – we're a single unit. Respect our knowledge and traditional practices. Respect me, land, culture and air. Treat people respectfully – don't treat like them like they are incompetent. We have a right to be who we are.	Treat shared information as a gift of self. It's important to treat people as what they're giving you is valuable. Treat it safely. Participants want to feel heard, listened to, validated, respected, valued for being there and included in the conversation. They want to feel that people are being genuine and that they are appreciated for their time and energy. There's value in what is important to us.	Health care partners need to truly listen to us and hear what we're saying to understand our being – don't let health care partner knowledge (your education or the way we have always done it) get in the way of listening to us share our knowledge.



	Awareness & Understanding	Learning & Education	Build Relationships	Prepare
Recommendations	Learn about the historical context and the communities you are working with (avoid translation exhaustion). How can you utilize traditional local knowledge?	Cultural sensitivity training for all health care providers and patient engagement providers. Incorporate traditional healing methods into those sensitivities.	Work with patient partners to understand what's needed to create an equal playing field, a sense of belonging and a space for shared learning. Empower partners to participate and be comfortable.	Provide information before the meeting to set and manage expectations Create an environment of sharing and inclusion. Think about safety, value and valuing everything and everyone around us.



	Kindness & Empathy	Respect	Value	Listen
Recommendations	Prepare meeting attendees ahead of the session to create a safe space for sharing. Meet with the patient partner beforehand to understand and indicate safety measures in case they are feeling triggered at any point and what actions should be taken to help.	Ensure all participants understand the role of the patient partner, what the question is and what's the personal goal of the patient in being involved. At the opening of the session, set a tone of mutual respect.	Training and preparation for the chair to enable participation and inclusive discussion. Reminder to attendees of value of sharing and how challenging it can be to share experiences.	Circle when you come together as a community, virtually, don't multi-task and stay focused with active listening.



	Awareness & Understanding	Learning & Education	Build Relationships	Prepare
Actions	Requirement for group members and meeting attendees to be aware of lands and communities they're working with. A basic understanding of the role and value of traditional knowledge.	Required cultural sensitivity training for health care partners/ engagement providers, including traditional knowledge. Understand translation exhaustion and do your homework as a health care partner.	Include time for one-to-ones to meet people where they are, not just in group settings. Allow for time in project planning for relationship building, from start to close. Be human first.	Pre-meet with patient partners to go over agenda, focus, expectations and any questions they may have. Prep materials and info for other attendees to help prepare the meeting space and set the tone.

	Kindness & Empathy	Respect	Value	Listen
Actions	Set terms of reference or working group rules to highlight humility and acceptance. Focus on collaborative working to help and serve patients.	Set clear guidelines of conduct for working groups and meetings. Create an action plan for trauma-informed practice on how to intervene and safeguard patient partners, if necessary (having support, follow up).	Follow up with patient partners after the session to thank them for their time, to let them know where they added value and how their contributions will be used to move work forward.	Standardize circle or U-shaped set up in engagement session venues (in-person). Use breakout groups virtually if the group size is over 10.

Appendix B: Additional Resources

BC Patient Safety & Quality Council: Cultural Safety & Humility Action Series

First Nations Health Authority: Creating a Climate for Change - Cultural Humility Resource Booklet

International Association of Public Participation: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Indigenous Cultural Safety: Collaborative Learning Series

BC Ministry of Health and First Nations Health Authority: Indigenous Engagement and Cultural Safety Guidebook: A Resource for Primary Care Networks

Provincial Health Services Authority: San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training







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