



National Collaborating Centre
for Indigenous Health

Indigenous-specific health impact assessment: What might it look like in Canada?

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January 29, 2026

Health Impact Assessment Webinar Series

Introduction

Dr. Diana Lewis



Dr. Elana Nightingale



Who's in the Zoom Room?

What best describes your current role?

- Student
- Research
- Government
- Community/Not for Profit Organization
- Indigenous Organization
- Private Sector
- Other

Who's in the
Zoom Room?

How would you rate your knowledge about
Indigenous Health Impact Assessment?

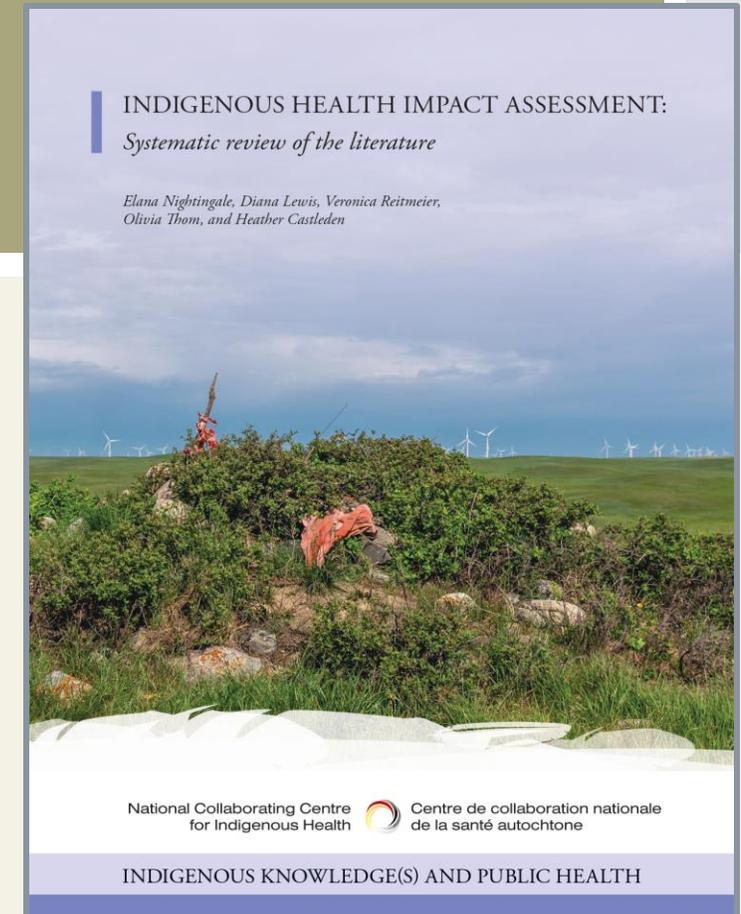
1 (not at all familiar)

5 (very familiar)

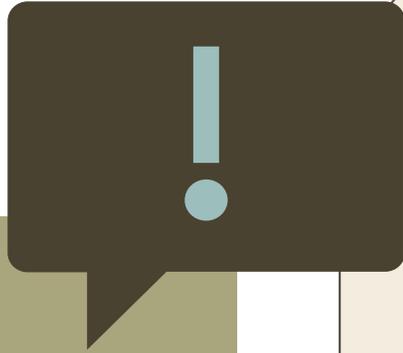


Outline

1. Key concepts
2. *Case study*: Pictou Landing First Nation
3. Literature Review: Methods
4. *Findings*: Best Practices
5. Moving forward: Challenges and gaps
6. Conclusion
7. Question period



Key Concepts



Indigenous Community-Specific Models of Health and Well-Being

- First Nations health
- Métis health
- Inuit health

Impact Assessment

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

- Identify and analyze potential impacts on the health and well-being of a population
- Comprehensive and engaged approach that emphasizes equity in the distribution of effects

Canadian Context

- Section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982)
- Impact Assessment Act (2019)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (2021)

Current Gaps

- **HIAs are voluntary within impact assessments**
- Lack of guidance on Indigenous-specific HIA processes
- Capacity of HIA practitioners

How are Indigenous communities impacted when western HIA approaches are used?

Pictou Landing First Nation

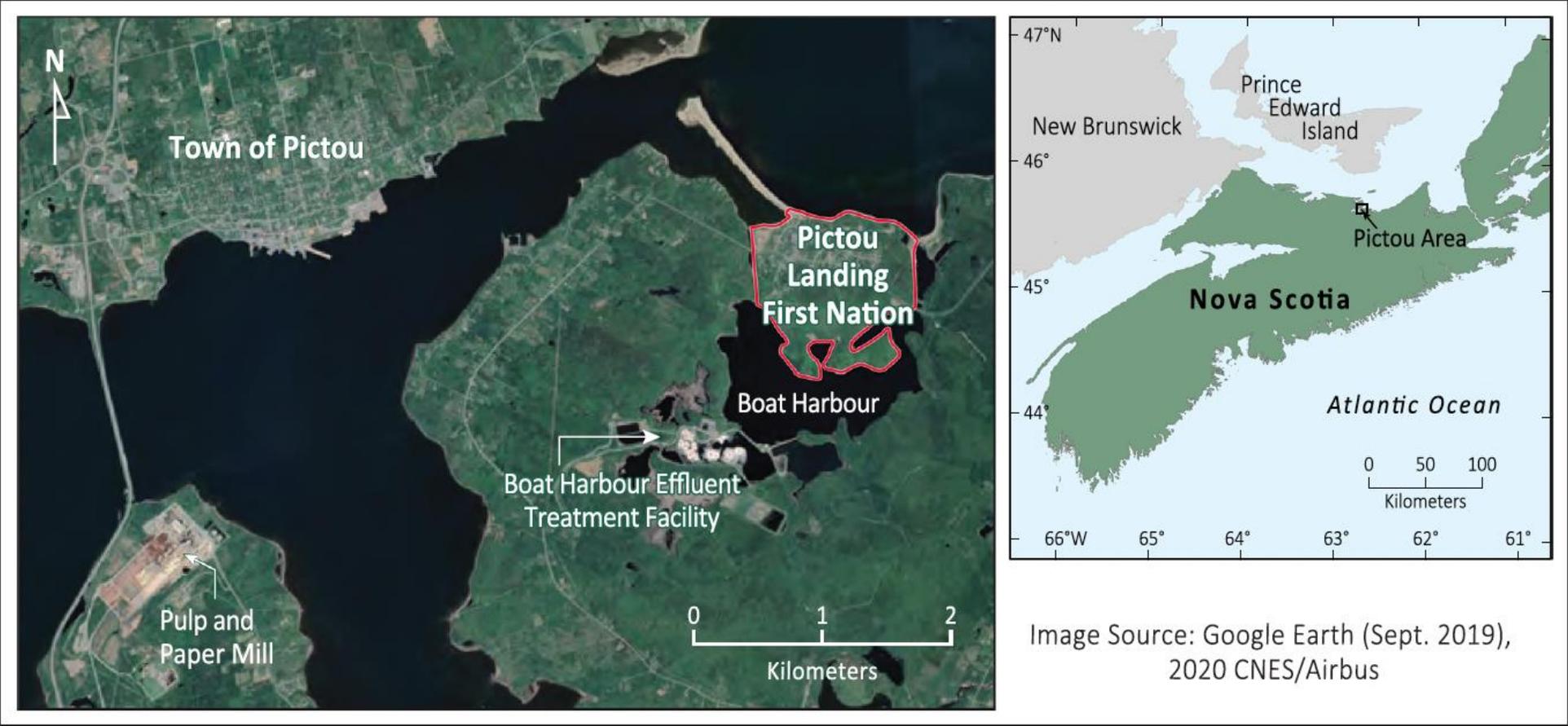


Figure 1
Map of Pictou Landing First Nation and Boat Harbour Effluent Treatment Facility
SOURCE: Google Maps (2019)

Boat Harbour Effluent Treatment Facility



(Source: <https://signalhfx.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/lagoonlarge-990x559.jpg>)

Literature Review

Indigenous-specific Health Impact Assessment

Literature Review Methods

Systematic review process

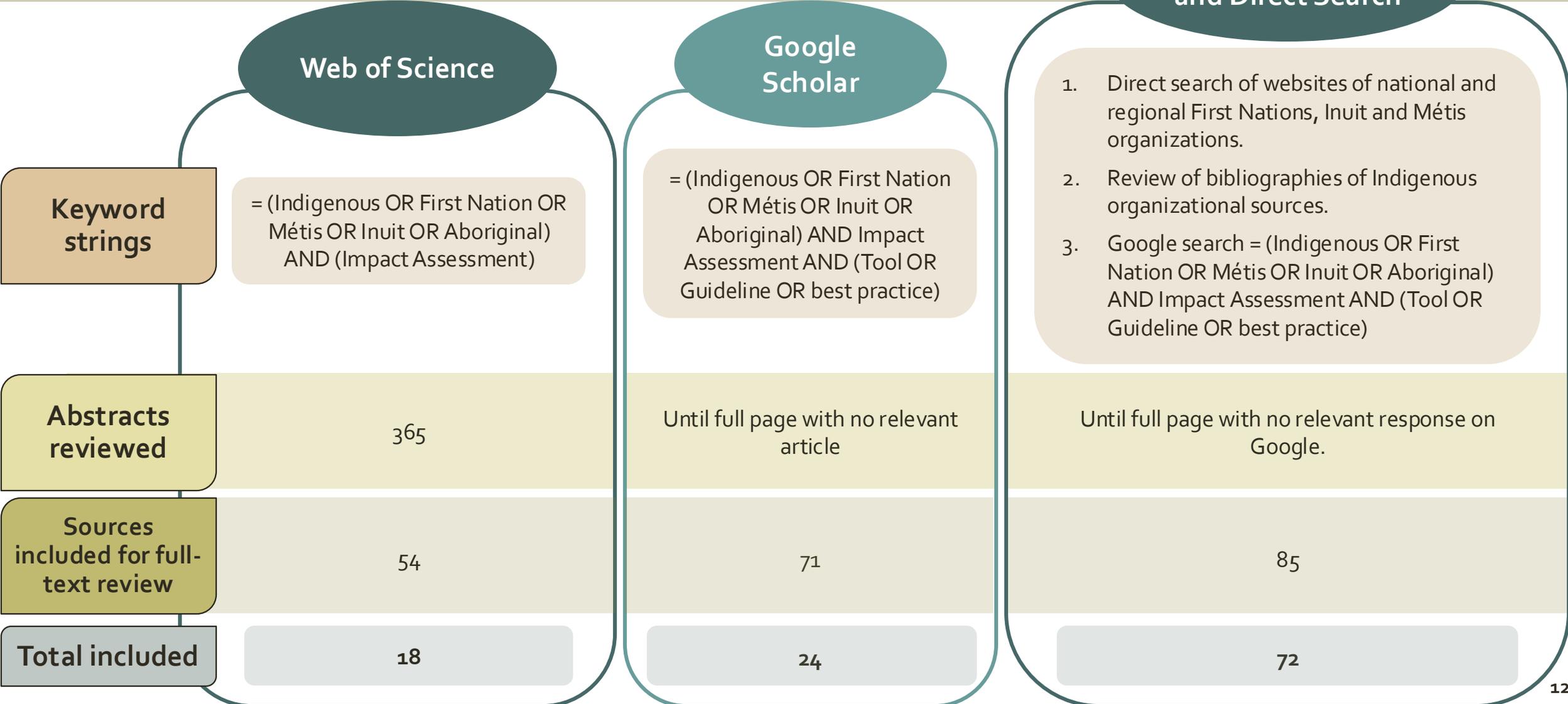
What is the existing base of evidence on Indigenous participation in IA processes?



Emphasis on sources produced by Indigenous researchers, organizations, and governments.

Literature Review Methods

Literature search process



Literature Review Methods

Analytical process

1.
What are the implications of community-specific health models for HIA?

2.
What Indigenous-specific HIA resources/tools exist?

3.
What best practices for Indigenous leadership in HIA have been identified?

4.
What are the challenges or barriers to Indigenous leadership in HIA?

Literature Reviewed and Findings

- Total of 114 publications
- Findings:
 - Canadian and International guidelines, resources, and tools to support Indigenous HIA
 - Best Practices for Indigenous HIA
 - Challenges for Indigenous HIA



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PAUKTUUTIT
 INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA



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 INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI



First Nations
 Health Council



Native Women's
 Association of Canada
 ~~~~~  
 L'Association des  
 femmes autochtones  
 du Canada



First Nations Health Authority



National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)  
 Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)  
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# Findings: Best Practices for Indigenous HIA

1) Be Indigenous-led

2) Determine potential impacts based on community-specific models of health and well-being

3) Assess impacts relative to community-specific baseline health data

4) Draw on Indigenous value-based methodologies

5) Prioritize cumulative effects

6) Respect Indigenous jurisdiction over Indigenous knowledge systems

7) Enhance relationships and communication between Indigenous Peoples, government, and industry

8) Integrate culturally-relevant gender-based analysis and equity considerations

# 1. Indigenous-led Impact Assessment

## Proponent-led

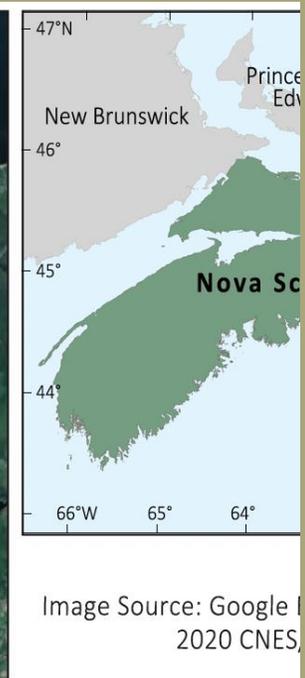
- Indigenous communities are stakeholders or communities of interest
- Proponent determines how/when/extent Indigenous priorities are included
- Indigenous Knowledge and values stuck in Western/colonial process

## Indigenous-led

- Recognizes Indigenous authority over lands/resources
- Builds from cultural definitions of health, knowledge systems, and ways of life
- Respects laws/customs
- Example: Aotearoa and Australia

## Pictou Landing First Nation

What difference did Indigenous-led impact assessment make for understanding community health impacts in PLFN?





# Piktukowaq Environmental Health Interpretive Framework

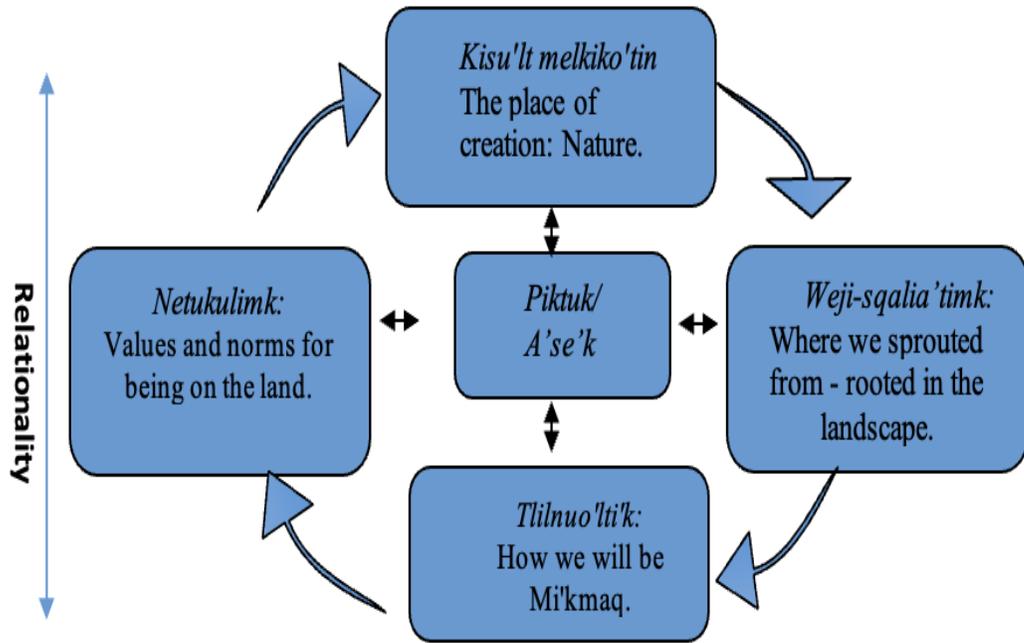


Figure 3.1 - Piktukowaq Ways of Being.

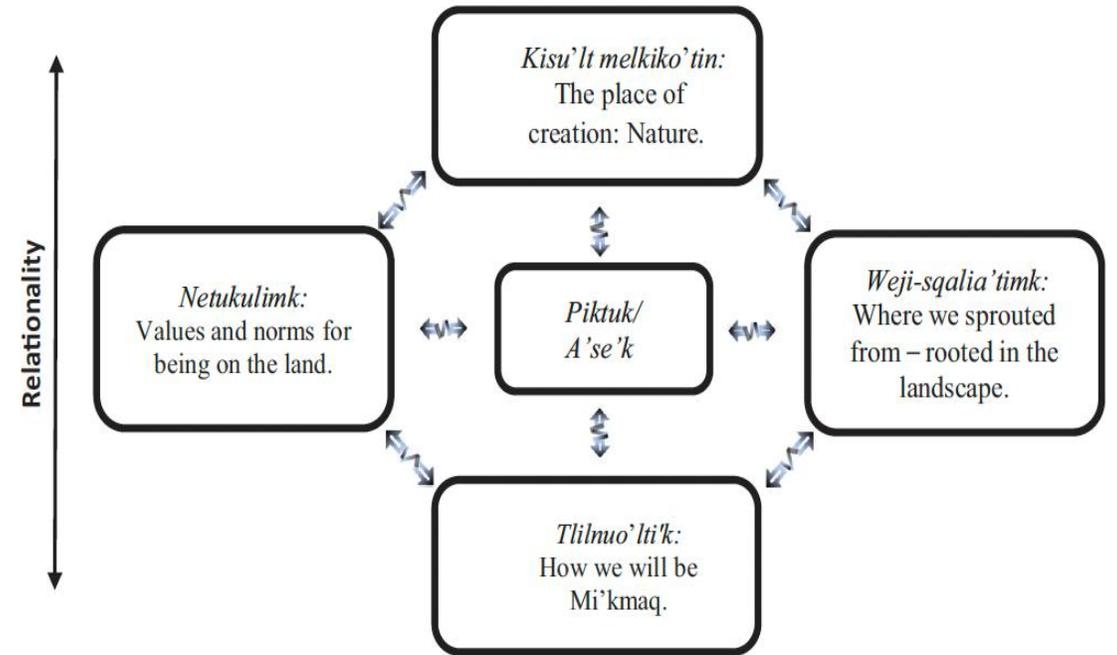


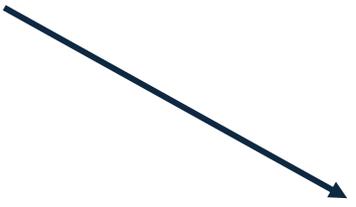
Figure 5  
Piktukowaq ways of being as relationships are severed.

## 2. Community-Specific Health Models

## 3. Health Data



- Based on community-specific determinants, valued components, and indicators of well-being
- Emphasize context in understanding health determinants
- Includes physical, mental, spiritual, social, and cultural determinants



- To accurately estimate potential impacts based on community practices, protocols, and connections to land
- To assess health equity within community
- Requires multiple types/forms of data



## Pictou Landing First Nation

Lack of baseline health data is a common challenge for many Indigenous communities; how did you implement a whole Indigenous data process in PLFN?

**Table 5.1**  
**Health Outcomes First Nation Adults.**

|                             | Adults (18 years and older) |                   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
|                             | Poor to Fair                | Good to Excellent |
|                             | %                           | %                 |
| First Nations - Canada      | 23                          | 77                |
| First Nations – Nova Scotia | 19                          | 81                |
| Pictou Landing First Nation | 46                          | 54                |

Note:

Sources: FNIGC, 2016; UNSI 2013; EHS, 2014

Health Rating: National RHS  $n = 11,043$ ; NS RHS  $n = 710$ ; EHS  $n = 174$

**Table 5.2**  
**Education and Employment as Explanatory for Health Outcomes.**

| Measure             | PLFN           |                     | PCDHA          |                     | Nova Scotia    |                     | Canada         |                     |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|
|                     | Poor to Fair % | Good to Excellent % | Poor to Fair % | Good to Excellent % | Poor to Fair % | Good to Excellent % | Poor to Fair % | Good to Excellent % |
| Education           |                |                     |                |                     |                |                     |                |                     |
| High School or less | 43             | 57                  | **45           | **55                | ***15          | ***85               | ***9           | ***91               |
| College/higher      | 42             | 58                  | **11           | **89                | ***11          | ***89               | ***9           | ***91               |
| Working             |                |                     |                |                     |                |                     |                |                     |
| No                  | 42             | 58                  | **28           | **72                | ***22          | ***78               | ***18          | ***82               |
| Yes                 | 46             | 54                  | **14           | **86                | ***7           | ***93               | ***6           | ***94               |

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

Note:

Source: PLFN EHS, 2014; CCHS, 2014

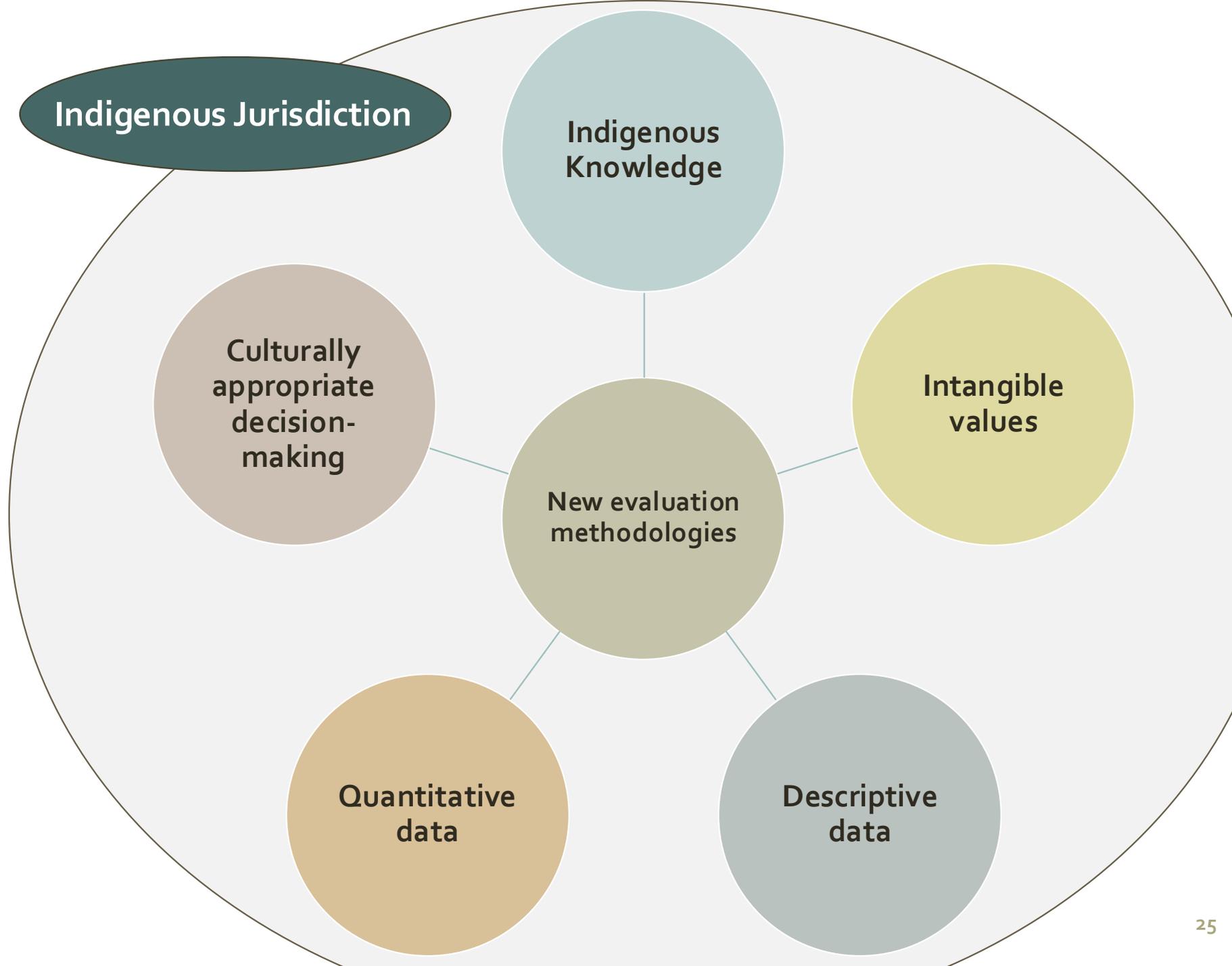
Education: PLFN *n* = 193; PCDHA *n* = 39,512; NS *n* = 808,959; Canada *n* = 29,982,131

Employment: PLFN *n* = 185; PCDHA *n* = 39,512; NS *n* = 808,959; Canada *n* = 29,982,131

Note: NA/DK/Ref/Missing are suppressed.

4. Indigenous Value Based Methodologies

5. Indigenous Jurisdiction over Indigenous Knowledge



# Pictou Landing First Nation

## Example: Measuring intangible values

*"In the EHS, land displacement and environmental dispossession was measured by asking the participants to reply to the following statement, 'I feel the air, land, and water around me will hurt me.'"*

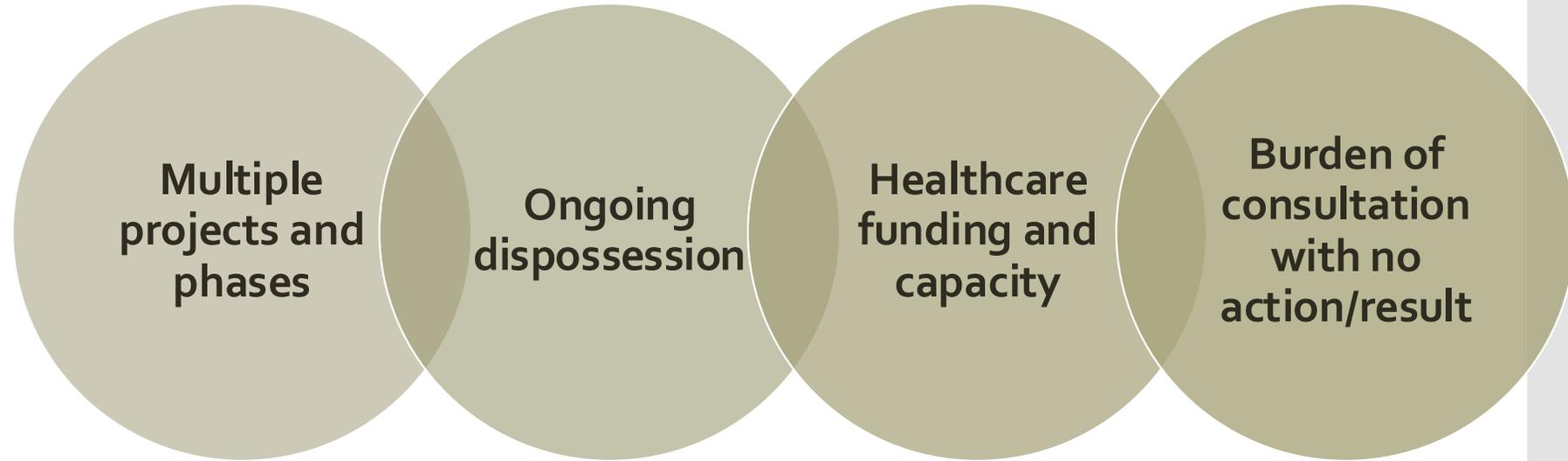
Lewis, D., Francis, S., Francis-Strickland, K., Castleden, H., & Apostle, R. (2021). If only they had accessed the data: Governmental failure to monitor pulp mill impacts on human health in Pictou Landing First Nation. *Social Science & Medicine*, 288, 113184.

## Example: Defining significance

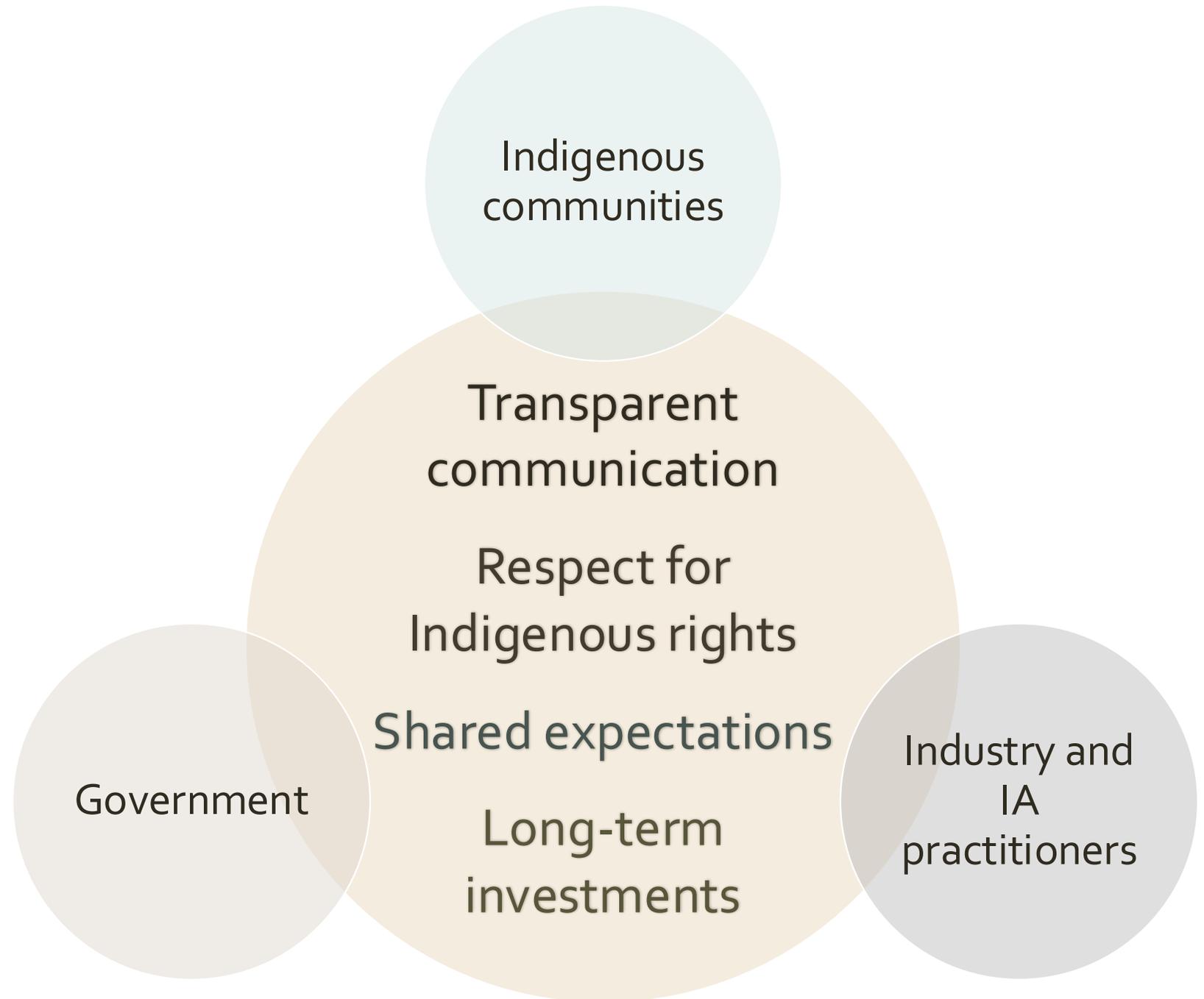
" And until A'se'k is reclaimed (api'jatu'k), impacts are considered significant. If the Piktukowaq do not get back to being who Kisu'lk intended them to be, then the Province has failed in the remediation of the BHETF " (p.24)

Appendix S: Pictou Landing First Nation Well-Being Baseline Study.

## 6. Prioritize Cumulative Effects



## 7. Relationships and Communication



## 8. Culturally relevant Gender Based Analysis and Equity



# Moving Forward: Challenges

## Decision-Making

- Lack of transparency: how are Indigenous concerns included in decision-making?
- Need legal role for Indigenous Peoples in final decision-making and determining criteria for approval

## Capacity

- Engaging in IA processes is demanding: time, human resources, financial resources, organizational capacity
- Need significant federal investment in Indigenous governments and organizations to develop and lead their own IA processes
- IA timelines are an important barrier

## PLFN Now

After years of developing community-led health impact assessment, what has been the result?

*Where is PLFN now?*

# Piktukowaq Environmental Health Interpretive Framework

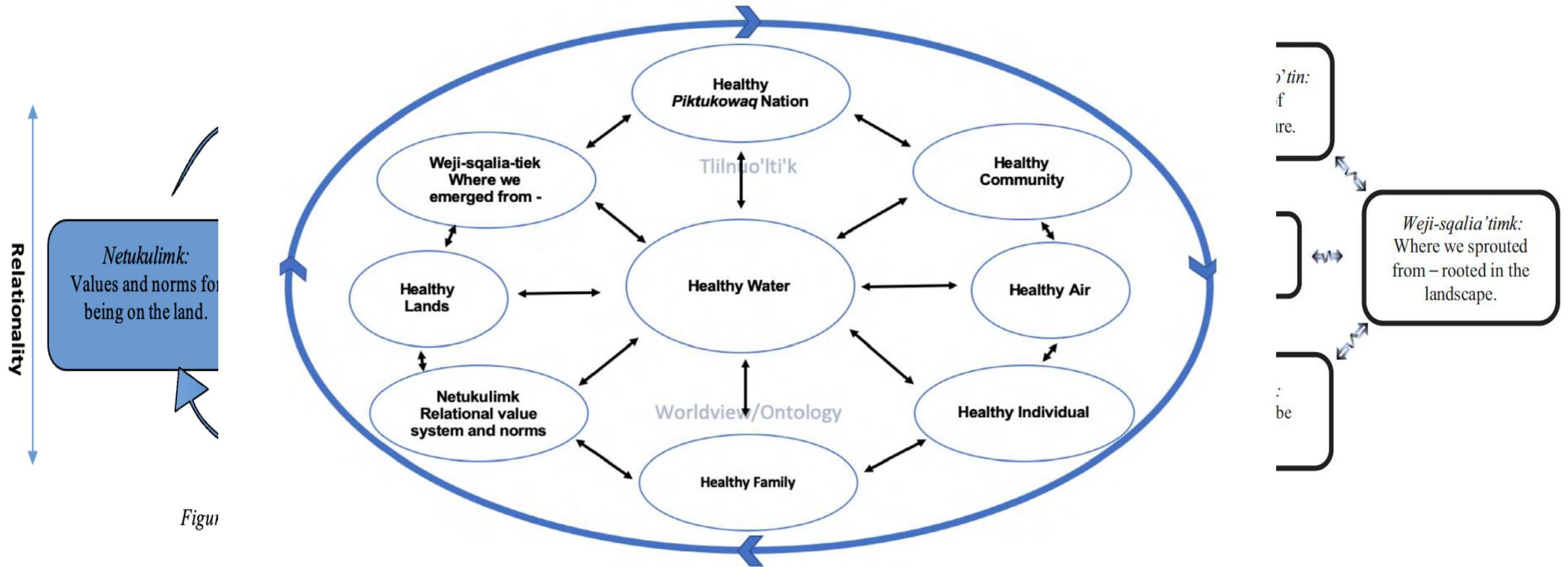


Figure 3.1: Piktukowaq Logic Model - Tan teli ikaluksi'k

# Conclusion

A standardized,  
one-size-fits-all  
approach is not  
possible for  
Indigenous HIA.

Distinctions-  
based,  
community-  
specific HIA  
frameworks,  
guidance and tools  
are needed.

Indigenous  
Peoples need  
authority in  
conducting HIAs  
and in final  
decision-making  
on projects.

## Upcoming HIA Webinars

**February 17, 2026** – What does Meaningful Engagement Mean: “Drinking Tea” with Practitioners of Community-Led Participatory Research

**March 3, 2026** – Indigenous Values vs Western Economic Values in Impact Assessment

**March 31, 2026** – What is distinctions-based Health Impact Assessment?

Questions?

We'la'liog

Thank you

To read the full report, please visit the NCCIH website.