National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health | Centre de collaboration nationale de la santé autochtone

Webinar

Pathways to Indigenous health – Inuit identity south of 60

Description

This second webinar of the *Pathways to Indigenous health series* examines Norma Dunning's lived history as an Inuk who was born, raised, and continues to live south of sixty. It takes into account the many assimilative practices that Inuit continue to face and the expectations of mainstream as to what an Inuk person can and should be.

Pathways to Indigenous health is a series of webinars hosted by the NCCIH. Between September 2023 and April 2024, this series of webinars explores a variety of topics related to the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. The series intends to strengthen the links between knowledge, policy, and practice, by supporting the educational journeys of healthcare workers, public health audiences, and beyond.

Bio

Dr. Norma Dunning is a Padlei Inuk writer, professor, and grandmother. She has published five books and has received many literary awards. Her books have been translated into several languages. She teaches Indigenous Health Studies at the First Nations University of Canada and lives in Regina, SK

Transcript

Sarah de Leeuw: I'm Sarah de Leeuw. I'm with the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health.

I just want to acknowledge that from coast to coast to coast in this nation of so-called Canada, we are all on lands, waters, and breathing airs that were governed since time immemorial by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

We are on for the most part occupied, stolen lands. And the NCCIH works hard to think about relationships of stories and land and people's health and well-being.

And it's unquestionably (of) that nexus that we're extremely excited to have Dr. Dunning speak to us about today. For those of you who might be new to our webinar series, this is the second in a webinar series that will be unfolding into the new year, into 2024.

The NCCIH is one of six national collaborating centres for public health across the country. Our sister NCCs and ourselves are extremely honoured and privileged to do the work nationally that we do. So, thank you again to the 206 odd folks who are joining us again from coast to coast to coast on lands and waters and breathing airs that have really always been stewarded by Indigenous people, including, and importantly, Inuit people and people of the Arctic Circle.

A few other technical notes: if you have any questions or feedback, you can put that into the Q\&A window. The "raise hand" feature doesn't work in this particular Zoom format, but please let us know. You're welcome to be in touch via email, just look us up on the web, the NCCIH, if there's any specifics any follow-up, any resources that you would like to have secondary follow-up after this webinar session.

Today's session is not going to be recorded, but again we're really excited to offer any follow-up conversations as you may see fit, to let us know or to follow up with the NCCIH about.

So, with no further ado… It's genuinely a thrill and an honour to introduce Dr. Norma Dunning.

For those of you who are waiting patiently, you probably know that Dr. Dunning is an Inuk woman and writer who was raised and continues to live south of 60.

The talk today, I think, like so many of Norma's research projects and her works of very well-acclaimed, creative and literary work, across the country, continues to explore assimilative practices that Inuit face, and the expectations of mainstream geographies and mainstream organizations as to what an Inuk person should be or can be.

I think this is a profoundly important conversation to have in today's climate of conversations about identity and about identity links to health.

On a personal note, I just want to say I've had the distinct honor of reading with Dr. Dunning in places like *SkirtsAfire* in Calgary and wandered around Whistler during a writing fest. As a fellow creative writer, I just want to say, "Go out and buy Norma's books!" If you would, please download her doctoral thesis and read some of her research papers. She is a profoundly important voice in this country that I think contributes to conversations, both creatively and academically.

A real honour, Norma, to invite you to this webinar series from the NCCIH, the learning objective of which is to enhance the understanding that Inuk live and thrive outside of their land claim areas. So, with that – and bearing in mind that we do have some technical challenges behind the scenes – I'm going to pass things over to Dr. Dunning. And hopefully we can welcome Dr. Dunning virtually, with huge thanks. And Norma, honestly, from the bottom of my heart, thanks for being such an incredible colleague, friend, and person to invite into this virtual space.

I'll stop sharing now. We'll put up other slides. And Norma, hopefully we can hear you.

Norma Dunning: All right, thank you everyone. Thank you for such an amazing introduction, Sarah, and thank you to NCCIH for even inviting me. It's always such an honour and a privilege for me to be able to talk about Inuit, and especially Inuit who live and thrive and get up in the morning and go to Tim Horton's and buy newspapers in the southern areas of Canada. So, I think often, you know, when we…

And I recently started to teach in Indigenous health at First Nations University in Regina, and so for me it's the first time that I teach this subject. And what I really had to work with my students, is for them to think beyond a physical ailment as an indicator of health. And we have to think about mental health and we do have to consider how important that is in terms of how it affects our bodies. We have to think about spiritual health and how that, too, comes into play.

And my PhD work looks at what happens to Inuk students who are studying outside of their land claims areas and how there's this incredible amount of pressure that falls upon, I think, all Indigenous students. And I think specifically for Inuk students, it becomes a very much denser kind of navigation.

So, we will start slide one, it's "Inuit identity south of 60". And Inuujunga – I am Inuk. Could we go to the slide two now, Donna?

So, you know, we have to think about how the Inuit population in our country is just over 70,000. However, when we compare that population number against First Nations and Métis, we're barely anything. We're like a half an inch on a on a 12-inch ruler or, you know, 5 cm on a on a meter stick. And we're just such a small population. But approximately 21,865 Inuit live outside of their land claims areas.

In stats… You know, the thing about numbers, we can make them do whatever we want them to do. But Stats Can in 2021 found that the Inuit population living outside of Inuit Nunangat—and Nunangat is the "homeland", that's the direct of translation of that word—is moreover increasing at a faster pace than the population within the Inuit homeland. So, it's 23.6% versus 2.9%.

This picture that you're looking at is an Inuk young man who is in Ottawa, and he tells the story of having been moved south with his family. And in that move, there was this disconnect with language and with culture and ceremony. And one of the things that he did is he had this tattoo placed onto his stomach as a reminder. He's an adult now; he has two children of his own. He lives in Ottawa and you can find him on that the first link indicated on the slide.

Anyhow, so when we look at the numbers, when we look at 70,000 up against almost 22,000, we have over 30% of Inuit Canadians residing outside of their land claims areas.

Now, just because we're living south does not mean that we are no longer members of our land claims area. We still are. But when we have that shifting, when an Inuk body moves from North past that 60th parallel, then everything pretty much shifts over in terms of—especially myself, being a beneficiary of Nunavut, and my three sons are also beneficiaries—when we are residing in the South, pretty much diminishes, almost makes everything in terms of benefits that lay within the Nunavut lands claims agreement, it makes everything become very much dimmer or smaller.

And Inuit Canadians—if we go to slide three, Donna—Inuit Canadians are commonly thought of as living in the Arctic regions of Canada. But you know Inuit do live everywhere. And who are Inuit when they

reside outside of the north? So, we have four in 10 Inuit living outside of Inuit Nunangat and living generally into a larger urban centre.

Now this was an older stat in 2011: 37.5% of the Inuit living outside of Inuit Nunangat were living in places like Edmonton, Montreal, and Ottawa. Now each of these cities showed a 2021 census. Inuit in Edmonton come in at 1,250. In Montreal, 1,130. Ottawa/Gatineau, 1,730.

What I will say is that I think the stats, in terms of each of those cities, I think the numbers are actually quite small and that there are many Inuit who are living outside of the land claims areas who choose not to identify. And a part of that not identifying has to do with, you know, just the amount of questions that come to you as an Inuk person who dares to live in in the southern areas of Canada and the world.

Donna, can we go to the next slide with this beautiful little baby?

So, what we had in the 2019 Statutes of Canada, and it's really beautiful to read this Act… Some of these kind of —I don't know if it's fair to say that they're political or that they have a political leaning, but this Act, an *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families*… So, look it up because it's kind of wonderful to read.

According to Ottawa TI (Tungasuvvingat Inuit), on April 10th, 2019 in reference to Bill C-92, *an Act respecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families*, non-Nunangat Inuit are defined as the Fifth Region – (the) Non-Nunangat Inuit Region. So, what we're saying is non-Nunangat are the Inuit who are living outside of the four land claim areas in Canada. And within that Act in 2019, we're given this designation of being the Fifth Region. There must be consideration for the Inuit who are no longer living in, or members of, their representative land claim. With approximately 40% of Inuit with self-identified ancestry, there is a growing number of Inuit who are not connected to one of the four land claims regions yet remain connected to Inuit culture and identity.

When I was writing my PhD thesis, I made use of this word "Non Nunangat Inuit region" and had another Inuit scholar say there's no such word. But apparently that scholar had not read this Act.

And so, the Fifth Region is not recognized by Inuit leadership and land claims organizations. However, the Inuit fully consider themselves as Inuk, with all the culture, traditions, and rights inherent to that identification. So, it's, you know, what I, and I heard it more so with younger Inuit students who would say: "You know, I don't I don't have a beneficiary card". So, that means that they had not made application into what would have been one of their ancestral land claims areas. And they would say… I would just think the oddest things… They would say: "Well, I've never been up north."

Well, you don't have to be up north, or have even traveled or visited up north, in order to say that you are an Inuk. And when you're filling out the beneficiary application, it doesn't ask where you are living now. It asks what your ancestral location would have been.

For myself, that became Whale Cove. I'm Padlei Inuk and my Inuit originally just lived above the tree line, or what would be Treaty One in Northern Manitoba. And we always have to remember that Inuit were never invited or negotiated into treaty, not at all. And so, we were just above that tree line. And what that means is that we were not coastal. It is through forced relocation that my Inuit, Padlei Inuit, ended up in Whale Cove. So, it was…

What happened with my Inuit is they were relocated five times. Each time it would be a government plane would land and load people into the plane and fly them further north. We were originally in around Henik and Milliton lakes. So, we were being taken further north. And each time the Padlei Inuit walked back to Henik and back into the Milliton lake area. What happens in that process is starvation, and my Inuit are dying in their return home. They just keep walking back, and the government just keeps coming back and taking them again.

But when I talk about… You know they were lifted with only what was on their backs. That means they had no food, no tools, no tents, nothing. And the expectation was, well, you know Inuit, they'll, they're the ones that are most connected to the land and hunting and all of that, but we're talking about lifting people who were not coastal and putting them next to water.

And we did not hunt whale; we hunted caribou. We were not big fishermen. We did go to different areas through spring, summer, and early fall to fish, but we weren't ocean-fishing people with big nets.

And I read one bit where Louis Boisé, who is in Whale Cove still, he is sent to check on a group of Padlei who had been issued fishing nets and were placed along the Hudson's Bay coast. And when he gets there, the nets are not in use. So, we have to think about how this was not a method of fishing, and we have to think about how we're taking a group of people and we're relocating them into an area that is completely unfamiliar. And the expectation is, even though you cannot (…) you have no tools to make a fire, or have a tent or any kind of shelter, any kind of food, the expectation is, well, you're going to survive. So why do we have…

And other Inuit were also being relocated. And the relocations have to do with Canada claiming sovereignty in the north, and the only way they could think of proving that sovereignty was to move Inuit along the coastlines and be able to say to the rest of the world, “Look, we have Canadians living along the Hudson's Bay”. So, it's through that constant relocation that Padlei end up – and where I have to make application to – is Whale Cove Nunavut.

So, we have in 2019 this wonderful gesture of talking about the Fifth region, but the bottom line is this: Inuit who are residing outside of their land claims areas do not have political representation. We have Natan Obed and he represents and speaks on behalf of Inuit who live in the North only. Now that is not his choice; that is what is written into every land claim, and it's specific that the national leader speaks for those who reside in the north.

Now, when I was writing my PhD, I had the honour of speaking with John Merritt, who is the longtime lawyer for the Nunavut Lands Claim Agreement. And he was, and has stayed with, that land claim from inception to signing it off 20 years later. And we have to remember when a land claim is signed, it's just the beginning. Because now it's implementation of everything that was agreed upon in that land claim has to happen.-time lawyer for the Nunavut lands claim agreement.

So, what he had told me is at that time when Nunavut was a 20-year process of pulling that land claim together. When that was happening, what the people who stayed with the claim, who negotiated that claim, what their thinking was, they wanted Nunavut to be the place that young Inuit would stay.

So, you know, therefore the writing of the land claims leans towards that kind of thinking, but also the government was very specific about “You will have a national leader, but he only speaks for Inuit who are in the north.”

So, Donna, if we go to Slide 5.

So here I am, blabbing, blabbing, blabbing, and what am I driving at? It's simple: Inuit who reside in the southern areas of Canada are without formal representation, and based on their locale, the benefits for their land claims area become diminished. The national leader only represents and speaks on behalf of Inuit who live in the North.

So, I wrote this, off to the right. I wrote: “Once a land claim was signed, signaling a business transaction between the Canadian federal government and Inuit residents of the north, simultaneously Inuit who resided in the south were becoming less significant because of their locale. While one door opened, another slammed shut.” Now that sounds harsh, but it's a reality.

And, you know, Inuit in the south are, I always say overall Inuit are “left off”. But when we get into the the very 20,000+ of us that live in the south, we become even more “left off”.

And I do think that there are some things that Inuit in the south have done well. For example, Larga House exists in every major city in Canada. And Inuit have to come south, usually for any kind of medical surgery, any kind of medical treatments, because the infrastructure is not in the north.

So, what Larga House does, in major cities across Canada, is provide a place for Inuit to stay before and after receiving treatment. And you know what happens, though, is often Inuit from the north coming into the south, they don't have the language, and so, they're always looking for interpreters. Generally, if it's an elder who's coming in from the north into the south, they will provide somebody to travel with them.

But then we have to, you know, think broader, and in thinking broader, we have to think about how medical terminology in English does not translate well into Inuktitut. And so here we have translators who are trying to explain what is going to happen to the patients, and how much can that patient understand?

So, we have to think about, you know, how does that work for Inuit who are coming south, so terrified, and then not really understanding what a doctor or a nurse or anybody is saying to them? And having to deal with what can often become a very long hospital stay. I like that Larga House exists. They are often in need of interpreters. And we do have to think about: “How does medical terminology translate?” Or if it even translates into Inuktitut at all. (…)

And so that's another example of how, you know, being in the south, especially if you're north coming south, you're going to have a hard stress. It's not going to be easy at all. And when I was living in Victoria, that's where I went for 2018–19, and it's where I wrote my PhD thesis and my short story collection *Tainna*.

But when I was there, I was contacted by a group out of Stony Plain, Alberta, and they have a great, great many, at least 50 or more, Inuit who are with them, who come into St. Albert. Some are physically

or mentally (or both) challenged, and there's no infrastructure again in the north to take care of these Inuit.

So, I was invited to go out to Stony Plain. And I think it ran over three months. I used to fly into Edmonton every weekend. And I did Inuit awareness training for that staff. And you know it was quite amazing, you know, how the staff looked at their clients.

Because I asked them: “How are Inuit, that you're taking care of, how are they reacting or how are they behaving around food?” And I would be told: “Oh, they hide it. And it's gotten to where we have to lock all the cupboards and the fridge because they take food and they hide it.”

And you know, from a western standpoint, that's a terrible thing to do. From an Inuk standpoint, coming from Nunavut where, and I mean Inuit have, I always say, Inuit have the highest numbers, in the statistics that nobody wants, we have the highest rate of poverty, the highest rate of teen suicide, the highest rate of food scarcity.

And here we are, in a first-world country, where 22 Inuit can sleep in shifts inside of a two-bedroom house. And we have government after government after government who say they're going to improve things. Well, actually nothing ever improved.

So, we can see those statistics. And how can we have such a huge rate – it’s , I believe, around 300 times higher for Inuit in the north – having tuberculosis, and that is a disease that is almost nonexistent in the south.

Now why am I going on about Inuit in the north when we're supposed to be talking about Inuit in the south? I'm going on about it because there came a time where the government started to do these comparisons of Inuit statistics, you know: Nunangat and non-Nunangat. So, what they started to show stats on, for those of us who did identify as living in the south, they started to show education success was much higher for Inuit who resided in the south.

A part of that is we've already learned how to navigate those systems, how to operate within schools and hospitals and all the places that are never historically kind to us. But you know, I used to sit and think: What is the government driving at here? Are they trying to get as many Inuit (as possible) from the north to move south? And then, think about how the fiduciary obligation through each land claim is diminished.

And at the time that I was writing my PhD, Inuit in Nunavut were having an outmigration rate of about 188 people per year. And that would be a permanent outmigration.

And I sat there and I thought: you know what, in about 45 years, there'll be nobody left up there. Is that what we want? I have no idea.

So, can we move on to slide 6 please, Donna?

Okay. Inuit identity is always under scrutiny, and being a southern Inuk seems to amplify that scrutiny for myself. The worst—I mean, and I've had a lot—but the worst of all the racist comments always falls back to having coffee with a white professor. I was no longer her student and was very touched that she wanted to visit with me.

Early in our visit, this white prof who I had studied under, looked at me and asked: “Norma, all your sons, do they all have the same dad?” I was stunned and so amazed by that question.

And it felt like it took me hours to be able to say, “Yes”, because in my head I was thinking: “Would you ask a white woman that question? Would you ask a white single mom that question?” I doubt it. I sincerely doubt it.

When I talk about being under scrutiny, it's… I mean, when I was in university, there were times when I simply did not identify. And I did not because I just wanted to get through the course. I didn't want any kind of backhanded comments to come my way via the prof or other students. And I just, you know, just wanted to get my degree and wanted to be able to move on.

But when we're, you know, when we're in business, and it's really crazy, how for myself, as an Inuk student, I had to apply to *Freehorse Family Wellness*. And I had to make those applications twice in a year. And I had to supply so much information to that.

But I will always be grateful that I never had to worry about tuition. I did work two to three jobs every semester. It was just… I had to. And so here you are, you're trying to get yourself through and complete a degree, and in the meantime, you have this kind of constant scrutiny that you're under.

It's like you're always under a microscope of some sort. And I can remember being in class one day and having the prof say: “You know what, Norma, today we are going to talk about the north, but I will not expect you to participate because you've never been there.” And she wasn't wrong.

I'm number five of six children before my parents left Churchill. And the reason behind their leaving was because my mom survived eight full years in a residential school. My mom and her two sisters were literally taken from their family and moved into a residential school just outside of Winnipeg.

So, when my folks are… And my folks had the first 10 years of their marriage in Churchill. And by the time my mom is pregnant with me, my oldest brother and oldest sister are in a school which is just another form of residential school.

So, what happens in our country is when residential schools are closing in the southern areas of Canada, they are opening in the North. And the government of Canada never took responsibility for the education of Inuit until 1965.

So just before I am born, my father rejoins the military and we move to Quebec. So, I am born in Quebec. So, the two older brothers, two older sisters, they have that documentation of, you know, a northern beginning. I don't have that. And I have one more younger brother, so he and I were both born in Quebec.

But we have to think about, you know, why do people leave the North. Quite often parents take their kids because they want them to have a better chance at a better education. People move south based on medical reasons. But we have this population that is growing and growing and growing in the south, but we're still handled differently.

So, I want to go back to talking about postsecondary. So Donna, can we move to slide 6?

Donna Atkinkson: Yes, so we're at slide, looks like 7.

For an Inuk who resides and studies outside of their land claims area, funding is supplied by a third party – in my case, *Freehorse Family Wellness Society*. So, funding through them meant that, number one, I allowed the funder to contact my faculty at any time to check up on me. So, literally I sign off on FOIP (Free of Information and Privacy Act). I give them the power to call or visit or send an email and ask, you know, "How is she doing?" Another thing I had to do is I had to supply midterm grades, which meant I needed all of my profs to sign off on my standing halfway through a semester. If I could not supply that, I was in jeopardy of losing funding.

Now, this was crazy because most profs don't really have a standing halfway through. I know that as a prof. But I was forced to ask them to just even write one sentence, you know: "She is performing fine in my class."

Number Three: I was never guaranteed funding, ever. So, from year to year, (…) I had to apply each year as a new application. So, nothing that was on file about me was still on file, so I was always treated like a brand new application. And there was one year where I received an email and the person from *Freehorse Family Wellness* said to me: "You know, Norma, we're not sure if we can fund you this year."

Now, funding equals tuition plus $25 per semester to put toward books or photocopying. So, I mean, that $25 is nothing. But she called me and said, "You know, we're not sure whether or not we can fund you."

And I said, "Why not?"

And she said, "Well we've just had such a huge amount of applications come through. You know, we're thinking, we funded you, you know, through your BA, and now you're in your MA, and we're not sure."

And I said, "Oh, really?"

And she said, "Yes."

And we hang up.

And the next day I get in my car, bring water and a sandwich. I drive to their office. I walk in, the receptionist says, "Do you have an appointment?"

I just said, "No, I don't."

He says, "Well, you know, all the intake workers are fairly busy." And I said, "I don't mind, I've got all day, I brought a sandwich and a book."

And then, so I'm sitting there. And finally, near end of day I get called into a worker's office. And I said, "I'm really concerned about not being funded."

And the worker says, "Well, we can never guarantee it. We can't guarantee."

And I said, "Well this is what I would like to know: I would like to know how many Inuit students are you helping out right now?"

And she has a blank look on her face. And I said, "Me. I'm it. I'm it."

And I'm here to tell you this: “You pull my funding, I go to the media”. And we start to talk about how funding works through this group.

And she said, “Hey Norma…”

And I said, “Listen, you threatened me first. Now I'm here to threaten you.

I do not like being that way, but sometimes you’ve got to push because when you think about it, education through the land claims, through treaty, is one of the guarantees. It's something that is built in.”

So, I was never guaranteed, never, never. I would have to fax in a form to Iqaluit so they could reject my application. I had to do this twice a year, and it's quite a long application I had to fill out from Nunavut.

But what I… And I would have to fill it out, like fill in every blank, and then I would fax it. And on the top of the application I would write, “Please reject me ASAP.” I needed the territory to reject my application for a student loan.

I also could not ever apply into to Northern-based scholarships because I was and am, first of all, a nonresident of Nunavut and did not graduate Grade 12 out of Nunavut.

I became… You know, I already said I worked two or three jobs per semester, but I also became scholarship-dependent. And, you know, I always have to think about how I needed to have that little bit of cushion in the bank.

So okay, we're looking at all of this, and we're seeing that, you know, first of all, nothing is guaranteed. Education is not a just a handoff given to any Indigenous student in our country and so you have this additional practice. So first of all, you say, “Guess what? I'm Inuk,” and then people are asking you the craziest questions.

The first one was always, “Well, do you speak it?” I think a lot of people cannot say Inuktitut, but they can ask that question: “Can you speak it?” And I always say, “I can disappoint people three times in under 90 seconds. I am not fluent in my language. It is something that I study on my own”.

Guess what? I do not eat raw meat. I know that's a really big disappointment. And number three: I have never been North.

So those things, like, then you become disqualified as an Inuk Canadian. “Well, you don't speak it, you don't eat it, and you don't live there, so you don't count.” And that's a common kind of response that happens.

But when we think about just the stress of being in postsecondary and then having to do all this additional reporting to the funder… When I think of people who take out a student loan: nobody is saying to them halfway through the semester, “How are your grades? How many classes are you skipping out of?” That kind of stuff.

Can we go on to slide 8?

Donna Atkinson: Yes. We're good.

Norma Dunning: Okay great, thank you, Donna.

So often mainstream Canada thinks all Indigenous students receive free postsecondary education. I did receive tuition, but no cost of living, no book allowance. I worked a minimum of three jobs per semester.

I will say I was always tired. But what Stats Canada began to put together were education successes and wellness charts comparing Inuit Nunangat and Inuit outside of Nunangat, or non-Nunangat. So we can think, “Aaah, you know, so what? Who cares? Who cares? Like, it's just the government doing all their usual stuff.

And, so, I want to say that I care. I care because I don't think… I think one of the worst things that happens with Indigenous Canadians is I really hate it when we fight with each other or when we make that kind of comparison.

And I've had Inuit in the north who are living in in the north say to me, “Well, you know, what do you know? You don't live here.” And my comeback to them is, “Well, hey, what do you know? You don't live down here?” So we, you know...

But that's… That kind of comparison, that kind of fighting inside of ourselves, that… It's just so wrong. It's just so wrong.

And what I really hope is that, in time, Inuit in the south will have some kind of representative who speaks on our behalf and who investigates things like how we are treated through postsecondary, how we are treated when we go to the doctor.

I went to the doctor one time, I was so sick—and I don't get sick very often—and, you know, when I do get sick, it's such an event that I have to call up everybody I know and say, “Guess what!”

And they'll say, “What?”

And I'll say, “I'm sick.” [Laughs.] Because it is an event for me.

And I had like bronchitis for about three weeks, and I go into a walk-in clinic where I sit for about four hours, and finally I get in to see the doctor, and he comes in with my chart.-in clinic where I sit for about four hours and finally I get in to see the doctor, and he comes in with my chart.

Now, I had presented my beneficiary card. On the back of my card is an N-number. That N-number signifies that I am Inuit and that my health care is paid through Health Canada. So, when he sees my chart, he may not know that I'm Inuit, but what he does know is that I'm Indigenous.

So, he comes in, he opens his chart and he does not say, “Hello, how are you? What has brought you here? My name is Dr. Blah blah blah.” Nothing.

He opens my chart and I know, I see him see that Health Canada N-number, and he looks at me and says, “Do you drink?”

And I was stunned. I was stunned. I was amazed. I couldn't believe it.

So, I look at him and I said, “No. Do you?”

Well, now he's mad because doctors don't like it when you talk to them like that.

And I said, “Listen, I need some penicillin. You know, I'm really bronchial and it's been going on for three weeks.”

And he says, “Aah, you know, it's a virus, a viral, you just have to work it through.”

And I said, “I'm here to tell you I've been trying to work it through and it's not going away, and I know I need medicine.”

And he says, “Well, I think, you know, you should just go home, ride it out.”

And I said, “No, no. Either you give me a prescription for penicillin right now, and if you choose not to, I'm going to go back out to that waiting room and I'm going to sit there for another two to three hours, and I'm going to see another other doctor in this clinic. And I will keep doing that until somebody writes me a prescription for penicillin. Even if it's amoxicillin, I know it'll help.”

And so, he wrote the prescription, but the bottom line is, I should not have to talk like that. I should be able to be an Inuk person walking into the doctor because I know I need medicine, and I shouldn't get any kind of blowback. And I should not be asked, “Do you drink?”

So, you know, but the difference, I think, you know, between me and other Inuit is I'm old. And when you're old, you just get tired and you get sick to death of the constant rhetoric you have to deal with day in and day out.

And so, I can do that kind of pushback and get my way. I don't like being pushed into a corner, but when I am, I'll come out swinging and I will. But I don't like it; that's not how I am or who I am. So, for Inuit who, you know, we're living in the south, so therefore we're living, you know, out of context, I think would be how mainstream Canada would look at it.

And so, we'll go to the very last slide. Are you guys happy? It's the very last one. If you were my students, you'd be really happy right now. [Laughter.]

So, when I talk about, you know, “Who cares?” I care. I do.

And when we are talking about wellness, we're also talking about more than a physicality of a human. We're also talking about spirit, soul, core spiritual beliefs, and what a sense of self entails.

When Inuit in the south are constantly scrutinized, when you're constantly under the gaze of a postsecondary funder, when you're constantly under the gaze of a professor who says, “Hey, do all your kids have the same dad?,” when you walk into a medical clinic and they see you have an N-number.

These are like the everyday movements of humanity. But when you're Inuit, it's like, “Ooof! You're living in the wrong place.” And when we think of how, you know, the measures that non-Inuit place against Inuit, that isn't how we see one another and it isn't how we measure each other.

So, I'm going to finish up by reading this little poem. And it's called “Inuit Breathe In”… It's just called “Inuit”. You know, it was actually commissioned, it's a commissioned piece that I wrote for—this is crazy—that I wrote for the Toronto Dominion Bank in Toronto.

And they took this poem, they did a beautiful job with it, and they etched it onto glass. And underneath, so it's my English on the top line, and then underneath, it's this poem that's written in Inuktitut syllabics. So, it's simply this:

Inuit breathe in two worlds,

past and present,

yesterday and today,

north and south.

We are one in two ways.

We live on in our old ones.

Ancientness blankets our young.

Whispers of traditions

are carried by soft winds

from the tundra to city sidewalks.

Innuitgut.

We are the Inuit.

We are here.

Okay, everybody. Thank you.

Are there any questions before we finish up?

Sarah de Leeuw : Norma, it's Sarah de Leeuw back. I confess I'm a bit... I'm a bit wobbly because of your beauty and your fierceness and ending on a poem. So, thank you.

Just a quick check-in, Norma, can you hear me? I know you're joining us on a speaker phone in somebody else's office, so I just want… I'll run into Donna's office to ask these questions. But can you hear me, Norma?

Norma Dunning: Yeah, I can, I can.

Sarah de Leeuw: Okay. I just… Norma, I just want to thank you again. Yeah, I know there are people who are thanking you. We have questions.

I'm going to read them to you, if you'd be so kind to answer them, but I think I probably speak for all 184 participants—and you had just over 215 at one point—when I say you've really moved our hearts and given us a great deal to think about, Norma. Thank you for the power, the fierceness, the courage of your stories, and your voice. We did have people, Norma, in the chat saying they're so sorry for the racism that you faced.

I'll just read you Julie Nordstrom, who's written in response to your conversation about what you faced in the walk-in clinic because of the N on your chart: “Those questions that they ask are very prevalent especially for women.” And I suspect Julie is right. I suspect there's a gender dynamic.

If they went into nontraditional apprenticeships back in the day of my growing up years, they're, you know, they need to be trained more fully. There were different rules for those positions, but just that Julie mentions what you went through was so biased and so very unpleasant, and just very, very, sorry that you had to fight so hard. And I, yeah, I know I echo Julie Nordstrom's question and remarks.

This might be a question, Norma, if you'd be so kind to give it a little bit of thought. Sarah, I apologize for the pronunciation of your name, but Sarah Ayaruak Thomson, Sarah asks, “Are there any folks working to form a group to represent southern Inuit? Ideally, the ITK would represent us all, but that is not the case. Inuit are Inuit whether we are in the north or not.”

And Sarah, apologies for mispronouncing your last name, but I think that that question is so spot on and I suspect a lot of participants will have that question. Inuit are Inuit outside the north, in the south. Norma, that's clearly what you're fighting so fiercely and generously for. Is there any movement to have an organization or representation of Inuit in the south. Do you know, Norma?

Norma Dunning: Well, yeah, I've heard rumblings, but I don't think anything's ever been formed, and when we look at ITK and who they were historically and, you know, a part of each land claims agreement is that the government of the time said to Inuit, “We're not getting involved, number one, in your membership. Number two, we want each land claim to form a corporation and that is who we deal with in terms of socioeconomic benefits.”

And so that's how everything started. And the government, I think, recognized how they'd messed up First Nations' identities to such an extreme. And in Canada, if you read, oh – his last name is Grammond… Sébastien Grammond – his PhD thesis, he talked about how in Canada blood quantum does not exist. Like, technically, it does not exist. If you look at the Indian Act, 61, 62, those sections about marrying out and marrying in, it does hide itself under… That's actually blood quantum. But it isn't given those exact words in the *Indian Act*.

When it comes to Inuit, when I, you know, made application for myself and my three sons, what I indicated was, first of all, my mother's name and then one of her sisters, and my cousin. And so, I could, you know, draw them that kind of gene lineage, is what I was able to do. But what happens is that each community that you make application into, the community comes together, and it's generally the elders who will recall. And my understanding is that they've remembered my mom, and because of that remembrance of my mother, I was, and my three sons were, brought through as beneficiaries. That process took about three years. Like, things don't move quickly.

So, in all of it, when we're looking at organizations like ITK, who you know initially started out as really wanting to represent all Inuit, but then we have the land claims that put specifics into only Inuit in the north will have any kind of political representation. And so, to me, we're Inuit no matter where we are.

What I get, when I said earlier… I do get upset, especially with younger Inuit who say, “You know, I've never been north, but you know, so I don't think I should apply.”

And recently I had an email from a woman who said to me, “I am half Inuk.” We're not half. We're never half or a third or whatever kind of percentage because it's all based on the memories of the elders, and when you are accepted as Inuit, you're full. So, people have this, you know, this kind of thinking that there's such a thing as Métis Inuk. There isn't. There isn't. Either you are or you're not. And so, you know, just remember that the land claims were very specific about what a national leader could and could not say, or how they can represent Inuit. (…) [Laughs.]

Sarah de Leeuw: Norma, again I'm going to read you a couple of comments because I think, again, your generous, fierce, thoughtful, and sharp and smart responses… People are really appreciating this conversation.

There's comments in the Questions and Answer section, things like: “This is my first time hearing Dr. Dunning and I must say, ‘Wow! I have learned so much.’ it's so unsettling how much we don't know about indigenous people. Thank you so much. Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you so much. I hadn't considered the challenges of living in the south. It's a beautiful presentation. Thank you for your frank words.”

So, I just really want to say, I think that the act of ‘storying’ this conversation is a remarkably powerful strategy for sharing and expanding this conversation. So again, thank you very much.

There is another question. Tatana Kim is asking, and again with the preface, “Thank you so much for this presentation, Norma. You highlighted how statistics were used in a questionable way. Could you share any thoughts on what statistics not currently available might be relevant to highlight issues relevant to Inuit?” So, I think what Tatana is actually asking is, like, Dr. Dunning, if you could wave your hand and say, “We need this data. We need these statistics. Maybe particularly with reference to health and wellness,” do you have an idea about what you might say if you were going to wave your magic wand?

Norma Dunning: Oh, you know, that is so funny. Well, to me it's funny. I volunteered for two years with the Inuit Edmontonmiut group, and the expectation was that Inuit will, I don't know, form an Eskimo village downtown. Like, we were going to be this little community that huddled in and lived together. And, but I mean, we lived all over the city. So, you know, there's… So, I give that as an example.

Like, quite often people think that, “Oh, you know, like, you're all Inuit people, so you must be neighbours”. And no, we're not.

So being able to gather up data on Inuit who live in the south is difficult, and it's something that has been attempted time and time again. And the group that did really well is out of Montreal. That Inuit group did very, very well. But they hired in a dedicated a researcher to gather up as much data as they could of Inuit who are living in Montreal. Because I believe that many Inuit in the south still experience poverty, still are afraid, you know, to go to postsecondary, are still afraid to go to the doctor.

And those kind of… And I still believe that many of us are afraid of white people. Like, when we look back historically and when we look at the word “Qallunaat”, that's the one that's used most often to say white people… my Padlei and my dad's dialect, we say “Kabluna,” and that means white person.

But when we look at the definitions of “Qallunaat” and how, you know, quite often it's given, “those with the eyebrows”, but it's also given the definitions of “those who move things around” and also “those who expect an answer immediately”.

When you're doing research with Inuit people, quite often, you know, a question is asked and then there's a silence. And that's, I think quite often, where non-Inuit researchers get a little agitated, because there will be this silence. And Inuit don't, you know, generally answer a question right off the hop, you know. That isn't how we operate. It isn't how we're taught when we're coming up. And to think, you know...I teach always Indigenous subjects, and I always have to tell my class: I will not teach from a point of loss. We're still here. We're still breathing. And that's our biggest act of resistance. We're all Indigenous Canadians if we continue breathing.

But, more importantly, our traditions and our customs and our ways of being are transferred to us. And when I think about how my mom operated with me… And I had to spend time with that, to really think about how she taught me things, and to spend time thinking about how, you know, like we're taught everything has a spirit, so a pen would have a spirit.

And I remember I got my first two-wheel bicycle when I was in grade two. And we were not rich, but my dad would pull apart old bikes and weld together, you know, a bike that had 12 different colours and beat-up tires and all of that. But I loved my bike. I remember, like, this deep love for my bike and how I would pull it up onto the porch in the evening and I would kiss it and say, “I'm going to see you first thing tomorrow. You're going to be the first thing.” [Laughs.]

But then I would think, like, why the hell did I behave like that? And we have to think about: what is blood memory? And what is inherent? And that's what, you know, that's the thing I really push, definitely with younger Inuit, and there are so many young Inuit that are living in the South in Canada and who are afraid, you know, to identify.

I interviewed and knew one Inuit fellow, and he was a lifeguard with the City of Edmonton. And he would talk about how Asian people would walk up to him and start speaking to him in Cantonese and he would, like, shake his head, like, “No, I don't speak.” And then, they give him heck for being a nonspeaking Asian guy. [Laughs.]

So, you know, that was, like, part of your workday and you just, you know, you didn't aggravate things, you just kind of went with it. And when I think about one other young guy I interviewed, he managed a Chili's restaurant at the airport in Edmonton, and one day this lady comes along and she starts asking him, you know, “What are you?” And so, he said, “Well, I'm Inuit.”

She went, “Ahhh!” She went and grabs her camera phone, you know, flips it on to the camera, stops somebody and says, “Hey can you take a picture of us two together?”

And this young Inuit guy doesn't really understand what's going on. Anyhow, the stranger clicked the picture and she looked at him and said, “You know, I'm so glad I have proof to my family that I can tell them I find finally met an Eskimo.” And so, you know, he talked about how, “I felt like I was in a zoo.” Like, it was just so weird.

And so, when we have that kind of stuff that is happening in the south, it makes Inuit, I believe, especially young Inuit, they stop identifying. They don't want to identify. And I completely understand that you just don't want to have to deal with the mainstream questions that will come to you.

I was at an event and my girlfriend brought her man—I'd never met him—and she introduces us and then she leaves to go get us some tea. And this guy, who I think I'd known him for 35 seconds, he looks at me and he says, “Hey, your dad, he was white, right?”

I said, “What?”

“But your dad, your dad was white, right?”

And I'm thinking, what the hell is going on? Like, I just met him 45 seconds ago. And so, I look at him and I said, “You want to know what my dad was?”

And he says, “Yeah, what?”

And I said, “He was an awesome hunter. Like, he had six kids, and no matter where we lived, like, the first thing my parents did, my dad scoped out where he was going to hunt and my mom figured out where all the berries were growing.” And that's, you know, like God, we picked berries forever. But, you know, what I'm talking about is his weird kind of reaction that Inuit people get simply by being Inuit and living outside of their land claims area.

So, I think there is a real need, you know, to be able to get the statistics, to get the…

You know, like, we have to remember that the statistics are an image of a people, but they are not the people themselves.

I hope that's good. [Laughs.]

Sarah de Leeuw: Norma, I guarantee you it's good because again people are literally sending you love and respect via the chat. I quote: “Sending lots of love and respect,” from Sheri Gibson. So, I think you have absolutely provided so much incredibly depthful, fulsome, and yet kind and personalized information for a large audience.

The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health is truly eternally thankful for your perseverance. Just making it to this webinar, I know we had so many technical difficulties. So just again, amazed and thankful that you were so generous and willing to share. I think you educated hearts and minds across this colonially violent country of Canada. So, thank you so, so much again. Oh, and somebody, as a fellow creative writer is saying, “Congratulations! Go buy her books.”

Yes, some have been translated. We are at time, Norma, but I just can't help myself – creative writer to creative writer, poet to poet – I have to say when I first read *Annie Muktuk and Other Stories*, I laughed and I cried, and I cried and I laughed, and I bloody sobbed, and then I laughed so hard I thought I was going to bust my gut, Norma. Did you want to close by offering any reflections on the role of story and narrative for Indigenous well-being and health, or especially for Inuit well-being and health?

I mean, *Annie Muktuk*— your other books are completely brilliant! Go out and buy them, folks! I've got them lined up here in my world. I'm showing your books off, Norma, onscreen right now.

But, any thoughts? I think the fact that you are a creative writer, a poet, and yet you're teaching about Indigenous health at the First Nations University. I think this is maybe where conversations about health, especially mental health, are going. Do you have any closing thoughts and any closing thoughts on humour and the beauty of humour for longevity and resilience? I don't know, Norma.

Norma Dunning: Well, I think that…

What I tell my students, usually in the first class, is that when you're with an Indigenous prof, they're teaching you through story, and so you're going to sit out there and think, well, gee, Norma Dunning, all she does is talk about herself.

Well, guess what, yeah, I do. And I do because each of those stories has a purpose. And for me, I think about visiting with an elder that I interviewed long ago, an Inuit elder in Edmonton. And it was a brutally cold day. I was amazed that my car started. And I got there to her place, and, you know, for Inuit, we cannot ask the elder the question first. Like, we cannot. We have to wait for the elder to say, "Okay, you know, what is it that you'd like to talk about?"

So, this one day the weather is brutal and then there's snow squalls, they're coming in, and my car was really old. And there's the elder, she's telling me this story about growing up and having to find driftwood because her father and her grandfather contracted to HBC, and they would build, you know, the smaller boats, the scows.

And so she's telling this story and I feel like it's just going on, and I'm sitting there and I'm thinking, "My car is never going to get started again, you know. Like, I'm probably just going to have to leave it here in the parking lot until June because, like, it's an older car."

But she keeps telling me this story. And it wasn't, you know, until I… And then, when she finished that story and she took about 45 minutes. It's a beautiful story, it's an absolutely wonderful story. And it wasn't until, you know, I wrote about it and I put it into an article, and anyhow, it would be, you know, for me, when I have those stories of the elders, those stories return to me on the days when I need them. And so, I can think, you know, I'm having the worst day, or this is just a hard day, and I can hear that elder's voice come back to me, and I can remember some of her exact sentences.

And so, for me, when we're talking about teaching through story, it's more than, "Hey, I'm trying to entertain you." It's having those words return to us with a deeper meaning and a deeper purpose.

And I think often—and I think it's getting better though too at the same time—researchers have to really respect that, that story and why the story is being told, and what they do with it. There are many stories that will remain sacred, that will never go into print, and that only knowledge keepers will carry.

So, you know, it's time to understand each other and to really, really think about the story that you're being told. I mean, I can tell you about a story where I'm sick and I'm sitting in a walk-in clinic. Well, what the hell is really going on there? It's more than Norma Dunning being so frustrated and pushing back, you know, against the medical system. Not a specific doctor, it's against an entire system. But we have to, like, we have to always broaden our thinking when we're being—how do I say… When we're receiving the gift of story, we really have to broaden why that story is coming to us and what do we do with it?

Sarah de Leeuw: Norma, we are so thankful. I think many people who attended this webinar today will return to the stories that you've shared. I think your act, your kind and generous act, of sharing stories will be the kind of stories that we will continue to learn from for a very, very, very long time.

So, your time is valuable. We're so thankful for the time that you shared with us today. I think with that, unless there's any pressing questions that I'm not seeing in the Questions and Answers and in the chat functions.

Folks, just a heartfelt thank you from all of us at the NCCIH to all of you who took time out of your busy afternoons to attend this really gorgeous seminar by Dr Dunning. And also, a reminder that it was recorded. Apologies—that's totally on me. I mixed that up at the beginning of the introduction to this webinar. It will be posted when it's translated and tidied up a bit.

It will be available on the NCCIH website so that many, many more people, Norma, can learn from you. Thank you so much again.

And Norma, just at a personal note: It is never anything short of a delight, a pleasure, and just a really raucous opportunity to work with you. So, thank you again for your generosity today. And yeah, we're going to have to get together at a literary festival again soon. I know, we need to go to a spa or something! Aww!

Norma Dunning: And to everybody who came out, in my language, Ma'na, thank you.

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