



National Collaborating Centre  
for Indigenous Health

# What is Distinctions-Based Health Impact Assessment?

Presenters: Dr. Diana Lewis and Dr. Elana Nightingale

Prepared by: Dr. Diana Lewis, Dr. Elana Nightingale, Veronica Reitmeier, Lara Durksen, and Dr. Heather Castleden

March 31, 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  
distinctions-based health impact assessment?

**1** (not at all familiar)

**5** (very familiar)



# Outline

1. Health Impact Assessment: Context and key concepts
2. Understanding 'Health': Indigenous models of well-being
3. Distinctions-based HIA in practice
  - How does the process change?
  - How do you work with community?
  - Why does it matter?
4. Conclusion
5. Question period

# What is Health Impact Assessment (HIA)?



Identify and assess potential impacts of a development on the health and well-being of a population



Comprehensive and systematic approach that emphasizes equity in the distribution of health effects

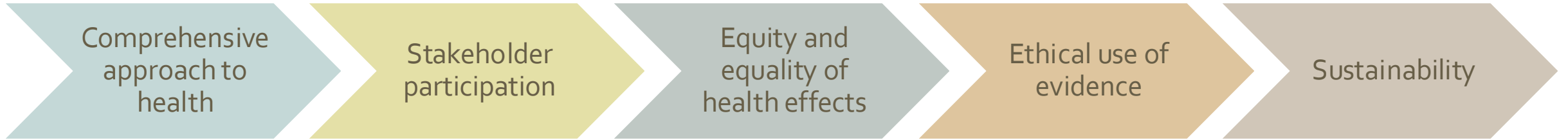


HIAs are voluntary within the Impact Assessment Act (2019)



Lack of guidance for practitioners on Indigenous community-specific HIA processes

# International Association for Impact Assessment's Guiding Principles for HIA



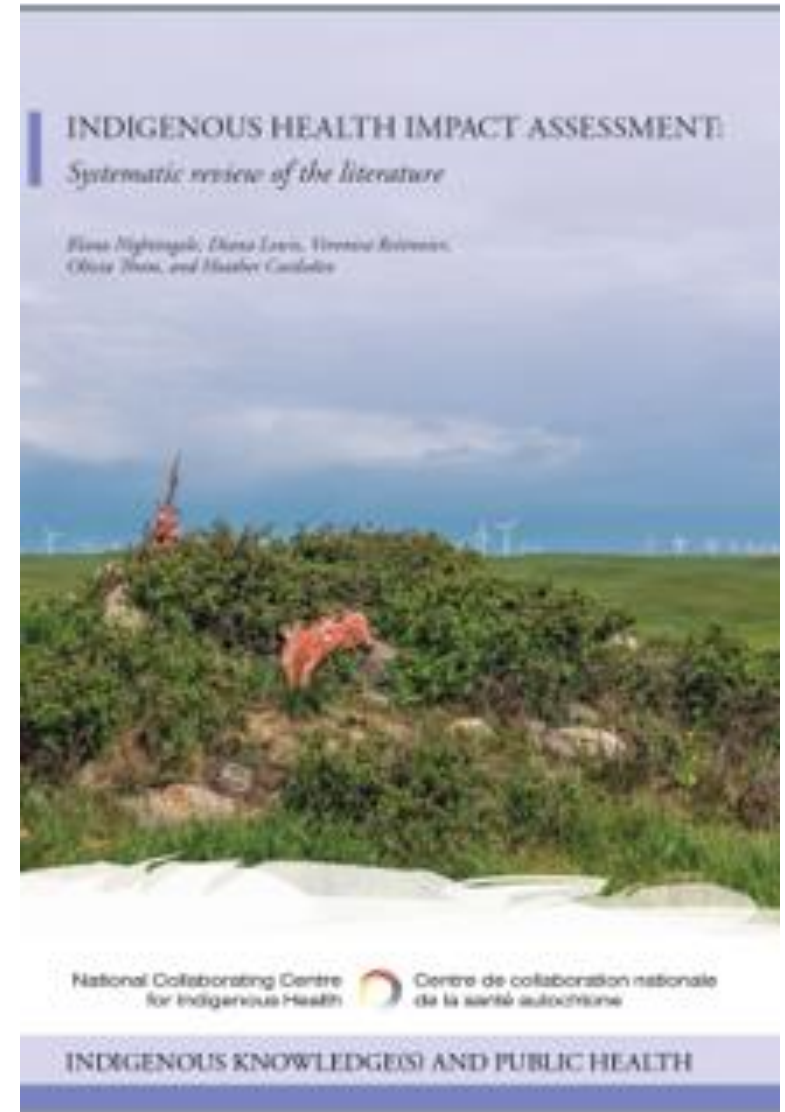
IAIA: global network of researchers, practitioners, and knowledge users of impact assessment

- Provides training, best practices, and resources for different types of impact assessments
- Includes an Indigenous Peoples Section and Health Section
- IAIA.org

Previous  
publications:  
NCCIH.ca

## Health Impact Assessment Webinar Series:

1. January: What is Indigenous-specific HIA?
2. February: What does meaningful engagement mean?
3. March: How are Indigenous values considered in Impact Assessments?



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



GUIDANCE APPENDICES TO THE MAJOR PROJECTS ASSESSMENT STANDARD

**FIRST NATIONS MAJOR PROJECTS COALITION**

Free online course  
on **Health Impact Assessment (HIA)**

Register!  
[ncchpp.ca/hia](http://ncchpp.ca/hia)

First Nations Major Projects Coalition  
Health Impact Assessment  
Collaborating Centre  
by Health Canada

A Guideline for Conducting Health Impact Assessment for First Nations in British Columbia, Canada

Commissioned by: Tsimshian Environmental Stewardship Authority  
July 2018

An Introduction to **Indigenous-led Assessment**

Key Considerations and Principles

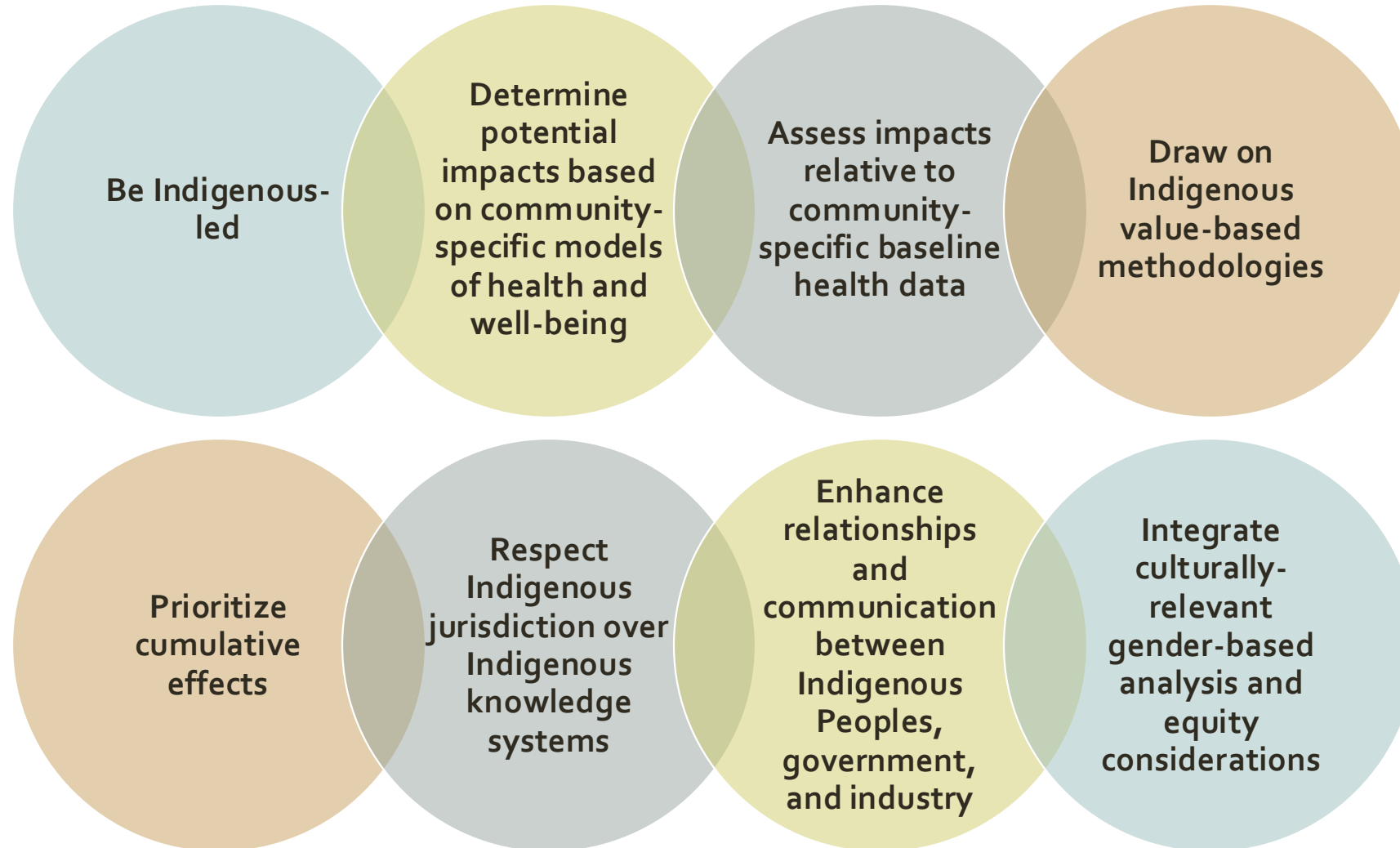
**firelight**

**FIRST NATIONS MAJOR PROJECTS COALITION**

Prepared by:  
The Firelight Group  
The First Nations Major Projects Coalition

# Key Resources for How-to HIA

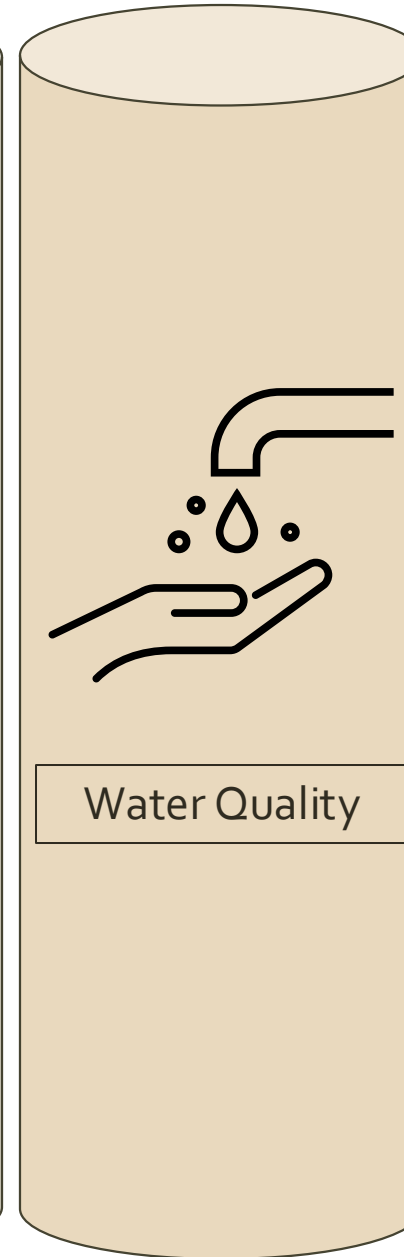
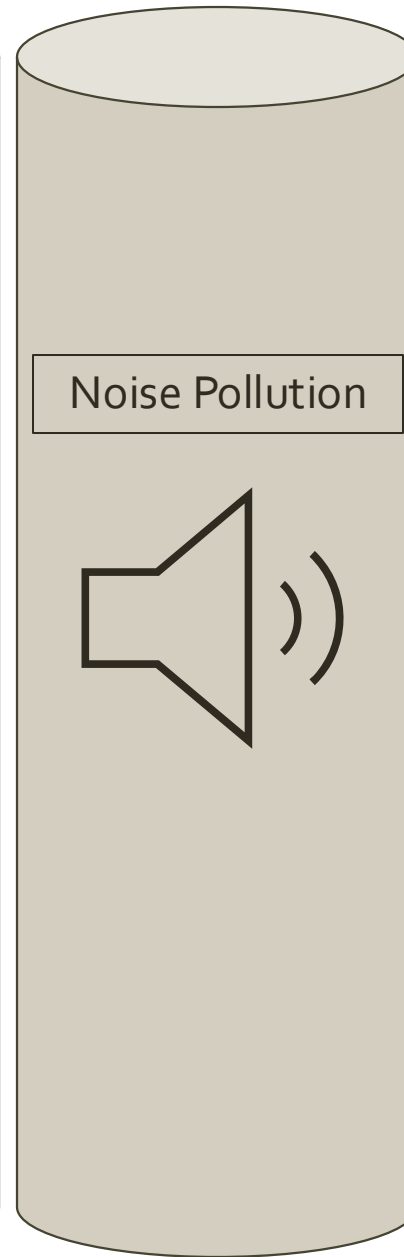
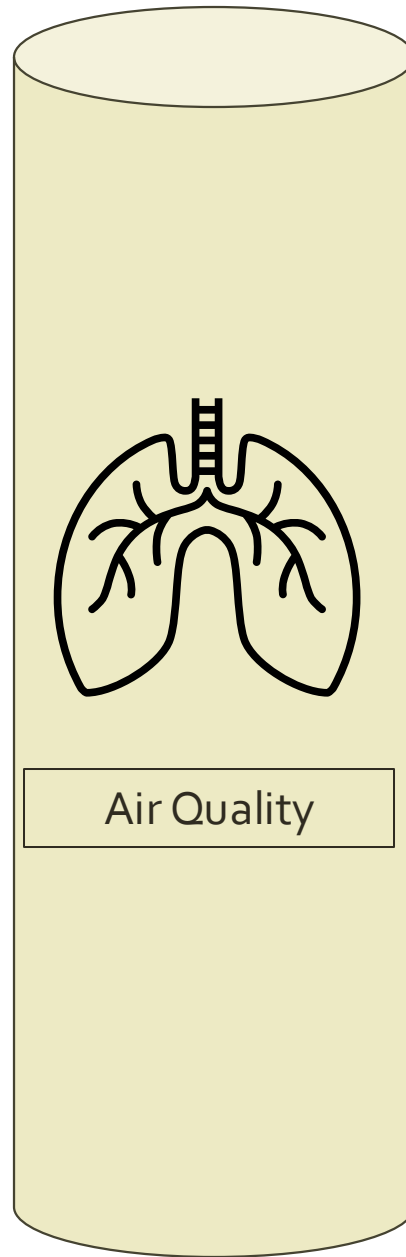
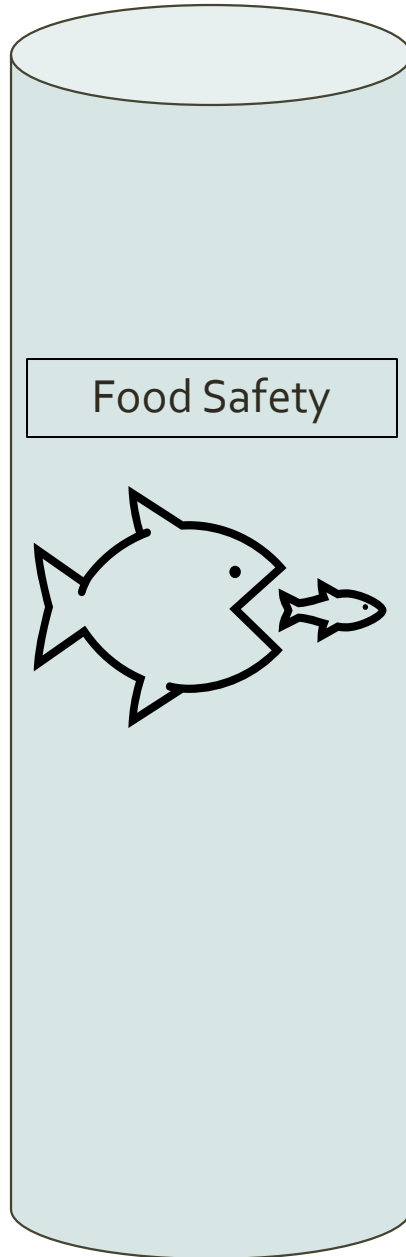
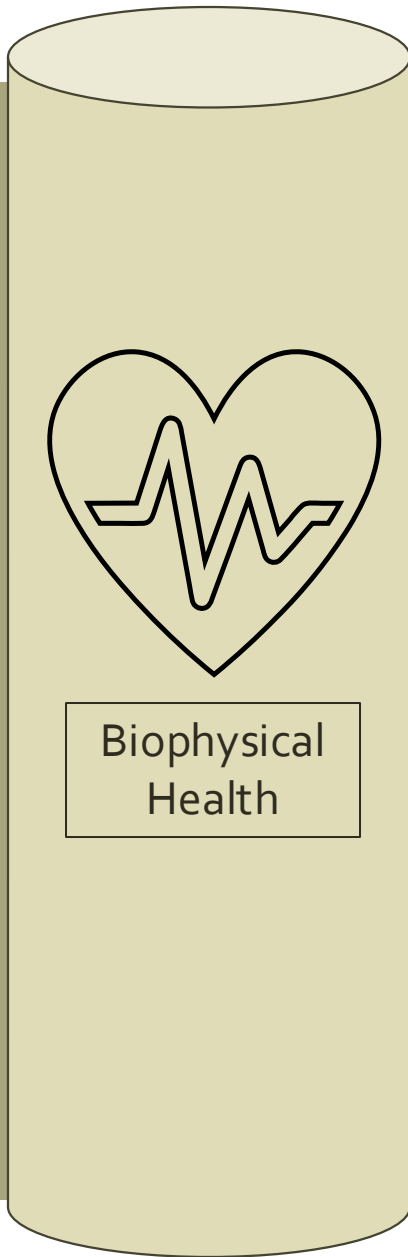
# Recommended HIA Best Practices



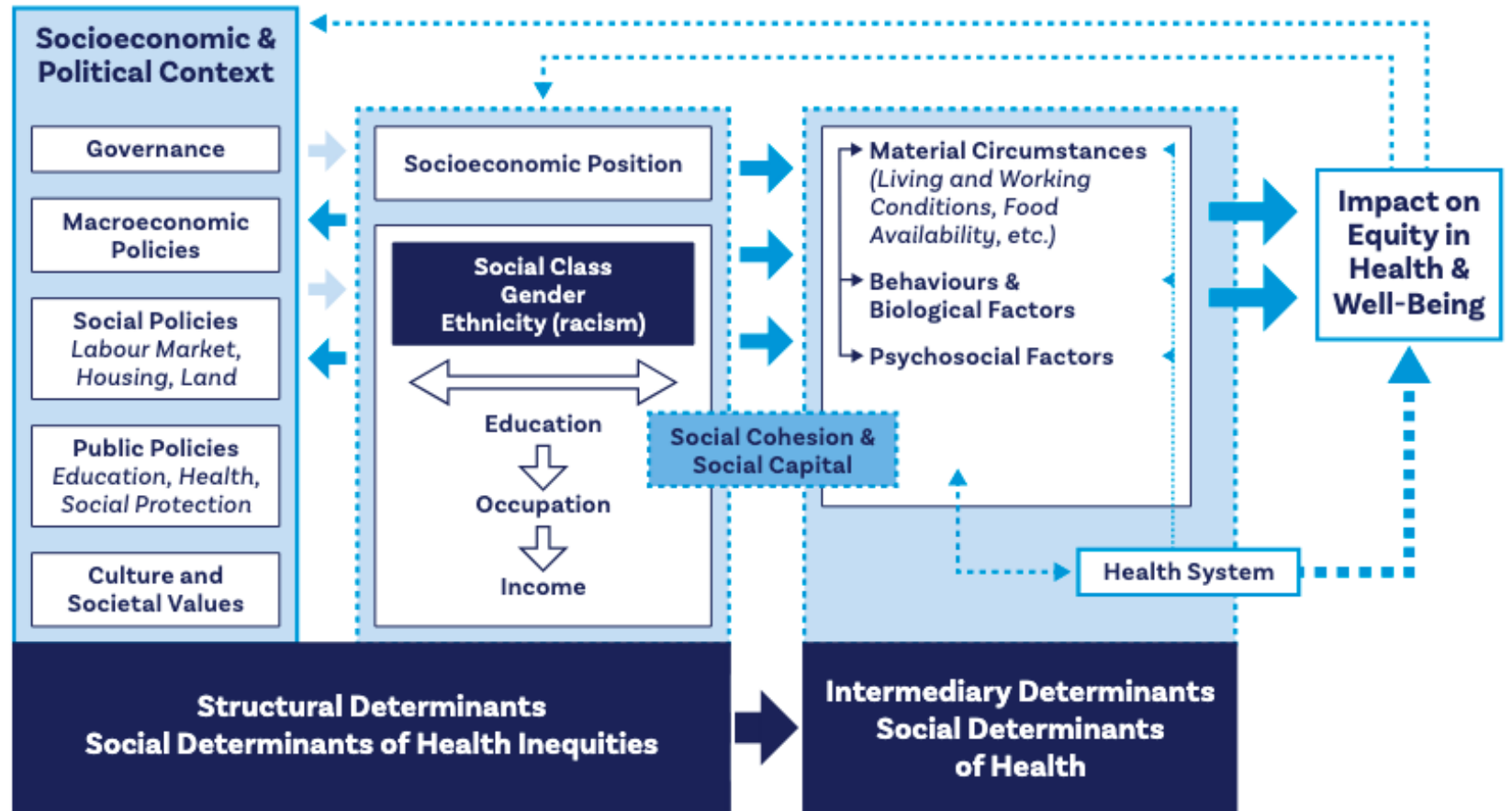
# What does 'health' mean in Health Impact Assessment?

And who defines it?

Where We Started...



# Where We Are Now...



Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008). Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Loppie, C., & Wien, F. (2022). *Understanding Indigenous health inequalities through a social determinants model*. National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health.

## SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' HEALTH

- Health Activities
- Geophysical Environments
- Employment and Income
- Education
- Food Insecurity



- Systems
- Community Infrastructure, Resources and Capacities
- Environmental Stewardship
- Cultural Resurgence



- Colonial Ideologies
- Colonial Governance
- Indigenous Self-Determination



Stem  
Determinants

Core  
Determinants

Root  
Determinants

© 2021 Charlotte Loppie

# Where We Are Going...

- **Distinctions-based Indigenous health frameworks**
  - Recognize the unique determinants of health at the Nation, Inuit region, and community levels
  - Emphasize place-based context and the role of history, geography, culture, and spirituality in shaping well-being
  - Uphold community-specific relationships to land/territory and related responsibilities, values, knowledge, and protocols
  - Include Gender, 2SLGBTQQIA+, diverse abilities, and urban contexts
  - Highlight community timeframes and the interconnections of past, present, and future impacts

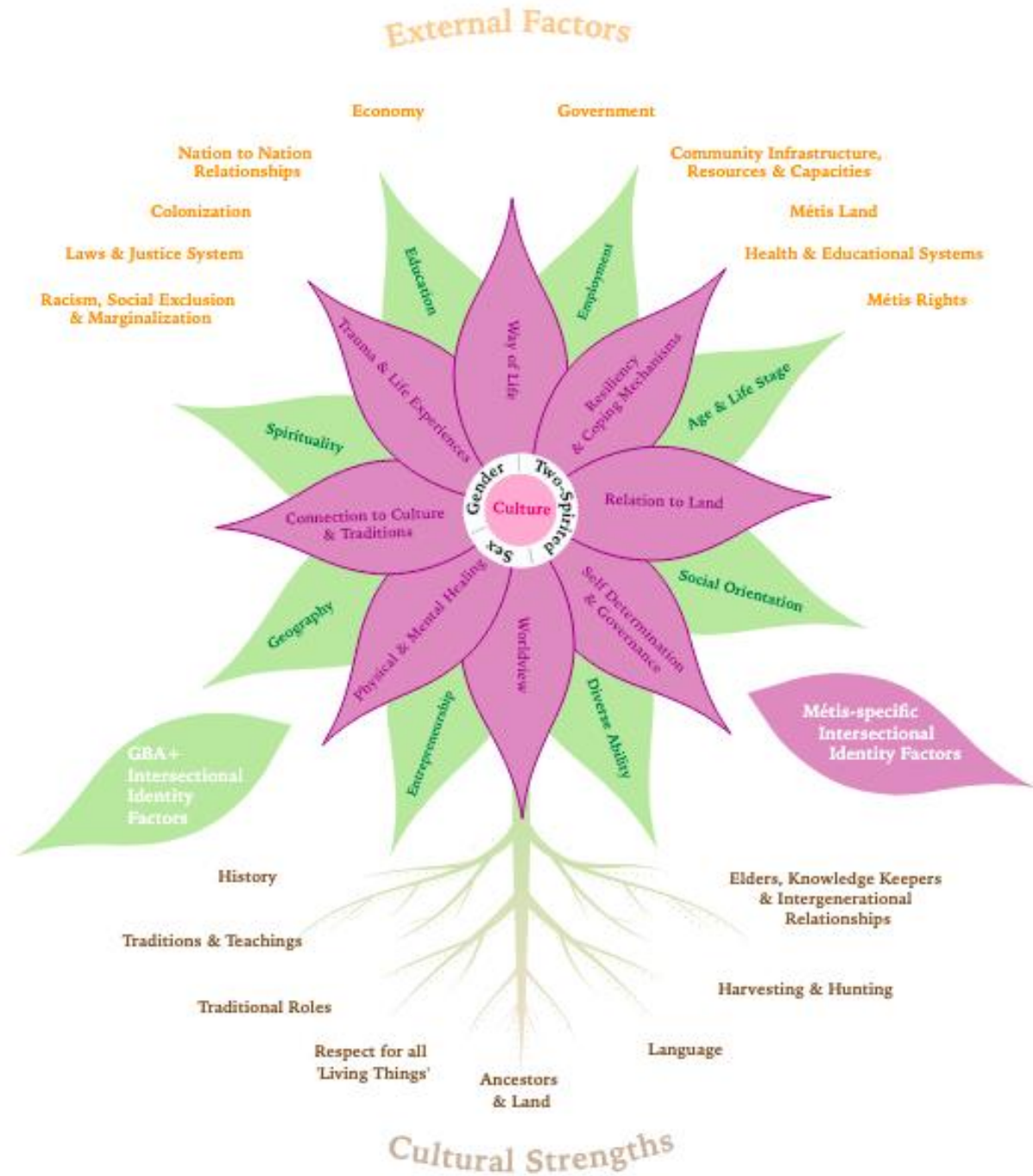
## \*Transferability of Concepts

Wilkes, R. (2015). Indigenous resistance in comparative perspective: An overview with an autobiographical research critique. In Coburn, E. (2015). *More will sing their way to freedom: Indigenous resistance and resurgence* (111-128). Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing.



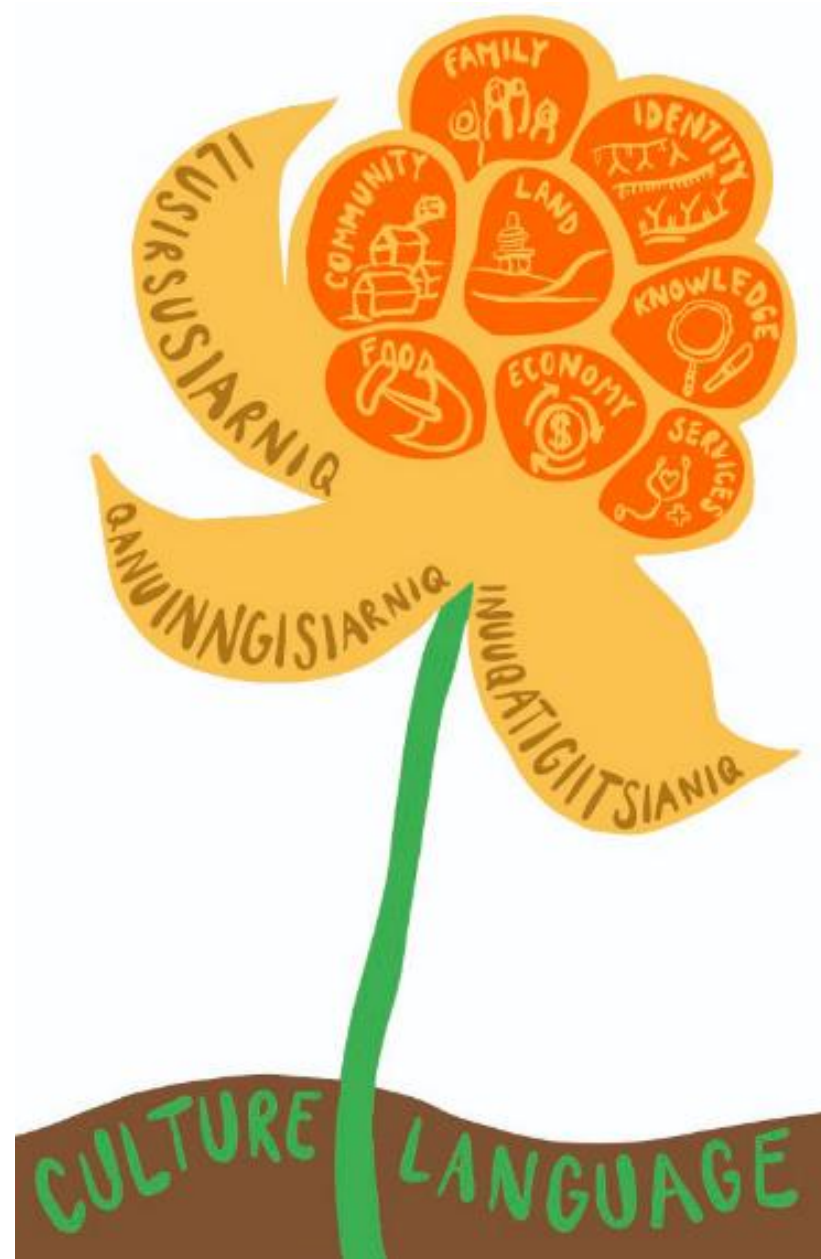
# Ex. GBA+ Métis-specific Model

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO). (2019). *National Métis Women's Forum 2019: Métis-specific gender based analysis plus (GBA+) tool*. Women of the Métis Nation.



# Ex. Nunavik's IQI Model of Health

Fletcher, C., Riva, M., Lyonnais, M-C., Saunders, I., Baron, A., Lynch, M., & Baron, M. (2021). Definition of an Inuit cultural model and social determinants of health for Nunavik: Community component. *Nunavik Inuit Health Survey 2017. Qanuilirpitaa? How are we now?* Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS) & Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ).



Determinants	Sub-themes	Items				
COMMUNITY	Ways of living together	Altruism	Awareness	Expectations	Inclusion and rehabilitation	Intergenerational link
		Involvement	Recognition	Respect	Social support	Communication
		Elders	Outsiders	Visiting and gathering	Feeling safe in the community	
	Infrastructure	Building infrastructure	Municipal services and functioning	Leisure activities, sports and recreation	Justice	
	Housing	Accessibility	Sense of home	Structure		
FAMILY	Sense of family	Harmony	Adoption	Raising children/parenting	Grandparents	Roles within the household
		Extended family connections and mobility				
IDENTITY		Childhood and youth experience	Connection to culture	Cultural activities	History	Impacts of southern culture
		Language	Pride			
FOOD		Sharing	Harvesting	Food quality, adequacy and quantity	Food preferences	Food regulations
LAND	Accessibility	Land as healing	Taking care of the land	Outdoor activities		
	Safety and security	Search and rescue	Practices	Knowledge		
KNOWLEDGE	Leadership	Governance	Empowerment		Inter-agency collaboration	
	Education	Skills development	Schooling	Administrative knowledge		
ECONOMY	Making a living/providing	Job opportunities	Work (ethic, conditions, competences)			
	Local and regional development	Access to goods	Cost of living	Expertise	Funding	
SERVICES	Health services	Mental health services	Physical health services	Community health initiatives and sustainability		
	Trauma and healing	Acknowledgment	Coping	Cultural safety	Faith	Grieving
		Harm and self-harm	Healing services	Intergenerational trauma	Nurturing	Readiness

# Ex. Mi'kmaq Community- Specific Models





A'SE'K – THE  
OTHER ROOM

# Boat Harbour Effluent Treatment Facility



What do community-specific health models mean for doing HIA?

# Piktukowaq Environmental Health Interpretive Framework

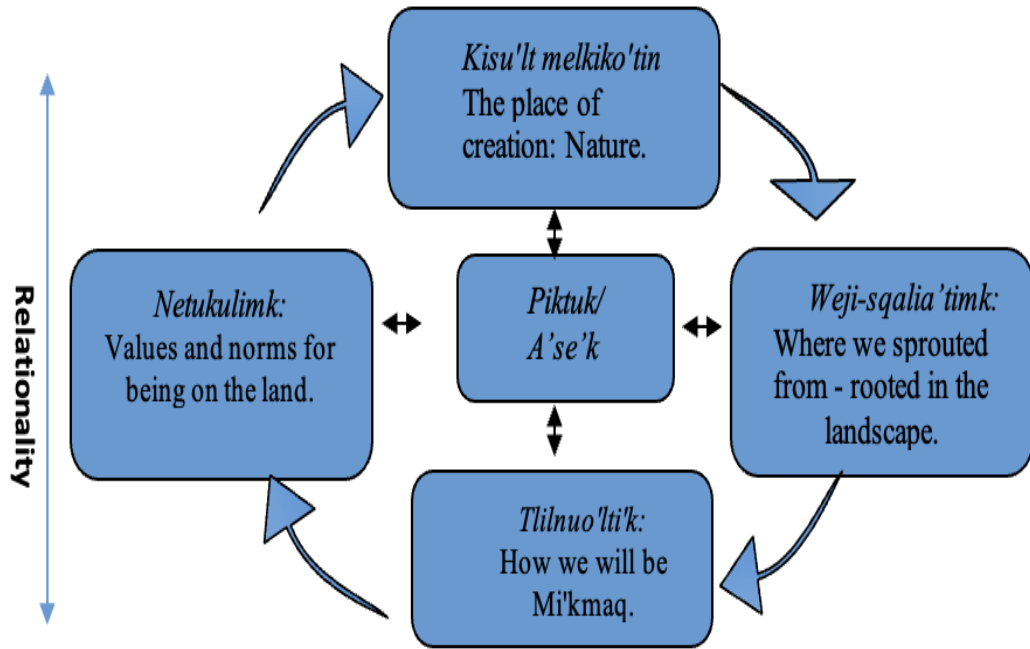


Figure 3.1 - Piktukowaq Ways of Being.

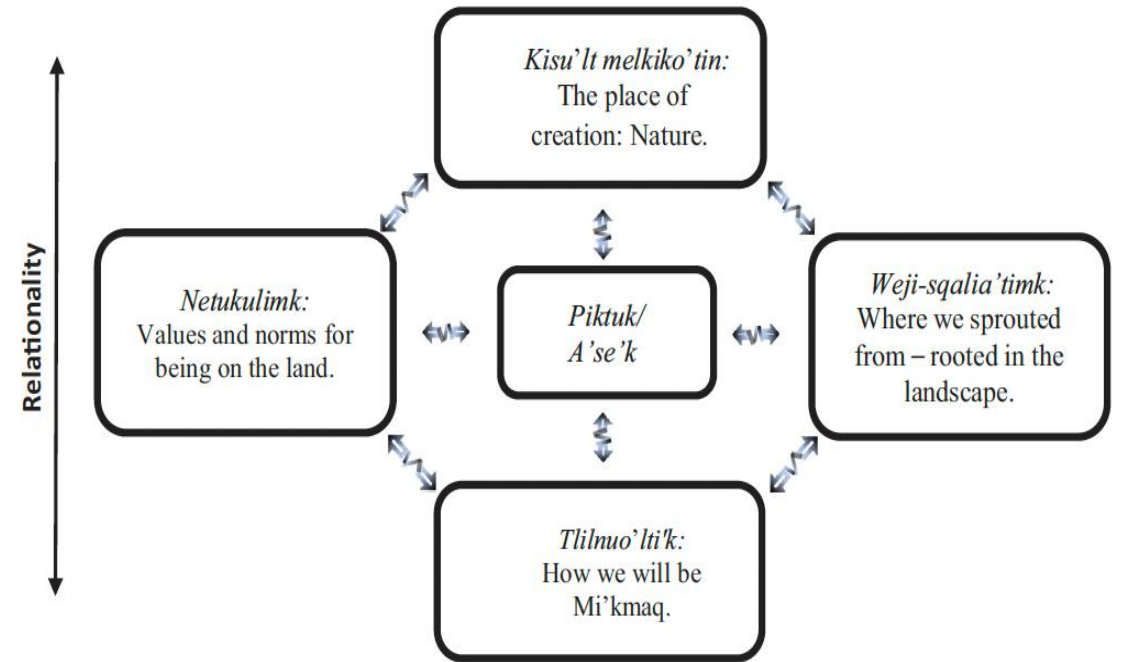
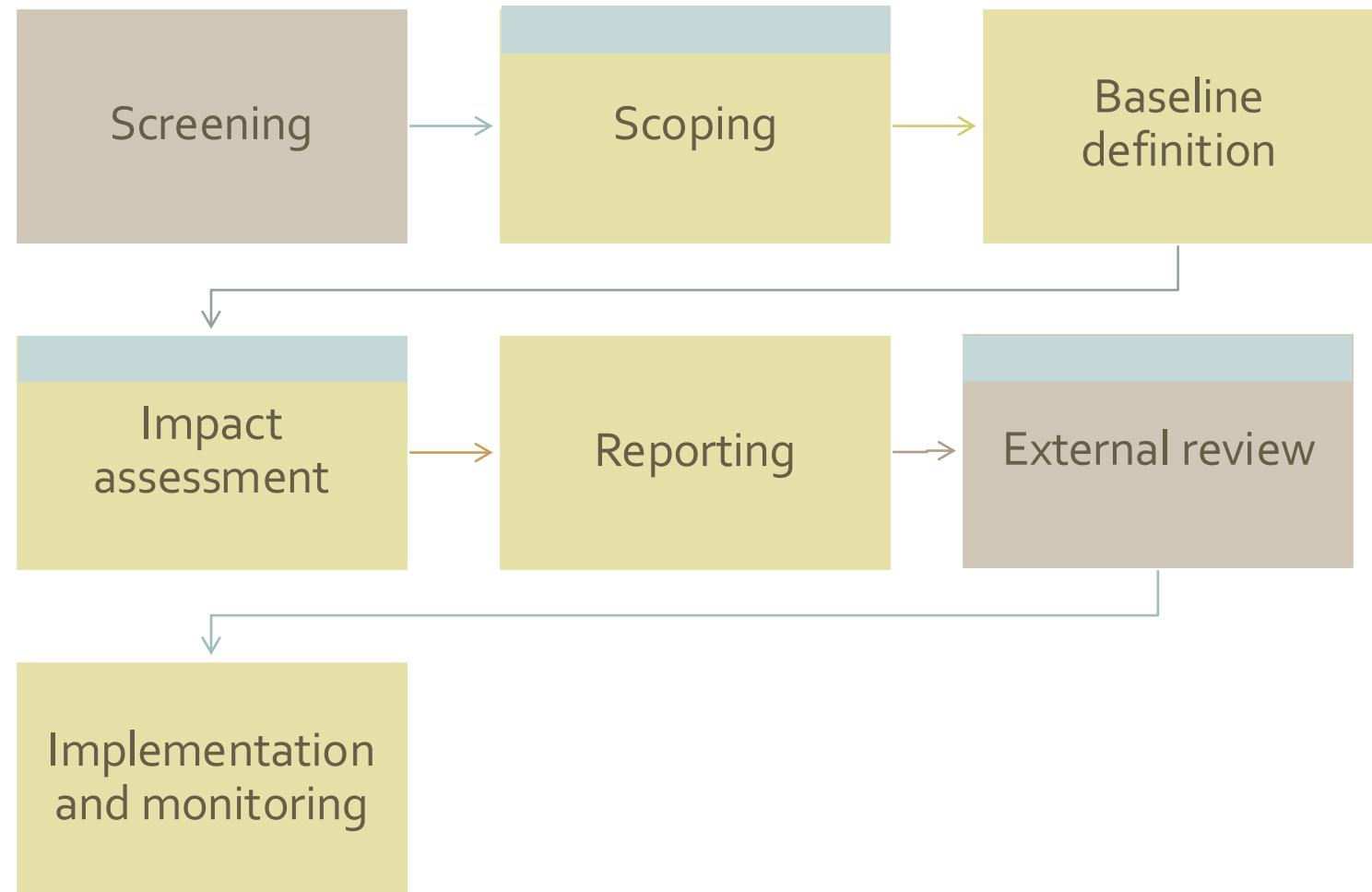
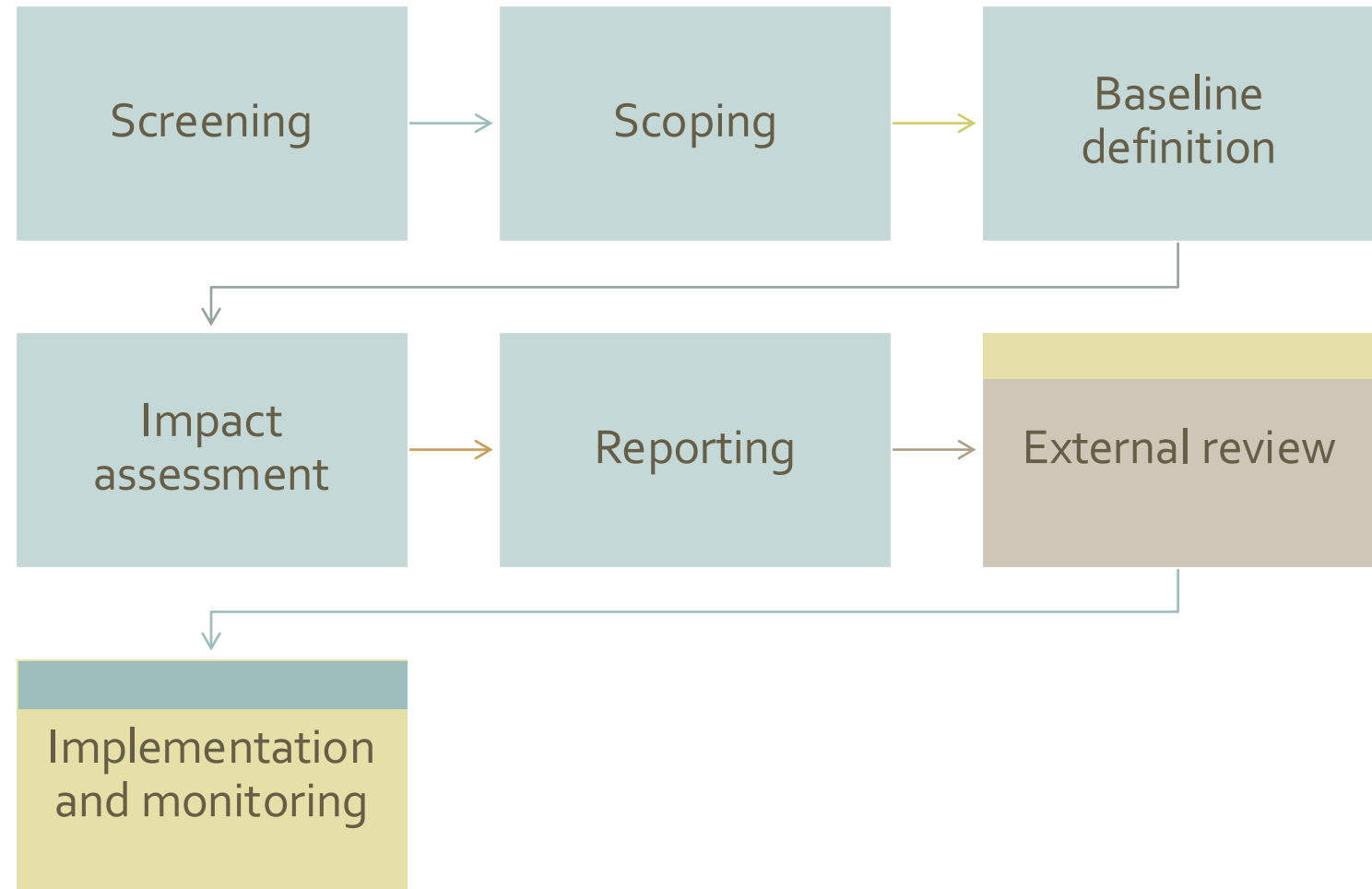


Figure 5  
Piktukowaq ways of being as relationships are severed.

# The Steps of HIA



# The Steps of Distinctions-Based HIA



# Scoping and Defining a Baseline

Which communities may be affected?

What are community-specific impact pathways?

Which community-level data are available?



# Assessing Potential Impacts

Characterizing effects

Prioritizing potential impacts

Highlighting equity

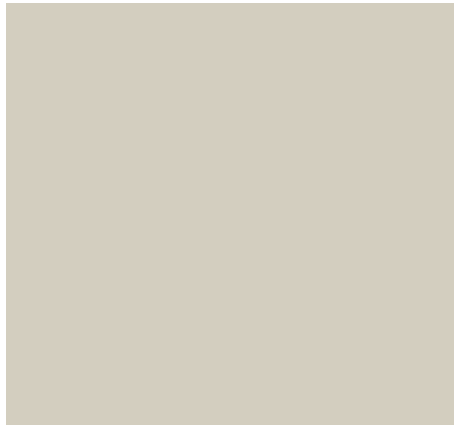
Defining significance:

Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia  
Standards or Thresholds for  
Determination of Significance

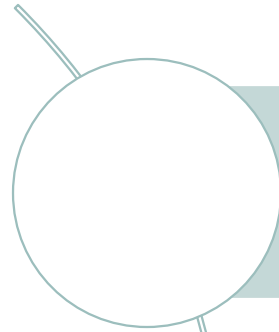


# Implementation and Monitoring

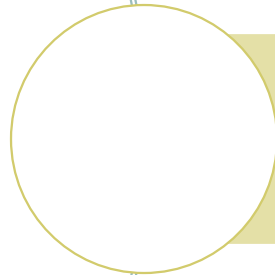
Source: <https://signalhfx.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/lagoonlarge-990x559.jpg>



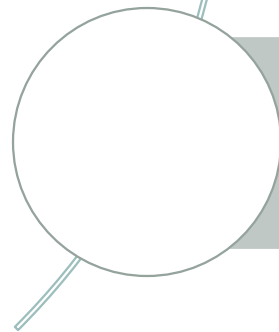
# Working WITH Community in HIA



Supporting community leadership and authority

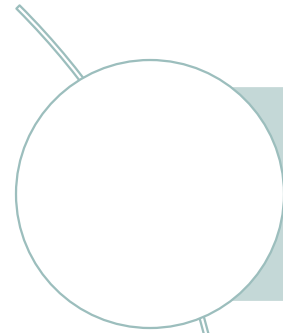


Building relationships: Honesty and trust for the long-term

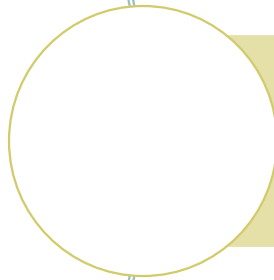


Indigenous Knowledge: Respecting, not extracting

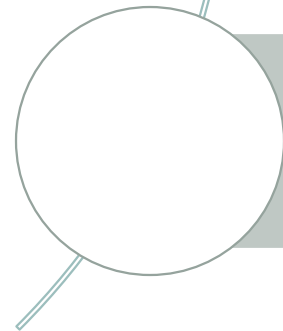
# Leading HIA



Vetting HIA practitioners and health researchers

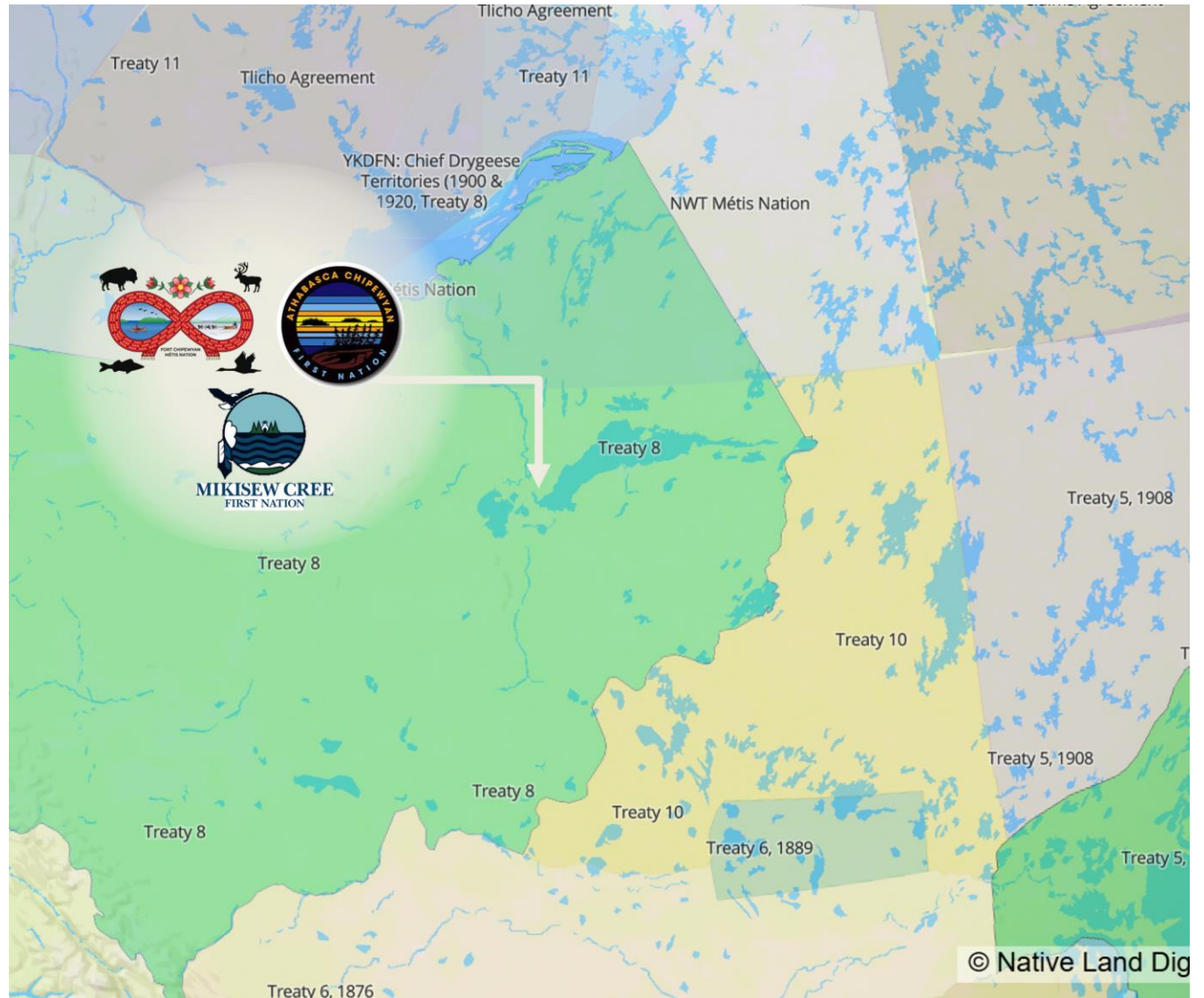


Asking for the time and/or resources required



Finding HIA examples and other communities to connect with

# Ex. A Distinctions- Based Process in Fort Chipewyan



© Native Land Digital © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

# A Few Recommendations Moving Forward

## 1. Supports for HIA practitioners

- What do they need?
- Who has been vetted by community and already knows how to do this work?

## 2. Distinctions-based resources and tools

- For proponents on how to support HIA based on the expectations, best practices, and recommendations of communities
- For proponents and government on how to appropriately review and assess distinctions-based HIA
- To guide communities in developing their own HIA laws, models, and processes
- To support communities with measurement techniques to assess and determine the significance of effects based on local values

## 3. Forums to share experiences across communities

# We'la'liog

# Thank you

Please visit the NCCIH website to access:

1. Literature review report
2. Complete HIA webinar series



Questions?