

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL SAFETY:

*An environmental scan of cultural safety initiatives
in Canada - Chapter 14: Cultural safety initiatives
in the Northwest Territories*




National Collaborating Centre
for Indigenous Health



Centre de collaboration nationale
de la santé autochtone

CULTURAL SAFETY AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS



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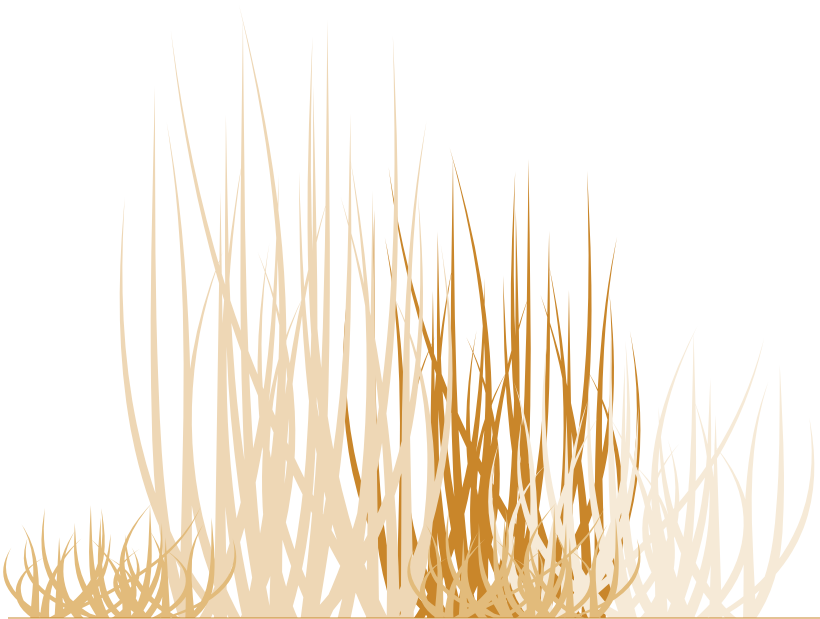
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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on cultural safety initiatives in the Northwest Territories that have been identified as part of the wider environmental scan. In keeping with the change model proposed by Greenwood (2019), this includes structural-level actions, such as legislation, tripartite and bi-lateral partnership agreements, as well as policy initiatives aimed at promoting cultural safety, humility, and anti-racism in health service delivery through, for example, advancements in Indigenous self-determination over health care planning, design, and delivery. System-level responses by national Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations with a health mandate are also considered, and include strategic action plans, position statements, professional competencies, and practice standards and guidelines. The final sections provide an overview of cultural safety educational resources and training initiatives developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and governmental departments.

A note to the reader: In 2017, the federal government replaced Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) with two new departments, Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, to reflect its commitment to reconciliation.





LEGISLATION



Government of the Northwest Territories

Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act, 1994

Inuit recognize custom adoption as an essential practice (O'Brien Payne, 2017). In custom adoptions, birth parents give consent to other family members, extended family, close friends, or community members to adopt their child and they generally maintain a role in the child's life after adoption. This legislation allows custom adoptions to be easily recognized through a relatively simple application process.

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/aboriginal-custom-adoption-recognition/aboriginal-custom-adoption-recognition.a.pdf>

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Tripartite ¹ partnerships

None identified.

Bilateral ² partnerships

None identified.

¹ For the purposes of this report, tripartite activities are defined as involving any number of entities from both the federal and provincial/territorial governments plus any number of entities from Indigenous organizations or the health sector.

² For the purposes of this report, bilateral activities are defined as involving any number of entities from either the federal and provincial/territorial governments (but not both), plus any number of entities from Indigenous organizations or the health sector.



POLICY AND PROGRAM RESPONSES



Tripartite policy responses

Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), federal government, and NWT On the Land Collaborative

Mental Wellness Teams, 2018

The federal government, in partnership with the GNWT and the NWT On the Land Collaborative, announced a \$500,000 investment to support Mental Wellness Teams and projects to improve mental health services across the NWT. The funding supports the delivery of on the land programming that respects the unique cultural aspects of mental wellness for Indigenous peoples and uses a team approach (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2018).

On the Land Healing Fund

The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) administers the On the Land Healing Fund through Indigenous governments to help ensure the delivery of culturally relevant, community-based options for individuals living with mental health issues and addictions. The fund supports programming that blends traditional activities on the land with a therapeutic focus, including land-based addictions treatment and aftercare.

Bilateral policy responses

None identified.

Territorial responses

Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)

Cultural safety: Declaration of Commitment, 2019

This declaration signifies the GNWT's commitment to embedding cultural safety and relationship-based care throughout the NWT's health and social services system. The declaration is available in English, French, and seven Indigenous languages.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/declaration-commitment-cultural-safety-english.pdf>

Primary Health Care Reform, 2019

The NWT Health and Social Services system launched a primary health care reform initiative focused on cultural safety and relationship-based care, beginning with six demonstration projects across the NWT to test innovative new models and approaches to primary health care. The projects are developed in keeping with the principles of cultural safety, as outlined in the recently released cultural safety action plan.

<https://www.nthssa.ca/en/primary-health-care-reform>



Mind and Spirit: Promoting Mental Health and Addictions Recovery in the Northwest Territories – Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Action Plan 2019-2021

This action plan is the final deliverable under the Mind and Spirit Strategic Framework, and contains key activities aimed at improving access to mental health and addictions services and creating clear and seamless service and referral pathways between government and non-government providers, including culturally based and traditional options. The action plan outlines the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) approach to the implementation of the Seamless Care Pathway, a person-centred and holistic approach that includes formal and informal supports and services to meet the needs identified by the individual (DHSS, 2019).

Northwest Territories Child and Family Services Quality Improvement Plan, 2019- 2021

Released in August 2019, this plan identifies 70 action items for improving the Child and Family Services System and achieving better outcomes for children, youth, and their families. The plan focuses on 10 priority areas: system improvements, prevention services, cultural safety and respect, foster care services, investigations, structured decision making®, case management and permanency planning, specialized placement services, and accountability structure.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/cfs-quality-improvement-plan.pdf>

Government of the Northwest Territories Disability Action Plan 2018/19-2021/22

Building on the “Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Participation NWT Disability Strategic Framework,” this plan guides actions to ensure that persons with disability are able to engage as full citizens. The action plan is grounded in principles of self-determination, equality of opportunity, independence, innovation, personal accessibility, person and family-centred, non-discrimination, respect, flexibility, and dignity.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/gnwt-disability-action-plan-2018-19-2021-21.pdf>

Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020

This action plan was developed in consultation with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, communities, and other stakeholders and shares a vision for achieving cultural safety in health and social services in the NWT that focuses on all four elements of peoples’ health and wellness (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). The goal of the plan is to “support equitable access to culturally safe and relationship-based care to improve health outcomes for Indigenous peoples” through 27 actions taken across four objectives:

1. creating an organizational culture of cultural safety;
2. strengthening staff capacity for cultural safety;
3. honouring traditional knowledge and healing approaches and care; and
4. improving client and community experiences (NWT DHSS, 2019a, p. 5).

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/cultural-safety-action-plan.pdf>



Indigenous Advisory Body, 2018 -

To ensure that cultural safety is woven into the health and social services system and integrated into all aspects of management, operations, and frontline services, the DHSS established an Indigenous Advisory Body, consisting of representatives appointed by Indigenous governments, to provide guidance on how the health and social services system can better incorporate Indigenous traditions, culture, and healing practices so that health outcomes are improved.

https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/statements/ms_205-182.pdf

Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Participation, NWT Disability Strategic Framework: 2017-2027

Developed in collaboration between the GWNT and non-governmental organizations, this document provides a framework for ensuring that persons with disability engage as full citizens. The framework establishes four interconnected goals: person and family-centred; inclusion and accessibility; awareness, education, and training; and coordination, evaluation, and reporting. Culturally competent and safe care is a key aspect of the framework's first goal, providing person and family-centred care.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/equity-accessibility-inclusion-participation-nwt-disability-framework.pdf>

Mind and Spirit: Promoting Mental Health and Addictions Recovery in the Northwest Territories – Child and Youth Mental Wellness Action Plan 2017-2022

Developed through engagement with youth in every region of the NWT, this action plan is strengths-based, holistic, and grounded in connection to culture. It builds on the 2016 Mind and Spirit Strategic Framework and is guided by four strategic directions:

1. a focus on prevention and early intervention,
2. a recovery-oriented system,
3. personal experiences and outcomes, and
4. a whole of government approach.

The action plan addresses the full continuum of services needed to support optimal child and youth mental health, from prevention, to promotion, to early identification, to treatment and ongoing recovery supports.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/child-youth-mental-wellness-action-plan-2017-2022.pdf>



Continuing Care Services Action Plan 2017/18-2021/22

This action plan is focused on serving and supporting seniors and Elders to age in place through enhanced home and community care services that are responsive, culturally safe, and efficient. It guides work over the next five years to address goals and commitments identified in the “Our Elders, Our Communities” strategic framework and work towards the departmental strategic plan of “reducing gaps and barriers to provide equitable access to safe, culturally respectful, and responsive programs and services” (NWT DHSS, 2017a, p. 3).

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/continuing-care-services-action-plan.pdf>

Mind and Spirit: Promoting Mental Health and Addictions Recovery in the Northwest Territories: Strategic Framework, 2016-2021

This framework is intended to guide the GNWT in the delivery of quality, culturally appropriate, mental health and addictions programs and services locally. Developed in consultation with northern residents, social and health services providers, and Indigenous governments, the framework is grounded in a population-health approach and builds on existing strengths of connectedness to culture and community as foundations for prevention against mental health crisis and substance abuse.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/mind-spirit-promoting-mental-health-addictions-recovery-nwt-strategic-framework-web.pdf>

Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System, 2016

This document presents the GNWT’s commitment to working collaboratively with partners to ensure all aspects of health and social services are culturally safe and respectful for patients and clients. It highlights the need to address systemic racism, provides an overview of what cultural safety is and what has been done in the past, and outlines commitments moving forward, including a commitment to develop an action plan for addressing cultural safety.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/building-culturally-respectful-hss-system.pdf>

Our Elders: Our Communities, 2014

This strategic framework outlines seven priorities and seven guiding principles for meeting the health care and social needs of Elders and seniors to allow them to age in place. The framework is grounded in Indigenous perspectives of health and well-being and traditional values.

<https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/td90-175.pdf>

Building Stronger Families – An Action Plan to Transform Child and Family Services, 2014

Developed through engagement with Indigenous governments and community leaders in the NWT, this action plan guides activities aimed at improving the quality and delivery of child and family services through three goals:

1. increasing accountability between Health and Social Services Authorities and the DHSS;
2. improving service delivery; and
3. better assisting children and families.

The plan calls for a fundamental shift in the delivery of child and family services in the territory, and encompasses 23 separate initiatives, along with a change management strategy and evaluation component.

https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/td_120-175.pdf

- An update on progress on the *Building Stronger Families* action plan, given by former Minister of Health and Social Services Glen Abernethy: <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/news/glen-abernethy-progress-update-building-stronger-families>

Indigenous Community Wellness Division, 2013 -

The Community Wellness Division works with communities to set their own priorities and run their own health and wellness programming.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/community-wellness-initiatives>

Northwest Territories Community Wellness Initiatives: Annual Reports

The GNWT receives funding from the federal government's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch to implement community wellness programs that are administered by the GNWT and allocated directly to community and Indigenous governments, Health and Social Services Authorities, and non-government organizations. These reports highlight how the funds were used over the fiscal period, including for mental health and addictions programming focused on cultural identity and traditional values and the development of Community Wellness Plans, as well as successes and challenges documented by communities.

- **2014-2015 Report:** <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/community-wellness-initiatives-report-2014-2015.pdf>
- **2013-2014 Report:** <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/community-wellness-initiatives-report.pdf>



Education, Culture and Employment (ECE)

Early Childhood Development Action Plan 2017-2020

This action plan is a collaboration between the ECE and DHSS to advance the goals made in the “Right from the Start” framework. It supports the GNWT’s effort to “offer high quality, inclusive and accessible ECD programs and services in a culturally capable environment” (NWT ECE, 2017, p. 3), based on the principles of: community-driven, the role of elders, inclusive, programs and services focusing on vulnerable children, prevention focused, evidence-based approaches, and child-centred and family- focused.

<https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/ecd-action-plan-2017-2020.pdf>

Right from the Start: A Framework and Action Plan for Early Childhood Development, 2013

Based on a comprehensive community engagement process, this strategic framework guides the GNWT actions over a 10-year period to improve the development of children 0-5 years. It lays out the GNWT’s commitment to action to ensure “every child, family, and community has access to high quality, comprehensive, integrated early childhood development (ECD) programs that are community driven, sustainable, and culturally relevant” (NWT ECE, 2014, p. 9).

<https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/ecd-framework-and-action-plan-2013-2016.pdf>

Executive and Indigenous Affairs

Meeting the Challenge of Reconciliation: The Government of the Northwest Territories Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, 2015

This document provides the GNWT’s response to the TRC’s Calls to Action and outlines a plan of actions towards reconciliation.

https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/gnwt_response_to_trc_calls_to_action.pdf

The GNWT has provided several updates on actions taken to respond to the TRC’s Calls to Actions, including the following:

- **2017 Update:** https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/an_update_to_meeting_the_challenge_of_reconciliation_the_gnwts_response_to_the_trcs_calls_to_action.pdf
- **2019 Update:** https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/gnwt_updated_response_to_trc_june2019.pdf

Community Wellness and Safety, 2016-2019

This website highlights progress made towards 64 commitments the GNWT made under the theme of Community Wellness and Safety over the period 2016-2019. This includes progress on mental health and addictions initiatives aimed at ensuring that services are delivered locally with culturally appropriate methods; implementing the Building Stronger Families action plan to transform child and family services; and specific actions related to the TRC’s Calls to Action.

<https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/en/mandates/community-wellness-and-safety>





Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT)

Doing our Part: Initial Response to 'Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls', 2019

In 2019, the GNWT released Doing Our Part: Initial Response to 'Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' ("the Initial Response"). The Initial Response lists the thematic sections of the Inquiry's Calls for Justice, highlighting where the GNWT is already doing work that departments can build on and setting out several high-level questions the GNWT will need to carefully consider before taking further action.

https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/td_doing_our_part-initial_response_to_reclaiming_power_and_place-the_final_report_of_the_national_inquiry_into_missing_and_murdered_indigenous_wo.pdf

Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories 2019-2023

This document outlines the GNWT's agenda for the 2019-2023 period, including: implementing the UNDRIP; increasing the number and variety of culturally respectful, community-based, mental health, and addictions programs; and working in collaboration with Indigenous governments, communities, and other stakeholders to expand community-based and family-friendly early childhood development programming that respects the cultural needs of children.

<https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/mandate2019-english-pages-web.pdf>

NWT On the Land Collaborative

Created in 2015, the NWT On the Land Collaborative brings together territorial and First Nations governments, charitable, corporate, and other partners in supporting and promoting on the land initiatives in the NWT.

<http://www.nwtontheland.ca/who-we-are.html>

Health system responses

None identified.



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES

Professional organization and regulatory body responses

Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories
and Nunavut

Cultural Safety Position Statement, n.d.

This statement articulates the Association's beliefs about nursing and cultural safety and affirms its commitment to cultural safety. It also identifies actions to take along the continuum towards cultural safety, related to the Canadian Association of Nursing Code of Ethics and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action.

<https://cannn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Position-Statement-Cultural-Safety.pdf>

Competencies in the Context of Entry-Level Registered Nurse Practice, 2014

This document articulates skills and knowledge that practicing nurses should have when entering the profession, including those related to cultural safety and humility.

<https://nperesource.casn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Competencies-in-the-Context-of-Entry-Level-RN-Practice.pdf>

Indigenous organizational responses

Hotì ts'eeda Northwest Territories SPOR Support Unit

Primary Health Care Reform Initiative, 2021

Governed primarily by Indigenous governments in the NWT and funded by the CIHR, Hotì ts'eeda is often contracted to conduct external evaluations on GNWT programs. It conducted an evaluation of the GNWT's Primary Health Care Reform initiatives



to improve health care access, equity, and outcomes for Indigenous residents. Hotù ts'eeda examined and measured the impacts of Primary Health Care Reform projects and efficiencies related to financing, governance, and the delivery of health care in the Northwest Territories.

https://nwtspora.ca/sites/default/files/2022-08-29_ht_ict_executive-summary.pdf

Healthy Family Program Renewal Project, 2018-20

Contracted by the GNWT, Hotù ts'eeda conducted a review of and assisted with program renewal of the Ministry's Healthy Families Program, a community-connected, Indigenous, strengths-based, and culturally competent program.

<https://nwtspora.ca/en/supported-projects/healthy-family-program-hfp-renewal-project>

Mainstream (non-Indigenous) organizational responses

Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission –
Northwest Territories and Nunavut

2020 Corporate Plan: 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, 2018

The Corporate Plan identifies strategic priorities and actions to achieve those priorities. Under Strategy priority 2: delivering quality services and outcomes, Item 2.3 focuses on “improving cultural safety in our day-to-day work and in our services for stakeholders”.

<https://wscc.nt.ca/sites/default/files/documents/14948%20WSCC%202020%20Corp%20Plan%20%28EN%29%20WEBREADY.PDF>

- A 2018 evaluation of progress achieved in relation to this priority: <https://wscc.nt.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2018%20Q2%20Quarterly%20Update.pdf>



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND TRAINING INITIATIVES



Territorial government educational resources and training initiatives

Department of Health and Social Services

Cultural Safety Training, 2020

The *Cultural Safety Action Plan* commits the GNWT to develop cultural safety training. A one-day training session targeted at nurses, doctors, social workers, and other frontline staff focused on bias in the workplace and positive relationship building has been offered by Yellowknife-based contractor (Blake, 2018).

Cultural Safety in the NWT Health and Social Services System, 2019

This website provides information on frequently asked questions concerning cultural safety and the *Caring for our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan 2018-2020*, focused on Indigenous Peoples in the NWT.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/cultural-safety-nwt-health-and-social-services-system/frequently-asked-questions>

Health system educational resources and training initiatives

None identified.

Professional organization and regulatory body educational resources and training initiatives

None identified.

Indigenous-developed educational resources and training initiatives

None identified.

Other educational resources and training initiatives

None identified.





SUMMARY



The Northwest Territories (NWT) have an integrated health and social services system that operates under a one-system approach, with the aim of facilitating the sharing of expertise and improving overall efficiency (Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority [NWT HSSA], n.d.). The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) is guided by seven principles articulated in a *Health and Social Services Establishment Policy*: universality, personal responsibility, basic needs, sustainability, continuum of care, prevention-oriented system, and people-oriented system (Government of the Northwest Territories [GNWT], 2016).

Prior to 2016, eight independent health and social services authorities had responsibility for the delivery of health and social services in the NWT. After a four-year extensive public and stakeholder engagement process to examine the health and social services system, six of the regional health authorities (Beaufort Delta, Sahtu, Dehcho, Fort Smith, Yellowknife, and Stanton Territorial Hospital) were amalgamated into a single NWT Health and Social Services Authority to address systemic barriers to innovation and improve patient care and efficiency (NWT HSSA, n.d.). The NWT HSSA works in partnership with the Tłı̨ch̨ Community Services Agency, which provides health and social services to members of the four NWT communities of Behchok̨, Gamètì, Whatì and Wekweètì, and the Hay River Health and Social Service Authority, which provides health and social services to residents of the Slave Lake area, until such time that negotiations bring staff of this HSSA into the public service (NWT HSSA, n.d.).

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has been working swiftly to embed cultural safety into all health and social services through numerous high-level actions, developed in close collaboration with communities and relevant stakeholders. Institutional change is supported through a system-wide commitment to cultural safety (NWT DHSS, 2019b) and to reconciliation within health and social services. These commitments have led to an array of initiatives being developed and implemented to ensure Indigenous people in the Territory experience cultural safety. The GNWT's (2019b) mandate over the period 2019-2023 focuses on ways to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and enhance culturally respectful, community-based, health and social services (GNWT, 2019a). The DHSS developed a framework for building a culturally respectful health and social services system (NWT DHSS, 2016a) and implemented an action plan for achieving equitable access to culturally safe and relationship-based care (NWT DHSS, 2019a). The GNWT also implemented cultural safety training to build a culturally safe and responsive work force.

Elements of cultural safety, equity, and anti-racism have been built into strategies and action plans to address specific health and social issues. These include plans for transforming and improving the quality of Child and Family Services (NWT DHSS, 2014a, 2019c); for addressing: mental wellness and addictions recovery (NWT DHSS, 2016b, 2017b), disabilities (NWT DHSS, 2017c, 2018), seniors' needs (NWT DHSS, 2014b), continuing care services (NWT DHSS, 2017d), and early childhood

development (NWT ECE, 2014, 2017); as well as for responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action (NWT Executive and Indigenous Affairs, 2015) and the Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (GNWT, 2019b). These strategies and action plans were developed with extensive engagement with communities, experts, and other stakeholders and include formal accountability mechanisms and monitoring processes. In 1994, the GNWT also passed the *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act*, which recognizes the Inuit cultural practice of biological parents giving other members of the family or community permission to adopt their child through a relatively simple application process (O'Brien Payne, 2017).

In addition to these high-level activities, an Indigenous Advisory Body was created by the Department of Health and Social Services to provide guidance on how to better incorporate Indigenous traditions, culture, and healing practices in the health system and improve health outcomes. The GNWT launched seven demonstration projects across the NWT aimed at reforming primary health care through innovative community-level service models. An Indigenous Community Wellness Division was created within the DHSS to work with communities as they set their own priorities and run their own programming. Dedicated funding exists through the On the Land Healing Fund, financed by the federal government and administered through the DHSS, to support Indigenous governments in delivering culturally safe mental wellness and addictions recovery support. Further, Mental



Wellness Teams have been implemented to provide culturally appropriate mental health services across the Territories (INAC, 2018, 2020). The GNWT also plays a significant role in the NWT On the Land Collaborative, which supports and promotes on the land initiatives in the NWT, as both a funding contributor and administrator of the program.

The Internet search revealed relatively few cultural safety initiatives undertaken by professional organizations, regulatory bodies, or other health-related organizations in the Territories. This is likely a reflection of the small population size within the territory and its relative remoteness from large urban centres. The only initiatives identified from a search of the Internet were:

1. the Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut's release of a Cultural Safety Position Statement (n.d.) and the identification of competencies related to cultural safety and humility in entry-level registered nursing practice (2014);
2. the Hotù ts'eeda Northwest Territories SPOR Support Unit's evaluation of the GNWT's primary health care reform pilot demonstration projects (2022) and the Healthy Family Program Renewal Project (2020); and
3. the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut's (2018) identification of cultural safety as a strategic priority, with regular reporting on progress achieved.



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for Indigenous Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
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