

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL SAFETY:

*An environmental scan of cultural safety initiatives
in Canada - Chapter 15: Cultural safety initiatives
in Nunavut*



National Collaborating Centre
for Indigenous Health



Centre de collaboration nationale
de la santé autochtone

CULTURAL SAFETY AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on cultural safety initiatives in Nunavut 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 Nunavut

Bill 36: Mental Health Act, 2021

The new *Mental Health Act* replaces the outdated Mental Health Act that was carried over from when the territory was part of the Northwest Territories. The new act incorporates feedback from consultation with communities who indicated, among other things, that the previous Act did not reflect Inuit values. The new Act legislates community assisted treatment orders (CATOs), which allow certain individuals who would have otherwise been hospitalized to receive treatment and support in their own community and requires individuals to continue their treatment. It will allow health care providers to notify a selected representative that certain events have taken place (e.g., suicide attempt) and consult with them when the patient is unable to make treatment decisions for themselves. The legislation also creates a new mental health review board, with an Inuit advisor who will meet and evaluate the individual subject to the application and give evidence and advise the panel on Inuit societal values and Inuit perspectives that are relevant to the application or review.

<https://assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/Bill-36-Mental-Health-Act-Assent-EN-FR.pdf>

Nunavut Public Health Act, 2020

The *Nunavut Public Health Act* establishes measures related to health protection and promotion, population health assessment, public health surveillance, disease and injury prevention, and public health emergency preparedness and response. The Act recognizes the importance of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit societal values) to public health protection and promotion and defines how these values are incorporated into the public health system.

<https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/newsroom/nunavut-made-public-health-act-becomes-law-2020-01-07-0>

Consolidation of 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, while generally maintaining 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

Government of Nunavut, Government of Canada, and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI)

Nunavut Partnership Table on Health

Involving the Government of Nunavut, NTI, and the Government of Canada, this well-established senior-level table meets quarter annually to strengthen coordination and identify shared priorities and opportunities for action for the purpose of improving Inuit health outcomes in Nunavut (Office of the Auditor General of Canada [OAGC], 2017).

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 Nunavut, Government of Canada, and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI)

Nunavut Recovery Centre, in progress

The Government of Nunavut, NTI, and the Government of Canada are working together to construct and operate a Nunavut Recovery Centre. The Centre will provide a range of treatment and healing interventions in Nunavut for addictions and trauma, as well as on-the-land treatment and healing, and clinical counselling services. Services will be Inuit-led and informed and include a family-based approach built on Inuit cultural strengths and societal values (ISC, 2019). The Centre will be part of a system wide approach that includes on-the-land treatment, supports, and resources for pregnant women to support their healing journey, as well as support for Inuit workforce development and capacity.

Nunavut Wellness Agreement, 2017

The Nunavut Wellness Agreement supports Inuit in defining and taking action on their own health priorities through a model that is culturally respectful and supported by strong partnerships at both the community and territorial levels (Health Canada, 2017). The Agreement commits the federal government to provide \$189 million in funding over 10 years to support community-based health promotion and disease prevention programs in Nunavut in four broad areas: healthy children, families and communities, healthy living, mental wellness, and home and community care.

Bilateral policy responses

None identified.





Territorial responses

Department of Health

Mental Health Act Consultation Report – What we Heard from Nunavummiut, 2017

As part of the Government of Nunavut's efforts to update its outdated *Mental Health Act*, that was adopted from the Northwest Territories in 1999, to better reflect the realities of Nunavut, current medical practices, and the Inuit way of life, the Government held consultations with community stakeholders across the territory between November 2015 and May 2016. This report reflects what was heard in these consultations from the perspectives of clients, their families, and the public at-large about ways to change the *Mental Health Act* (Government of Nunavut, 2017a).

Department of Health Annual Report, 2016- 2017

This annual report highlighted objectives achieved in the Department of Health's annual work plans towards its mission of providing "excellent health care services that empower Nunavummiut to live health lives," through "collaboration, innovation and integration of Inuit societal values" (Nunavut Department of Health, 2017b, p. vii).

[https://assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/TD-358-4\(3\)-EN-Department-of-Health%202016-2017-Annual-Report.pdf](https://assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/TD-358-4(3)-EN-Department-of-Health%202016-2017-Annual-Report.pdf)

Territorial Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Program

To ensure equitable access to quality health care across Nunavut, the Government of Nunavut implemented a territorial approach to quality improvement activities through a CQI program, starting in the 2016-17 (OAGC, 2017). The CQI Program works to identify system gaps and inefficiencies, collect meaningful data, and implement quality improvement initiatives across all health facilities in Nunavut, with a goal of delivering a more efficient, patient-centred, health care system.





Office of Patient Relations

The Health Department established an Office of Patient Relations, with responsibility for investigating and resolving conflicts between patients and healthcare providers, as well as sharing positive patient experiences.

<https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/health/patient-relations>

Other initiatives to improve access to culturally appropriate and safe programs and resources include:

1. Opening the Qikiqtani General Hospital to bring services closer to home;
2. Opening an eight-bed long-term care facility in the Kitikmeot Health Facility in Cambridge Bay;
3. Creating a new Home and Community Care Program in Baker Lake; and
4. Expanding telehealth to every community health centre (Nunavut Department of Health, 2017b).

Department of Human Resources

Nunavut Human Resource Strategy 2019- 2023

As one element of addressing barriers to culturally safe care for Inuit, the Department of Human Resources implemented a strategy for increasing the number of Inuit in healthcare professions and supporting their growth, development, and career progression. The strategy aims to strengthen and support the use of Inuit societal values in Government of Nunavut workplaces, policy and program development, and delivery of government services to Nunavummiut.

https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11/iqqanaijaqtinut_kajungiqsaigutiksait_parnautigijangit_hr_strategy_2019-2023_-_eng_0.pdf

Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Nunavut Nurses, 2019

This strategy builds on a 2008 recruitment and retention strategy but goes beyond it by providing financial bonuses to undertaking actions to strengthen the nursing workforce as a whole. The strategy focuses on an orientation program and more training and certification for nurses; expansion of mentorship beyond the current one-year mentorship program offered to Nunavut Arctic College nursing graduates; transition of casual and short-term nurses into indeterminant full-time positions; hiring of stable Inuit community mental health workers in communities; and on-the-job learning and support for community health workers to help increase retention (George, 2019).

Clerk Interpreters

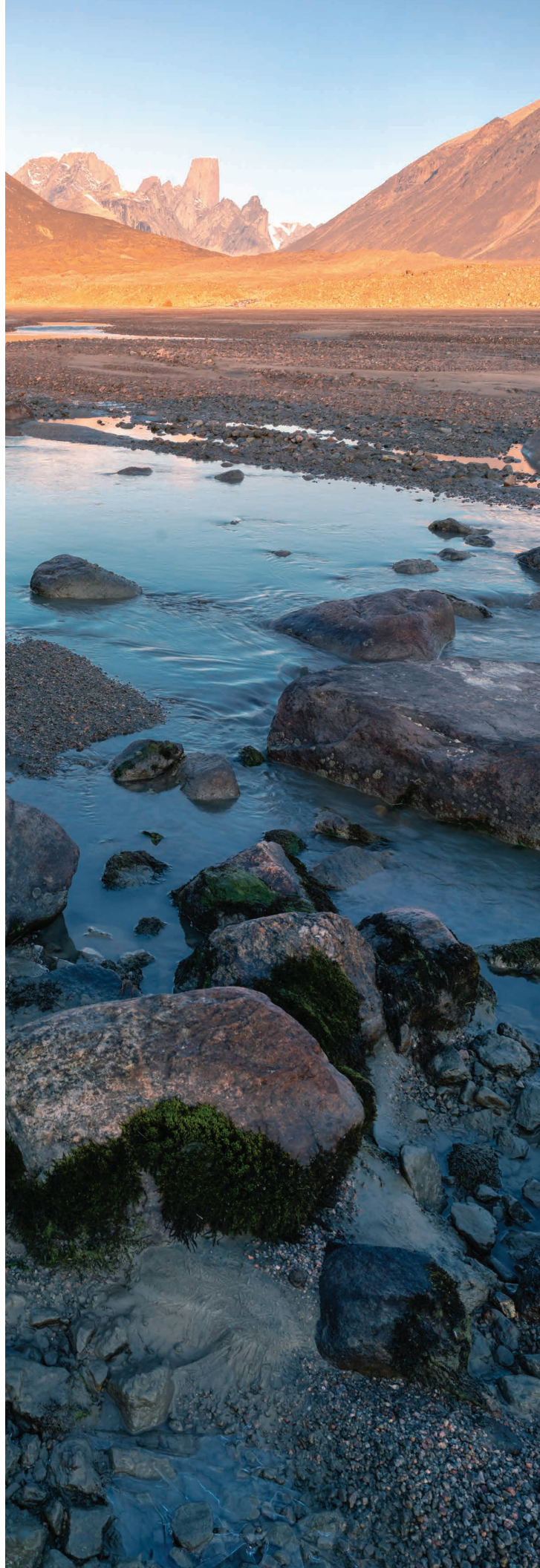
Community health centres have clerk interpreters who provide interpretation services between non-Inuit doctors, nurses, and other health professionals and their Inuktitut- or Inuinnaqtun-speaking patients (OAGC, 2017).

Government of Nunavut

Addictions and Trauma Treatment in Nunavut – Executive Summary, 2018

Conducted by NVision Insight Group Inc. on behalf of the Government of Nunavut, this document summarizes a needs assessment and feasibility study for in-territory addictions and trauma treatment programs and services in Nunavut. The in-territory addictions and trauma treatment would be grounded in Inuit culture and support continued recovery and healing for Nunavummiut.

https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11/gn_att_executive_summary_summary_report_-_final_-_english.pdf





Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan 2017-2022

This third Nunavut suicide prevention plan presents actions that the Nunavut Government will take over the period 2017 to 2022, in partnership with NTI, the RCMP, and Embrace Life Council. The action plan includes significant investments in community led action, mobile Inuktitut counselling services, the Quality-of-Life Secretariat, and support for the Embrace Life Council. As part of supporting community-led action to prevent suicides, the Government of Nunavut established the Upigivatsi Suicide Prevention Initiatives Fund, which provides annual funding to support community-led suicide prevention initiatives and after school programs (Government of Nunavut, 2021).

<https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11/TD-352-4%283%29-EN-Inuusivut-Anninaqtuq-Action-Plan-2017-2022.pdf>

- This action plan has recently been updated and can be found at: https://www.premier.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/2024-10/Inuusivut_Anninaqtuq_Action_Plan_2024-2029_-_ENG_0.pdf

Resiliency within: An Action Plan for Suicide Prevention in Nunavut 2016-2017

Developed by the Government of Nunavut in partnership with other stakeholders, this action plan extended the 2010 plan's vision, goals, and approaches to suicide prevention. It articulated a new set of actions to build on previous successes and engage stakeholders for a longer-term to foster and support resiliency within Nunavummiut. As an Inuit-led plan, it adopted a holistic and population health approach, tailored to fit local needs, priorities, and assets.

https://multiculturalmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Nunavut_Resiliency_within_suic_prev_2016-17-2.pdf



© Credit: iStockPhoto.com, ID 147533523

Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS), 2010

Developed by the Government of Nunavut in partnership with other stakeholders, this document outlined a vision for a healthier Nunavut, the strategy's approach to preventing suicide, and concrete commitments by each partner for achieving this vision. The strategy was built on three core components:

1. a full range of mental health services and supports;
2. evidence-based suicide prevention interventions; and
3. community-development activities that promote individual and community mental wellness (Government of Nunavut et al., 2010a, p 12).

<https://www.tunngavik.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/2010-10-26-nunavut-suicide-prevention-strategy-english.pdf>

Office of the Languages Commissioner

If You Cannot Communicate with Your Patient, Your Patient is Not Safe: Systemic Investigation Report – Investigation into the Qikiqtani General Hospital's Compliance with the Official Languages Act, R.S.N.W.T. 1988, Final report, 2015

Written by the Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut, this report assesses the availability of health services and communications in Inuktitut and French between March 1, 2012 and March 31, 2013, as well as compliance with the Official Languages Act, at the Qikiqtani General Hospital. The study found recurring issues of language barriers and non-compliance and made recommendations for addressing some of the key challenges that contributed to these barriers.

<https://langcom.nu.ca/sites/langcom.nu.ca/files/QGH%20-%20Final%20Report%20EN.pdf>

Health system responses

None identified beyond the Government of Nunavut's Department of Health initiatives.

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 TRC's 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>

Inuit organizational responses

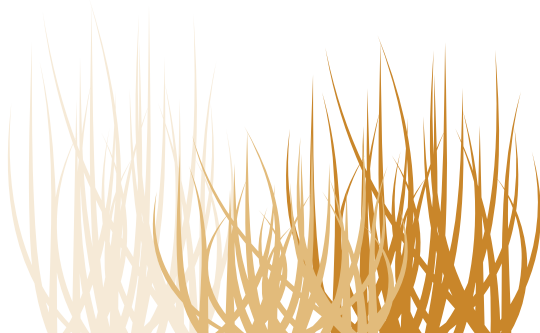
Qaujigiartit Health Research Centre

Makimautiksat Youth Camp, 2010-2015

Developed for 9- to 12-year-olds, the Makimautiksat Program is an evidence-based model for promoting health and wellness among Inuit youth. This community- and land-based program focuses on enhancing protective factors to prevent suicide and promote wellness. The program is based on the Eight *Ujarait*/Rocks Model of critical skills and knowledge that youth need to build their lives and upon Inuit societal values and has shown some success in improving wellness among Inuit youth.

<https://www.qaujigiartiit.ca/workshop-and-course/makimautiksat-youth-camp>

- An evaluation of the program was conducted by Healey et al. (2016): <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijih/article/view/29060>





Umingmak Child Advocacy Centre

Umingmak Child Advocacy Centre

Located in Nunavut, the Umingmak Child Advocacy Centre is committed to using evidence-based, Inuit-specific, approaches to providing therapy for children and youth who have experienced abuse and increasing local capacity to provide these services. The Centre provides a one-stop place for support, overnight residence, facilities for coordinated delivery of core services, child and youth advocacy, and therapeutic services in a trusted, safe, supportive, child-friendly, and culturally informed environment. Children only have to tell their story once to minimize re-traumatization. The Centre involves a partnership with the territorial departments of Family Services, Education, Justice and Health, as well as NTI and the RCMP.

<https://www.umingmakcentre.ca>

Mainstream (non-Indigenous) organizational responses

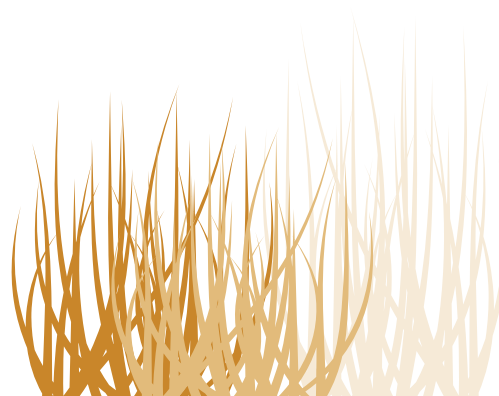
Workers' Safety and Compensation
Commission – Northwest Territories
and Nunavut

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%20WSSCC%202020%20
Corp%20Plan%20%28EN%29%20
WEBREADY.PDF](https://wscc.nt.ca/sites/default/files/documents/14948%20WSSCC%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%20
Q2%20Quarterly%20Update.pdf](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

Government of Nunavut

Cultural Orientation Program

Offered by the Human Resources Department, this program is available to all Government of Nunavut employees, providing them with the opportunity to learn about Nunavut's history, the Nunavut Agreement, Inuit cultural activities, and how to incorporate Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inuit societal values into the workplace. Sessions are offered as one-day events in each of the regions, delivered in a classroom setting, via videoconference or as seasonal, on-the-land sessions.

<https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/employment-training-and-career-development/orientation-program>

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

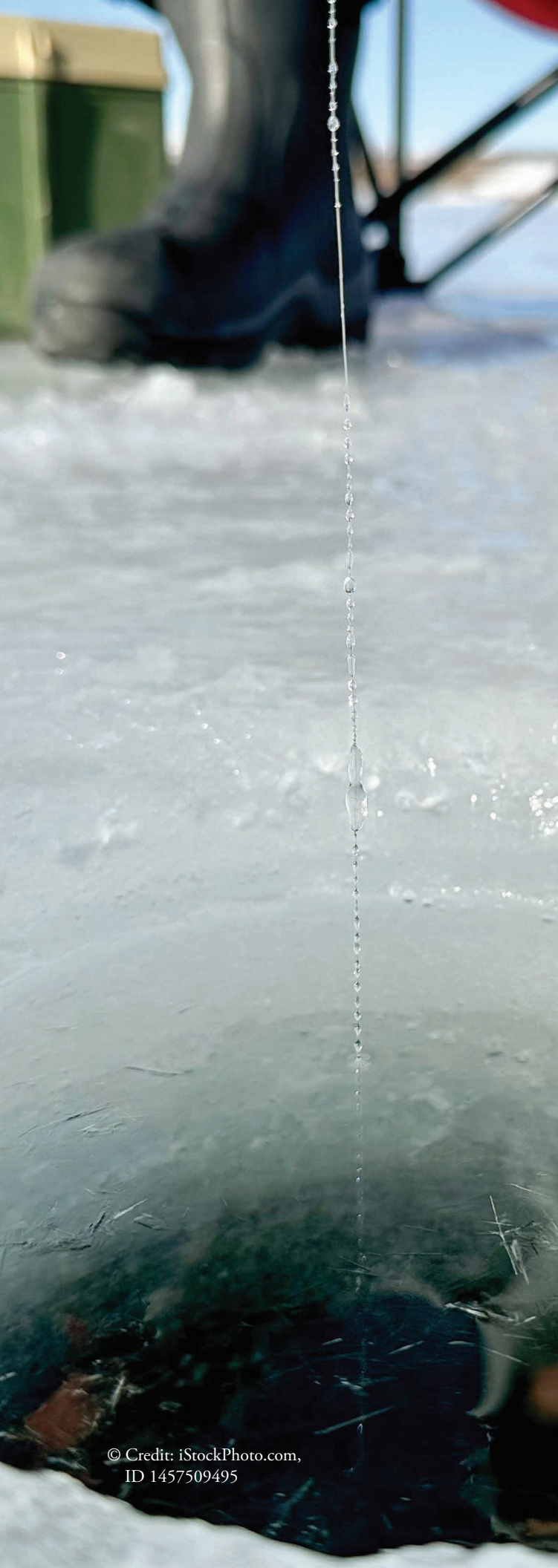


Nunavut, which became Canada's third territory in 1999, has a predominantly (approx. 80%) Inuit population and the language of Inuit³ is spoken widely. The territorial government's Department of Health has the responsibility for delivering health care services to Nunavut's 25 communities and developing policies and legislation that govern the health care system. Its mission is to promote, protect, and enhance the "health and well-being of all Nunavummiut,"⁴ incorporating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (that is, traditional Inuit knowledge and values) at all levels of service delivery and design" (OAGC, 2017, Intro. pt. #6). In addition to delivering health services through 22 community health centres, regional health centres in Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay, and the Qikiqtani General Hospital in Iqaluit, the Department also manages long-term care and Elder care centres in five communities and has public health responsibilities through its public health unit located in Iqaluit (OAGC, 2017).

Maintaining adequate health human resources has been an ongoing challenge in Nunavut, in part due to lower levels of educational attainment among adults in the territory and geographic remoteness of Inuit communities, resulting in the need to compete with other employers to recruit staff with the necessary knowledge and skills (Nunavut Department of Human Resources, 2019). This has resulted in many positions being left vacant or filled with casually employed or contracted nurses; community health centres that are typically staffed by only a nurse-in-charge and community health nurses; and physicians and specialists generally serving health centres on a periodic visiting basis only (OAGC, 2017). This health system context provides unique challenges for promoting cultural safety in the healthcare system.

³ The main language spoken among Inuit in Canada is Inuktitut (or Inuktitut); however, there are multiple dialects and variations of subdialects across Inuit Nunangat – the homeland of Inuit (Pirurvik Centre and Government of Nunavut, n.d.).

⁴ Nunavummiut is the Inuit term for residents of Nunavut.



Nunavut's approach to embedding cultural safety into the healthcare system focuses primarily on three types of strategies that are uniquely Inuit-specific:

1. addressing barriers to equitable access to healthcare by developing Inuit capacity through Inuit employment initiatives;
2. developing and implementing system-wide approaches to support health and healing; and
3. adapting policies and practices that reflect Nunavut and Inuit societal values.

Since Nunavut's healthcare system is centralized, with no regional health governance entities (Healey, 2016), most cultural safety related activities have been developed and implemented by the Government of Nunavut and its various departments and agencies, either alone or in partnership with other external organizations.

The Internet search revealed three tripartite initiatives involving the federal and Nunavut governments together with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated⁵ (NTI). These include:

1. the Nunavut Partnership Table on Health, a forum that works to strengthen coordination and identify shared priorities and opportunities for action for improving health outcomes among Nunavut Inuit;
2. the Nunavut Recovery Centre, an Inuit-led and informed addictions and trauma treatment centre that, when completed, will utilize a family-based approach built on Inuit cultural strengths and societal values; and
3. the signing of a 10-year Nunavut Wellness Agreement, which supports community-based health promotion and disease prevention programs in Nunavut.

⁵ NTI is the legal representative of the Nunavut Inuit responsible for ensuring that all parties to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement fulfill their obligations.

Health system change in Nunavut is driven by the Government of Nunavut through legislative changes, the development and implementation of policies and programs, engagement activities, as well as cultural safety training initiatives. The Internet search revealed the passage or introduction of three pieces of legislation that contribute to cultural safety – the *Nunavut Public Health Act* (2020), *Bill 36: Mental Health Act*, and the *Consolidation of Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act* (1994). Each is founded on Inuit societal values and reflects Inuit perspectives and the unique Nunavut context.

Health-related strategies and action plans are likewise grounded in Inuit societal values and developed through extensive community consultation to ensure they are reflective of Inuit community needs, values, and the challenges of delivering health services in remote regions. These include engagement on an addictions and trauma treatment needs assessment (NVision Insight Group Inc., 2018), a suicide prevention strategy (Government of Nunavut, 2010, and suicide action plans (Government of Nunavut, 2016, 2017, 2024). Being guided by Inuit societal values means that health legislation, policies, programs, and services for Inuit may look different than they do in the provinces to the south; they will, among other things, be more holistic and have a greater focus on cultural strengths and family-based approaches to health and healing.

Since Nunavut has long experienced challenges in recruiting and retaining nursing staff and other health care professionals, a focus on the hiring, retention, capacity building, and career progression of Inuit health staff are key to address barriers to culturally safe care for Inuit. The Nunavut Department of Human Resources (2019) developed a *Nunavut Human Resources Strategy*, which aims to increase the number of Inuit in healthcare professions and support their growth and advancement, as well as a recruitment and retention strategy for Nunavut nurses (George, 2019).

The Government of Nunavut has also been working to address language barriers to accessing health services and implementing innovative and culturally appropriate and safe programs and resources. Some prime examples include the opening of the Qikiqtani General Hospital in 2017 to bring health services closer to home, an eight-bed long-term care facility in the Kitikmeot Health Facility in Cambridge Bay, and a new Home and Community Care Program in Baker Lake (Nunavut Department of Health, 2017, Peachey and Health Intelligence Inc., 2018). Furthermore, the government expanded telehealth to every community health centre, established an Office of Patient Relations, and implemented a Continuous Quality Improvement Program (Nunavut Department of Health, 2017, Peachey and Health Intelligence Inc., 2018). Finally, the Government of Nunavut also offers a Cultural Orientation Program for all government employed staff.

The Internet search revealed only a few cultural safety related initiatives undertaken by organizations with a health mandate in the Territory. The only cultural safety initiatives implemented by professional organizations were the Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut's release of a cultural safety position statement (n.d.) and the implementation of cultural safety related competencies for registered nursing practices (2014). Two Inuit organizations developed uniquely Inuit culturally safe and appropriate programs. The first is Qaujigiartit Health Research Centre's Makimautiksat Program, an on-the-land program based on Inuit societal values designed to enhance protective factors to prevent suicide and promote wellness among youth (Healey et al., 2016). The second is the Umingmak Child Advocacy Centre, which provides support and therapy for children and youth who have experienced abuse. The only other cultural safety initiative identified in the Internet search was the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission – Northwest Territories and Nunavut's (2019) identification of cultural safety as an element of the priority to deliver quality services and outcomes in its 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, with subsequent quarterly reporting on progress made in achieving this priority.

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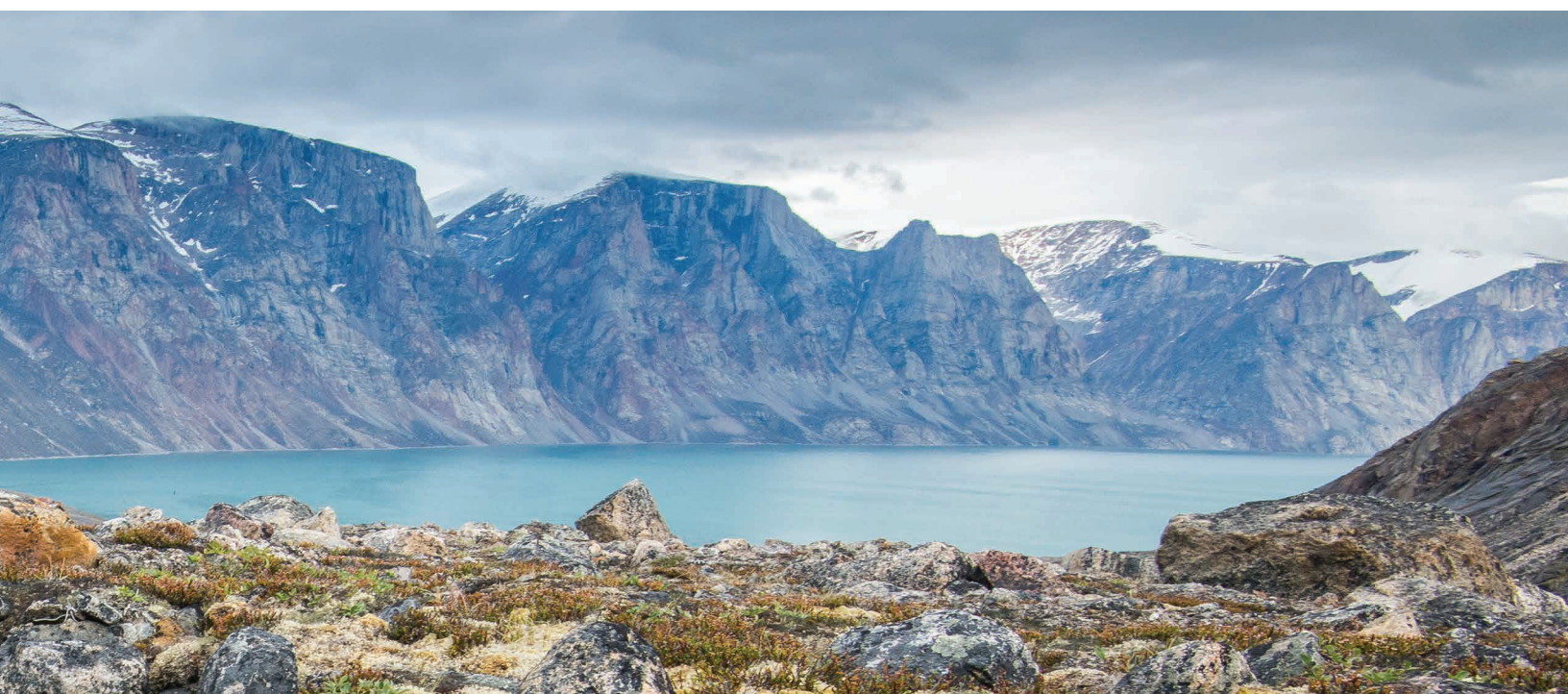
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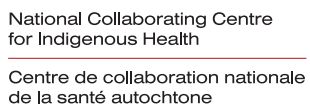
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