



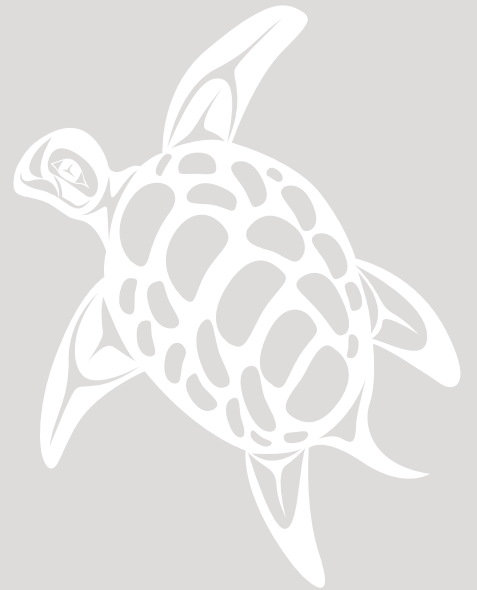
HEALTH QUALITY BC

# Culturally Safe Engagement

## What Matters to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) Patient Partners?

### Companion Guide







HEALTH QUALITY BC

## About Health Quality BC

Health Quality BC (HQBC) leads efforts to improve health care quality in British Columbia. We understand that meaningful change comes from working together. The impact of hearing from patients, families and the public are profound. Through building great partnerships with patients, families and the public, new ideas emerge and grow. These ideas change and improve clinical practices, speed up our partners' improvement efforts and ensure that patients are at the core of everything we do.

HQBC supports building strong partnerships between patients, families, the public and all that focus on improving health care. These connections enable us to nurture networks, recognize the needs of our health care system and build capacity where it has the most impact.

If you want to improve BC's health care system, visit [healthqualitybc.ca](http://healthqualitybc.ca) to access programs and resources that can help you start today. If you are someone who is interested in sharing your experiences of health care in BC to improve services, join [Patient Voices Network](#).

The term **Indigenous** is used throughout this document to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples. It's an inclusive and international term to describe individuals and collectives who consider themselves as being related to and/or having historical continuity with "First Peoples."<sup>1</sup>

## Acknowledgements

We thank the following people for their invaluable contributions to the development of this resource. Their expertise and dedication were instrumental in bringing this guide to life.

- Gitxsan Hereditary Chief Sim'oojit Ma'os, Bill Blackwater Jr. for co-designing and co-hosting the "What Matters to You in Indigenous Culturally Safe Patient Engagements?" conversation
- Patient Voices Network (PVN) Indigenous patient partners for sharing their knowledge
- Health care partners for respectfully listening

[Bert Azak](#) provided creative insight and inspiration through his artwork. His unique designs embody the spirit of cultural safety, humility and the foundational message of collaboration.

Bert's log cabin design on the cover page depicts the four main crests of the Nisga'a Nation within the tribal houses. The log cabin is a representation of unity and a house of healing ([Wilp Haldawks](#)). Orange was added to the background to honour the truth of the initial 215 unmarked graves of Indigenous children found in a residential school at Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, and all of those uncovered subsequently, and to acknowledge the Every Child Matters movement to create awareness of the direct and inter-generational impacts of residential schools.

# Table of Contents

Reflections from Sim’oogit Ma’os, Bill Blackwater Jr. . . . .	1
Executive Summary . . . . .	2
Introduction . . . . .	3
Background . . . . .	4
What We Did. . . . .	6
Using this Resource . . . . .	7
Key Principles in Culturally Safe Engagement . . . . .	8
1. Awareness & Understanding . . . . .	9
2. Learning & Education. . . . .	10
3. Build Relationships . . . . .	11
4. Prepare . . . . .	12
5. Kindness & Empathy . . . . .	13
6. Respect. . . . .	14
7. Value . . . . .	15
8. Listen . . . . .	16
Closing . . . . .	17
For Further Reading . . . . .	17
References. . . . .	18

# Reflections from Sim'oogit Ma'os, Bill Blackwater Jr.

"Yes, time did fly by, but our message, important to the beginning of improving the relationship between Indigenous patients and health care providers, was brought forward through the work by Health Quality BC and was successful. My biggest hope is that the witnesses and partners were convinced by the message to the extent that they continue seeking ways for their organizations to improve relationships with Indigenous patients."

## Patient Partners

- Victoria English, Blackfoot
- Duane Jackson, Gitanmaax
- Bill Blackwater Jr., Gitxsan
- Morris Amos, Haisla
- Patient Partner, Inuit
- Patient Partner, Kwantlen
- Christine Hunt, Kwakiutl
- Lee Cameron, Métis
- Linda Nelson, Métis
- Cherie Mercer, Nisga'a
- Tina Miller, Nisga'a
- Stanley Namox, Wet'suwet'en
- Carla Christman

## Health Care Partners

- BC Cancer
- BC Renal
- Doctors of BC
- First Nations Health Authority
- Fraser Health
- Interior Health
- Island Health
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions
- Northern Health
- Providence Health Care
- Provincial Health Services Authority
- Vancouver Coastal Health

# Executive Summary

This guide and its [accompanying at-a-glance resource](#) was created from the voices of Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) patient partners to enhance the cultural safety of engagement efforts. Health Quality BC (HQBC) hosted an event centred around “What Matters to You in Indigenous Culturally Safe Patient Engagements?” where Indigenous patient partners shared their experiences of what comfortable and safe engagements look like. Its focus is on engagement with individual or groups of Indigenous patient partners, which should not be conflated with engagement with Nations or communities.

Eight key principles emerged from these discussions, along with a series of recommended actions to help and encourage health care partners to create the conditions for culturally safe patient, family and public engagement. The eight principles of culturally safe engagement are:

- 1 Awareness & Understanding
- 2 Learning & Education
- 3 Build Relationships
- 4 Kindness & Empathy
- 5 Prepare
- 6 Respect
- 7 Value
- 8 Listen

As you consider your role in creating a culturally safe space, please be curious and open to learning and listening as you engage with Indigenous People.

Download the at-a-glance resource, Culturally Safe Engagement: What Matters to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) Patient Partners Pamphlet at [healthqualitybc.ca](http://healthqualitybc.ca).

# Introduction

We often hear from health care partners who want to engage with Indigenous patient partners but are unsure how to do so in culturally safe and appropriate ways. To support health system partners in their efforts to engage in a good way, we invited Indigenous patient partners to tell us what matters to them when participating in a patient and public engagement opportunity. We also invited health care partners to witness the event.

The event was held as part of our work leading “What Matters to You?” in British Columbia. “What Matters to You?” started in Norway in 2014, with the goal of encouraging meaningful conversations between patients, caregivers, families and their health care providers. It’s a simple question that can have a big impact on care. When providers have a conversation about what really matters to the people they care for, it helps ensure that care is aligned with patient preferences, builds trusting relationships between patients, families and their health care providers and advances person- and family-centred care.

## **Witness:**

To act as a witness to a patient partner’s story is about being a compassionate and silent observer, giving attention to others without judgement and providing a space for partners to speak their truth.<sup>2</sup>

# Background

The experience of patients, families and the public when accessing health care is linked to their perceptions of safety within the health care system. Engaging people to better understand their perspectives and experiences enables health care providers and leaders to consider these experiences to create a safer health care system that is truly person- and family-centred. Powerful insights and growth are achieved through safe patient, family and public engagement practices founded on mutual trust and respect.

This guide, and the at-a-glance resource it accompanies, supports health care partners to put **cultural humility** into practice when engaging with Indigenous Peoples. The aim is to help partners understand what a **culturally safe** engagement looks like, while providing tips and suggestions on how to strengthen engagement approaches through the development of their own cultural humility.

In 2020, the release of the [In Plain Sight Report](#) (IPS report) confirmed what was already known to Indigenous People, that Indigenous-specific racism is wide-spread and systemic across health services. Before and since the IPS report, efforts have been undertaken to address Indigenous-specific racism and create culturally safe care through the pursuit of cultural humility. Significant developments have included:

- Creation of a [Cultural Safety and Humility Standard](#) by the Health Standards Organization (HSO) in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority.
- Development of a [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act - Province of British Columbia \(DRIPA\)](#), the BC legislation to adopt the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- Modernization of the [Health Professionals and Occupations Act \(HPOA\)](#) that includes definitions of discrimination and racism.

**Cultural humility** is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience.<sup>3</sup>

**Cultural safety** is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.<sup>3</sup>



The goals of the HSO CSH Standard and DRIPA are to eliminate Indigenous-specific racism, but also to advance the **decolonization** of health and other BC institutions. The inclusion of Indigenous patient, family and public voices in all manners of health system improvements is one element that can contribute greatly to a safer and more appropriate health system for all people in BC. But that inclusion itself needs to be approached through the lens of cultural humility, to build meaningful and trusting relationships along the way.

To support the decolonizing of health care and ensure equitable access to high-quality care, Indigenous perspectives and leadership must be included in health care decision-making. Meaningful engagement with Indigenous patient partners is foundational to integrating these diverse perspectives.

**Decolonization** is a process of cultural rejuvenation, honouring Canada's obligations to upholding First Nations rights and title and restoring just relationships with Indigenous Peoples. It refers to both the unlearning of narratives and stereotypes that perpetuate colonial norms and practices, and the integration of Indigenous leadership into the institutions that impact both Individual lives as well as community and Nation-based sovereignty and wellness. Decolonization integrates diverse Indigenous worldviews not only to improve conditions of Indigenous Peoples, but to improve health and wellness systems for all people.

# What We Did

In June 2021, Indigenous patient partners came together and shared what matters to them in making engagement opportunities more safe, meaningful and comfortable.

The event was co-designed by Gitxsan Hereditary Chief Sim'oogit Ma'os, Bill Blackwater Jr., and Health Quality BC. Preparation meetings were held separately, before the event, for both patient and health care partners. These meetings were opportunities to:

- Build relationships
- Clarify the purpose of the event and concepts
- Explain the rationale and role of attending an event as a witness

Health care partners attended the event as witnesses so they could reflect and share learnings back to their respective organizations. A series of key takeaways, recommendations and suggested actions emerged and have been pulled together into a framework within this guide. HQBC staff worked collaboratively with participants, consistently reflecting on and honouring their feedback to ensure their voices were authentically captured.

The goal is to have Indigenous patients lead the way in identifying how to engage with other Indigenous patients, setting the standard for culturally safe engagement. This understanding of cultural safety and humility in engagement practices is useful for anyone working in the health system – including administrators and practitioners – for planning, assessing and improving engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

When you're ready to plan an engagement opportunity with Indigenous patient partners, to listen to Indigenous voices, it is always helpful to start with self-reflection. The following questions may be useful prompts to begin your process in a meaningful way:

What assumptions do I have about engaging with Indigenous patient partners? Where did they come from? What intentions am I bringing into this engagement process?

Have I reflected on how the norms of a colonial society have influenced my own thoughts and behaviour? What can I do to prepare myself to engage with Indigenous patient partners so I am not placing an extra burden on them to educate me about cultural safety?

# Using this Resource

This guide represents a shared vision of quality for culturally safe engagement which supports the practice of safe, meaningful and comfortable engagement activities.

Indigenous Peoples and communities follow different protocols and customs. We encourage you to discover the protocols of the land you live, work and play on.

As part of your journey in learning about cultural safety and humility, it's important to acknowledge the history of colonization and its impact on racism in health care.

Knowing the history of the health system, and how its institutions, relationships and processes came to be, is necessary to understanding people's experiences of care. How colonialism in Canada is recognized, represented and addressed profoundly affects the health and wellness of Indigenous Peoples and communities.<sup>4</sup>

The Province of British Columbia recognizes that a **distinctions-based approach** is needed to ensure that the unique rights, interests, and circumstances of Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia are acknowledged, affirmed and implemented. The Province recognizes First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit as the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, consisting of distinct, rights-bearing communities with their own histories, including with the Crown. The work of forming renewed relationships based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership must reflect the unique interests, priorities, and circumstances of each person.<sup>5</sup>



The following statements are in the voice of the participating Indigenous patient partners.

## 1. Awareness & Understanding

<p><b>Key Takeaways</b></p>	<p>Acknowledge the history of racism in Canada and the impact of <u>systemic racism</u> on us. Have a level of <u>cultural awareness and sensitivity</u>. We are vulnerable when we share our stories.</p>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to eliminate your own biases and stigma.</li> <li>• Provide support. Relating health care experiences puts us in a vulnerable position and it may be triggering.</li> <li>• Include questions about individual interactions with health care providers to better understand our experiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Actions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop cultural humility and awareness prior to engagement to avoid <u>translation exhaustion</u>. We are here to improve health services, not to educate you on Indigenous Peoples.</li> <li>• You come with our own biases. It takes self-awareness and time to understand them. Spend time considering your biases, where they come from, and what you will think and do differently.</li> <li>• Be a lifelong learner. Read about First Nations and <u>Métis history and culture</u>. Attend local events and activities.</li> <li>• Make a commitment to developing your own cultural humility to be better prepared to create culturally safe spaces. <u>#ItStartsWithMe</u></li> <li>• Provide a meaningful <u>land acknowledgement</u>. Research it, write it down and incorporate it into meetings.</li> </ul>

Awareness & Understanding



Learning & Education



Build Relationships



Prepare



Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value



Listen



## 2. Learning & Education

<b>Key Takeaways</b>	Humility is the key to being influenced by Indigenous culture and open to learning. Be open to learning about our traditional practices, like traditional medicines and the value they bring.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open to learning from Indigenous Peoples' knowledge.</li> <li>• Prepare to unlearn norms and assumptions. Open your heart and mind to reflect on when you might be defensive or judging.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete cultural sensitivity training before your engagement. Look into what's available from your organization.</li> <li>• View <a href="#">Health Quality BC and First Nations Health Authority Learning Series</a>.</li> <li>• Read the <a href="#">In Plain Sight Recommendations</a>, <a href="#">Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action</a>, <a href="#">Jordan's Principle</a>, <a href="#">Joyce's Principle</a>.</li> </ul>

Awareness & Understanding



Learning & Education



Build Relationships



Prepare



Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value



Listen



### 3. Build Relationships

<b>Key Takeaways</b>	Get to know us to balance the power dynamic, enable collaboration and build trust. Show genuine compassion through warm welcomes and connecting with us as people first.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize building relationships with us.</li> <li>• Consider ways to learn about culture and connect with Indigenous Peoples.</li> <li>• Work with us to understand what is needed to create a balanced power dynamic – an equal relationship.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect with us. Develop a personal introduction so we get to know you beyond your business card. Include: Who you are as a person, what is your background, why are you in health care?</li> <li>• Include time for relationship-building throughout the project. Always take extra time for introductions and check-ins.</li> <li>• Be aware of sensitivities in building relationships due to generational trauma. We suggest you consider the need to create an action plan for trauma-informed practice.</li> </ul>

Awareness & Understanding



Learning & Education



Build Relationships



Prepare



Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value



Listen



## 4. Prepare

<b>Key Takeaways</b>	Provide documents well before the meeting and allow for questions to be asked. Offer various opportunities, like one-on-ones with the health care partner, so we can add more to the work.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware of seasonal cultural practices and events. Prepare to be flexible.</li> <li>• Provide information before the meeting to set and manage expectations.</li> <li>• Create an environment of sharing and inclusion.</li> <li>• Think about safety, the value in sharing our experiences, everything and everyone around us.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware of cultural impacts on timing. Be prepared to be flexible.</li> <li>• Reach out to see if your organization has protocols and support for inclusion of Elders or Knowledge Keepers to support your efforts.</li> <li>• Creating safer spaces takes time. Make pre-meetings and debriefs standard practice so we are prepared for meetings and know where to focus energy.</li> <li>• Ask us if email communication is OK or if mailing printed materials is preferred. Check if we're able and comfortable using video conferencing/Zoom and what other support we might need to participate.</li> </ul>

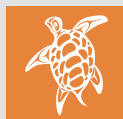
Awareness & Understanding



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Prepare



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Respect



Value



Listen





## 5. Kindness & Empathy

<b>Key Takeaways</b>	Always be human first. Take a moment to ask yourself: Am I being empathetic, patient and compassionate? We are speaking from both our head and our heart.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create space to get to know people before you get into the content of the opportunity.</li> <li>• Focus on leaving the table with a good feeling of the experience on both sides.</li> <li>• Offer things that are kind gestures to make us feel at home and well taken care of.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include enough time at the start of a session for a meaningful welcome or introduction and set group guidelines with us.</li> <li>• Greet everyone individually at the beginning of the session to welcome and set the stage.</li> <li>• Ask yourself: How else can I be kind, patient and compassionate during this engagement?</li> </ul>

Awareness & Understanding



Learning & Education



Build Relationships



Prepare



Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value



Listen



## 6. Respect

<b>Key Takeaways</b>	Show respect for Indigenous Peoples, cultures and nations, and understand we hold our ancestors close. We are sharing our own experiences and do not speak for all Indigenous Peoples' experiences.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how your engagement adds value to the Indigenous patient experience, and how the engagement session supports that work.</li> <li>• Show respect by ensuring this is a mutually beneficial partnership. Are everyone's needs being met as best as possible?</li> <li>• Reflect on why you are engaging with an Indigenous patient partner. If you have pre-determined solutions seeking validation, the engagement may be tokenizing.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set clear expectations for our role as patient partners and where we're able to contribute.</li> <li>• Do not engage with us if solutions have been pre-determined.</li> <li>• Have a pre-meeting with us to discuss our role and the engagement's purpose. Ask what matters to us and discuss how we want to work together.</li> </ul>

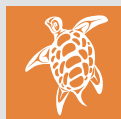
Awareness & Understanding



Learning & Education



Build Relationships



Prepare



Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value



Listen



## 7. Value

<p><b>Key Takeaways</b></p>	<p>Acknowledge traditional expertise as well as our experience and knowledge. We have chosen, despite experience that reflects a colonial institution, to work with the health care system because of a desire to make things better and have health care reflect what matters to us.</p>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make space for sharing and learnings from traditional knowledge, grounding and traditional medicine.</li> <li>• Ensure a feeling of equality to everyone else as a patient partner.</li> <li>• Honour and thank us for sharing our experiences for the benefit of others.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Actions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind participants how challenging it is for us to share health experiences.</li> <li>• Value our time and contribution by staying on point and acknowledging our input.</li> <li>• Thank us for coming, explaining the next steps in follow up, and how our contributions will be used to move the work forward.</li> </ul>

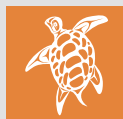
Awareness & Understanding



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Respect



Value



Listen



## 8. Listen

<b>Key Takeaways</b>	Have a sense of vulnerability, openness and humility. Be prepared to listen to us respectfully and actively.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Test understanding by summarizing what was shared back to us to demonstrate if you were listening and if you grasped the message that was conveyed.</li></ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set seating up in a circle or U-shape so participants will be facing each other while sharing.</li><li>• Do not multi-task. Stay focused with active listening.</li><li>• Use breakout groups or tables to allow room for us to participate.</li><li>• Provide coaching to other participants on how to create a safe space for sharing and listening.</li><li>• Reflect to ensure understanding.</li></ul>

Awareness & Understanding



Learning & Education



Build Relationships



Prepare



Kindness & Empathy



Respect



Value



Listen



# Closing

We are grateful to all the Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) patient partners for giving their time, thoughts and suggestions for a safer, kinder and more empathetic way of engaging Indigenous patients. Thank you for your generosity and your commitment to system change, for the greater good and for future generations. Thank you for being part of the Patient Voices Network and reminding us to always be human first.

# For Further Reading

[Health Quality BC: Cultural Safety & Humility Action Series](#)

[First Nations Health Authority: Creating a Climate for Change – Cultural Humility Resource Booklet](#)

[International Association of Public Participation: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#)

[Indigenous Cultural Safety: Collaborative Learning Series](#)

[BC Ministry of Health and First Nations Health Authority: Indigenous Engagement and Cultural Safety Guidebook: A Resource for Primary Care Networks](#)

[Provincial Health Services Authority: San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training](#)

[In Plain Sight Report: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care](#)

[First Nations Health Authority's Policy Statement on Cultural Safety and Humility](#)

[First Nations Health Authority Cultural Safety and Humility Key Drivers and Ideas for Change](#)

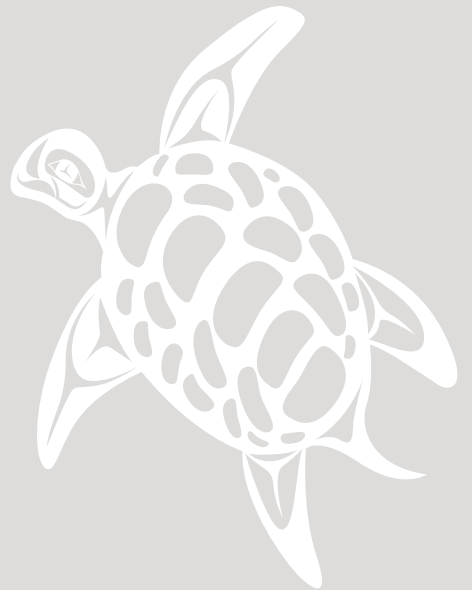
[Remembering Keegan: A BC First Nations Case Study Reflection](#)

[Distinctions-Based Approach Primer](#)

[First Nations Health Authority: Territory Acknowledgements Information Booklet](#)

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## Culturally Safe Engagement:

### What Matters to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) Patient Partners?

In June 2021, Indigenous patient partners were asked to share what mattered to them when participating in Indigenous culturally safe patient engagement opportunities. Their words are reflected in the advice and eight key principles provided in this resource. As you consider your role in creating a safer place, be curious with an open heart and mind to learning. Find more guidance on how to use this tool: [Culturally Safe Engagement: What Matters to Indigenous \(First Nations, Métis and Inuit\) Patient Partners Companion Guide](#).

#### 1. Awareness & Understanding



***Acknowledge the history of racism in Canada and the impact of systemic racism on us. Have a level of cultural awareness and sensitivity.***

Start off well. Provide a meaningful [land acknowledgement](#).

Get to know people from the territory you work and live on.

Avoid [translation exhaustion](#) by having some cultural competence.

#### 2. Learning & Education



***Humility is key to being influenced by Indigenous culture and open to learning.***

Complete cultural safety and humility training before working with us.

Research local cultural practices and protocols.

Read resources such as the [In Plain Sight Recommendations](#) to better understand our experiences.

#### 3. Build Relationships



***Get to know us to balance the power dynamic, enable collaboration and build trust. Show genuine compassion through warm welcomes and connecting with us as people first.***

Include time for relationship building throughout the engagement.

Be aware of sensitivities due to generational trauma. Consider the need for an action plan for trauma-informed practice.

#### 4. Prepare



***Provide documents well in advance and allow opportunities for questions to be asked.***

Be flexible for seasonal cultural practices and events.

Send relevant documents ahead of time.

Make pre-meetings and debriefs standard practice.

Ask us if email is acceptable or if printed materials are preferred.



## 5. Kindness & Empathy



***Always be HUMAN first. Take a moment to ask yourself: Am I being empathetic, patient and compassionate?***

Greet everyone individually to welcome us and set the stage for building a relationship.

Include enough time at the start of a session for a meaningful welcome or introduction and set group guidelines with us.

Focus on leaving the table with a good feeling of the experience on both sides.

## 6. Respect



***Show respect for Indigenous Peoples, cultures and nations. Understand we hold our ancestors close.***

Set clear expectations for our role as patient partners and where we can contribute so our presence is meaningful.

Don't engage with us if solutions have already been pre-determined.

Create a respectful environment by treating everyone around the circle as equals.

## 7. Value



***Acknowledge traditional expertise as well as our experience and knowledge. We have chosen, despite experience that reflects a colonial institution, to work with the health care system because of a desire to make things better and have health care reflect what matters to us.***

Remember that we are experts in our own health care experiences.

Remind other participants how challenging it is for us to share our health care experiences.

Thank us for coming and explain next steps.

## 8. Listen



***Have a sense of vulnerability, openness and humility. Be prepared to listen to us respectfully and actively.***

Check in. Reflect words back to us.

In person: Set the room up so participants sit in a circle or U-shape.

Virtual: Don't multi-task. Stay focused with active listening and use breakout rooms.

Provide coaching to other participants in creating safe spaces for sharing and listening.



This material has been co-produced with patient partners.

Bert Azak's designs were inspired by the Seven Sacred Teachings and were designed in his style of Nisga'a Art and Culture.

All seven designs are related to the Seven Sacred Teachings as well as the Wilp (tribe or house) of the Nisga'a Nation.

Further information and guidance on how to use this tool can be found in the comprehensive companion guide at **HealthQualityBC.ca**.





**HEALTH QUALITY BC**



This material has  
been co-produced  
with patient partners.

201-750 Pender St W  
Vancouver, BC V6C 2T8

604.668.8210 | 1.877.282.1919

healthqualitybc.ca  
info@healthqualitybc.ca

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