



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

*“That which the trees exhale, I inhale.
That which I exhale, the tree inhales”*

Graveline, J. Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness

Prepared by

*Indigenous Engagement
Platform*

Prepared for

Public Stakeholders

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**INDIGENOUS
ENGAGEMENT
PLATFORM**

Letter from the Platform Coordinating Officer

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Over the 2025–2026 reporting period, my work with the CRISM Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP) focused on strengthening relationships, supporting national coordination, and advancing culturally grounded, distinctions-based Indigenous engagement and research across Canada. This work was rooted in collaboration with CRISM nodes, Indigenous partners, Knowledge Keepers, and national leadership, with an emphasis on trust, continuity, and respectful engagement.

A central component of my role involved participation in national and node-level coordination. I contributed regularly to National Principal Investigator and node manager meetings, research facilitator forums, community-based research networking activities, and IEP advisory discussions. These spaces supported shared planning and helped ensure Indigenous perspectives and priorities remained central to CRISM governance, research processes, and reporting. I also contributed to CIHR reporting cycles, ongoing work related to the National Guidance Document, and the development of ethical and culturally informed research practices.

Relationship-building and community engagement were core to my work throughout the year. I engaged with partners and collaborators across the country, including the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Substance Use & Addictions, organizations in Quebec, the Mental Health Support Network (PTSS Lab) in Saskatchewan, community-based research initiatives in Ontario, and Saskatchewan NEIHR. I participated in culturally significant events, ceremonies, community gatherings, the Saskatoon PiT Count, and supported site visits, conferences, and outreach activities that expanded and strengthened IEP advisory networks. These engagements reinforced trust, mutual learning, and cultural integrity across CRISM's work.

I also supported communications and knowledge-mobilization efforts, contributing to newsletters, blogs, interviews, website development, and social media content. I prepared materials and provided coordination support for key gatherings and conferences, including the NCC meetings in Banff, the CCSA Conference, the Newfoundland and Labrador Substance Use Conference, the Thunderbird Addictions Summit, and Indigenous youth engagement activities with the Health Quality Council. Preparing meeting summaries, presentations, and welcome materials helped ensure clarity and continuity across events.

Operationally, I planned the CRISM Spring & fall meetings, executed staffing and contract renewals, evaluator onboarding, leadership development activities, and administrative coordination for ceremonies. I also began preparation for the Annual Report, stakeholder engagement and supported Management and Oversight Committee planning through documentation and materials development.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the next year, I remain committed to supporting the IEP's continued growth and impact through distinctions-based engagement, Indigenous-led research approaches, and strong national coordination. I look forward to deepening relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partners and supporting research and engagement practices that are respectful, culturally grounded, and responsive to community priorities. Through sustained collaboration and shared leadership, the IEP will continue to strengthen its role as a trusted platform for Indigenous engagement and research across Canada.

With gratitude,

IEP Coordinating Officer, Heather Poirier



What is the CRISM Indigenous Engagement Platform?

The goal of the IEP is to model relational accountability for substance use research that centers and prioritizes Indigenous priorities. The historical and ongoing impacts of colonization have profoundly affected the lives of Indigenous Peoples, contributing to increased substance use related challenges. This underscores the need for ethical and meaningful Indigenous collaboration in all aspects of the research process.

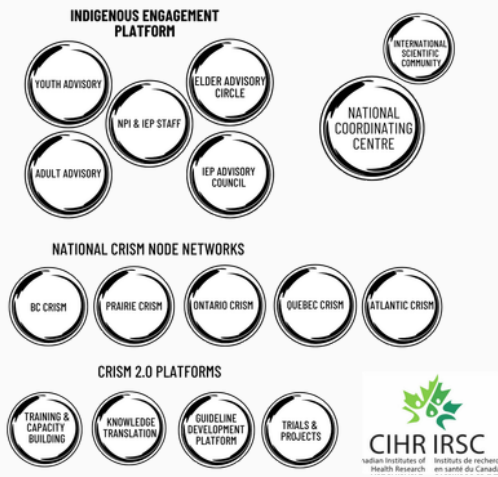
Our objectives from the CIHR mandate are to: establish a foundation for Indigenous-led substance use research by creating and implementing an Indigenous Engagement Platform for the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM) to:

- Expand the reach and impact of CRISM's engagement with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples, including Urban Indigenous communities across Canada, and serve as a bridge between the Regional Nodes, the CRISM Network and Indigenous communities;
- Inform, support and co-lead relevant activities of the CRISM Network Coordinating Centre and the Regional Nodes; and
- Champion Indigenous-led substance use research to ensure that First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples, including Urban Indigenous communities, can engage, lead and participate in substance use research in a meaningful and culturally safe environment that is founded in Indigenous ways of knowing, priorities, and values.



Platform Membership & Governance

CRISM - ICRIS



Circles Representing Our Five Regional Nodes

This year, we welcomed new members into our four intergenerational advisory Circles, which represent the five CRISM nodes across Canada. Through our networking connections, opportunities, and outreach to potential partners, the IEP has been actively growing our Circle membership in anticipation of our second in-person spring meeting.

During our first joint spring gathering in Banff (May 2025), we held a successful event alongside our Circle members and Council. We had 12 Council members from our national advisory council and 16 Circle members in attendance. Additionally, six CRISM node researchers and managers joined us, bringing the total to 31 members from across Canada.



CRISM IEP DRAFT MEETING AGENDA MAY 9-12, 2025

Location: Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity:
107 Tunnel Mountain Drive, Banff AB

- Weekend Agenda**
- Friday, May 9th:** Check-in at the front desk in Lloyd Hall
- Saturday, May 10th:** Main Room *Kinnear Centre 301*
- 8:00 AM: Breakfast in the Vistas Dining Room
 - 9:00 AM: Opening Ceremony and Introductions
 - Overview of IEP, CRISM, NCC, Advisory Circles
 - 12:00 PM: Lunch in the Vistas Dining Room
 - Elders Teaching led by Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback
 - 4:00 PM: Conclusion of the Day's Activities
- 6:00 PM: Supper at Three Bears Brewery
- Sunday, May 11th:** Main Room *Kinnear Centre 301*
- 8:00 AM: Breakfast in the Vistas Dining Room
 - 9:00 AM: Open Meeting and Review from Day 1
 - 9:30 AM: Breakout rooms for Advisory Circles & Council
 - Branding Discussion for Council
 - Discussion of Terms of Reference for the Advisory Council
 - Conversations regarding the Community for Advisory Circle Members
 - 11:00 AM: Groups rejoin in main room
 - Year 2 planning for the IEP
 - Lunch
 - 1:00 PM: Wrap-up and Closing with Elders
- Monday, May 12th:** Travel Day

Activity Highlights

This has been a busy year for the IEP, with fast movement in building an online presence through establishing and building the CRISM-IEP website, LinkedIn and Facebook pages in the summer, as well as rolling out the first quarterly newsletter for the network in August.

Subsequent editions delivered to our network in November, February and May. Engagement across Canada with node managers, researchers, partner projects, and networking to build relationships have been central to the work of the platform coordinator. The creation of our logo with representation of our circles through the rings of a cedar tree, with a cedar branch representing traditional healing methods and grounding. The colours and style blending First Nations, Inuit, and Métis designs.

There have been two in person national meetings held for the IEP leadership, the first in the spring for our advisory council, circles, and node representation in Banff; our second in Ottawa in late September for our advisory council. Over 1 and a half days, our advisory met to discuss strategic planning potential for the next year and what they hope the IEP can position as goals and outcomes for the next year.

The IEP hired an external evaluator, Micheal Heimlich, who also is working on the NCC & Saskatchewan NEIHR network evaluations for our NPI, Dr. Henry. The role of the evaluator will be to establish a framework of evaluation for the IEP, survey membership on engagement & activities, and to provide a report on his findings.



Ceremony in Research



Naming Ceremony

During our spring gathering in Banff, we presented our Elder Jo-Ann with bundles of cloth tied with ribbons, symbolizing the colors of diverse Indigenous traditions and customs linked to healing, spirituality, renewal, and growth.

These gifts were shared and blessed at our meeting so that our Elder would have them ready before our naming ceremony.

Healing Ceremony

In June 2025, members of the IEP and CRISM Prairies node, and our honoured Elders Jo-Ann & Jerry Saddleback gathered in prayer and ceremony to hold space and celebrate the health and wellbeing of two community members. The gathering also held space for the safety, healing, and strength of the broader community impacted by substance use.

Ceremony and acts of reciprocity- through time, energy, and resources- are essential components of ethical and grounded research with Indigenous peoples. These practices remind us that research is not separate from community, but rather a part of it.



Thunderbird Partnership Addictions Summit

The Summit saw collaborative participation from representatives of both the IEP and CRISM Quebec, alongside our research partners and community members.

Council members Dr. Morgan Phillips and Blanche Du Sault engaged in networking at the outstanding summit organized by the Thunderbird Partnership Organization. They successfully connected, fostered relationships, and promoted both CRISM research and the initiatives of the Indigenous Engagement Platform. CRISM Quebec members were also in attendance with Dr. Marsan, Natalia Gala, and

Both members conveyed their gratitude to the network for facilitating their attendance and the promising opportunities that may arise from it.



CRISM IEP at the 2026 Thunderbird Partnership Foundation National First Nations Substance Use Summit and Tradeshow February 25–26

By: Dr Morgan Kahentonni Phillips, IEP Advisory Council Representative

The 2026 National First Nations Substance Use Summit, held this past February 25th and 26th at the Hilton Lac-Leamy in Gatineau, Quebec served as a powerful gathering for over 400 leaders, wellness workers, and researchers from across Turtle Island. Co-hosted by the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and Youth Substance Addiction Committee (YSAC), the event focused on strengthening collective responses to substance use through culture-based, community-led, and distinctions-based approaches.

Among the diverse exhibitors at the summit's tradeshow were representatives (Blanche DuSault and Morgan Phillips) from the Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP) and CRISM. Blanche and Dr. Phillips showcased its mission to foster collaborative, Indigenous-driven research and knowledge mobilization. The tradeshow provided us the vital space to share our materials and network with others. We accomplished this by distributing our resources related to the platform's five core pillars including Indigenous research priorities and evaluation frameworks. We also had the opportunity to not only listen to keynote speakers, attend some of the workshops and the awards banquet, but to engage with frontline service providers, vendors, and community health directors involved in improving Indigenous health and well-being through community-led efforts.

One of the most profound insights gained during the summit was the sheer scale of frameworks, movements and programs currently operating across the country! From innovative life promotion strategies to complex Indigenous models of care, community members and leaders proudly shared information about their programs through interactive sessions about the national landscape of wellness.



CRISM- IEP National Meetings

In Person meetings were held in the spring for the IEP Council and Circles, with CRISM regional and national representation in Banff.

A second in-person meeting was held in Ottawa, as the IEP Council made it's way across Canada together, highlighting the local regional influences, CRISM node, and experiences.

May CRISM-IEP Advisory Council & Circles Meeting in Banff





September Advisory Council Meeting in Ottawa



October National CRISM Meeting in Banff



Words from our Elder

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Jo-Ann Saddleback

CRISM Indigenous Engagement Elder
Advisor

Compassion is an act of Love.
Compassion is a Divine truth. It
exists whether human beings exist
or not. In fact, Compassion existed
before human beings were
created. Compassion is not a
human creation.

The most powerful phrase we can say is Wicihin “Help me.” If we are not saying these words, then the help is moot because it is unasked for and is enforced. The goal is not sobriety, the goal is recovery/healing; and that is what maintains the sobriety. We must act on our own behalf, we must have the Freedom to make our own decisions, as difficult as that is for most people. We must respect the lives of others and accept everyone is doing their best, wherever they are and whatever they are doing. The “best” we can do is support them and be ready when they ask for help.

Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback

-People speak of hope as if it is this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spider’s webs. It’s not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go. -

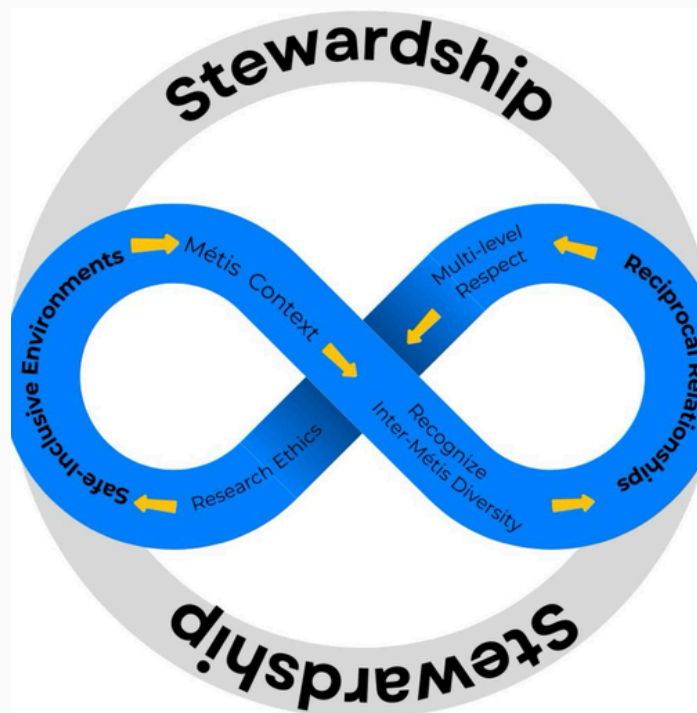
CRISM– IEP Spotlight

Promoting self-determined Indigenous data governance in Canada: the Métis Health Research and Data Governance Principles

Robert Henry, Chelsea Gabel, Caroline Tait, Kiera Kowalski, Alexandra Nychuk

Population-level data collection is crucial to advance Indigenous rights and sovereignty but requires localized approaches to develop representative datasets. In Canada, a focus on First Nations research and data governance and principles has led to the underrepresentation of Métis realities and a reliance on data governance models that fail to address their unique cultural, historical, and community-specific needs.

“The Saskatchewan Métis Health Research and Data Governance Principles©” were developed to guide Métis research and promote Métis data sovereignty. While these principles share similarities with the First Nations Principles of OCAP®, they emphasize Métis-specific priorities such as capacity building and active engagement with Métis rights holders. These principles provide a framework for Métis health research, ensuring that Métis values and perspectives are embedded throughout the research lifecycle.



Research Spotlight

Indigenous Engagement Platform

Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Matters (CRISM)



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
College of
Arts and Science
DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS STUDIES
ARTSANDSCIENCE.USASK.CA

Housed in the Department of Indigenous Studies under the nominated principal investigator, Dr. Bobby Henry, the Indigenous Engagement Platform is in the second year of its funding. Within the CRISM network, the platform works towards engaging with a diverse population of Métis, First Nations, and Inuit Peoples.

Check out more of what we do or subscribe to our newsletter! www.crism-iep.ca

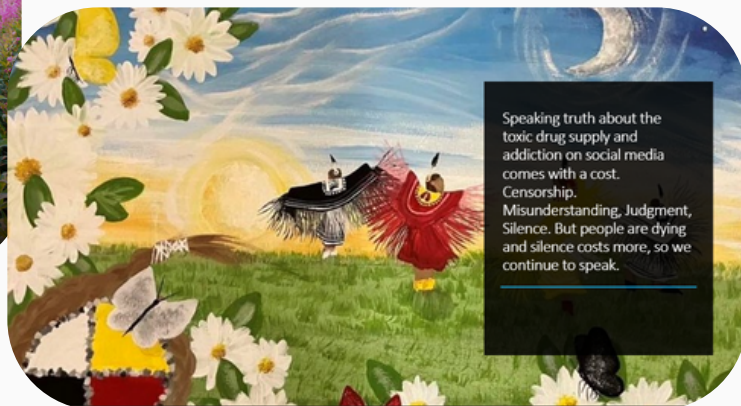
CRISM - ICRIS



Transforming Pain into Power

The IEP had the opportunity to fund an important substance use conference. We provided \$15,000 to sponsor the event and reduce any barriers for participating with partners at the University of Alberta & First Nations University.

Two IEP Council members, Dr. Barb Fornssler & Chantel Huel participated in the event as presenters.



Social Responsibility

The Indigenous Engagement Platform prioritized supported local vendors and Indigenous owned companies in services and expenses throughout the year.

We commit to improving our methods and activities towards a sustainable ecological and social model. The utilization of Indigenous owned businesses during our professional activities received welcome feedback for the quality of product, service, and appreciation for financial support that prioritized economically growing communities.

Purchases from Youth 4 Youth helped to sponsor cultural programming for 4 youth at an equine horsemanship workshop. *“Kîšâc is a word from Swampy Cree which means “ahead of time / in preparation / with a view to the future”. For you it means a community where Indigenous youth can learn together, connecting through cultures.*

We contributed to sponsor a talk about resiliency and recovery from addictions by Cody Demerais on March 11, 2025 at Usask.



Activities & Engagement

Research Networking

The IEP continues to expand our reach through networking, building new relationships and deepening old ones. IEP staff and advisory members have attended numerous conferences, meetings, and events across Canada to spread the word of the IEP and CRISM research.

2
CONFERENCES



Establishing Collaborations with ACT Indigenous Clinical Trials & Thunderbird Partnership

2

Indigenous Ceremonial Events held



4 QUARTERLY NEWSLETTERS



11 ADVISORY MEETINGS

3
In-Person CRISM Meetings Attended



1
IEP Active Monthly Engagement with CBR Researcher Forum

11 online & 1 in person in Ottawa

Advisory Activities

Decisions for the IEP is made through consensus with our advisory council and to that end, our principle investigators on the advisory council have committed to engaging with us twice a year in person and monthly remotely.

4 ADVISORY CIRCLES



Recruiting 1 member from each node in each category of adult, senior, youth, and Elder

5 PILLARS

Research Priorities



2

In-person national meetings in Banff & Ottawa

CRISM-IEP NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

1 Ethical Guideline for Indigenous Engagement

CRISM Collaborations with internal documents, grants, and communications

Dissemination of opportunities for training, education, and funding to both the IEP and regional CRISM networks

National newsletter submissions

Activities & Engagement

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Social Media

The IEP has successfully created an online presence, sharing stories, resources, and essential information with community members and researchers. In the summer of 2026, the IEP coordinator launched a website and is actively working to broaden the platform's reach.

51 LinkedIn Page Views
April 2025-26

69 Website Page Views
March-April 2026

11 Facebook page views
February-April 2026

Research Funding

2 \$15,000 Research funds
support distributed

4 Sponsorships for OCAP
training

Evaluation

1 Established an evaluation framework for the IEP's activities through engaging an external contractor, Micheal Heimlich, to create engagement measurements for our NPI, Dr. Robert Henry.

Future Outlook



We are actively working on creating our advisory circles throughout Canada, identifying research opportunities and community priorities while also fostering relationships within the CRISM network and beyond.

Future Plan

We continue to work towards expanding the reach of the CRISM-IEP research team, advisory council and circles. Building capacity and supporting events with Indigenous voices leading and engaging as community leaders, builders, and researchers to establish a foundation of distinctions-based Indigenous leadership across Canada.

Summary

CRISM-IEP Expansion Goals

- Expand the reach of the research team, advisory council, and circles.
- Enhance capacity by supporting Indigenous-led events.
- Promote distinctions-based Indigenous leadership across Canada.
- Support the CRISM regional nodes in their own engagement activities with First Nations, Inuit, & Metis Peoples.

Contact Us

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