

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

*Reflecting on our journey,  
Crafting our fate.*

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Prepared by

*Heather Poirier with Dr. Robert  
Henry*

Prepared for

*Public Stakeholders*

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# Letter from the Principal Investigator

Dr. Robert Henry



Dear Partners, Colleagues, and Communities,

It is an honour to share a few reflections on the work of the Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP) over the past year.

Our platform was established in response to the urgent need for Indigenous voices, leadership, and methodologies to be embedded within substance use research across Canada. As we reflect on this past year, it is important to acknowledge the broader social and political contexts that continue to impact Indigenous peoples disproportionately.

The intersection of political instability, systemic inequities, and the ongoing effects of colonialism continues to shape the realities faced by Indigenous communities. Stigma surrounding substance use remains deeply entrenched in many systems, limiting access to culturally appropriate supports and perpetuating harmful narratives. Indigenous peoples, who are overrepresented in health disparities, homelessness, and mental health crises, are also too often left out of decision-making processes that directly affect them.

In this context, the work of the IEP is not simply a matter of engagement — it is a matter of accountability. Western research institutions have long benefited from the knowledge, experiences, and resources of Indigenous peoples without ensuring equitable reciprocity or respect for Indigenous governance. Our platform exists as a corrective tool: to hold research structures accountable to Indigenous communities, to foster distinctions-based approaches, and to ensure that Indigenous priorities are not an afterthought but a foundation.

Throughout the past year, we have worked to strengthen our Elder and Knowledge Keeper advisory circles, foster opportunities for Indigenous researchers, and advocate for the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across all CRISM activities. We know that this is only the beginning. True transformation requires sustained commitment, critical reflection, and the willingness to reimagine research practices in ways that honour Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge systems.

I extend my deepest thanks to our Elders, community advisors, partners, and leadership teams who have guided our efforts with generosity, wisdom, and vision. It is through these relationships that our platform will continue to grow in strength, purpose, and impact.

We look forward to building upon this work together in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bobby Henry

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# Letter from the Project Coordinator

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Heather Poirier



As we close the first year, we are filled with gratitude for the progress and partnerships that have shaped our journey in advancing the Indigenous Engagement Platform. This year has been a testament to the power of collaboration and shared vision. I am excited to share the highlights of what we have accomplished together.

One of the key milestones this year was the addition of a dedicated Project Coordinator to our team. This role has been pivotal in driving our initiatives forward, ensuring that the platform remains organized, responsive, and aligned with the community's needs.

We successfully convened an Advisory Meeting with key stakeholders, including representatives from Indigenous communities, Elders, organizations, and knowledge holders. This meeting laid the foundation for meaningful collaboration and informed the direction of the platform. We actively participated in four significant conferences this year, where we shared insights, built connections, and learned from others in the field. Additionally, we presented at three CRISM (Canadian Research Initiative on Substance Misuse) conferences, showcasing our work and engaging with experts to inform the development of the platform.

A critical step this year was the drafting of the Terms of Reference for the Indigenous Engagement Platform. This document outlines our principles, goals, and operational framework, ensuring that the platform reflects the values and priorities of Indigenous communities. Looking ahead, we are embracing a consensus-based approach to planning for the next year. Through collaborative discussions, we aim to set priorities that are inclusive and reflective of the diverse voices we serve.

These achievements are a testament to the collective effort of everyone involved — our team, advisory members, Elders, partners, and supporters like you. Together, we are building a platform that fosters meaningful engagement and honors the knowledge, traditions, and aspirations of Indigenous communities.

As we step into the second year, we are excited to continue this journey and appreciate the support of our stakeholders, community members and partners.

With gratitude,

Heather Poirier

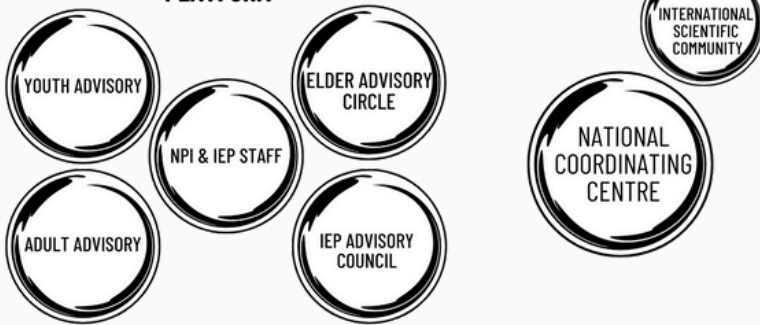


# Grant Inception & Call to Action



**CRISM - ICRIS**

## INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM



## NATIONAL CRISM NODE NETWORKS



## CRISM 2.0 PLATFORMS



In 2023, a call was issued for the establishment of a National Coordinating Centre within the CRISM Network, marking the transition to what is now known as CRISM 2.0. This initiative also included the creation of the Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP) and four additional knowledge platforms.

Dr. Robert Henry took the lead on the grant application for the IEP and successfully secured its recognition as an equal entity within the network, alongside the National Coordinating Centre.

By June 2024, efforts were underway to coordinate the network node managers, bring together advisory board members, and plan the inaugural National Meeting. This meeting aimed to define the Terms of Reference and set goals aligned with the platform's five core objectives.



The Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP) aims to strengthen relationships between Indigenous Peoples, communities, and organizations through community-driven, distinctions-based approaches within the CRISM network. By fostering collaboration and developing culturally specific interventions, the IEP seeks to address the unique impacts of substance matters within Indigenous populations. Grounded in Indigenous concepts of relationality, the IEP will enhance the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities while ensuring that local solutions can effectively be upscaled regionally, provincially, nationally, and internationally.

- Community-engaged approach with a priority to establish ethical space across the research lifecycle.
- Distinctions-based to address the gaps and knowledge misunderstandings created by pan-Indigenous research processes.



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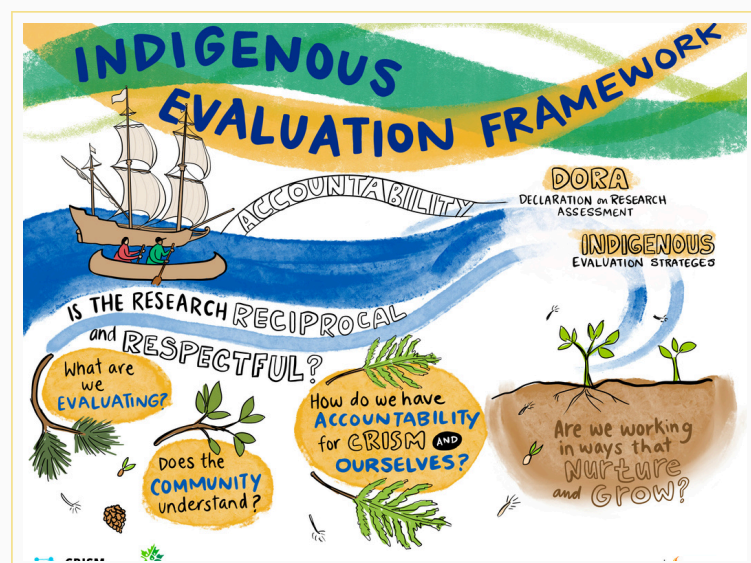
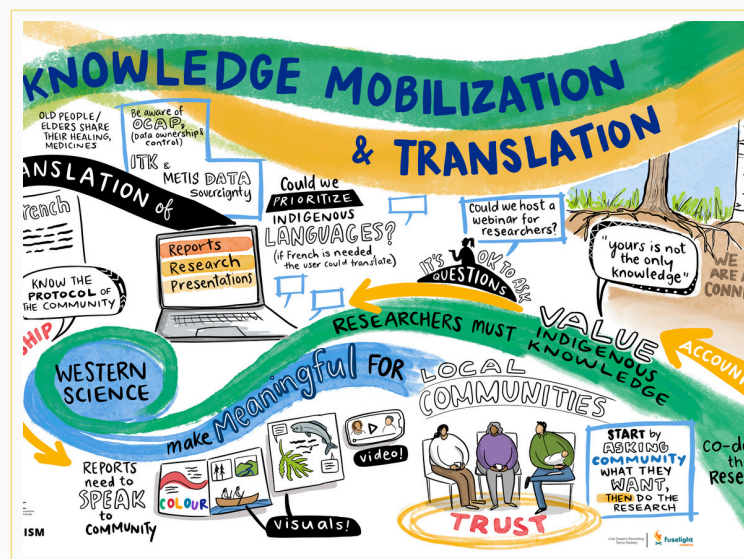
# Activity Highlights

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The IEP hosted their first in person meeting with the Principal Investigators on the grant as well as community members, students, and members of CRISM nodes from across Canada. We met in Vancouver BC from October 3rd to 5th to discuss the vision, terms of reference and governance structure of the IEP. There was also a graphic recorder brought on for the duration of the 2 days of meetings to record the priorities of the platform as well as consensus building discussions.







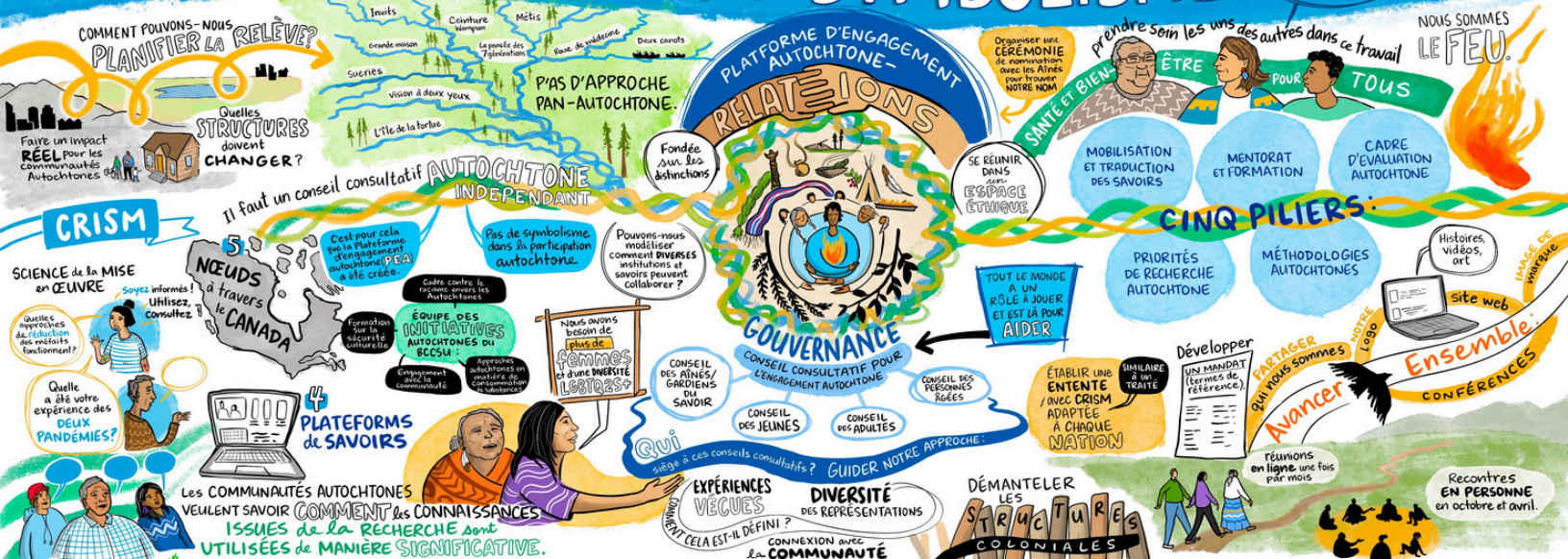
**Graphic Recordings of our in person  
Advisory Council Meeting by Fuselight  
Creative**



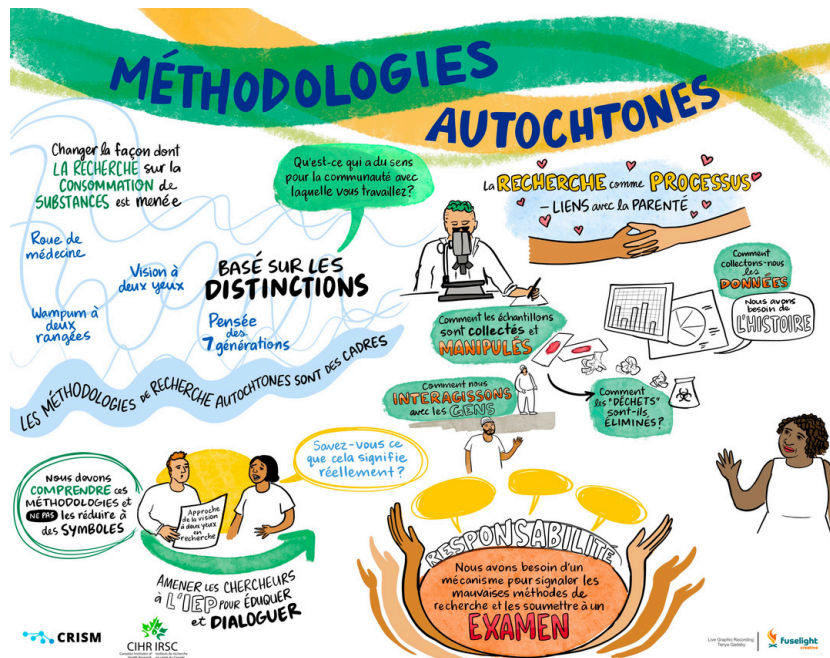
# ALLER AU-DELÀ DU SYMBOLISME

Écoutez nos histoires

9



Réunion du conseil consultatif de la Plateforme d'engagement autochtone : 4 et 5 octobre 2024







# Evaluating Previous CRISM Research through an Indigenous Lens



## Node Research Analysis

- Establish a baseline for past and current Indigenous focused research being done through CRISM networks to be able to evaluate the best ways forward.
- Survey of past and present research involving Indigenous priorities/communities as well as student mentorship in Indigenous health priorities.
- Listen to expectations and goals for Indigenous research, support, and inclusion within CRISM priorities of each node.

## IEP & Node Engagement

- Communications with all nodes across Canada to assist and support an increase in Indigenous partnerships and engagement. Working towards the inclusion of Indigenous substance use research and support for affected communities.
- Increase research in areas that affect Indigenous populations and are being requested by community.
- Distinctions-based research that recognizes the myriad cultures and communities across Canada. While there are similarities in socio-economic aspects, there are also distinct differences.

# CRISM Funding for Indigenous Research

This year we compiled previous and current funded research for or by Indigenous researchers in areas of Indigenous research priorities. Please check out the Prezi link for those projects.

## CRISM Funding across Canada for Indigenous projects



By Heather Poirier  
Jan. 8, 2025



Present



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# Employee Spotlight

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## Heather Poirier

### CRISM Indigenous Engagement Officer

Heather took on the role of CRISM IEP coordinating officer (Project Coordinator) for the grant in June 2024. She has a Master of Political Studies, Certificate of Global studies, and BA honours in Political Studies. Previously, she worked for the College of Arts Vice Dean of Indigenous Engagement at the University of Saskatchewan. As the single employee under the IEP grant, she has worked on coordinating and establishing the foundations for the platform while networking and building relationships across Canada.



## NEIHR Partnership

With the NEIHR Saskatchewan housed in Saskatoon and Dr. Robert Henry as their PI, as well as the National Coordinating Centre's co-pi, Heather has engaged with the leadership and employees of the network on numerous occasions. In the picture are Fleur McQueen, the network's Saskatchewan node and National Coordinating Centre manager and Susan Shacter, Community Research Facilitator.

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# Elder Spotlight

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## Jo-Ann Saddleback

CRISM Indigenous Engagement Elder Advisor

Jo-Ann Saddleback is an Elder from Maskwacis, Alberta who has worked with CRISM Prairies from its inception to document regional wisdom and practices regarding addictions and has been instrumental in socializing the Prairie Node to develop respectful working relations with Indigenous communities. She has presented at Prairie Node conferences and sits as Elder for CRISM | Prairies.

Elder Saddleback has been a member of 36 different committees, boards and task forces over her career, focused on issues important to Indigenous communities, including FASD, health, addictions and recovery, housing, social justice, youth development, education, media, healthy relationships and environments, cultural traditions, communications, First Nations self-governance, crime prevention, economic development and land use, building safe environments, Language and justice. Elder Saddleback sits on the working committee of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, a National Indigenous research organization on substance use that partnered with CRISM during the first funding cycle. Elder Saddleback is also currently the Elder-in-Residence for Edmonton Public Library. She and her husband, Elder Jerry Saddleback, offer ceremonies and other cultural approaches for people healing from substance use.



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# Letter from Elder Jo-Ann

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Greetings,

As we reach the end of another year, I offer these reflections on the journey we've shared and the path we continue to walk together through the Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP).

Since the inception of IEP, we have taken meaningful steps in defining and embodying what it means to have Indigenous-led, community-rooted research within the CRISM network. The goal was always clear: to ensure that the knowledge, priorities, and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples are not only included but foundational in addressing substance use and healing across our communities.

Our relationship with CRISM has been one of mutual respect and learning. Over time, trust has grown through shared commitments and listening. CRISM has demonstrated openness to Indigenous worldviews, processes, and the leadership of Elders and community members. Together, we are moving from simply being the subject of research to being the holders, guides, and leaders of that research.

One of our greatest accomplishments this year has been the continued growth and affirmation of IEP as a national Indigenous body — one that holds space for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis voices, experiences, and knowledge systems. This includes deepening our relationships across regions, ensuring inclusivity, and developing practices that reflect Indigenous ethics and sovereignty, including the foundational principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession).

We have begun to shape a vision for what Indigenous research truly looks like — rooted in community, led by those with lived experience, guided by Elders, and grounded in cultural knowledge. We recognize that research must support real change at the frontlines — with families, with those in recovery, and in the development of policy and programs by our own leadership.

Our work this year has also included refining how IEP functions as a committee: how we make decisions, how we build consensus, how we honour each member's contributions, and how we stay accountable to the communities we serve. This is ongoing and evolving, but we are finding strength in our shared values and commitment to one another.

Looking ahead, our vision is to continue building a sustainable, respected, and independent Indigenous research body — one that informs CRISM's work but also stands on its own. We aspire to house our own knowledge, create tools for frontline workers, translate research into community action, and pass on what we've built to future generations.

I close with gratitude. To the members of IEP, to CRISM partners, and to the communities who trust us with their stories and their hopes — thank you. Your dedication, expertise, and heart are the fire that keeps this work alive.

Jo-Ann Saddleback

# CRISM Advisory Member Spotlight



## Jennifer Swanburg & Blossom Labillois

Atlantic Node Manager & Indigenous Community Research Coordinator

CRISM Atlantic Node: Indigenous Engagement Summary

### **1. Intentions for Indigenous-Focused Research and Supporting Indigenous Researchers**

The CRISM Atlantic Node's Indigenous Engagement Coordinator, Blossom Labillois, works closely with the Indigenous Advisory Council and Indigenous communities (be this community members or affiliates) to guide, inform and build research capacity & knowledge within community and/or strengthen awareness of substance use related research activities.

### **2. Indigenous Student Engagement, Training, and Mentorship**

The Node supports students and trainees in several ways:

- When individuals join CRISM we ask about areas of interest and expertise. From this information we work to engage interested students and trainees with research teams or projects.
- For funding call reviews, we invite student and trainee voices to participate in the review process. We offer to work with students and trainees who are new to reviews to support their engagement by hosting a working session: "what is the role of a reviewer".
- As the CRISM Training Support Platform takes shape it is the intent of the platform to have a specific approach to support & build Indigenous student engagement, which would included training, mentorship, and advancement opportunities.
- Support students to attend the CRISM Atlantic bi-annual Symposiums and present abstracts and contribute to/or present at the Symposium



### 3. **Current Indigenous Engagement Activities**

- Research is Healing (June 2023) - a hybrid gathering held in Moncton, NB which brought together Indigenous voices from community, front line health care professionals, academics and persons with lived and living experience to meet in a safe space to share, learn and discuss the impact of research within Indigenous communities and ways to create meaningful research collaborations
- In 2024, the Node's Indigenous Advisory Council came together for a 2.5-day Co-learning Gathering in Unama'ki. The gathering brought together Elders, invited guests, Advisory Council members, the IEP; CRISM Atlantic PIs and executive members to discuss how substance use research could be relevant with and for community. Attendees participated in discussion on the integration of Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik and Inuit knowledge, priorities, and approaches to both research and meaningful, ethical engagement with Indigenous communities. Attendees heard from representatives of the Wabanaki Youth Council and the Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance on engagement with youth. Attendees also participated in a facilitated review of the CRISM II (A) IAC Terms of Reference; with opportunities to revise the existing language and structure.
- The Node is currently looking into how it might be able to support cultural training to Node Coordinating core members and the broader Node membership.

### 5. **Defining CRISM Research**

Research is recognized as CRISM-affiliated if it is:

1. Related to substance use interventions involving CRISM members; or
2. Funded through CRISM Atlantic initiatives such as:
  - The annual Research Development Program (RDP)
  - Working Group Funding (themes: Youth & Substance, Rural Access & Telehealth, Concurrent Disorders)
  - Demonstration Projects, reviewed and approved by the Node Executive

### 7. **Research Details and Support**

Our CRISM Atlantic website has updates on Research projects funded by the Node, <https://crism-atl.ca/> as well as a listing of publications and ongoing studies via Publications. The CRISM Atlantic Node offers Node members support through continually building research connections between members and supporting the three funding call mechanisms as noted in Research Development Program funding; Working Group Funding; and Demonstration Project funding.

# 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.

We financially contributed to a talk by Cody Demerais on March 11, 2025 at Usask.



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# Activities & Engagement

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## Research Networking

Engagement from coast to coast! Presentations about the Indigenous Engagement Platform at conferences, meetings, and research symposiums.

**2**



**2**



**1**

Halifax & Cape Breton

Vancouver

Toronto

**3**



**1**



**1**

In-Person CRISM  
Meetings Attended

Whitehorse

Ottawa

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## 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**



**5 PILLARS**



**2**

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

Research Priorities

In-person national  
meeting in Vancouver &  
Banff



# 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 are coming together once again in person May 9th-12th, 2025 in Banff, Alberta to deepen and expand relationships, build community engagement, and connect networks across Canada.

## Innovation

The comprehensive engagement across Canada with various groups—Métis, First Nations, and Inuit—for a substance matters research network represents an innovative strategy. This approach aims to involve the most diverse, equitable, and expansive collective, ensuring that numerous voices contribute to substance use research and enhance Indigenous representation in this important field.

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# Contact Us

*Indigenous  
Engagement Platform*

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Email