

# Community Newsletter

## INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

◆  
May 2026



Original Art Contributed by  
Circle Member: Neveah Rei Huel

This spring, we have embarked on a season filled with numerous challenges, both locally and globally, that have truly tested the strength of our resilience, communities, and harm reduction efforts. Whether facing the loss of loved ones due to addiction, navigating policy changes, dealing with funding cuts, or responding to global events, we have repeatedly recognized the urgent need to persist in and intensify our commitment to trauma-informed practices and harm reduction.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Neveah Rei Huel for the stunning artwork featured in this and previous issues. Their creative vision beautifully embodies the spirit of unity and hope that propels our community forward.

Together, let us continue to support one another and strive towards a brighter, healthier future for everyone.

Marsi cho



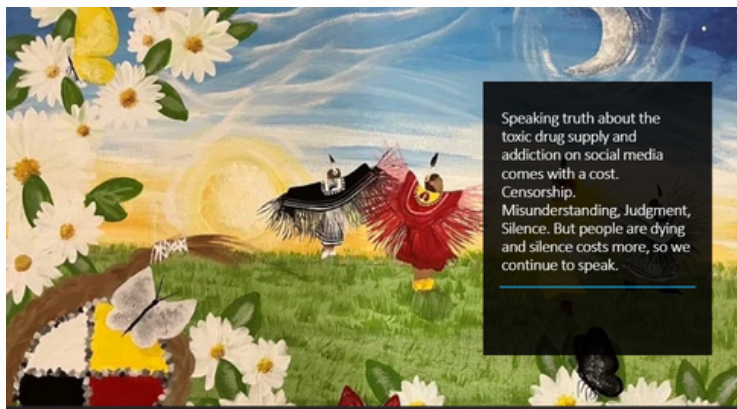


## Transforming Pain into Power

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.

More about the event: [Transforming Pain into Power with sâkhitowin & âhkamêyimowin: Responding to High-Risk Substance Use Summit](#) brings together knowledge keepers, Elders, students, academics, community leaders, and allies from across Turtle Island.



### Grants & Conferences

- [NEIHR Yukon](#) Funding opportunity
- Health Canada Emergency Response Research Funds
- CIHR IIPH funding for [Planning and Dissemination](#) Deadline June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026



### Training & Webinars

- Indigenous Data Governance training. OCAP sponsorships for IEP members- please reach out directly
- CRISM Prairies webinar series: [Addiction Rounds](#)

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## COMMUNITY NEWS



### Montreal IEP Council & Circles Meeting

Planning for the IEP annual meeting was well underway this winter with expanded engagement efforts across Montreal and Quebec.



### ACT Indigenous Clinical Trials Network Gathering

The IEP coordinator attended the Indigenous Clinical Trials Meeting held March 23–24, 2026, which brought together approximately 20 Indigenous Elders, Grandmothers, clinicians, researchers, and community leaders from across Canada. The meeting focused on Indigenous-led and Indigenous-engaged clinical trial work, with particular attention to ethics, governance, data sovereignty, and culturally aligned trial design, including substance use-related research.

## Thunderbird Partnership Addictions Summit



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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# CRISM IEP at the 2026 Thunderbird Partnership Foundation National First Nations Substance Use Summit and Tradeshow

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.



## On Compassion

from our Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback

We now have two provinces bent on normalizing enforced drug treatment by will of other people rather than themselves: Alberta and Saskatchewan. Saskatoon has stripped an active organization helping people where they are at, to overcome substance matters. One would hope such acts come from wanting to help people, but I am not convinced this legislation will do what they want. The old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink,” rings too true with this legislation.

The legislation is the Compassion Care Act. I am excited about anything that has to do with Compassion, but I am not convinced that this Act is about Compassion.

I am not convinced because I do not think “compassion” means in this legislation what Plains Cree Culture teaches us Compassion means. 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.

In our Story of Creation/The Long Story, we are told K’se Manito told the Creation Story to our first couple. We are not immigrants, we know who our original grandparents were and where they were created on this Island, Cree people call Menastik (North, Central and South America). He told our first couple His name: K’se Manito, KindCompassionateGod, it is not a description of Him, it is the name He told us to call Him. Compassion belongs to Him. Our Old People say that if you only ever achieve kindness and compassion in your Life, you will have achieved everything. The whole goal of Culture is to lead us to Kindness and Compassion.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

I have met Old People who achieved a level of Kindness and Compassion, that to be in their very presence was healing. One feels no pain, no heartbreak, no sorrow; just love and acceptance. On the road to achieving Kindness and Compassion is the knowledge and practice of the Seven Divine philosophies found in the prayers of the Rainbow and Big Dipper. The fifth Philosophy is Liberty: Freedom. Freedom is not lack of responsibility, rather it is all the responsibility. Only accountable people are responsible, and only responsible people are accountable. If I cannot account for what I do and say and think in a day, then I am not a free person. Freedom is about making choices and being accountable and responsible for them. Good choices open doors to opportunities and poor decisions close doors. I am not sure the Compassionate Care Act opens doors for anyone if they are not making the choice to be there.

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.

With Care,  
Jo-Ann Saddleback



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# COMMUNITY NEWS

## Updates

The IEP coordinator has been busy preparing for both the Naming Ceremony and the spring meeting in Montreal. While the weather did not cooperate with us to hold the naming ceremony in April, we are hopeful to have it held at the end of May. We have also been expanding our network with presenting on the CRISM-IEP at conferences and across our home University.

**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](http://www.crism-iep.ca)

CRISM - ICRIS

CIHR  
IRSC  
Canadian Institutes of Health Research  
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada



## A Few Notes To Remember

- Check out our website and stay up to date on blog posts or other engagement opportunities at [www.crism-iep.ca](http://www.crism-iep.ca)
  - If you would like to be featured in our newsletter or are interested in presenting your research or project through the CRISM-IEP, please get in touch with Heather at [iepcoordinator@usask.ca](mailto:iepcoordinator@usask.ca)
  - The CRISM Quebec node continues to recruit participants in the newest national [clinical trial on methamphetamines](#).
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**CRISM- INDIGENOUS  
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If you are interested in being a CRISM research member, learn more by reaching out to your regional node! [CRISM.ca](http://CRISM.ca)