

Community Newsletter

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

♦
August 2025



Greetings and Welcome to the Indigenous Engagement Platform for CRISM

Dear Partners, Colleagues, and Communities,

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

The IEP was created in response to the urgent need for Indigenous leadership, voices, and methodologies in substance use research across Canada.

This work unfolds within a broader context of systemic inequities, political instability, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism- all of which continue to disproportionately affect Indigenous communities.

Stigma around substance use remains deeply embedded in many systems, limiting access to culturally grounded supports and excluding Indigenous Peoples from decisions that directly impact their lives.

Dr. Robert Henry,

Robert Henry,

Nominated Principle Investigator

In this context, our work is not just about engagement- it is about accountability. The IEP seeks to challenge extractive research practices by centering Indigenous priorities, governance, and distinctions-based approaches.

Over the past year, we've strengthened our Elder and Knowledge Keeper advisory circles, supported Indigenous researchers, and advocated for meaningful inclusion across CRISM activities. This is only the beginning. Real change requires sustained effort, reflection, and a willingness to reimagine research in ways that uphold Indigenous sovereignty.

Thank you to our Elders, advisors, partners, and leadership teams for your vision and guidance. It is through these relationships that our platform continues to grow. We look forward to continuing this work together in the year ahead.

ORIGINAL ARTWORK IN THIS EDITION HAS BEEN CONTRIBUTED BY
NEVEAH REI-HUEL, AN IEP YOUTH MEMBER

Spring Meeting Highlights



Naming Ceremony

The IEP continues to work in collaboration with our Elder in residence, Jo-Ann Saddleback, in the protocol and ceremony for the naming of the Indigenous Engagement Platform. We also are working with Megan Currie of X-ing Design on the branding that aligns with our vision & purpose.

Banff IEP Meeting

In May, we gathered for a highly successful in-person meeting at the stunning Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity. Surrounded by the natural beauty and fresh mountain air, the setting offered a grounding and inspiring space for meaningful connection with our newly established intergenerational Advisory Circles alongside our Advisory Council and CRISM members.

We were honoured to host 32 attendees from across Canada, each bringing their unique experiences, perspectives, and knowledge to the table. Together we shared stories, had vital conversations, and

built relationships to strengthen our collective efforts in advancing substance use research and advocacy.

Throughout our two days together, we began crafting our vision to health and wellness for Indigenous Peoples, while also reflecting on the successes, challenges, and systemic barriers that impact social safety, healing, and advocacy. The rich dialogue underscored just how much work lies ahead- and how essential it is that we continue to do it together.

A Few Notes To Remember

- Our next in person meeting for our Advisory Council is September 22nd-23rd in Ottawa.
- We will be polling dates for the spring in person meeting for all Advisory Council and Circles in September.
- Our first session of our webinar series that highlights issues related to Indigenous Peoples and substance matters, "CRISM Connects" is beginning in the fall.

COMMUNITY NEWS



New harm reduction toolkit 'With Open Arms' for Indigenous youth of B.C.

Resource put together by and for youth with lived experience, and the First Nations Health Authority

 Nanaimo News Bulletin / Jul 9

New Resource: With Open Arms Supportive Conversations Among Friends:

In July, the release of an important resource that our circle members, Leaf Turrell & Berkley Andres-Baker, was disseminated across the IEP network. These members helped create this valuable resource in collaboration with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA).

This Youth Substance Use Toolkit is designed to support meaningful conversations with youth about substance use, wellness, and healthy communities.

The toolkit includes a wide range of worksheets, discussion guides, and practical resources to help facilitate these critical conversations in a respectful, supportive way.

EXPLORE THE TOOLKIT AT: [FNHA.CA/WITHOPENARMS](https://fnha.ca/withopenarms)



Research Grants

- [Research Impact Graduate Scholarship](#) new funding will be announced in November 2025
- [Telus](#) Funding for Community: \$5-\$25,000 grants for Indigenous-led projects
- While not substance use specific, the [CMHC](#) has [grants](#) supporting sustainable housing initiatives with a lack of housing being interconnected with substance use.
- Community team grant [STEPS](#)
- Indigenous [STBBI CIHR grant](#)



Upcoming Conferences

- [Canadian Knowledge Mobilization Forum](#)- June 2026 tba
- [CCSA Issues of Substance](#) - November 17th - 19th in Halifax
- [Mentor Canada](#)- November 13-14, 2025 in Calgary
- [C2U](#) is requesting proposals for hosting their next 2029 conference.
- [CSAM](#)- Canadian Society of Addiction Medicine- Scientific Conference October 16th- 18th, 2025

COMMUNITY NEWS



In June, members of the Indigenous Engagement Platform (IEP), our honoured Elders Jo-Ann & Jerry Saddleback and CRISM Prairies 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 in service to it.





Stories of Impact: Supporting Wellness Through Ceremony Kyra Price and the SGNLSUN Society

Kyra Price, co-founder of the SGNLSUN Society in northern British Columbia, is helping lead the return of sweat lodge ceremonies as a form of healing for people who use substances. Supported by the First Nations Health Authority's Urban and Away From Home grant, Kyra, her husband and her family have created a safe, spiritually grounded space for those often left out of mainstream recovery systems.

The sweat lodge is run as a family, in partnership with her husband, children, and siblings. Every step of this work is done together, in balance- with each person contributing their unique role and strength. "What we do works because we work together," Kyra says. "My husband and children are a huge part of this journey."

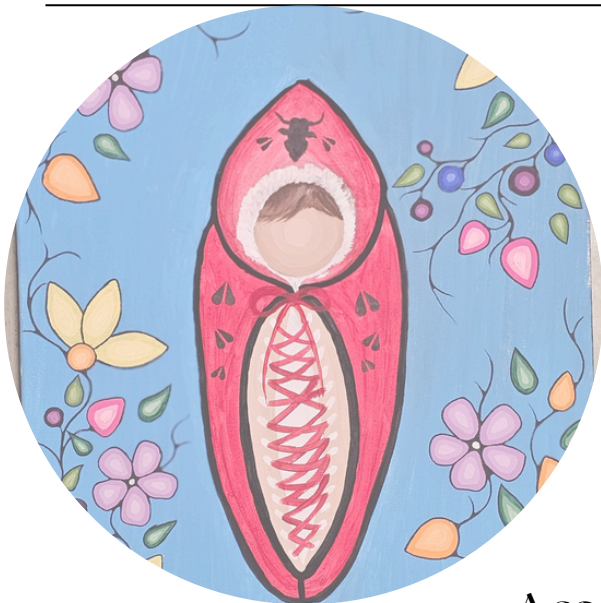
Together, they've helped unhoused and street-involved individuals reconnect with ceremony, culture, and identity, creating new pathways to recovery grounded in love and respect. Kyra emphasizes the power of women-only lodges, where laughter, vulnerability, and non-judgment make room for deep healing.

She also sees research as having a role- when it's community-led and grounded in the knowledge already held in ceremony. She challenges researchers to prove the effectiveness of traditional healing and to hold systems accountable for treating relapse as a systemic failure, not a personal one.

Kyra's message to other Indigenous women doing this work is rooted in collective strength: *"You need thick skin and strong relationships. Build with others. This is decolonizing work- and it begins by lifting each other up and reclaiming our space as life-givers."*

Together, Kyra and her family are helping raise a new generation of freedom fighters- young people who are reclaiming traditional values and demanding their rightful place within every system.

Thank you for reading!



CRISM MEMBER RESEARCH:

Words of Wisdom: Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback

Culture is the process to get where you want and need to go. The business of elders is Culture. This means we keep Culture for everyone and especially for the ones who might never thought themselves worth of Ceremony. It is our business to make sure everyone knows how to access and have access to Ceremony. It is what keeps us part of keeping it all alive. It is our business to bring people to forgiveness of themselves and allow them to see the light they hold, the light they hold for all of us: the Good Medicine we all hold for each other. We find this in Ceremony; where Culture brings us.

A scoping review of harm reduction practices and possibilities among indigenous populations in Australia, Canada, and the United States

Authored by: Camille Zolopa a,* , Seema L. Clifasefi b, Sophia Dobischok a,c, Natalia Gala a,d, Hannah Fraser-Purdy a, Morgan Kahentonni Phillips a, Sophie Blackmore a, Dennis C. Wendt

Screening 578 references generated a corpus of 28 studies, 16 (57 %) of which were conducted in Canada. Indigenous people who use drugs generally reported favourable attitudes towards harm reduction initiatives; other community members and healthcare providers were more hesitant. A variety of harm reduction strategies were discussed, most commonly needle-syringe programs (n = 8, 29 %).

Barriers included the availability and acceptability of harm reduction services.

Community members expressed concerns regarding cultural appropriateness, but also offered possibilities for improved integration of harm reduction into Indigenous traditions and practices.

This review indicated an emerging, wide-ranging, and somewhat disparate body of literature.

While barriers remain, there are promising possibilities for reconceptualizing harm reduction from an Indigenous ethos.



If you are interested in being a CRISM research member, learn more by reaching out to your regional node! CRISM.ca

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