



**Anishnawbe
Health Foundation**
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“We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Indigenous healing practices and use them in the treatment of Indigenous patients in collaboration with Indigenous healers and Elders where requested by Indigenous patients.” – Call to Action #22, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015

Partner with Anishnawbe Health in the Reclamation of Traditional Healing Practices to support Indigenous Health and Wellness

“Attending ceremonies provides a sense of identity, builds confidence, provides positive support. I am learning to become whole through my identity and culture.” – Anishnawbe Health Toronto Client

Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT), the accredited community health centre serving the Indigenous community in Toronto, has developed a unique model that provides healthcare and healing guided by the teachings of traditional healers, elders and medicine people. Western health practitioners work side by side with traditional healers and counsellors to build a healthy, strong Indigenous community by looking at health holistically and helping clients to overcome barriers to health and living a good life; barriers such as homelessness, poverty, trauma, abuse and addiction. In addition to traditional practitioners, clients can access traditional medicines and participate in ceremonies such as Sweat Lodges, Smudge, traditional births, Shake Tents, Feasts and Naming at AHT. Connecting to identity and culture are at the core to finding a healthy path for clients.

At the same time, the increased need for culturally safe and Indigenous-led care is evident now more than ever. While anti-Indigenous racism is not new in healthcare, tragic stories like that of Joyce Echaquan of Atikamekw Nation of Manawan this past summer have brought this issue to the forefront again. Joyce Echaquan recorded and streamed the racist treatment she received during the last hours of her life by the staff at a Quebec hospital.

Central to providing this care is the Traditional Healer. Historically, government policies and laws have discouraged and banned traditions leading to a shortage of traditional healers, ceremonialists and medicine people. As the only Indigenous Health Centre in Canada with traditional healers on staff fulltime, Anishnawbe Health sees every day how colonization has eroded Indigenous teachings, practices and ceremonies in Canada, and we know that support to ensure this valuable knowledge is shared with the next generation is critical. To date, AHT's efforts to address this gap for its own needs have been done on an ad hoc basis, without any dedicated resources to do so. Yet, AHT has recognized a need for a formalized training in place for Traditional Healers in the urban context to build capacity and ensure the continuance and growth of this practice.

Developing a First of its kind Training Program for Traditional Healers, Ceremonialists and Osh-ka-be-wis (Traditional Helpers)

As a first step, Anishnawbe Health contracted Dr. Lynn Lavallee, Interim Director and Professor, School of Social Work and FCS Strategic Lead, Indigenous Resurgence at Ryerson University to explore whether formalized training for Traditional Healers in the urban context is warranted, and if so, what might a clearly defined curriculum look like for such a program. Dr. Lynn Lavallee met with 72 individual key informants and had several meetings with some of the same individuals for further discussion and feedback about the initial findings. The total number of interactions, either in a group or with an individual, was 104. The key informants included Traditional Healers, Osh-ka-be-Wis, traditional people, Elders, academics, and representatives from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

From this consultation, there was overwhelming support for a Foundational training for Osh-ka-be-wis, or Traditional Helpers. A curriculum for the training was developed that involves students being progressing through four doorways or directions with the following seven curriculum components:



Launching the First Class

As a next step, AHT is planning to initiate the planning and development of this program an initial group of up to ten students. Objectives for the pilot are to:

- Ensure the current and future holistic health and well-being of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.
- Pass on the traditional teachings, ceremony, and healing practices to the next generation.
- Accelerate the learning for future Traditional Healers, Ceremonialists, and Traditional Teachers.
- ‘Graduate’ up to 10 students from the program.
- Use results of the first session as proof of principle to secure long-term, operational funding for an ongoing training program.

Project Implementation Leadership: Michael Milward, Director of Special Projects



With donor support, Anishnawbe Health Foundation has provided organizational capacity funding to the Health Centre to hire a Director of Special Projects to plan and implement a proof of principle pilot of the Training Program. Michael Milward, Special Projects Director, is from Beardy's & Okemasis' Cree Nation, Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Michael has successfully supported innovative and transformational initiatives for First Nations, Inuit and Métis, first in the post-secondary education sector and now in the health care sector. Michael worked with the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia in coordinating the Synala Honours Program, a summer program offered to grade eleven First Nations students which provides a six-week on-campus introduction to university life. The students were encouraged to pursue post-secondary education and professional careers, as the program addressed the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of learning. The program provided a strong focus on Indigenous identity, with Elders supporting the students and Indigenous role models from many professional backgrounds engaged with the students. Most recently, Michael served as the Manager, Provincial Initiatives, for the Shkaabe Makwa Centre for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Wellness at was at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). Shkaabe Makwa is designed to drive culturally relevant systems initiatives to transform health outcomes by advancing research, training and innovative healing models that respect, honour, and harmonize traditional knowledge and medical expertise. Anishnawbe Health Toronto is pleased to welcome Michael to the team as of January 2021.

Pilot Project Timeline

Anishnawbe Health Foundation is currently raising the seed funding to implement this program. Anishnawbe Health Toronto aims to initiate the planning phase for the pilot program in 2022. Teacher and student recruitment will begin in late 2022 with classes to begin in 2022 or 2023.

Further Information, or to Request a Full Proposal:

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