Building Capacity to Provide Culturally-Safe Care:

An Approach to Reducing Harm & Removing Barriers for Indigenous Women & Gender-Diverse People Who Use Cannabis



COMMUNITY-INFORMED APPROACH TO CANNABIS PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS



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Agenda

- Background
- Understanding Indigenous Social Determinants of Health
- Trauma-Informed Care in Social Care Settings
- Navigating Cannabis Use with Clients
- Case Study
- Indigenous Cannabis Resources





BACKGROUND

Project Overview, Learning Goals & Indigenous Learning Lenses





About the Cannabis Project

Goals:

- Facilitate knowledge-sharing of cannabis as a harm-reduction tool
- Reduce stigma and barriers and enhance HSCPs understanding of cannabis as a form of medicine
- Enhance culturally safe and destigmatized care for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who use cannabis

Funded by Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program

A continuation of NWAC's ongoing Cannabis Education work







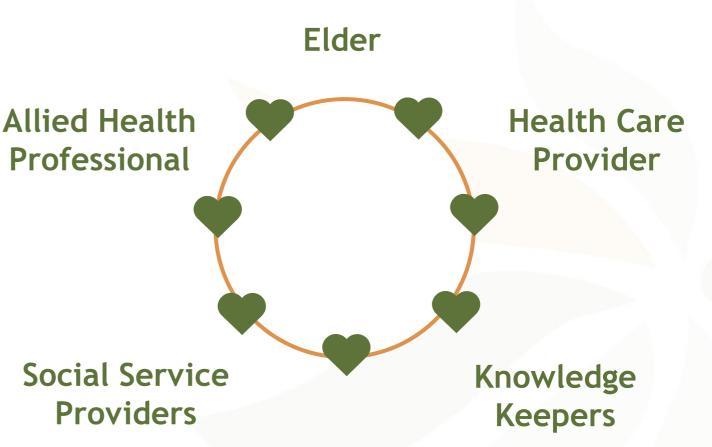
AUDIENCE: Health & Social Service Providers

Social Care Providers

Including (but not limited to): social workers, addiction support workers, community support workers, Indigenous support workers, and crisis intervention workers.







Advisory Circle

Purpose:

- Ensure all project activities and outputs are meaningful, relevant, and responsive to the needs of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who use cannabis
- Provide insights grounded in lived and professional experience







Learning Objectives

Developed through surveying 45 Health and Social Service Providers to identify gaps in training and knowledge.









Two-Eyed Seeing

A guiding principle that encourages viewing the world through two lenses:

One eye focused on Indigenous ways of knowing



The other eye focused on Western scientific knowledge

Fostering a balanced, respectful approach, drawing on the strengths of both knowledge systems for a fuller understanding of health and wellness!





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UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Examples, Cultural Safety, & Sharing Power





Social Determinants of Health

The social determinants of health (SDOH) refer to the non-medical factors that influence an individual's health outcomes.

These include the holistic conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, shaped by **economic, social, and political** forces.

They play a critical role in determining the overall well-being and health equity of populations



based on work for First Nations Health Authority at Gathering Wisdom VI J







Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is a framework for delivering care that is free from discrimination, power imbalances, and stereotypes.

Cultural Safety for Indigenous Clients

- Acknowledges ongoing effects of colonization, intergenerational trauma, and systemic racism
- Ensures Indigenous voices, knowledge systems, and cultural practices are centered in care
- Builds trust by fostering environments where clients feel respected, valued, and understood

Reflections for Social Care Providers

- Consider the power dynamics in your client relationships
- Reflect on your own biases and actively work to challenge stereotypes and assumptions
- Ask yourself reflective questions:
 - Am I a safe person to work with?
 What would make me safer in the eyes of my clients?



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Sharing Power with Indigenous Women & Gender-Diverse Clients

Shift language away from the term "empowerment" which can imply a hierarchal dynamic where power is granted. Instead "sharing power" reflects collaboration and mutual respect.

"The medicine is already within us... we have the power to heal ourselves." - Advisory Circle Member



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Key Steps for Sharing Power



Honour Traditional Roles

Recognize traditional roles as caregivers, leaders, and Knowledge Keepers



Provide Tools

Offer resources, skills, and supports that allow clients to take the lead Cultivate Supportive Environments

> Model respect, strength, and advocacy and guide clients



Foster Shared Decision-Making

Recognize clients are experts on their lives and needs







Minimizing Barriers



Cultural Safety & Understanding

- Prioritize cultural safety in interactions
- Partake in additional trainings on Indigenous histories, traditions, and understandings
- Build trusting relationships



Address Systemic Barriers

- Advocate for policy changes
- Connect clients to resources
- Help remove barriers like transportation, financial costs, and language
- Ensure services are designed to offer culturally safe care



Collaboration in Care Planning

- Engage in holistic teamwork with diverse health and social care providers
- Actively connect clients to community supports and resources
- Coordinate services and referrals whenever possible

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE IN SOCIAL CARE SETTINGS

Definition, Recognizing & Responding, Building Trust





Defining Trauma- Informed Care

Understanding Trauma

- An emotional and physiological response to distressing events that overwhelm ability to cope
- Can result from a single event or ongoing exposure
- Impacts holistic health (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual)

Trauma-Informed Care

- Recognizes how trauma affects all aspects of people's lives
- Creates safe spaces
- Acknowledges how colonization impacts life experiences and SDOH
- Emphasizes strengths and resiliency
- Failure to implement can cause re-traumatization





How to Provide Trauma-Informed Care

Recognize the impacts of colonialism on the lives of Indigenous women and gender diverse people Reflect on how your personal values and beliefs influence your interactions with clients Recognize and respect that traditional knowledge and biomedicine can coexist and can be integrated





How to Provide Trauma-Informed Care

Tips for Trauma-Informed Care

- You do not need to know what trauma a person has gone through to provide trauma-informed care
- Be aware of your positionality and privilege
- Practice empathetic listening with clients
- Help your people to make the best decision for their holistic health and wellbeing

To expand your understanding of trauma-informed care, consider further exploring concepts of prohibition, intergenerational trauma, and cultural safety as it pertains to Indigenous women and gender diverse people.





Recognizing & Responding to Trauma Activation

As a note, this slide will utilize the term "activate" instead of "trigger" when referring to a stimulus that awakens a memory, feeling, or symptom.

Common Stressors

- Particular environmental, sensory, or interpersonal stressors can activate a trauma response
 - Sounds, smells, specific places, confrontations, sensations, or even phrases
- Hard to predict what will activate someone!

Signs & Symptoms

- Physical signs
 - increased heart rate, sweating, shaking, sweating
- Emotional signs
 - fear, anger, sadness, shame, numbness
- Behavourial signs
 - avoidance, hypervigilance, outbursts, freezing
- Cognitive signs
 - flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, confusion, distorted thinking



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Response Strategies

- Validate the experience
- Provide a safe and calm environment
- Offer grounding or coping techniques
- Be patient and avoid pushing the person further
- Let them guide the conversation
- Help ensure they feel in control of their experience









Building Trusting Relationships

Fostering Safety

• Create physical and emotional environments that promote feelings of safety and security

Establishing Boundaries

 Set clear and consistent boundaries to build trust and predictability in the providerclient relationship

Sharing Power

 Encourage autonomy and shared decisionmaking, ensuring clients have control over their healthcare

Cultural Safety

 Honour the diversity of clients' experiences by incorporating culturally safe practices into care

Openness in Care

- Provide multiple treatment options (when available) and allow clients to share their perspectives
- Ongoing, informed consent!

NAVIGATING CANNABIS USE WITH CLIENTS

Cannabis basics, harm reduction practices, and supportive conversations



What is Harm Reduction?

Harm reduction is an evidence-based, client-centered approach that aims to reduce the various health or social harms of any action that has risk.

Why Harm Reduction?

- Reduces or minimizes potential harm
 through non-judgmental strategies
- Provides an opportunity to connect people to resources and services
- Allows for self-determination
- Meets people where they are at, not where we think they should

Indigenous Considerations

- Indigenous folks continue to face barriers to accessing quality and culturally safe services
- Harm reduction resources and supports are lacking in many communities
- Reclaiming one's identity is key to healing from trauma





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Cannabis Basics

What Are Cannabinoids?

- Active chemicals in cannabis plants that affect our brain and body when we consume them
- Interact with our Endocannabinoid System (ECS)
 - response to stress, mental health, immunity, and overall wellness
- There are over 100 cannabinoids but two most common types are:
 - tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)
 - o cannabidiol (CBD)



Cannabis Basics

THC

- Is responsible for the way your brain and body respond to cannabis
- Includes the psychoactive effect or "high"
- Binds to our ECS and temporarily replaces our body's endocannabinoids

CBD

- Does not produce a "high"
- Can block or lower effects of THC

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- Interacts with ECS to boost the effects of our body's own endocannabinoids
- Generally thought of as the medical cannabinoid (although THC is also medicinal)







Understanding Cannabis Products

Three Main Types

THC-dominant

- contains THC (over 7%) and minimal CBD (0-2%)
- Stronger "high" or euphoric effect
- Greatest chance for undesirable effects depending on dose

CBD-dominant

- contains CBD (over 7%) and minimal THC (0-2%)
- Little to no "high" or euphoric effect
- Milder and more relaxing depending on dose

Balanced

- ratio of THC to CBD that's either 1:1, 1:2, or 1:3
- The greater the CBD the more relaxing body-high and less stimulating "high"





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Understanding Cannabis Products

Methods of Consumption

- Smoke Inhalation
- Vaping Inhalation
- Ingestion
- Sublingual
- Topical Applications
- Juicing
- Nasal Spray
- Suppositories
- Transdermal Patches

All methods have different effects, durations, and purposes.

Many factors are at play and this is why it can take trial-and-error to find the best product and dose for unique needs.







Intention With Plant Medicines

Cannabis as Plant Medicine

- Rooted in traditional teachings
- Used for healing, spiritual practices, and ceremonially in some communities
- Represents a connection to land and sustainability for some people

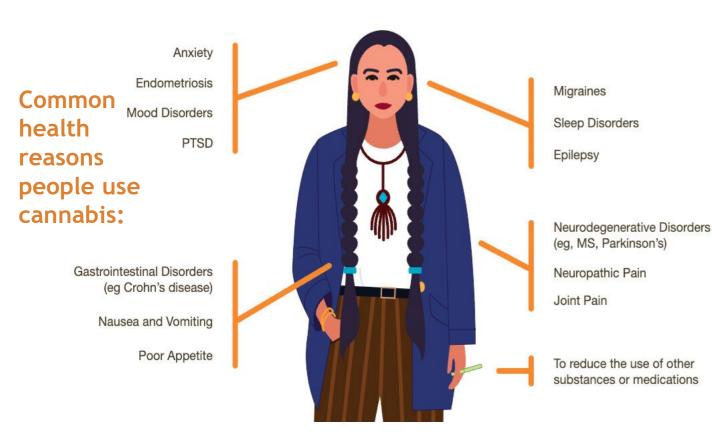
Importance of Intention

- Mindful use tied to balance and respect for the plant
- Intention connects people with the plant's purpose
- Aligning use with traditional values fosters respect for Indigenous perspectives





Why People Use Cannabis



Alternative to Substance Use

- Cannabis may serve as an alternative to other substances (such as alcohol and opioids)
- Can help withdrawal symptoms and serve as pain management
- Reduced risk of addiction and other health and social harms compared to other substance use
- Especially relevant as Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by the drug poisoning crisis!





Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD)

What is CUD?

- Spectrum of patterns in cannabis use
 - Mild, moderate, or severe
- Must have more than two symptoms consistently present within a 12-month period

Not all people who use cannabis regularly will experience this!

Symptoms:

- Consuming cannabis in larger amounts and/or over a longer periods than intended
- Cannabis use is impacting social/recreational activities
- Unsuccessful attempts at reducing or controlling cannabis use
- Disrupting regular activities to obtain cannabis, use cannabis, or recover from its effects
- Cannabis use is getting in the way of fulfilling obligations at work, school, or home
- Use of cannabis in situations where it is physically dangerous
- Use of cannabis despite problems it may be causing physically, emotionally, or within relationships
- Having a strong urge to use cannabis







Harm Reduction for Cannabis Use

Tolerance Breaks

- Cannabis receptors stop reacting as strongly to THC over time (building tolerance)
- This is reversible!
- After 2-5 days, the body's cannabis receptors will start to reverse tolerance

CBD interacts with the body's cannabis receptors differently than THC. It is unlikely to develop tolerance to CBD. If someone is unable to take a tolerance break, they can try:

Changing consumption routine

Switching up

the strain

Microdosing

Using less



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Communication Strategies for Discussing Cannabis Use

Basic Practices

- Prioritize culturally safe and trauma-informed care
- Recognize the diversity of identities
- Integrate traditional Indigenous practices with Western health approaches (Two-Eyed Seeing)
- Consider social determinants of health
- Use harm reduction principles

When Supporting Cannabis Use

- Provide guidance on selecting appropriate strains and forms of cannabis
 - Consider experience levels (beginner vs. regular use)
- Offer practical advice that resonates with individuals' goals and contexts
- Focus on preferences, therapeutic needs, and underlying medical conditions







Cannabis & Youth

Cannabis can be dangerous when used by youth for any period of time. **Before the age of 25**, the brain is still developing and cannabis use can cause negative health consequences.

Physical Health

- Impacts on the brain can affect mental function throughout life
- Can develop dependency
- Higher risk of also smoking cigarettes
- Negative impacts on lungs and respiratory system

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

- With regular use, more likely to experience anxiety, depression, psychosis, and schizophrenia
- Difficulty with memory, concentration, and decision-making
- Potential withdrawal from peers and conflict with family







Cannabis & Youth

Talking to Youth About Cannabis

- Ensure conversations are ongoing and nonjudgmental
- Include both evidence-based risks AND benefits
 - Prioritize their agency and decision-making capabilities
- Ask open-ended questions and use language that is accessible and straightforward
- Use harm-reduction messaging







Addressing Stigma & Discrimination

Examine the History of Stigmas & Stereotypes

Use Non-Stigmatizing Language

Understand Barriers & Intersectional Experiences

Engage in Open, Non-Judgmental Conversations

Respect Cultural Practices & Knowledge

> Recognize Diverse Perspectives on Cannabis Use

CASE STUDY







This case study is fictional. However, it was developed by the Advisory Circle based on personal insights and real lived experiences of working in and interacting with social care settings.

Scenario

Lyric (she/her) is a 28-year-old Indigenous mother of two young children. She has recently started working with a social care provider, Lisa, to access support services for housing and parenting resources. Lyric is hesitant to disclose her use of cannabis, which she relies on to manage anxiety and chronic pain. Her apprehension stems from worries of being judged, stereotyped, or even reported to child welfare services—a fear rooted in intergenerational trauma experienced in Lyric's family.

Lyric approaches the relationship cautiously, uncertain of Lisa's intentions and whether she can trust her. She feels the weight of previous negative experiences with healthcare and social service systems, which have often invalidated her experiences and reinforced harmful stereotypes.





Case Study: Interaction Example

Building Trust & Addressing Concerns

- Opening the conversation
- Allowing client to take the lead
- Creating safety around sensitive topics
- Validating & reassuring
- Addressing fears with transparency
- Collaborative problem solving

Outcomes

- Increased trust in provider
- Shared power in decision-making
- Addressing fears
- Collaborative action
- Improved care outcomes



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INDIGENOUS CANNABIS RESOURCES







NWAC: Cannabis Education Website

Cannabis Education for and by First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples

This website is part of a larger NWAC project, funded by Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program, titled A Community-Informed Approach to Cannabis Public Health Education and Awareness. Through this project, NWAC engaged urban, rural and remote Indigenous communities, encompassing First Nations, Inuit and Métis to identify current awareness and priorities of Indigenous women and genderdiverse people around cannabis public health education.

nwaccannabised.ca

- Cannabis in Canada
- Cannabis Basics
- History & Traditional Stories
- Cannabinoid Dose Calculator
- Cannabis & Health
- Cannabis for Medical Use
- Cannabis Use Disorder
- Resources









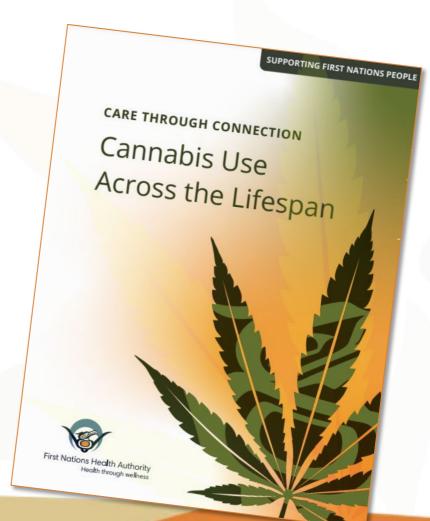
First Nations Health Authority Resources

- Designed to support Health Care Providers in facilitating open, compassionate conversations
- Emphasizes harm reduction, trauma-informed, and culturally safe approaches
- Case Studies
- Guiding questions and considerations

<u>Website</u>

- Apps & Tools
- Cannabis Resources
- Maternal Health and Parenting
- Cannabis Education

- Safer Cannabis Use
- Support for Youth
- Harm Reduction Principles & Practices Fact Sheet



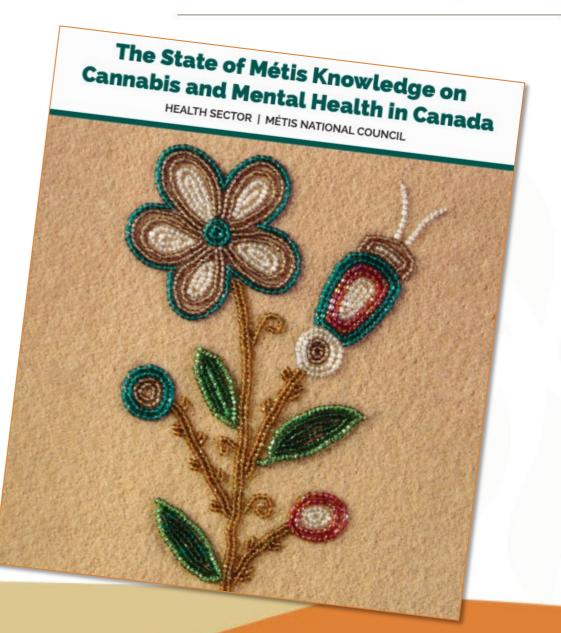






Métis Nation Council

- High-level overview
- Cannabis Among Métis Youth
- Risk Factors
- Medical Use of Cannabis
- Mental Health & Social Determinants of Health
- Cannabis Use Disorder & Treatment
- Other Substance Use Among Métis

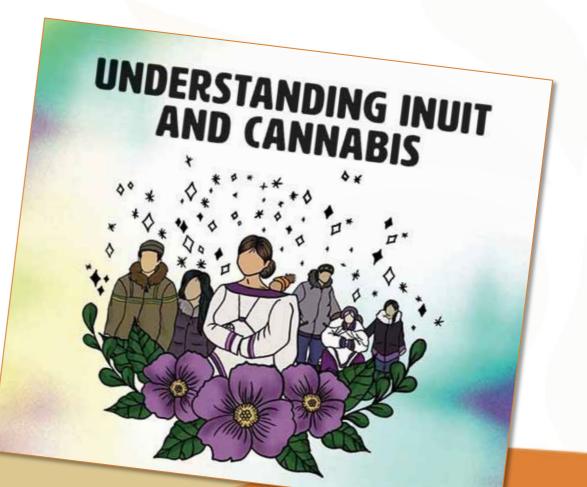






Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada: Cannabis Harm Reduction Toolkit

- Discussion Guides for Starting Conversations
- Reflecting on Cannabis Use Tool
- Posters & Factsheets in Multiple Languages
- Resources for Parents & Youth











International Journal of Indigenous Health NWAC Conversations on Cannabis and Mental Health

Canadian Centre on Substance Use & Addiction Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis

Health Canada Information for Health Care Professionals

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Additional Indigenous Cannabis Resources







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NWAC: Anti-Indigenous Racism Toolkit for Health & Social Care Providers

- Designed to support HSCPs in addressing and reducing racism in their daily practices
- Practical tools like post-visit surveys to collect feedback
- Guidance on understanding the needs of Indigenous clients



Racism in Healthcare Toolkits







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Thank you!



Haw'aa! Miigwetch! Qujannamiik! Wel'alin! Nakurmiik! Merci!



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