

# Indigenous Health and Wellness through Empowerment

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## Indigenous Health and Wellness through Empowerment

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this symposium is to share evidence-based methodologies, findings, and future implications in cultural safety research and education to enhance Indigenous health and wellness.

**Description:** Finding culturally relevant and safe ways to improve Indigenous health and wellness continues to be an important area of cultural safety research with Indigenous communities in Canada. Current evidence indicates a high prevalence of select chronic conditions among Indigenous communities, which may be preventable through increasing various healthy lifestyle behaviours including physical activity participation. Interventional and educational models should reflect a community-based, co-created, and Indigenous-led approach because a one-size-fits-all approach to improve health and wellness is not culturally safe in Indigenous communities.

**Chair:** Dr. Rosalin M. Miles. Over the past four years, we used a community-based and designed, and Indigenous-led approach to identify health and wellness aspirations unique to Indigenous communities in B.C.. This community work has culminated to the co-creation, implementation, and evaluation of a healthy lifestyle intervention with a partner community and an Indigenous curriculum within the University of British Columbia (Kinesiology, Faculty of Education).

**Presenter 1:** Shawn Hanna. **Co-creating Strengths-Based Approaches in Sharing Circles:** Sharing circles were facilitated with partner communities in our local and national programs, including community walk/run events and the annual National Indigenous

Physical Activity and Wellness conferences. Sharing circles empowered and enhanced the self-determination of community members in identifying emerging health and wellness issues through building a sense of connectedness.

**Presenter 2:** *Henry P.H. Lai.* **Health and Wellness Interventions through Empowerment:** In collaboration and consultation with a rural and remote Indigenous community in B.C., we co-created and implemented a 13-week Indigenous led intervention incorporating individualized exercise prescriptions and knowledge sharing circles in a group-based walking program. Measures of healthy lifestyle behaviours and other health-related physical fitness outcomes were taken pre- and post-intervention.

**Presenter 3:** *Kai L. Kaufman.* **Indigenous Health and Wellness Education:** We co-created and implemented Canada's first undergraduate course in Indigenous health and wellness (KIN 489B). Unique to this course, the modules were designed based on direct input from Indigenous community members, delivered using a blended-learning approach to pilot its feasibility as an educational resource in rural and remote geographies, and integrated community-based experiential learning placements to foster cultural awareness among students.

**Results:** Significant and clinically relevant improvements in health and wellness lifestyle behaviours and physical fitness outcomes were observed following the community research intervention. The content co-created in KIN 489B was integrated into current undergraduate and graduate courses, impacting over 300 students in three years.

**Conclusion:** This work demonstrates how community-based, co-created, and Indigenous-led approaches in research and education can provide culturally safe and relevant strategies to improve Indigenous health and wellness. Indigenous community leaders should be empowered to be the key advocates and program designers of health and wellness behaviour changes within their own communities.

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