



Walking wisely towards an Indigenous Integrated Youth Services (IYS) Network

Indigenous IYS Network Meeting Shareback
April 24–25, 2023

Introduction: Paving the way

On April 24-25, 2023, one hundred diverse stakeholders from nine provinces and one territory gathered in Montreal as part of the first steps towards building an Indigenous Integrated Youth Services (IYS) Network, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). This Indigenous network builds on the work of the ACCESS Open Minds Indigenous Council, which is part of the larger pan-Canadian [ACCESS Open Minds](#) (AOM) youth mental health initiative that supported the organization of the Montreal gathering.

Led by Christopher Mushquash (Psychologist, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Mental Health and Addiction at Lakehead University) and Srividya Iyer (Psychologist and Professor at McGill University and the Douglas Research Centre), this event aimed to connect existing partners, while also providing the grounds for new partnerships to blossom.

Goals and objectives



Build on the knowledge and experiences from the six Indigenous communities within the AOM/partner networks



Develop a guide on wise practices and recommendations to implement context-specific and culturally relevant youth mental health systems change in Indigenous contexts



Build a strong network of Indigenous young people, leaders, organizations, service providers

“

One of our first goals was to let people get to know each other. Relationships get built through listening, sharing knowledge, and this builds efficacy, confidence and skills. [We would like to] develop a system that meets youth's needs that is grounded in our culture.

”

— Dr. Christopher Mushquash

“

The hope for the day is to share [our ideas and perspectives], with the aim of listening, learning, growing, fostering a sense of connectivity and building something together.

”

— Dr. Srividya Iyer

Why do a shareback?

It is important to document, remember, and keep ourselves accountable as we pave the way for an Indigenous IYS Network. It is difficult to completely capture the depth and richness of the discussions that were shared at the gathering. However, by implementing multiple forms of documentation from note-taking, illustrations to photos, we can only hope to honour at least some of the valuable messages, stories, and wisdom through this shareback.

The information and quotes in this document were based on the notes taken at the gathering and (15) responses from the post-event survey.

Moments to remember

Welcome



Wisdom from Elders



Voices from AOM
Indigenous Council



Youth sharing circle



Learning



World café
knowledge share



Identifying strengths
and gaps in Indigenous
youth mental health



Brainstorming



Reflections

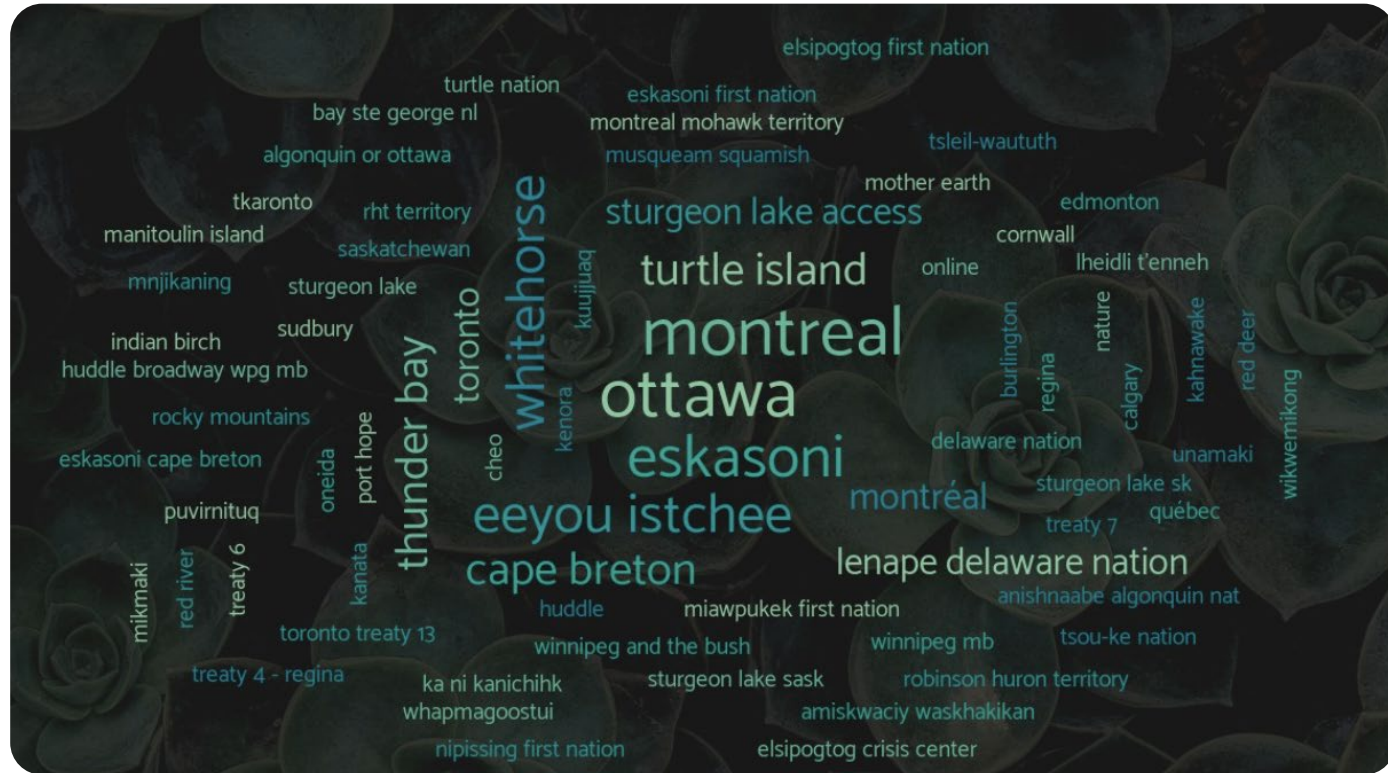


Collective sharing

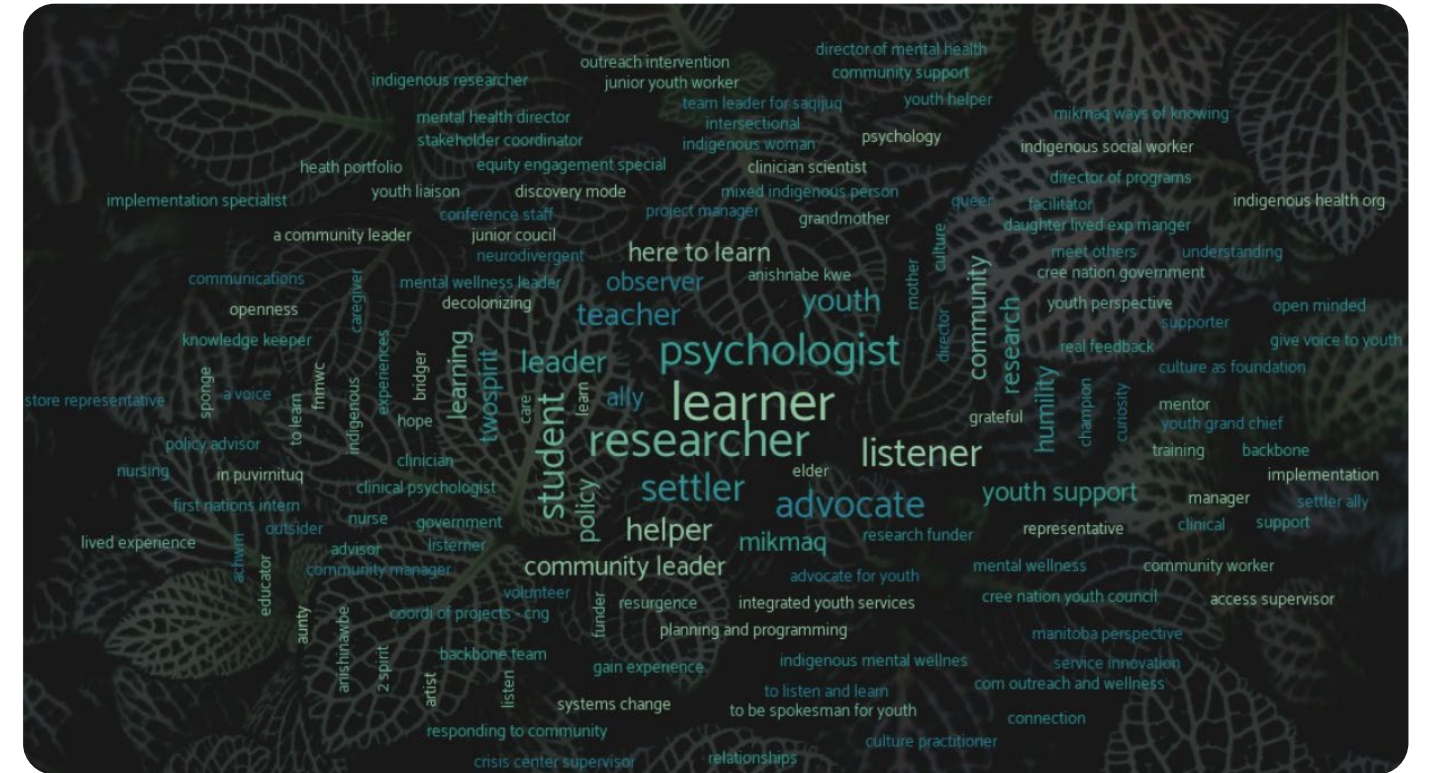


Participants

Where you live, work and play



Your role or perspective you bring



Organizations | Research | Government | Foundations



Listening in: Culture and Language



Culture is important

Embracing culture in the pathway of wellness and the sharing of community knowledge can help youth live healthy lives.

“Culturally appropriate services have helped in addressing self-esteem, grief, and gender-and sexuality related issues.” –Youth

*“Grounding culture within services, not simply integrating it”
–Participant*

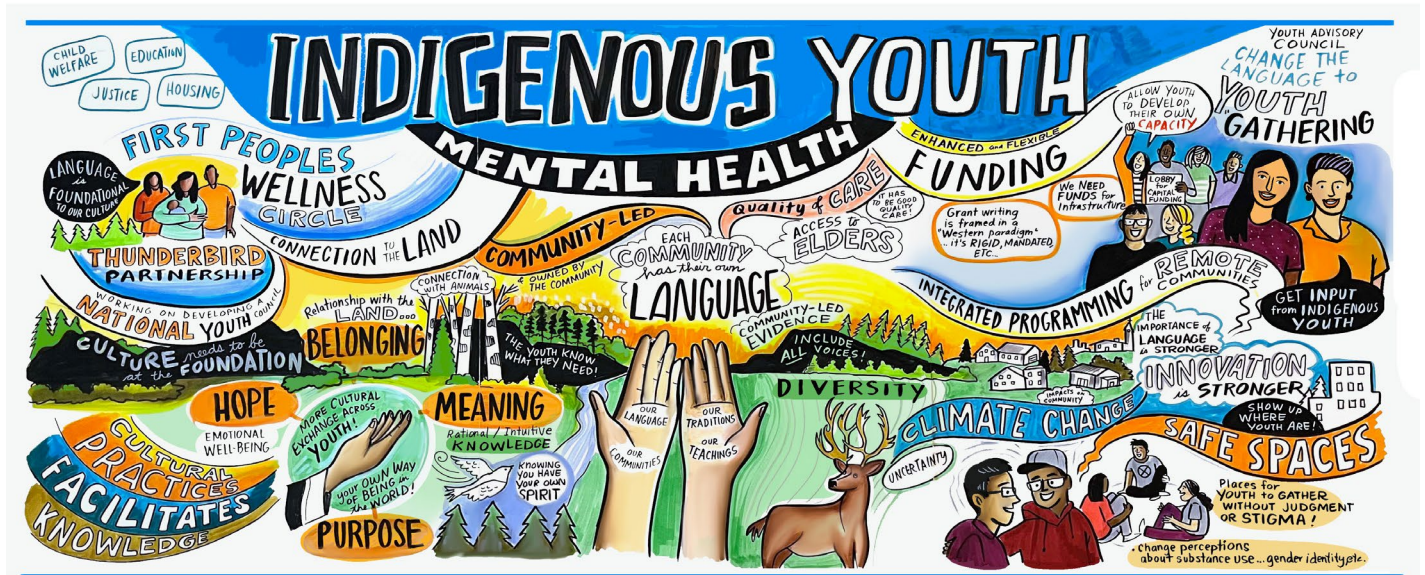
Language can heal

Revitalizing language is needed in the healing process. It provides a connection to the Creator, as well as knowledge for health and wellbeing.

*“There should be more resources to help youth learn language, to learn meaning, and explore their identity.”
–Youth*

*“In our language lies our knowledge. This knowledge is essential for the health and wellbeing of all of creation.”
–Elder*

Listening in: Youth and Sustainability



Listen to youth

Working towards wellness means listening to and working with youth to foster inclusive spaces where they may feel comfortable enough to open up.

"To have wellness, we need to listen to needs of youth and everyone's voices grounded in spirit, culture and knowledge." –Participant

"You have to have more youth specific spaces that include games and fun activities." –Youth

Sustainability is not easy

There are many obstacles to obtaining funding that meet the needs of the community. For any research data that is collected, it has to be clear as to what it is used for.

"If any research is to take place in the community, they need to be involved from the very beginning." –Participant

"The government doesn't want to support cultural centres. They're only willing to support western health specific initiatives." –Participant

Listening in: Relationships



Listen to Elders

Community Elders are there to teach and guide. Do not be afraid to ask them for teachings and support, especially if you did not have access to teachings growing up.

"Elders are important in Indigenous communities as teachers, reminders of culture, and the way of life...[they are] knowledge keepers." –Participant

Women lead the way

Women play an important role in providing support and healing in their communities through their strong leadership.

"It is our women who lead our way; it is in our teachings. [We need to] take up [our] responsibilities and role in supporting women. "
–Elder

Listening in: Youth voices



Considerations from youth sharing circle



Western society needs to listen and understand Indigenous youth



Work with the giftedness of Indigenous youth



Listen to and teach youth and empower their voices



Implement more youth-led programs



Community-based approach is critical to start at a young age (since this is period of the onset of mental health issues)







Youth need to learn about historical trauma to make sense of this trauma in the present for their future



Focus on the relationship with the land to take care of the planet and create a safe environment for the future

Highlights: Sharing circles

During the sharing circle session, everyone worked in small groups to identify strengths, challenges/gaps and considerations on various topics within Indigenous youth mental health. Participants were asked to indicate which thoughts they most resonated with. Here is a summary of what people felt strongly about.

Topic	Strengths	Challenges/Gaps	Considerations
Programming and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth develop their leadership Culture and land-based programming Family retreats Indigenous children and youth know what they want and need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges for services in isolated/remote communities Limited post-secondary seats Be fully inclusive given diversity of Indigenous culture Getting youth together Staff retention and difficult to attract people to the north 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More opportunities for life skills Invest in community members to be frontline workers and leaders
Youth Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing that youth do not exist in silos Today's youth are empowered and passionate about their needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access (virtual and/or in-person) due to tech limitations, transportation, and language Addressing power dynamics and understanding family influences and structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition should be working "WITH" youth If it doesn't come from communities and youth, it's not going to work It takes time, resources, and flexible timelines
Substance Use / Health care 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited access to specialized services (e.g., psychiatry) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intergenerational presence in a hub is vital (e.g., youth, family, elders, children) Supports in places for parents/caregivers that will help with routine and structure
Funding and Sustainability 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western criteria for funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not put burden on communities Dedicated Indigenous wellness services and funding

Post-event feedback

Thank you to those who responded to our survey after the event. We value your insights and are happy to share some of the feedback we received. Your comments have given us direction on how we plan future gatherings and more broadly, items to consider as we build the Indigenous IYS Network.

What you enjoyed most...



Opportunities to meet and connect with others



Small group discussions and flexible agenda provided more meaningful conversations

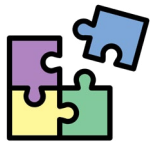


Felt inspired and empowered



Grateful for the presence of Elders

How this network will be helpful for you...



Future opportunities for collaboration and learning



Sense of solidarity and feeling supported by others with similar views



Informs programming and service delivery (culturally appropriate care)



A chance to connect with Indigenous communities within jurisdiction

What could be improved...



More time needed to make it an effective networking experience



Networking knowledge share (world café) needed more structure



More sports, healing, cultural resources for youth and medicines available for those having a hard time



Clarity around reimbursements and purpose of network prior to the meeting

Future directions

This gathering was part of the preliminary steps for the CIHR Phase 0 grant (1 year) to lay down the foundation for an Indigenous IYS Network. The next steps are to plan and organize the next phase of the project (Phase 1), which will be a grant for 5 years.

The objectives of the Phase 1 grant are to: 1) Develop knowledge mobilization capacity of Indigenous youth; 2) Provide a foundation for collaboration and knowledge sharing between IYS networks and Indigenous communities across Canada; and 3) Implement a learning health system that is responsive to youth and community feedback. The proposed project will increase uptake of wise practices and generate data that will be owned, shared and used in real-time by Indigenous communities, organizations, and IYS partners to provide culturally affirming, high-quality and responsive services for Indigenous young peoples.

The momentum from this event continues, as conversations around potential collaborations have already started. We are always happy to have more support as we move forth with this project. If you would like to learn more, get involved, or have any questions, please feel free contact us at accessomeo@gmail.com.



Thank you to all the participants for providing your rich perspectives!

Special thanks to: Elders (Amelia Tekwatonti McGregor, Georgina Doucette, Ed Connors), the youth, Liisa Sorsa (graphic recorder/illustrator), William Ngo (photographer) and the internal organizing committee