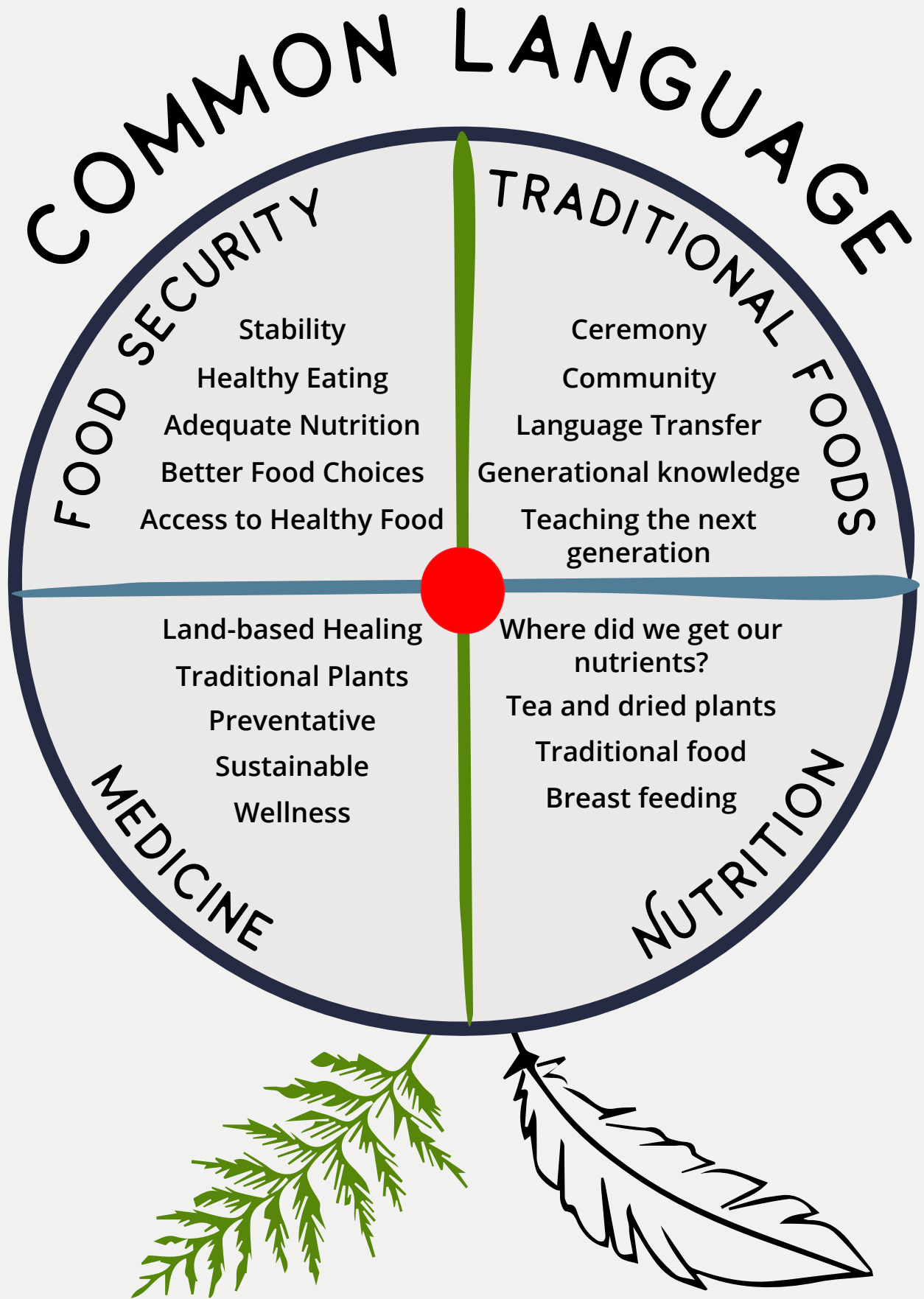




First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# UNDERSTANDING COMMON LANGUAGE

A toolkit for understanding and reflecting  
on the words Traditional Foods, Food Security,  
Nutrition and Medicine





# SPEAKING A COMMON LANGUAGE

When we encounter a word, whether it is spoken or written, we associate a meaning behind that word that highlights our cultural and societal perspectives. The context of our life sets the tone for how we will interpret and understand a word. This toolkit is designed to support us to feel and understand these words in a new way and a way that is grounded more in community, lived experiences. The goal of this resource is for all of us to gain insight into how these words could inform conversations with Indigenous communities. The creation of this toolkit brought together teachings and reflections from Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members. This engagement allows us to explore the deeper meaning, create new understandings, and give us a more contextual view of these words from Indigenous perspectives.

THE FOUR KEY TERMS FOR THIS TOOLKIT ARE:

TRADITIONAL FOODS



FOOD SECURITY



NUTRITION



MEDICINE



## A SPECTRUM OF MEANING

These words are presented with summarizing insights, thought-provoking questions, and definitions generations by community and FNHA staff. One side of the worksheet provides a thoughtful and culturally relevant definition of each term. These definitions were created in conversation with community and are surrounded by photographs, to best situate the term in its natural landscape.

The flip side of the worksheet sets the term into the context of our work, society and how we might interact with it on a day-to-day basis. Some food-related terms can be so common in our work that they may feel mundane. Their social context has rarely been interrogated. The way we understand these words can have a significant impact on how we engage and can affect the people we are trying to support.

We begin by grounding these terms in context, then we utilize reflective questions to help us explore our relationships with, and our understanding of, these words. Our goal is to unearth the myths and biases we may have and link these words within their social, political and cultural contexts. The goal is to support the reader to engage with the layers of meanings surrounding a word to inform work moving forward.

We know harm happens when there is miscommunication or a lack of reflection around language, so it is crucial in this work to have a clear communication to help us best set the path forward to a brighter and more connected future for everyone.

# THE ICEBERG

We created these visuals as a way to share the depth and breadth of the teachings shared in this project. These iceberg visuals attempt to highlight the complexity of each term and how deep their meaning can go.

## WHAT IS VISIBLE?

These are the simple and taken for granted aspects that come to mind when thinking, talking or utilizing these terms.

## WHAT IS NOT VISIBLE?

Some of the benefits related to these terms are not visible and have connections to relationship, community and culture. Those that are not visible are that way because for a long time they were illegal, forbidden, and forced underground.

## WHAT IS HIDDEN?

Each of these terms has a hidden history that needs to be understood before we can fully understand what the term means within an Indigenous context. These connections have been hidden to benefit colonial systems and have often created lasting trauma.

These icebergs are a multi-layered definition of the four terms. Taking us on a journey from the obvious to the hidden. A mosaic of the topics that come to mind when we hear these terms. They show how diverse and broadly connected these terms can be at their root and just how important it is that we understand them fully.

# USING THESE TERMS WITH INTENTION

The toolkit intends to be a stepping stone on a lifelong cultural safety and humility learning journey. This journey can feel overwhelming at times and it takes place over years of dedicated and sustained learning and unlearning. The scenarios included below are vital steps in properly engaging with this toolkit. We offer each scenario before proceeding through the toolkit. Then, after reading through the toolkit, we encourage a re-read to reflect again upon these scenarios. This practice can provide us with new insights and even show us how some of our cultural safety blind spots might unintentionally cause harm. If the toolkit has been successful we should be able to see a change in our perspective of the scenario after reading the full document.



## TRADITIONAL FOOD SCENARIO

While attending an Indigenous feast you notice that there were not many Traditional Foods being served. After the feast, the cook asks you how you enjoyed everything. You say everything was great and ask why there weren't more Traditional foods. The cook looks offended and you don't know why.



## NUTRITION SCENARIO

During a routine health check with a community member you ask if they've been looking after their nutritional needs since you last saw them. For the remainder of the appointment they were visibly upset. You can't figure out why.



## FOOD SECURITY SCENARIO

At a gathering, the topic of food security comes up after lunch. An Elder gets up and scolds everyone for talking about how people are going without food while everyone talking has full bellies. You wonder, "How can we do good work if we are hungry?"



## MEDICINE SCENARIO

While planning a Eating Healthy program, someone wants to ask an Elder/Knowledge Keeper to come in to talk about traditional plants and medicine. The planning committee is not sure how traditional plants and medicines fit within Eating Healthy programming.

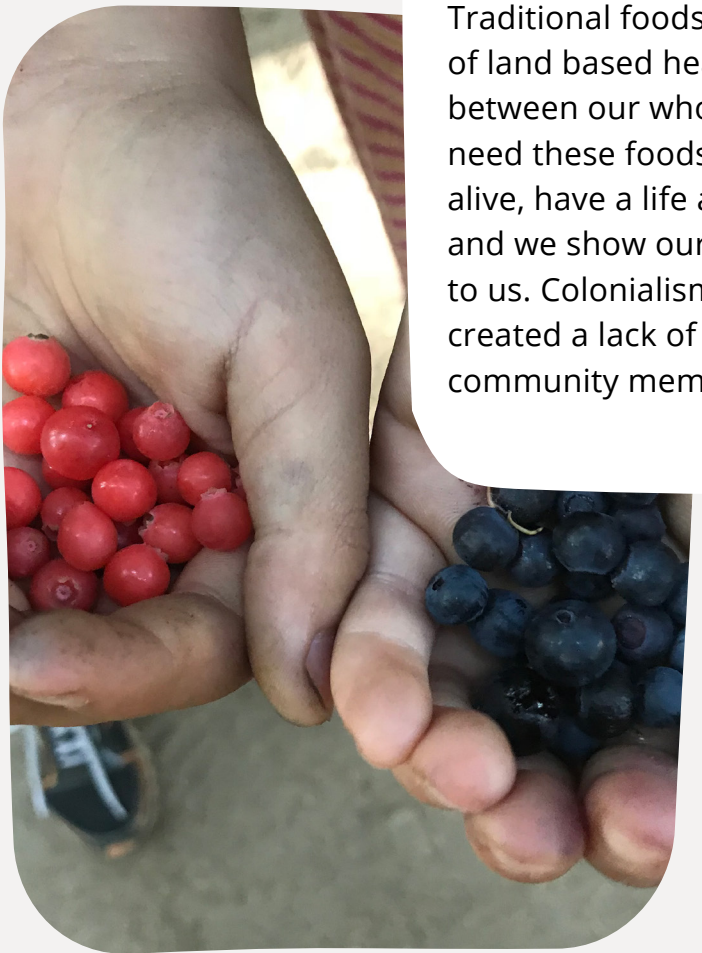




## TRADITIONAL FOODS

Traditional foods and the food systems they create are truly empowering. The harvesting of

Traditional foods is both an act of resistance and of land based healing. It is a spiritual connection between our whole body and our whole spirit. Both need these foods each year. Traditional foods are alive, have a life and a personality all their own, and we show our gratitude for the life that is given to us. Colonialism, drought, forest fires and more created a lack of access that makes it hard for many community members to acquire Traditional foods.



# TRADITIONAL FOODS

Traditional foods are foods that have been harvested by Indigenous community members, within their territory, since time immemorial. The term “Traditional foods” may indicate that these foods are purely traditional, from the past, or unchanging, but this couldn’t be further from the truth. Traditional foods are still evolving and changing and have been impacted by the introduction of new ingredients and cooking methods. For untold generations, Indigenous people tended and harvested Traditional foods, which created intricate and dynamic land based food systems that have become inseparable from their culture. Food, land, water, and life are all different forms of the same thing; different stages on a journey.



## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

As you look at the iceberg on the following page, consider these reflective questions:

- Do you know which foods are traditional within your area?
- How does Traditional food connect people to their territory?
- How can using the term Traditional food fossilize the concept of Indigenous cuisine?
- How does increased access to, and use of, Traditional foods benefit Indigenous communities?
- In what ways has colonialism informed our modern view of Traditional foods?
- What are some current colonial systems that potentially negatively impact access to Traditional food?
- How could lack of access to Traditional foods impact healthy eating or food security?
- What are the impacts to the Indigenous people’s health when Traditional Foods are inaccessible?



# TRADITIONAL FOODS



## WHAT IS VISIBLE?

Wild Rice

Shellfish

Venison

Berries

Herbal Teas

Three Sisters

Smoked Salmon

Fire Cooking

Moose Meat

## WHAT IS NOT VISIBLE?

Land Based Healing

Steam Cooking

Fire Mastery

Family Recipes

Seasonal Eating

Feast Halls

Cultural Generosity

Food Based Language

Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Food Relationships

Cultural Knowledge

Reciprocity

Connection to Land

Healthier Communities

Food Systems

## WHAT IS HIDDEN?

Regulations

Potlatch Ban

Climate Change

Food Scarcity

Indian Reserves

Generational Loss

No Access

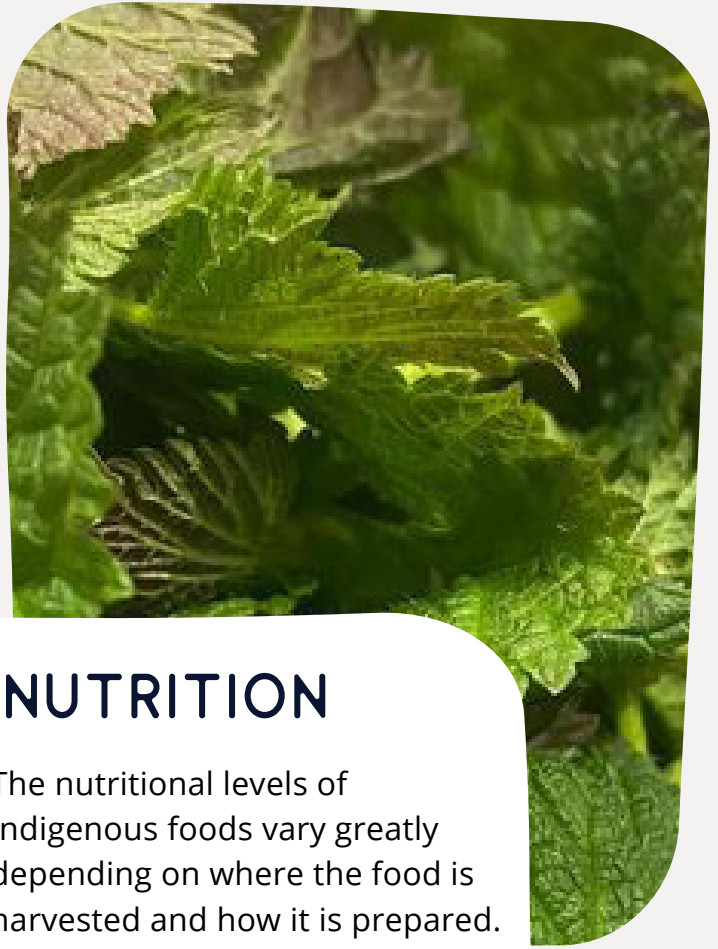
Resource Extraction

Colonialism

Land Theft

Pollution

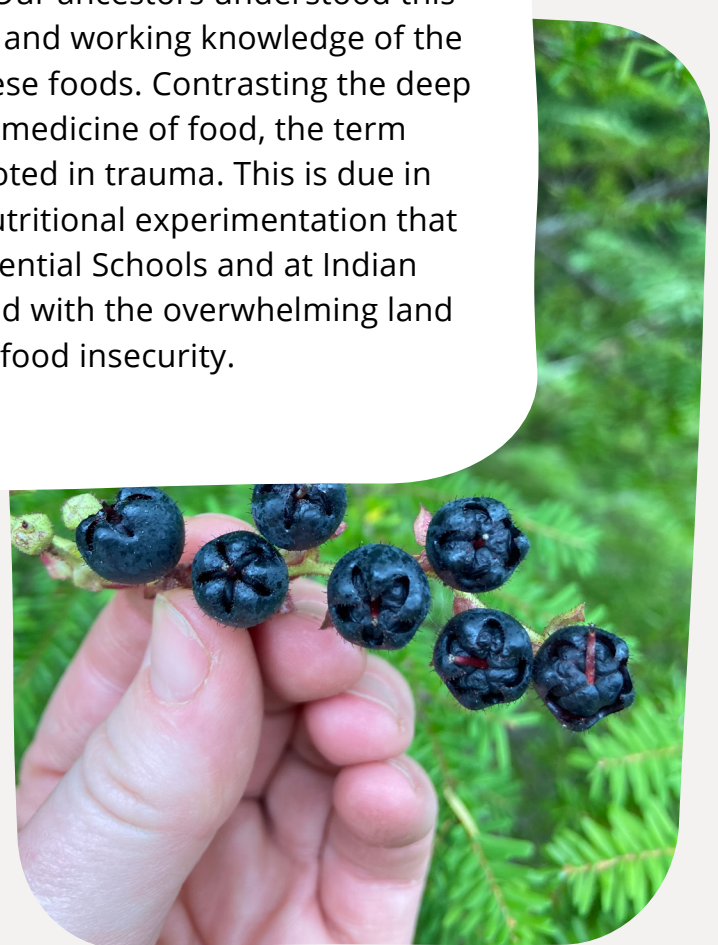
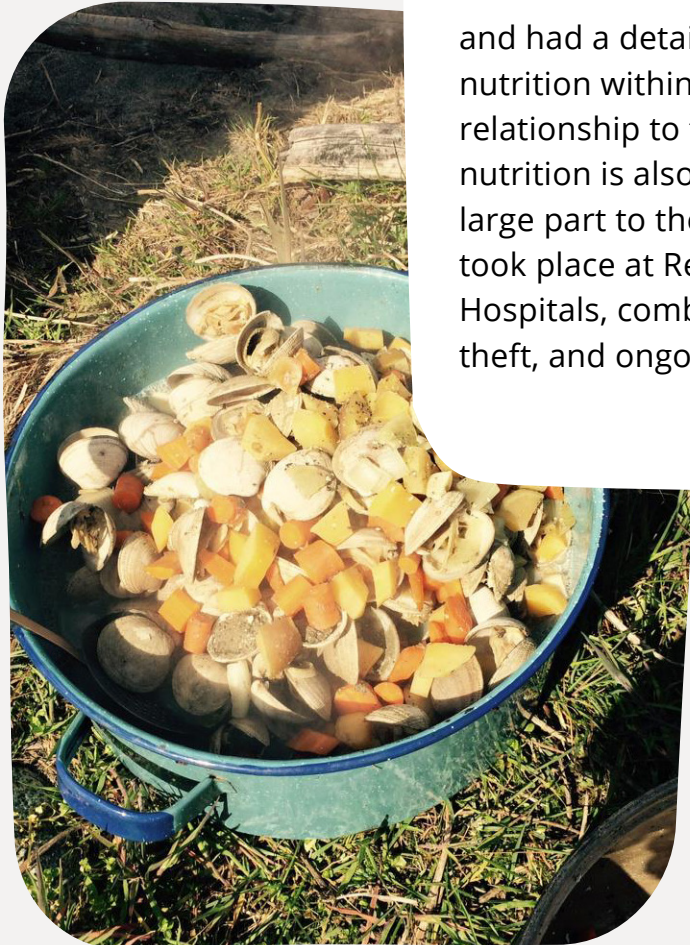




## NUTRITION

The nutritional levels of Indigenous foods vary greatly depending on where the food is harvested and how it is prepared.

Our ancestors understood this and had a detailed and working knowledge of the nutrition within these foods. Contrasting the deep relationship to the medicine of food, the term nutrition is also rooted in trauma. This is due in large part to the nutritional experimentation that took place at Residential Schools and at Indian Hospitals, combined with the overwhelming land theft, and ongoing food insecurity.



# NUTRITION

Nutrition has been colonially defined as the process of obtaining the food necessary for health and growth. Nutrition is influenced by social, political, financial and environmental systems and structures. These impact individuals and communities eating habits and choices. In many Indigenous communities, nutrition is still maintained by eating a selection of seasonal Traditional foods. Yet factors like pollution, resource extraction, climate change, and colonialism limit harvesting Traditional foods from the lands. Meanwhile, sourcing Traditional foods from the market can make eating difficult and expensive. Food gentrification has made it so that many Indigenous people are unable to afford their Traditional foods.



## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

As you look at the iceberg on the following page, consider these reflective questions:

- Can you imagine how nutrition could be informed by the change of seasons?
- How might the nutrition of market foods differ from Traditional foods?
- How might Indigenous diets and meal times look very different from the colonial norm?
- How can we increase and support access to traditional foods?
- How has colonialism impacted Indigenous nutrition?
- What impact has the nutrition profession historically had in Indigenous Communities?
- Can you see how eating healthy could be seen as a privilege?
- What are lasting effects of nutrition-related trauma?



# NUTRITION

## WHAT IS VISIBLE?

Vegetables  
Gardens  
Mom & Baby  
Protein Rich  
Berries  
Eating Healthy  
Food Guide  
Eating  
Nutrients  
Breastfeeding

## WHAT IS NOT VISIBLE?

Elder Knowledge  
Traditional Food  
Feasting  
Food as Medicine  
Cultural Diets  
Trade Networks  
Food Trauma  
Family Food Taboos  
Intergenerational Food Culture  
Eating with the Seasons  
Fasting  
Compartmentalization of Indigenous Knowledge  
Traditional Teas  
Medicine Language

## WHAT IS HIDDEN?

Food Warfare  
Nutritional Experimentation  
Colonial Food Systems  
Food Shame  
Assimilation  
Forced Starvation  
Food Guide Oppression  
Land Theft  
Pollution





## FOOD SECURITY

Food security means making sure that our foods are there for our future generations. Food security means that everything

is full. The freezers are full, the pantries are full, the cupboards, the lunch boxes and all bellies are full. Our homes once had food everywhere and when we talk about food security it's not just for ourselves but for the whole community. We lived knowing everything was connected. So when we talk about food security, we are talking about protecting all of our food sources on the land and in the waters.



# FOOD SECURITY



Food Security exists “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious foods to maintain a healthy and active life.” As one of our Knowledge Keepers so powerfully shared, “Food security means that everything is full. The freezer is full, the pantry is full, the cupboards are full, the bellies are full and the lunch boxes are all full.” The goal within food security is to embed self-determination, food sovereignty, food independence and ecological health within all programs, services and system redesigns. Ultimately, food security ensures that everyone has culturally safe access to their foods, lands and cultures. Including access to food harvesting, growing and preserving, as well as protecting, the ecosystem, land and waters for generations to come.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

As you look at the iceberg on the following page, consider these reflective questions:

- What role does the use of Traditional Food play in Food Security?
- How does the displacement of Indigenous People directly increase their food insecurity?
- Can you remember a time when you experienced food insecurity personally or within your community?
- How could ensuring food security positively influence entire communities?
- What are some of the effects of food insecurity?
- Are there colonial systems that might still impact Indigenous food security?
- What supports and changes might be needed to help ensure Indigenous Food Security?
- How can your work support food security?



# FOOD SECURITY



## WHAT IS VISIBLE?

Grocery Stores

Cooking

Filler Foods

Hunger

Emergency Foods

Budgeting

Hunting

Food Preservation

Gardening

## WHAT IS NOT VISIBLE?

Food Deserts

Urbanization

Assimilation

Poaching

Inaccessibility

Lack of Knowledge

Teaching the next generation

Community Support

Supporting Elders

Improper Nutrition

Intergenerational Food Trauma

Family Support

Connection and Relationships

Subsistence

## WHAT IS HIDDEN?

Food Desert, Empty Foods, and Health Conditions

Food Scarcity

Food Anxiety

Regulations

Disordered Eating

Territorial Loss

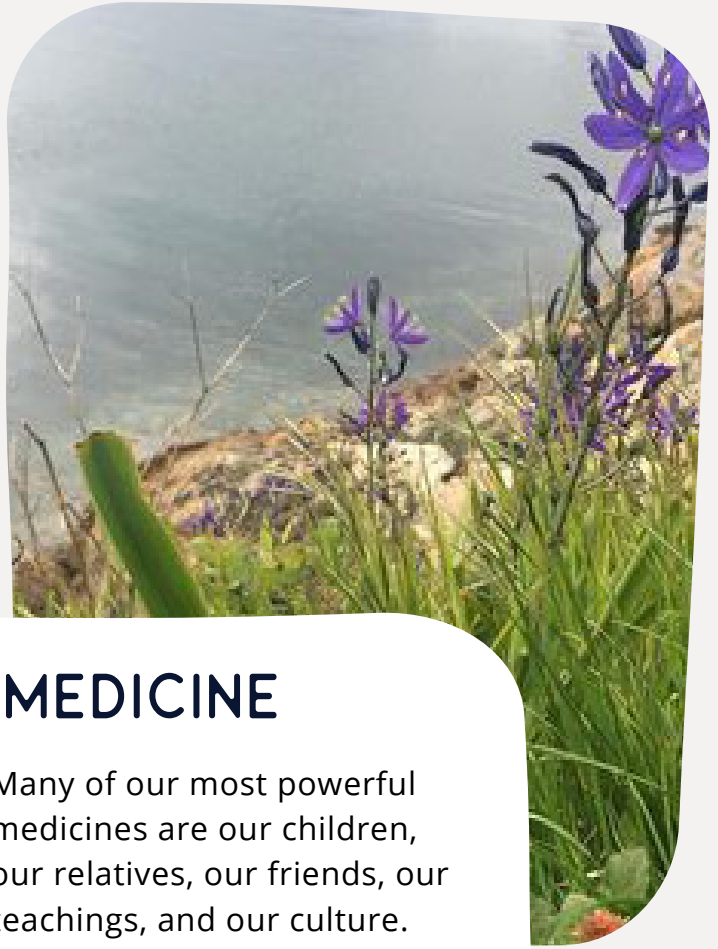
Residential Schools and Hospitals

Superiority/Paternalism

Starvation

Settler Colonialism

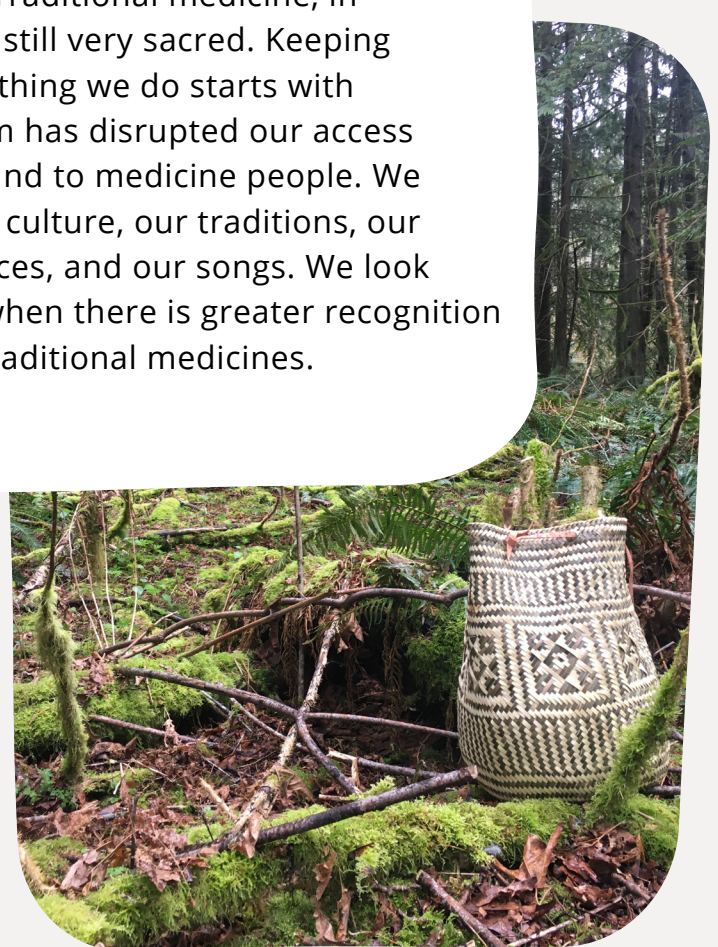
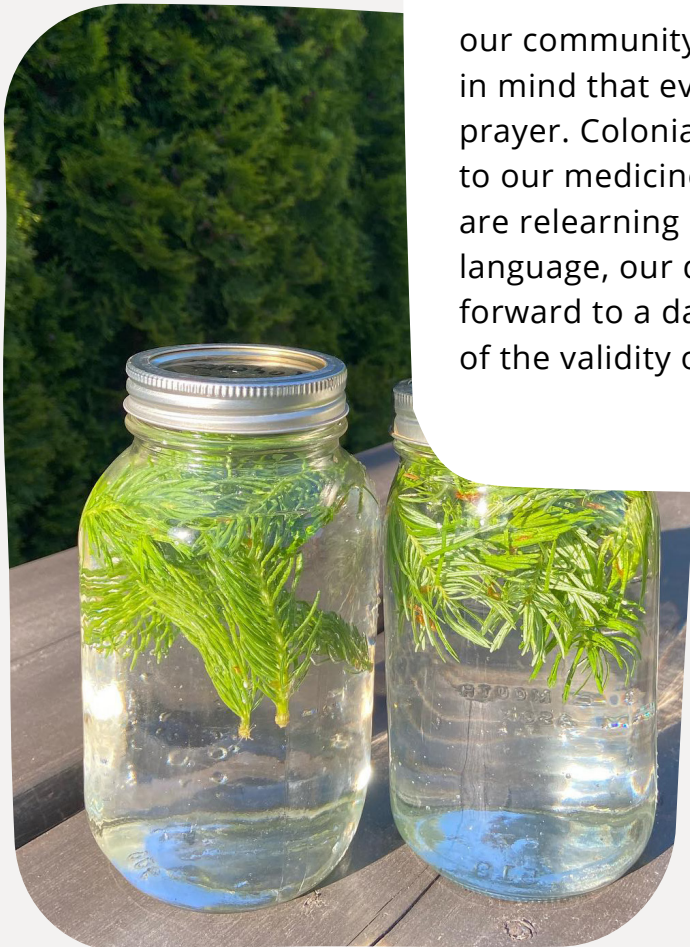




## MEDICINE

Many of our most powerful medicines are our children, our relatives, our friends, our teachings, and our culture.

Traditional medicine, in our community, is still very sacred. Keeping in mind that everything we do starts with prayer. Colonialism has disrupted our access to our medicines and to medicine people. We are relearning our culture, our traditions, our language, our dances, and our songs. We look forward to a day when there is greater recognition of the validity of traditional medicines.



# MEDICINE

Modern, or colonial ways of knowing, default the word medicine to its pharmaceutical definition. Elders and Knowledge Holders share generously that there is vast interconnection between food, medicine, and the world around us. In fact, “food is medicine” is a foundational teaching within Indigenous wellness and is one of the few teachings shared across the many cultures. All medicine is sacred and it must be respected and treated with the proper reverence it deserves. Therefore we respect that food is medicine by following the teachings and protocols around food. Protocols like only cooking or harvesting food with good feelings, knowing those feelings are passed on within the food.



## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

As you look at the iceberg on the following page, consider these reflective questions:

- What is your relationship and understanding of Indigenous medicines?
- How do Indigenous Medicines influence your work?
- Have you explored how medicines connect to food and wellness?
- Explored how Indigenous Medicine heal whole communities?
- How has colonialism affected Medicine?
- What has silenced the legacy of Indigenous Medicine?
- What systems continue to impact Indigenous Medicine?
- What definition of medicine is centered and whose knowledge is centered?



# MEDICINE



## WHAT IS VISIBLE?

Plants  
Teas  
Wellness  
Spirituality  
Ceremony & Prayer  
Sacredness  
Foods  
Medicine People  
Ecosystems

## WHAT IS NOT VISIBLE?

Family Knowledge  
Territory Destruction  
Rites of Passage  
Learning the Seasons  
Incompatibility with Western Medicine  
Protocols  
Fear of Exploitation  
Storytelling  
Traumatic Healthcare Experience  
Connection to Location  
Medicine Language  
Songs  
Lack of Knowledge

## WHAT IS HIDDEN?

Medical Racism  
Overharvesting  
Pollution and Climate Change  
Assimilation  
Potlatch Ban  
White Supremacy  
Sacred Rituals  
Regulations  
Appropriation  
Secrecy