



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

FACT SHEET

# Indigenous Harm Reduction Principles and Practices



The Indigenous Wellness Program at First Nations Health Authority is developing 'Indigenous Harm Reduction' principles and practices as a learning diagram to host conversations regarding addiction and harm reduction.

Indigenous Harm Reduction is a process of integrating cultural knowledge and values into the strategies and services associated with the work of harm reduction. Indigenous knowledge systems are strongly connected to spirituality, holism, and the natural environment. Therefore a learning model reflecting animal teachings and values was struck to support sensitive conversations around addictions and harm reduction through an Indigenous lens.

For more information, visit: [www.fnha.ca/overdose](http://www.fnha.ca/overdose)

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THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES USE CULTURAL REPRESENTATION FROM FOUR PROMINENT ANIMALS HERE IN BC. EACH ANIMAL IS REPRESENTED BY SYMBOLISM, A HEALING PRINCIPLE, AND COMPARATIVE HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES:



### THE WOLF

- A symbol of relationships and care.
- Healing requires working together as one heart and one mind.
- This representation is associated with harm reduction principles that emphasize the importance of building relationships with people who use substances. An example of carrying out this work might look like providing outreach services.



### THE EAGLE

- A symbol of knowledge and wisdom.
- Healing requires time, patience, and reflection.
- This means acknowledging that wellness is a journey instead of a destination. It aligns with the harm reduction principle that support may take many ongoing opportunities. It also means that in our professional work practice we take the time to reflect on our own emotions and allow room for patience in our engagements with people who are using substances.



### THE BEAR

- A symbol of strength and protection.
- Healing is embedded in culture and tradition.
- This principle celebrates a strength-based approach in working with harm reduction. This also recognizes culture and tradition as intergenerational strengths that are methods of harm reduction on their own.



### THE RAVEN

- A symbol of identity and transformation.
- Healing requires knowing who you are and accepting who you were.
- This healing principle acknowledges that the path to wellness is a journey that encompasses the exploration of identity and that mistakes will be made along the way. We do not need to carry the burdens of past, as they transform us when we learn from them.

## WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS HARM REDUCTION: LEARNING COMPONENTS

### THE WOLF: RELATIONSHIPS AND CARE

- Outreach services for people who do not access site based services: food, safer smoking/injecting kits, condoms, etc.
- Services are human-centred - inclusive, caring, and trauma-informed.
- Strategies and services are based on a foundation of cultural safety and humility.
- Acknowledging family relationships, community, Nation, and land.
- Understanding the impact of cultural oppression, intergenerational trauma, land-loss, and current social, environmental, and economic realities.

### THE EAGLE: KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

- Strategies and services are trauma-informed.
- Support individuals and communities wherever they are at in their wellness journey.
- Recognize that stigma and shame are factors that need to be taken into consideration and addressed.
- Supporting strategies and services that are evidence-based.

### THE BEAR: STRENGTH AND PROTECTION

- Strategies and services are wellness focused and holistic in nature.
- Incorporate Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices: medicinal plants, ceremony, Elder consultation etc.
- Incorporate Elders and cultural people to guide and participate in the initiatives.

### THE RAVEN: IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMATION

- View addiction as a health and social issue, not a moral or criminal issue that can result in complex personal health and social consequence, involvement with the law and premature death.