

Supporting Nurses Walking Together: Sharing Knowledge for Health Equity



Wisdom
Seeking to understand
Shared community

RELATIONSHIPS ARE FOUNDATIONAL

Curiosity
Learning
Respect
Connection



Reciprocal learning
Communication
Reducing barriers
Lifting each other up

KNOWLEDGE SHARING



ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION

Meaningful partnerships
Community support
Formal mentorship agreements
Sustainable pathways



WALKING TOGETHER



Increasing equitable access to health care

Positive recognition

Celebration of culture

Reconciliation



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



Interior Health

Walking Together

Illustrating the Path

In 2024, Interior Health (IH) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) set out on a journey together to support nurses working in First Nations communities with immunization competency skills. What began as a focused effort to strengthen clinical practice grew into something deeper—a collaborative process grounded in relationships, cultural safety, and shared learning. This document shares the story of that journey. Through visual storytelling, it highlights the values, connections, and community partnerships that have shaped the IH and FNHA Immunization Knowledge Sharing Walking Together project, offering both reflection and inspiration for nursing practice rooted in equity and respect.



Through this partnership, Community Health Nurses from First Nations communities worked with Public Health Nurses and educators from IH to gain immunization competency skills through a mentorship model. For the full report, see Deo & Bennett (2025).

Nursing has never been a solo endeavor. While we may have individual patient assignments, conduct home visits, or work independently in small clinics, our practice does not exist in isolation. Collaboration, mentorship, and shared learning are fundamental to nursing. From the start of our journeys in nursing school, we learn the importance of interdependence—how we must rely on and support one another. As circumstances, resources, and evidence evolve, we must remain adaptable, ensuring our practice is evidence-informed. To do this, we turn to one another—to seek guidance, stay up to date, and provide the best possible care.

Collaboration is essential for meeting our Practice Standards, which include professional responsibility and accountability, knowledge-based practice, client-focused service provision, and ethical practice (British Columbia College of Nurses & Midwives [BCCNM], n.d.). This knowledge strengthens our ability to walk together, sharing paths that have been supported by the many individuals involved in this project—each contributing to the broader goal of advancing health equity.

Guided by the wisdom shared with us on our journey of Two-Eyed Seeing within an ethical space, we have sought to weave Indigenous traditions and Ways of Knowing throughout this illustration. The essence of the IH and FNHA Immunization Knowledge Sharing Walking Together project is captured in this strategic visual storytelling, intertwining key elements that support nurses in meeting professional standards, which includes working collaboratively to address health equity. Through reciprocal knowledge sharing, foundational relationships have been established, fostering trust in shared communities and contributing to reconciliation and the reduction of health inequities. The intentional ambiguity in the overall image encourages individuals to interpret its meaning through their own worldviews, while specificity is found in the details of the illustrations.

In this project, we initially set out on a path with immunization as a central focus. However, as different individuals joined us on this journey, the path expanded, revealing a broader story of improving health equity. Drawing from Indigenous Ways of Knowing, where sustainable management practices are fundamental to cultivating and maintaining health, we have sought to create lasting pathways that prioritize health equity as the foundation for optimal immunization provision.





Rather than explicitly depicting immunization with images of needles or vaccine administration, we have acknowledged the historical and contextual understanding of health and wellness to take a culturally respectful approach that aligns with the values and preferences of First Nations communities. We have used recognizable images, such as a vaccine cooler, that link the larger illustration to the focus on immunizations. This project has successfully fostered deeper collaborative relationships between nurses in First Nations communities and Interior Health Public Health staff in the Interior region, extending beyond immunization practices.

We highlight four key themes in this illustration as guideposts: cultural safety, organizational collaboration, knowledge sharing, and relationships are foundational. Each theme is accompanied by supporting text and graphics that underpin the conceptual framework of supporting nurses to walk together. While individual interpretations of the images and words may vary, the central message remains clear: relationships are foundational to walking these paths in a good way. With a good heart, we walk together, supporting nurses in sharing knowledge and working towards health equity within their communities.

The images of bitterroot flowers represent gratitude for the lands where the nurses involved in the pilot project live and work. While the overall image is not rooted in a single specific location, these flowers acknowledge and pay homage to the location of the pilot. At the same time, they symbolize that these paths can be taken in other regions throughout the country in different ways, adapting to diverse contexts while maintaining the core values of the project.

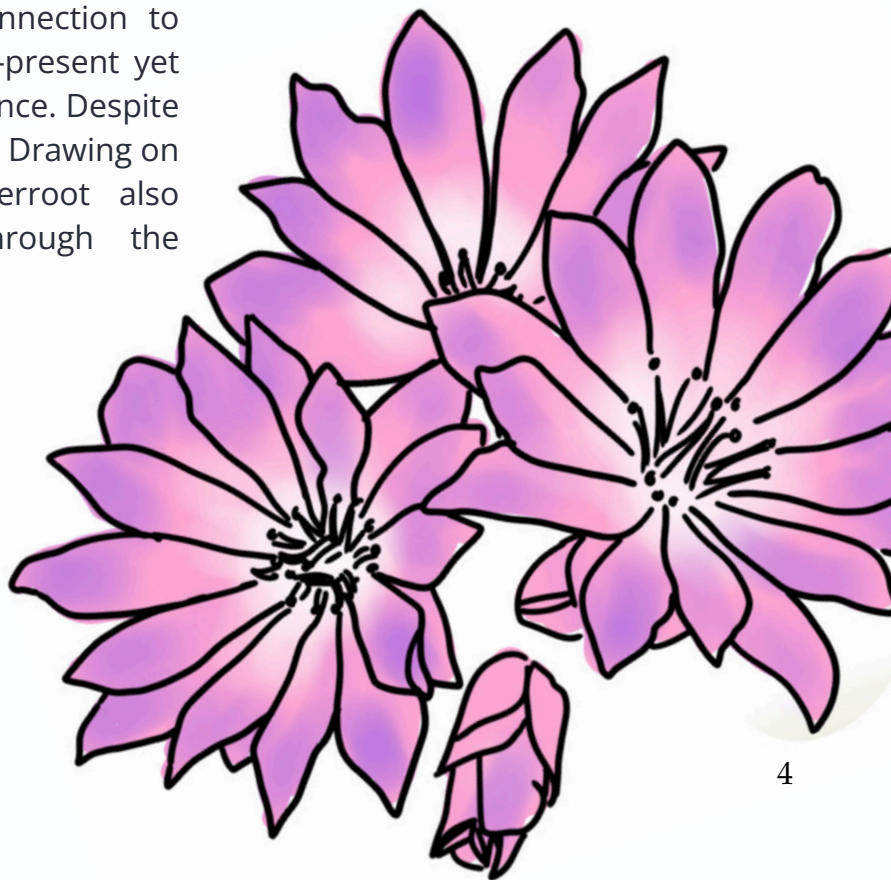
Throughout this visual story, the bitterroot flower appears in various forms, whether as tea on the kitchen table or growing on the lands where nurses walk together. As described by the First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association (2016), bitterroot is traditionally significant as a plant species growing in the driest regions of the BC Interior.

The Nlaka'pmx refer to the bitterroot plant as ʼqwepn; Secwepemc refer to it as sp'it'm (eastern dialect) or ʼek'wpin (western dialect).

For the Okanagan, sp'it'm is known as “the Chief for things under the ground.” For thousands of years, First Nations People have harvested bitterroot, following sustainable management practices. In many communities, a special ceremony marks the beginning of the bitterroot harvest, just before the flowering stage. While protocols vary by community, they often include words and songs of respect, offering thanks to the plant for sharing itself with the people. However, changes over time have significantly disrupted the sustainable harvesting of bitterroot, such as commercial farming, overgrazing, and livestock trampling have diminished its abundance.

In this story, bitterroot serves as a visual reminder of the necessary balance and sacred connection to place. It exists in the background, ever-present yet maintaining its space, symbolizing resilience. Despite disruption, the plant continues to bloom. Drawing on traditional ecological knowledge, bitterroot also represents health and wellness through the nourishment it provides.

It reminds the onlooker of the wholistic vision of health and well-being that balances the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of a being, while also emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals, families, communities, and the land.

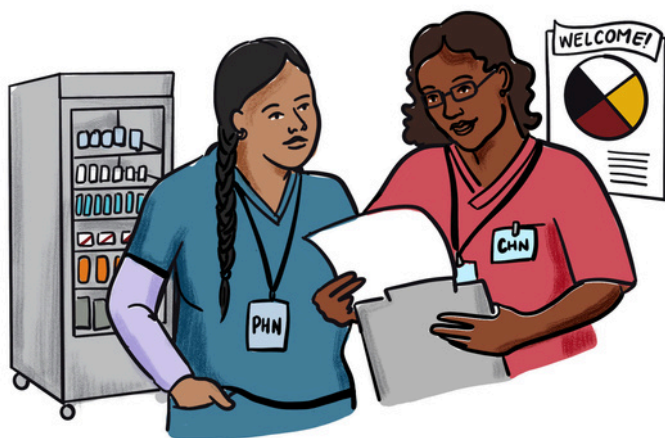


BCCNM (2022) expects nurses to meet a practice standard of Indigenous Cultural Safety, Cultural Humility, and Anti-Racism through six core concepts:

- Self-reflective practice (it starts with me)
- Building knowledge through education
- Anti-racist practice (taking action)
- Creating safe healthcare experiences
- Person-led care (relational care)
- Strengths-based and trauma-informed practice (looking below the surface) (p. 7).



Nurses collaborating to increase equitable access to health care are actively contributing to reconciliation. Positive recognition of the unique and dynamic role of community health nurses is essential across organizations. As an extension of public health work, these nurses bring healing by providing services within communities; they are champions of cultural safety. Cross-organizational nurse partnerships play a vital role in fostering recognition and celebration of culture, creating safer and more inclusive spaces for care.



The illustration depicts a Public Health Nurse and Community Health Nurse reviewing a client chart together, with a vaccine biological fridge in the background, symbolizing how the integration of Western and Indigenous Ways of Knowing, or Two-Eyed Seeing, embeds culturally safe care through knowledge sharing. A medicine wheel, visible in the background of the clinic setting, represents the importance of balance, wellness, and wholeness. Despite geographic challenges, collaboration and resource-sharing can help create more inclusive and accessible health care. This dedication is exemplified by nurses carrying a vaccine cooler to a float plane - a powerful demonstration of their commitment to expanding equitable health care access.



Ensuring culturally safe and equitable health care access for First Nations communities requires organizational collaboration that is rooted in cultural humility, relational practice, and shared accountability. Upholding the priorities of the BCCNM Professional Standards and the BC Government's commitment to cultural safety and humility, this work must be guided by Indigenous self-determination and sustained through reciprocal relationships.



Listening to partners—seeking insight, feedback, and evaluation throughout each stage of the work—demonstrates respect, humility, and a commitment to decolonizing health systems. The creation of a Memorandum of Understanding, depicted in the illustration, formalizes relationships and affirms the commitment of key partners, signaling that this work is both supported and valued at the systemic level.

As we walk this path together, formal mentorship agreements and sustainable pathways—built through meaningful partnerships between regional health authorities, FNHA, and First Nations communities—serve as the pillars that uphold this journey. These collaborative efforts align with the BCCNM's Professional Standards, particularly the commitment to culturally safe, client-centered care that is accountable to Indigenous communities. By fostering relational trust and shared learning, these relationships strengthen the foundation for long-term systemic change, ensuring that the path toward health equity, reconciliation, and decolonization remains strong and enduring.





Bringing partners together for reciprocal learning, education, networking, and celebration is essential to fostering knowledge sharing and ensuring meaningful learning takes place. The illustration highlights nurses engaging in communication and exchanging educational experiences across organizations, demonstrating that this can occur both virtually and in-person.

Creating opportunities to lift each other up strengthens relationships and maintains positive connections that extend beyond the provision of care. Supporting participation in cultural events and spending time on the land deepens connections, to culture, to one another, and to the work itself. By reducing barriers to these shared experiences, we cultivate spaces where knowledge is exchanged in a way that is both meaningful and sustaining.

Through seeking to understand, curiosity, and a practice of humility, relationships become meaningful and enduring. The illustration depicts a Community Health Nurse investing in relationships by sharing tea and food with community members around a kitchen table, an act that reflects the value of gathering, listening, and learning from one another. In another scene, a nurse carrying a vaccine cooler greets a parent and her children as their paths cross. These moments of connection reinforce the presence of Community Health Nurses as familiar and trusted figures, fostering wisdom-sharing and learning that extend beyond clinical care.



Relationships are not just one aspect of this journey; they are the very structure that holds it together. By walking together in community, we create space for trust, reciprocity, and client-led, relational care, ensuring that the path toward health equity is not only traveled but strengthened with every step.

This visual storytelling piece beautifully captures the spirit of the IH and FNHA Immunization Knowledge Sharing Walking Together initiative, a shared journey rooted in respect, connection and a commitment to learning from one another. It serves as a testament to our dedication to walking respectfully - honoring Indigenous Knowledge, fostering meaningful collaboration and building bridges that strengthen communities. At its heart, this piece reflects our vision of creating sustainable, inclusive pathways that uplift voices, celebrate cultural wisdom and inspire lasting, positive change for generations to come.

Acknowledgements

This story is the result of many hands, voices, and hearts coming together. It reflects the collaboration, wisdom, and dedication of individuals and groups who contributed in various ways—through story-sharing, insight, editing, illustration, and reflection.

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To everyone who walked alongside us in this process, your contributions made this story possible.

To the nurses reading this, we invite you to walk with us: to reflect, to connect, and to continue this shared journey of learning, relationship, and working together in a good way.

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