



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDIGENOUS TREATMENT AND LAND-BASED HEALING FUND

2018/19 - 2022/23
EVALUATION REPORT



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First Nations have been stewards of the land since time immemorial. Connection to the land is core to Indigenous identity. Relearning, reclaiming and revitalizing the wealth of traditional knowledge and healing practices held by First Nations is a foundational element of restoring balance and wellness for First Nations communities and members. Land-based treatment and healing can occur when individuals and communities return or reconnect to the land while using supports to reclaim traditional healing and wellness practices.

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) wishes to acknowledge the many Nations and communities who designed and implemented land-based healing initiatives and the staff who administered the Land-Based Healing Fund and supported project planning and implementation. We acknowledge and honour the Elders and Knowledge Keepers who share their invaluable wisdom for the betterment of current and future generations.

The FNHA Evaluation Team prepared this report in collaboration with Ference & Company Consulting Ltd. Evaluation learnings came from the cumulative insight and wisdom of FNHA executives, operational and regional staff, national and provincial partners and ministry representatives, land-based healing project staff and individuals supporting land-based healing work.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE LAND-BASED HEALING FUND

First Nations in BC have identified First Nations-led land-based cultural healing approaches as a key priority requiring dedicated funding and support. To meet this need, the Indigenous Treatment and Land-Based Healing Fund was established in FY 2018/19 with funding from the BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA) as part of the 2019 MMHA's A Pathway to Hope¹ provincial strategy.² This funding mechanism is commonly referred to as the Land-Based Healing Fund or LBH Fund.

The FNHA and MMHA understand that culture is healing. The stated intent of the LBH Fund is to support strengths-based, holistic and client-driven substance use treatment and healing programming that addresses aftercare and reflects family and community contexts.³ First Nations principles and values – including increased use of family, group and cultural ceremony and healing practices – were to guide the development of LBH-funded initiatives.

As understood by the FNHA, common guiding principles of land-based healing include:

- A focus on culturally safe models of care
- Viewing Indigenous languages as foundational
- Encouraging local control and fostering collaborations
- Improving the quality of life of individuals, families and communities
- Honouring local strengths and resources, and building expertise at home
- Targeting multiple determinants of health (e.g., self-determination, language acquisition, cultural values, life skills, human-nature relations, ethics and social cohesion)
- Being an essential element of a quality health system
- Fostering connection to traditional territories and land-based values
- Integrating the First Nations Wellness Model⁴

¹A Pathway to Hope: A roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia. Available here: https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap_2019.pdf.

²The MMHA Pathways to Hope strategy sets out a 10-year vision for mental wellness, improved mental health care and the establishment of an effective substance use prevention, addictions treatment and recovery system for the province. It includes four pillars, one of which is supporting Indigenous-led solutions, including expanding Indigenous land-based cultural and healing services.

³FNHA (2022). Funding Guidelines document. Objective/purpose of the Indigenous treatment and land-based healing fund.

⁴FNHA. What is Land-Based Treatment and Healing? Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-What-is-Land-Based-Treatment-and-Healing.pdf>.

1.2 DISBURSEMENT STRATEGY

Between FY 2018/19 and FY 2022/23, MMHA transferred approximately \$36.5 million received through a Canada–BC bilateral funding agreement to the FNHA for disbursement. The LBH Fund had a built-in escalator, increasing from \$2.5 million in FY 2018/19 to \$10.8 million in FY 2022/23.

In 2022/23, the FNHA began charging a corporate administration fee for restricted projects, such as the LBH Fund. In FY 2022/23, 1.8% of LBH funding (\$194,858) was withheld and spent on corporate administration expenses, such as finance, information technology, human resources, and office leases. The corporate administration fee was set to gradually increase to 4% in the next years.

Funding was allocated to FNHA regions in alignment with First Nations population counts. Regions managed funding disbursements through existing engagement processes and were responsive to First Nations communities unique visions for land-based healing and input on disbursement. Regions also provided support to recipients through regional mental health and wellness teams and project development staff.

All organization types were eligible under the flexible and non-prescriptive criteria. Funds had to be used to “support engagement and program Nation approach to land and culturally-based treatment and healing services” and could not be used to hire permanent staff.¹ Recipients required prior written approval from the FNHA to reallocate any portion of the funding received for other purposes. Funding mechanisms included contribution agreements² and grants. Organizations were allowed to apply for and hold more than one funding contract through both mechanisms.

As part of the funding agreement, MMHA asked the FNHA to provide quarterly reporting on the following indicators:

- Number of new sites for land-based healing
- Number of clients served
- Number of clients who completed the program
- Number of participants who reported increased connection to their culture to support mental well-being
- Current status
- Year-end status
- Major activities completed to date
- Issues, barriers and risks
- Mitigation strategies
- Successes, wins and stories

SPOTLIGHT

Examples of Interior Region Nations Investment Strategies

One Nation allocated 60 per cent of funding to communities for individual projects and 40 per cent to Nation-wide initiatives. Another hired a Nation-wide traditional wellness coordinator who worked across communities to develop a Nation land-based healing plan.

¹FNHA (2022). Funding Guidelines document. Objective/purpose of the Indigenous treatment and land-based healing fund.

²Contribution agreements are the FNHA's most used funding instrument. Unlike Health Funding Agreements, which are more ongoing and operational, contribution agreement recipients receive 80% of funding upfront and, upon receipt of reporting, the final 20% of funding.

1.3 FUNDING UPTAKE

Between FY 2018/19 and FY 2022/23, the FNHA disbursed \$28.9 million (or 79%) of the allocated \$36.5 million through 318 contracts to 151 recipients throughout the province. Recipients mostly included Nations and communities, but also health service organizations, community health centres, non-profit societies, and FNHA-funded Treatment Centres.

Regions distributed the majority of the funds (83%) through contribution agreements ranging from \$6,742 to \$1,254,508 in value and averaging \$193,944 per contract. Grants accounted for the remainder of the funds distributed; they were overall smaller in value, ranging from \$1,100 to \$165,705 and averaging \$25,787 per contract. In line with community direction, and due to their larger number of communities, Northern and Vancouver Island Regions offered a higher number of lower dollar-value contribution agreements and grants. Interior Region allocated larger value contribution agreements to the region's seven Nations and a health service organization.

In addition to contribution agreements and grants, a total amount of \$114,095 was also spent as reimbursements for miscellaneous costs such as travel, accommodation, catering, and honoraria.



TABLE 1: LBH Fund Disbursements by Region, FY 2018/19 to FY 2022/23

| Region | Funding Mechanism | Number of contracts | Average contract value | Grand Total |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| FRASER | Contribution Agreement | 8 | \$219,757 | \$1,758,059 |
| | Grant | 8 | \$35,938 | \$287,500 |
| TOTAL | | 16 | \$127,847 | \$2,045,559 |
| INTERIOR | Contribution Agreement | 16 | \$502,447 | \$8,039,158 |
| | Grant | 1 | \$17,094 | \$17,094 |
| TOTAL | | 17 | \$473,897 | \$8,056,252 |
| NORTHERN | Contribution Agreement | 31 | \$142,859 | \$4,428,634 |
| | Grant | 142 | \$27,280 | \$3,873,743 |
| TOTAL | | 173 | \$47,991 | \$8,302,377 |
| VANCOUVER COASTAL | Contribution Agreement | 12 | \$290,433 | \$3,485,200 |
| | Grant | 5 | \$31,000 | \$155,000 |
| TOTAL | | 17 | \$214,129 | \$3,640,200 |
| VANCOUVER ISLAND | Contribution Agreement | 56 | \$109,715 | \$6,144,035 |
| | Grant | 39 | \$17,824 | \$695,143 |
| TOTAL | | 95 | \$71,991 | \$6,839,178 |
| ALL REGIONS | Contribution Agreement | 123 | \$193,944 | \$23,855,086 |
| | Grant | 195 | \$25,787 | \$5,028,480 |
| GRAND TOTAL | | 318 | \$28,883,567 | \$28,883,567 |

The implementation of the LBH Fund coincided with concurrent public health emergencies including the COVID-19 pandemic, toxic drug supply crisis and multiple climate-related emergencies (e.g., floods, wildfires, atmospheric rivers and the 2021 heat dome). Emergencies constrained participation and limited expenditures, particularly during FY 2020/21 and FY 2021/22, when expenditures totalled 38% and 89% of the budget, respectively. In other years, FNHA expended between 95% and 105% of the yearly budget, resulting in an overall expenditure of 85% of the total allocated funding over five years.

TABLE 2: LBH Funding Allocated and Expended per Fiscal Year, FY 2018/19 to FY 2022/23

| FISCAL YEAR | FUNDING ALLOCATED | FUNDING EXPENDED | % BUDGET EXPENDED |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 2018/19 | \$2.5 M | \$2.49 M | 100% |
| 2019/20 | \$5.0 M | \$4.74 M | 95% |
| 2020/21 | \$7.5 M | \$6.67 M | 89% |
| 2021/22 | \$10.75 M | \$4.07 M | 38% |
| 2022/23 | \$10.75 M | \$11.24 M | 105% |
| Overall | \$36.5 M | \$29.2 M | 85% |

The overall \$29.2M accounts for all expended funds, including contracts to community, corporate administration fee, and miscellaneous expenses.

Human resources issues associated with staff reassignment, recruitment and retention challenges, and burnout among community staff, health and wellness practitioners, Elders and Knowledge Keepers – as well as supply chain issues – prevented some eligible recipients from applying for funding; led others to postpone, modify or cancel planned initiatives; and affected the reach and quality of some initiatives that were advanced within this timeframe.

“From a logistics point of view, trying to spend money during the pandemic was very challenging. We had communities that opted out of land-based healing because they were overwhelmed.”

– Traditional wellness coordinator

2. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

2.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This evaluation assesses the relevance and effectiveness of the design and implementation of the LBH Fund, as well as learnings, early successes and wise practices from initiatives undertaken between FY 2018/19 and FY 2022/23. The evaluation content was informed by reviewing reports and engaging with FNHA executives, program and regional staff and First Nations Health Directors Association (FNHDA) members. Learnings are intended to support strategic planning and quality improvement; there is no mandatory evaluation requirement attached to the funding.

The primary intended audience and beneficiaries of this evaluation are FNHA program staff, executives and board members. Secondary beneficiaries include First Nations Health Council representatives and FNHDA members, First Nations community leadership and health staff, and provincial and federal partners, including MMHA and Indigenous Services Canada.

2.2 DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

Evaluators collected data through the following methods:

Document and data review



Engagement with 51 key informants including:



- FNHA executive leadership and provincial and regional staff
- National stakeholders (i.e., Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, Indigenous Services Canada)
- Provincial partners (i.e., MMHA, housing providers and BC Corrections)
- Community leadership and staff of LBH-funded initiatives

Five in-person site visits:



1. Unist'ot'en Healing Centre on August 9, 2023
2. Lake Babine First Nation on August 10, 2023
3. Kwakwaka'wakw Family Trauma Healing Program on October 4, 2023
4. Kwakiutl First Nation on October 6, 2023
5. Nawalakw on October 5, 2023

Environmental scan of other jurisdictions and models to inform wise practices from outside of BC



2.3 LIMITATIONS

Known limitations of the report include the following:

- Limited engagement with leaders and operational staff of funded initiatives, as not all were able or chose to engage. The Fraser Salish Region, in particular, has less community and Nation representation, as the region did not engage through Caucus or regional focus group sessions.
- Gaps in reporting compliance, differences in reporting formats and the inconsistent use of quantitative measures by funding recipients prevented accurate measurement of the overall reach and impact of LBH-funded initiatives.
- Limited evidence of the impact of LBH-funded initiatives on participating community members due to lack of direct engagement and limited secondary data. The FNHA does not receive information on the identity of people who participated in LBH-funded activities and is not able to gather their direct input.



3. REFLECTIONS ON SUPPORTING THE VISION OF FIRST NATIONS IN BC

This section summarizes the land-based initiatives undertaken between FY 2018/19 and FY 2022/23 and describes findings relating to the alignment of the LBH Fund with FNHA and MMHA policies and strategic plans, and the responsiveness of the LBH Fund to the self-determination and needs of BC First Nations.

3.1 ALIGNMENT WITH FNHA AND MMHA POLICIES AND STRATEGIC PLANS

Alignment with FNHA Policies and Strategic Plans

Funding for land-based initiatives aligns with the holistic view of health and well-being outlined in the First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness¹ and the recognition that health and wellness journeys are owned by the individual and influenced by families, communities, environments and other Social Determinants of Health.

Funding supports the vision of a Mental Health and Wellness Continuum of Care outlined in the FNHA's 2019 Policy on Mental Health and Wellness,² including a range of services for varying levels of acuity and embedding cultural and traditional wellness throughout the continuum. As emphasized in the policy, land-based healing initiatives are grounded in First Nations ways of knowing, self-determination and relationship with self, family, community, nature and spirit to support resiliency and wellness.

Land-based initiatives also advance multiple strategic priorities in Paddling Together, the FNHA's Summary Service Plan, including culture and decolonization, innovation, quality and urban and away-from-home, as well as goals 3 and 5 to "Enhance culturally safe mental health and wellness approaches" and "Drive health and wellness innovation together with First Nations and other partners".³

Lastly, the Fund strongly aligns with the FNHA's Harm Reduction Policy, which states that a First Nations approach strengthens conventional harm reduction by weaving in culture, teachings, community and connections to the land and each other.⁴

"The healing that happens through the land is the most profound. If we put the money there, we won't need to have as many mental health supports or nurses."

– Community-based traditional wellness coordinator

¹FNHA. First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness. Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/first-nations-perspective-on-health-and-wellness>

²FNHA (2019). FNHA Policy on Mental Health and Wellness.

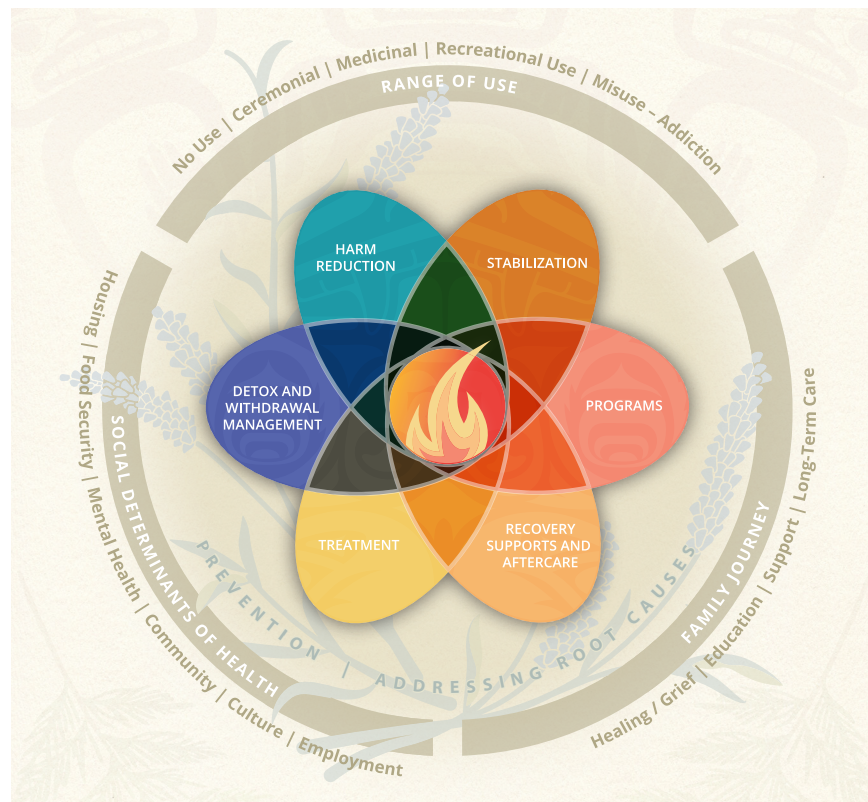
Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/WellnessSite/WellnessDocuments/FNHA-Policy-on-Mental-Health-and-Wellness.pdf>.

³FNHA Summary Service Plan 2022-2023 (2022).

Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Summary-Service-Plan-2022-2023.pdf>.

⁴FNHA Policy on Harm Reduction. Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-harm-reduction-policy-statement.pdf>.

The visual below, sourced from FNHA's All Paths Lead to Wellness harm reduction resource¹, depicts the range of services and supports available for people who use substances. While LBH-funded initiatives can occur across the entire continuum, land-based healing is best positioned to support the areas of stabilization, recovery supports and aftercare, and programs. These areas were all identified as being in critical demand in the 2024 Evaluation of FNHA-Funded Treatment Centre Services.



All Paths Lead to Wellness

Alignment with MMHA's Pathways to Hope Provincial Strategy

The Fund aligns with the Province's 10-year vision for mental wellness, improved mental health care and the establishment of an effective substance use prevention, addictions treatment and recovery system in the 2019 MMHA's A Pathway to Hope strategy². The LBH Fund advances the goal of the Indigenous-led solutions pillar to expand Indigenous land-based cultural and healing services and to set the foundation for a longer-term vision of blending the best of western and traditional Indigenous approaches to better meet the needs of Indigenous peoples in BC and improve their mental health and wellness outcomes.

Funding for land-based healing initiatives also advances BC's commitments in the British Columbia Tripartite Framework Agreement on First Nation Health Governance (2011)³ to focus on improving mental health and substance use services prevention and health promotion for First Nations in BC.

¹FNHA. All Paths Lead to Wellness. Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Harm-Reduction-All-Paths-Lead-to-Wellness.pdf>.

²A Pathway to Hope: A roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia. Available here: https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap_2019.pdf.

³BC Tripartite Framework Agreement on Health Governance for First Nations in BC (2011). Available from: https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/ForcePDFDownload?url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.canada.ca%2fcontent%2fdam%2fhc-sc%2fmigration%2fhc-sc%2ffniah-spnia%2falt_for_mats%2fpdf%2fpubs%2fservices%2ftripartite%2fframework-accord-cadre-eng.pdf

3.2 SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO PRACTISE SELF-DETERMINATION AND ADAPT TO EMERGING AND EVOLVING NEEDS

Flexible Funding that Supports Self-Determination for Land-Based Healing

All key informant groups agree that the flexible nature of the LBH Fund supported the self-determination of healing priorities and practices in alignment with Directive #1, and enabled participating Nations and communities to implement unique approaches aligned with their vision for healing.

“The importance of the Fund is allowing First Nations people in BC to build their own programs, and not have it be prescribed. There was very limited structure, policy or bureaucracy around the funding, and it allowed First Nations to enhance what they were already doing on the land. These newly funded initiatives are giving the design and implementation to First Nations to do what they need to do to heal.”

– FNHA executive

“The initiatives inspired our Nation. With this funding I saw our dreams put into action. Colonization has not succeeded in taking away our sacred practices and teachings. Our partners must recognize that revitalizing these practices and teachings will not occur through western ways of knowing and being. The impact of these initiatives is that we are revitalizing, rebuilding and coming back to our own in greater ways than ever before.”

– Community staff leading LBH-funded initiatives



A small number of communities experienced tension between the elected band councils and health service organizations (who initially received funding) and hereditary leadership, who claimed responsibility for overseeing traditional and land-based healing. These communities were able to work with their FNHA regional office to allocate funding in line with their vision and priorities.

The LBH Fund supported initiatives across the continuum of care. It complemented and facilitated referrals to other health, wellness and treatment programs and services, and it filled unmet needs associated with critical transition periods for individuals accessing substance use systems of care and key population groups, particularly men and youth. Community staff stated that LBH-funded initiatives led to increased participation in other health and social services.

“Throughout different forums and gatherings for First Nations in BC, we’re hearing an ask for traditional ways and Knowledge Keepers to support difficult and trauma-based conversations that are now happening among Indigenous people. We’re seeing the need for those supports more than the contemporary mental health supports . . . Having those meetings and gatherings on sacred land and places is critical to healing.”

– FNHA executive

“Land-based services attend to the continuum of care. They can be prevention and health promotion, and they can be intensive treatments for people of any age.”

– National partner

Many people interviewed for this evaluation confirmed the LBH Fund complemented other FNHA funding streams and programs, particularly Mental Health and Wellness Memorandum of Understanding (MH&W MOU) and Harm Reduction funding. Key informants noted it is very common for LBH funds to top up MH&W MOU funds, and vice versa. Provincial and regional FNHA staff intentionally removed silos between funding streams to enable recipients to use the funds in line with self-determination.

Responsiveness to Emerging and Evolving Needs of Communities and Nations

Executive, provincial and regional FNHA staff and community staff emphasized the increasing and evolving demand for land-based healing initiatives resulting from trauma and grief associated with the toxic drug supply crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the discovery of unmarked graves in First Nations communities across BC, Indigenous-specific racism documented in the 2020 In Plain Sight report,¹ and findings from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report². First Nations leadership reported that the Fund provided much needed additional support to offset compounding pressures. FNHA leadership and staff, Nations and community representatives all advocated for ongoing and expanded LBH funding to support Nations and communities in addressing unmet and emerging needs.

“Being on the land is critical to healing. It will be imperative to continue and sustain this funding stream in light of the unmarked graves and burial sites and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, so that First Nations in BC can truly heal on the land.”

– FNHA executive

¹Addressing Racism in BC Health Care. Available from: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/addressingracism/>.

²Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report: Available from: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>.



3.3 SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS LAND-BASED HEALING INITIATIVES

The funded initiatives linked culture, community, land and history to support healing and wellness in a holistic manner that aligned with local context, knowledge, traditions and priorities. While the context, aim, and approach varied considerably, a central and shared focus was the intergenerational sharing and revitalization of First Nations traditional practices and knowledge. A review of reports and engagement with regional staff and funding recipients revealed that most initiatives incorporated land-based practices, and many focused on developing resilience and cultural identities among youth and men - groups that were previously identified as underserved and with specific programmatic needs.



Cedar Harvesting Workshop,
Squamish Nation

Examples of activities carried out as part of the LBH-funded initiatives

- **Sharing cultural teachings and knowledge**
(e.g., traditional foods and medicines, sweat lodge construction, drum making)
- **Language revitalization**
(e.g., virtual language classes with Elders)
- **Healing services**
(e.g., day- or week-long culture and healing camps for youth and adults, grief and loss retreats, equine therapy, outdoor counselling and land-based substance use interventions)
- **Land-based activities**
(e.g., hunting, fishing, harvesting, walking, hiking) and restoring traditional land and sacred places
- **Cultural and on-the-land ceremonies**
(e.g., traditional baby welcoming, regalia making)
- **Mentorship activities and groups**
- **Integration of LBH within existing health services programming**



Commonly supported expenses included:

- Hiring term positions such as program managers, coordinators and wellness workers to develop, manage and deliver programs and services (including salary/expenses)
- Providing opportunities for mentorship, leadership and skills development, particularly for youth (including expenses for materials/training, and honoraria)
- Convening stakeholders (e.g., Elders, neighbouring Nations, service providers and system partners, including the FNHA) to develop relationships/partnerships, build trust and collaborate in the design, development and delivery of initiatives, such as through gatherings and planning committees
- Delivering programs, services and events that support holistic healing and wellness for individuals, groups, families and/or communities (including expenses for materials/supplies, such as catering, traditional medicines and technology for virtual service delivery)
- Developing infrastructure to support ongoing land-based activities (e.g., log cabin, greenhouse, sweat lodge, and outhouses)

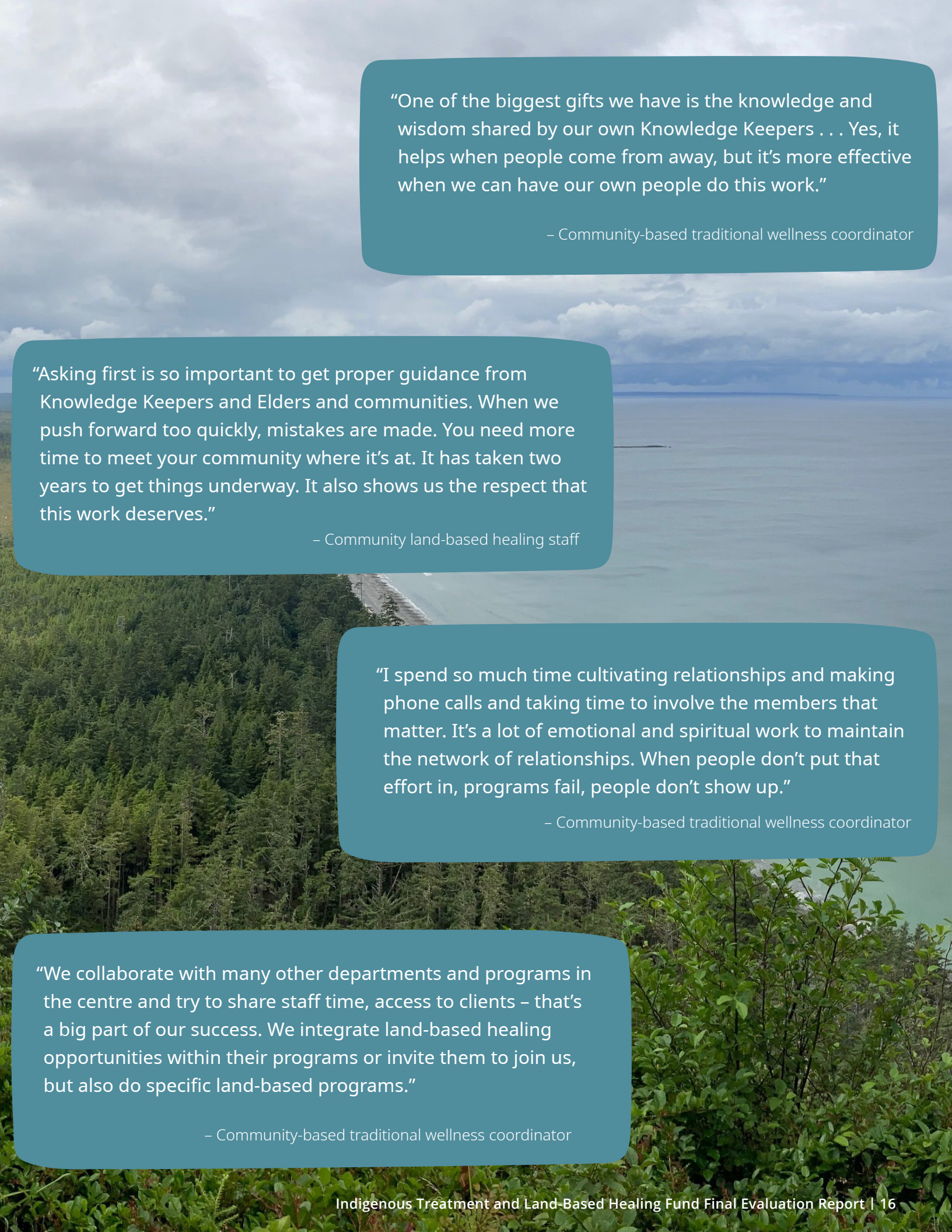


3.4 CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL LBH INITIATIVES

Factors Supporting Successful Land-Based Healing Initiatives

Community and Nation representatives attributed the successful implementation of land-based healing initiatives to the following factors:

- The ability to leverage relationships and partnerships within and among communities and Nations (e.g., restoring historical partnerships) as well as with external partners and service providers (e.g., to access supports from the FNHA)
- A focus on lifting and building upon local knowledge and traditions held by Knowledge Keepers, Elders and community champions
- Investments in community capacity development, including continued learning and mentorship opportunities, especially for youth, rather than outsourcing healing and wellness services and supports. Some community representatives expressed concerns over potential cultural appropriation of traditional healing and cultural services and emphasized the need to support local practitioners grounded in community rather than contributing to dependence on external facilitators, contractors or businesses
- Opportunities to collaborate on sub-regional, Nation/family or regional initiatives to support larger, higher-value initiatives, mitigate capacity and infrastructure constraints, and support efficiencies and economies of scale, and the use of clear terms of reference or memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for partnered initiatives
- The ability to leverage other funding streams and existing programs and services to reduce the time/effort required to develop proposals and stand up initiatives within the short funding window, in-kind staff time/support and available community resources (e.g., iPads, art supplies, tents, buses, boats), land and existing infrastructure (e.g., land to build a greenhouse, use of youth centre and gym)
- Access to time and resources to build relationships with, and engage community members on programmatic needs to inform the design, support increased uptake and enhance impact. Interviewees noted that initiatives involving facilitators and contractors from outside communities required intentional work. This can include making introductions from trusted community members, developing less formal relationships, establishing authenticity and ensuring culturally safe, humble, fair and transparent services
- Access to necessary cultural and clinical supports (e.g., traditional healers, clinical counsellors, child and youth workers, and traditional medicines)
- Environmental protection and stewardship of traditional territories and development of mitigation and adaptation strategies to address climate change and climate-related crises



“One of the biggest gifts we have is the knowledge and wisdom shared by our own Knowledge Keepers . . . Yes, it helps when people come from away, but it’s more effective when we can have our own people do this work.”

– Community-based traditional wellness coordinator

“Asking first is so important to get proper guidance from Knowledge Keepers and Elders and communities. When we push forward too quickly, mistakes are made. You need more time to meet your community where it’s at. It has taken two years to get things underway. It also shows us the respect that this work deserves.”

– Community land-based healing staff

“I spend so much time cultivating relationships and making phone calls and taking time to involve the members that matter. It’s a lot of emotional and spiritual work to maintain the network of relationships. When people don’t put that effort in, programs fail, people don’t show up.”

– Community-based traditional wellness coordinator

“We collaborate with many other departments and programs in the centre and try to share staff time, access to clients – that’s a big part of our success. We integrate land-based healing opportunities within their programs or invite them to join us, but also do specific land-based programs.”

– Community-based traditional wellness coordinator

Factors Constraining Implementation of Land-Based Healing Initiatives

In addition to the impact of the concurrent public health emergencies, community representatives and FNHA regional staff identified the following key factors that impeded more widespread participation in and implementation of land-based healing initiatives:

- Human resources recruitment and retention challenges, exacerbated by province-wide shortages and difficulties in recruiting staff for short-term temporary positions
- Insufficient infrastructure (e.g., camps, cabins, large meeting halls, accommodations for out-of-town facilitators) and accessibility barriers for members requiring physical or medical accommodations
- Transportation barriers (e.g., long distances to appropriate sites, forest service road only access, insufficient vehicles, high costs associated with transportation of members and supplies). Rural and remote communities reported challenges with transportation barriers and high travel costs. Urban communities reported difficulties accessing suitable land or spaces for traditional practices such as sweats and facilitating transportation of members to appropriate spaces
- Limited access to land and encroachment on traditional lands (e.g., degradation of traditional or sacred sites)
- Practical skill training and certification requirements (e.g., wilderness first aid, bear safety, radio communications, transportation licensing). Some communities and FNHA regional staff felt safety regulations for LBH-funded initiatives posed barriers, whereas others had significant mitigation and response strategies in place for emergencies due to their rural and remote locations (e.g., arrangements and notification to authorities during camp, sites for helicopter landings, presence of a boat at all times, bear policies and procedures)



Mám teq ta tmicw: Walk the Land, St'át'imc Outreach Health Services

"There are challenges even for having a sweat in any municipality. Many folks in urban areas cannot find green spaces where they feel safe and welcomed. We lack specific Indigenous spaces, spaces that haven't been ruined or commodified, where we can find medicine, or do sweats."

– FNHA regional staff member

"Communities wanting to do land-based healing has led to a national standoff. Communities need to be supported to deal with the land conflict. If we're asking communities to access traditional territories for programming, they also need to be supported to deal with the land conflict. So we can't pretend it's not a problem, or punish communities for running into challenges."

– FNHA regional staff member

"We have been out in canoes for centuries – none of our community members would sign a waiver, get insurance and put on a safety jacket. Same with hunting and fishing – all the procedures in place with coaches, first aid, it's just not going to happen in our communities."

– Traditional wellness coordinator



Buckskin Tanning Camp, St'át'imc Outreach Health Services

4. SUCCESSES OF LAND-BASED HEALING INITIATIVES

The following section explores the early impacts of LBH-funded initiatives, shares examples of initiatives to lift up the good work undertaken, and supports knowledge exchange.

4.1 CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO RELEARN, REVITALIZE AND RECLAIM TRADITIONAL WELLNESS PRACTICES

All lines of evidence revealed LBH-funded initiatives supported the relearning, reclaiming and revitalization of traditional medicines and wellness and healing practices. Funding recipients used intergenerational learning to support language revitalization and transfer knowledge of ecological sustainability, traditional hunting and gathering practices, traditional medicine gathering and use, and the use of ceremony and culture such as powwows, songs, prayers, drumming, dances and sweat lodges to support healing and well-being.

SPOTLIGHT


KTUNAXA NATION: BIG BROTHER/UNCLE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



In the Interior Region, the Ktunaxa Nation offered Nation-wide Big Brother/Uncle mentorship programming to develop relationships and foster a sense of belonging, self-confidence and accountability through learning traditional and cultural activities and life skills together.

Programming included one-day and four-day culture camps, as well as services for individuals who are justice-involved. Programming provided opportunities for peer counselling, harm reduction and clinical counselling. The Nation hired a psychiatric nurse to provide detox, home support and mental health referrals for further psychiatric assessment.

Participants in the Big Brother/Uncle Mentorship Program practised their traditional language, learned about traditional medicines and healing practices, participated in sweat lodges, and learned traditional hunting and gathering practices.



"The long term benefit of having a consistent land-based healing initiative will be the ability to coordinate cultural sharing and help all communities work together as a Nation."

– Community staff leading LBH initiative

"Prayer, ceremony, sweat lodges, cold water baths, medicine picking, hunting and gathering traditional foods, powwows and dancing can all happen out on the land. Feasting our ancestors as a way of attending to grief and loss on the land."

– National partner

4.2 INCREASING MEMBERS' CONNECTION TO THE LAND AND STRENGTHENING CULTURAL IDENTITY

All lines of evidence affirmed that LBH-funded initiatives strengthened participants' connection to the land and knowledge and pride in their cultural identity. Many initiatives fostered new or improved relationships between community members, including Elders and youth, members in-community and away-from-home, and within individual families.

"Nations linked culture, land and history to heal in ways unique to their communities and Nations . . . These healing and wellness events are bridging connections to self, community, land and culture for all age groups, both on and off-reserve."

– Community staff leading LBH initiative

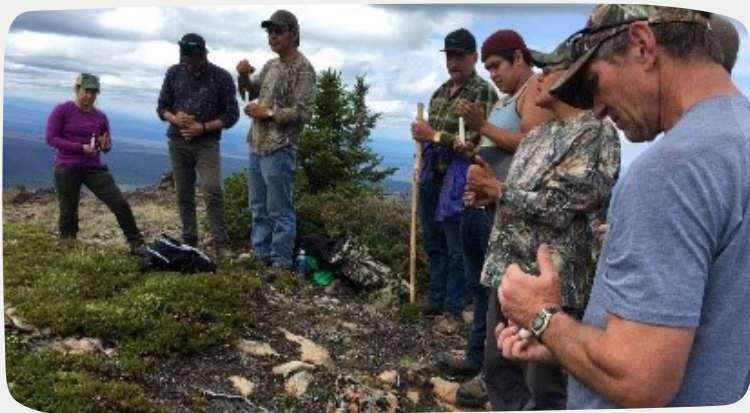
"It was healing to be together on the land, to learn, to care for and be cared for by the larger group. Dłaksiew – like other Kwaguł village sites – is surrounded by so many medicines that were cultivated by our ancestors. This camp was an opportunity to not only strengthen our relationship with the land, but also with each other. We not only visited Kwaguł village sites, but we also learned Kwaguł place names, origin sites and saw footsteps of our ancestors. It has been years since a Kwaguł had visited some of those sites."

– Community staff leading LBH initiative



SPOTLIGHT

DǃKELH DENÉ NATION'S RECLAMATION OF A TRADITIONAL HIKING TRAIL AND COMMUNITY FEAST



In the Interior Region, the Dǃkelh Dené Nation mapped and cleared a hiking trail to the traditional mountain Besbut'a (Anahim Peak), and constructed outhouse facilities to facilitate reclaiming of a traditional territory and foster connection to the land among members.

Two organized hikes were offered in the summer, one school-based for Ulkatcho youth and one for community members. The initiative was organized and implemented by the community mental health clinician with support from Elders and up to 20 community members. Participants shared a community meal following the hike. Programming also included an Uncle Program, bringing men together to cut wood, hunt, fish and camp, and bring children up to the mountain to facilitate cultural and community connections and connections to the land.

LBH funds supported the construction of the outhouse, transportation costs, the community meal and Elder honoraria.

SPOTLIGHT

HAISLA TRADITIONAL SWEAT AND LAND-BASED MEN'S CAMP



In the Northern Region, a wellness lead, wellness counsellor and outreach worker came together in April 2021 to start a program to take young men to their ancestral territories in Kitamaat to reconnect with tradition and themselves.

The Haisla Nation communally built a traditional sweat with blessings from community sweat leaders and other community members. The Nation then hosted multi-day camps on traditional teachings and fishing through the summer and early fall for groups of three to four men at a time, with one per month over the summer for six camps in total. Participants including both men living in community and urban and away-from-home.

A few days before camp, the group prepared the trapping cabin and crab traps and presented crabs to the owner/Elder of the trap land and other Elders, emphasizing the important teaching of sharing with Elders and those who cannot get on a boat for themselves.

On day one of the camp, participants arrived in Kitimat, and in line with Haisla teachings, went to the beach to wash their faces three times to wash away the ego so they could see the beauty of the land. The participants set their intentions and pledged to respect the land, respect each other and themselves. After unpacking, they enjoyed the catch from their crab traps. The group reconvened at the beach, where they enjoyed the moonlight and some music, led by a member with a guitar.

On day two, after getting up at sunrise, the group headed to the beach for a Nuhkwlagila (cold water cleanse), followed by teachings of Nuhyem (Haisla law) to ground themselves through meditation and breathing exercises. The group planned the day over breakfast and set out on the boat to source some willow to build a sweat lodge. Based on the learnings and permission of a Tsleil-Waututh sweat leader, the group built the sweat lodge with willow, tarp and blankets, had lunch together around a campfire, and then headed to the beach to find the grandfathers (the rocks). They brushed the trails to the natural hot springs and enjoyed a bath—as the ancestors did for healing benefits. After dinner, they participated in a sharing circle around the campfire.

On day three, after Nuhkwlagila, the group started a sacred fire to heat up the grandfathers and proceeded into the sweat lodge, following the teachings of the Lahkota from the Tsleil-Waututh sweat leader. During the sweat they were entertained by singing eagles and ravens: “we knew those were our ancestors telling us we were on a good path. It was a special moment.”



The group sang together. They celebrated the sweat ceremony with a feast and watched in awe as a grizzly bear “presented itself from the same direction as the bear’s spirit.” They discussed the trip experience in a sharing circle afterwards and shared advice and encouragement to prepare for their return home.

On day four, the group did grounding exercises and meditated, and Nuhkwlagila at the beach. The group started the journey back home together, pointing out ancestral landmarks along the way.



In the fall, the last trip of this initiative, a day before the group was to head to Kitamaat, the outreach worker received a phone call from the Vancouver Police Department about a missing Haisla person in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The outreach worker found the missing person who accepted the invitation to join the trip to Haisla. The following day, the individual was reunited with his grandmother before proceeding to the traditional trap lands, where the group built a sweat. The group did some crabbing and took a bath in a natural hot spring. The outreach worker said to him: "four days ago you were in a back alley in the Downtown Eastside, and today you're sitting in the same spot where one of our ancestors possibly did, looking out into their traditional territory."

The community outreach worker, community wellness staff and a volunteer supported the initiative. LBH funding supported fuel costs, food, boat rentals and camping supplies; an existing traditional trapping cabin was used for accommodations.



SPOTLIGHT

HAISLA INITIATIVES FOR URBAN AND AWAY-FROM-HOME MEMBERS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER NATIONS



In the Northern Region, the Haisla Nation partnered with other Nations to support land-based healing for urban and away-from-home members. Inspiration came from a conversation held between an outreach care worker and an Elder about traditional hunting and fishing practices to prepare for wintertime.

Using a donated fishing boat and a sharing agreement to borrow vessels from the Freedom Boat Club, Haisla, Heiltsuk and Nisga'a urban and away-from-home members (particularly those living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and recovery homes), were taken out on the water to reconnect to nature, community and culture, and to learn traditional teachings and practices relating to food sovereignty.

Through partnership agreements, Nuuchahnulth representatives taught Haisla members how to jar fish and Squamish representatives took urban and away-from-home Haisla members out to clam beds.

Representatives from Haisla expressed interest in growing their urban land-based healing, including creating opportunities to bring members to sundances and powwows and to visit other First Nations communities.

4.3 SUPPORTING FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Reporting and engagements with key informants revealed that many LBH-funded initiatives fostered the connection between traditional lands and traditional foods, revitalized hunting and gathering practices, and supported community food sovereignty and security. For example, one community planned a moose camp to teach traditional hunting and land-based skills, and the meat acquired by participants was distributed to community Elders. Many key informants reinforced the importance of food security and sovereignty for supporting community economies and physical health.



“We are trying to uplift and make connections between food sovereignty and land-based healing and hammer into the funders that being on the land is about our Indigenous economies of food collection and harvesting.”

– FNHA regional staff member

“I would love to see us have more initiatives that really help First Nations people access, process, and eat traditional foods . . . What we put into our body is to important for our health. For First Nations people, so much of our traditional food is connected to culture, traditional practices and the land.”

– FNHA executive

4.4 IMPROVING PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Engagement with key informants and reporting show that LBH-funded initiatives improved the physical health and wellness of participating members. In many instances, funding supported the integration of land-based activities to enhance the cultural safety and effectiveness of existing health and wellness programming. Many initiatives succeeded in getting members out on the land; participating in physical activities such as trail building, hiking, walking, hunting and gathering, gardening, canoeing, practising yoga and breath work; and participating in traditional games. Many initiatives also encouraged healthy eating, traditional foods, and use of traditional medicines. Some community representatives highlighted the benefits of being exposed to healthy microbes through land-based activities.

“We ask the participants about what they intake, ingest – the food, liquids, substances. We try to understand what is around the participants, and what is inside them. Trauma can be hiding within these things.”

– Community staff leading LBH initiatives



SPOTLIGHT

KWAKIUTL LAND-BASED HEALING



In the Vancouver Island Region, the Kwakiutl Healing Centre implemented numerous land-based healing activities and events. These included:

- A three-day intergenerational family-based culture camp
- Indigenous games
- The cultivation of a community garden and traditional root gardens, canning events and a “gratitude” pit cook
- Workshops on yoga and breath work
- A community walk
- Activities such as singing, dancing, and water bathing
- Ceremony
- Traditional medicine-making



Six to seven community staff – including the cultural coordinator, community wellness worker, research support worker, land and resource worker and youth worker – supported the initiatives, along with Elders, a contracted land-based cultural support facilitator and contracted facilitators.

LBH funding was used for facilitators' term contracts and expenses associated with the various activities.



SPOTLIGHT

TAKLA LAKE NATION-WIDE INTEGRATION OF LAND-BASED HEALING INTO HEALTH SERVICES



In the Northern Region, Takla Lake implemented a Nation-wide initiative to integrate land-based healing into all areas of their health care services. Existing staff – as well as Elders – used LBH funds to deliver land-based support for members struggling with substance use (including home-based detox, traditional supports and medicines and sacred fire); support for residential school survivors and their families, staff, and community members; ceremony and activities including a cultural camp; and traditional food harvesting, including berry picking, medicine gathering, hunting and fishing.

Funding supported Elder honorariums and program supplies.

“We understand that culture is integral to healing and well-being, and that access to land to undertake traditional activities is an important part of encouraging better mental health. We want to work with communities to facilitate culture-based healing approaches that fit the communities’ vision for prevention, and improved health and wellness for all their members.”

– Provincial partner

4.5 IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH AND ENABLING HEALING

All lines of evidence showed that LBH-funded initiatives contributed to improved mental health and well-being of participating members, including the ability to heal from trauma, grief and loss. Many land-based healing activities served as culturally safe and appropriate mental health and wellness supports, both to facilitate healing and to support proactive and sustained mental health and wellness. However, representatives of Nations and communities emphasized that healing is a journey and that communities need sufficient time to implement their land-based healing vision and achieve significant, lasting impacts.

“The greatest part of the project is seeing the compassion people have for each other; how each individual gains an understanding of their own journey, and that of others. Each person comes out of this camp with excitement, passion, new knowledge, and an outlook on life, ready to move forward.”

–Community staff leading LBH initiatives

SPOTLIGHT

LAKE BABINE LAND-BASED HEALING

In the Northern Region, the Lake Babine Nation Health Department offers year-round land-based healing initiatives with Elders, adults and families to support healing, particularly from grief and loss.

Examples of activities undertaken include smudging and distributing smudging kits, harvesting and sharing soapberries, talking circles, sweat lodges, traditional cooking, nature walks, language learning, and drumming. The health department accepts member referrals from the Band Office, and does outreach in community and in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.



SPOTLIGHT

KWAKWAKA'WAKW FAMILY TRAUMA AND HEALING PROGRAM, LIḡWILDAX^w HEALTH SOCIETY

In the Vancouver Island Region, the Liḡwıldax^w Health Society operates adult wellness retreats for 19+ adults, workshops, community gatherings, outreach efforts, group programs and training opportunities.

Three-, five- or eight-day adult wellness retreats options were hosted at the Wei Wai Kai Nation-owned Tsa-Kwa-Luten Lodge on Quadra Island between November and April in the tourism off-season, giving Indigenous staff members year-long employment. Participants included First Nations and Métis people from across the province. This unique modality featured Kwakwaka'wakw traditions and ceremony merged with western clinical practices; it also incorporated Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Coast Salish, Haida and Māori families teachings. The space offered healing and showed opportunities for how Indigenous members in recovery can help others lead healthy lives. Some participants that have gone through the programs have changed their life for the better, and are training to give back to their communities and help other community members choose life in recovery.

Wellness retreat programming included workshops on grief and loss, intergenerational trauma, addictions and trauma, life promotion, traditional healing and wellness. Staff supports included health coordinators and intake staff, Elders, traditional Knowledge Keepers and clinical support workers and contracted Indigenous facilitators, including cultural and traditional supports and clinical counsellors. Dedicated facility staff included a chef and other kitchen staff, lodge manager, front desk and housekeeping staff. The programs promoted harm reduction, suicide prevention and reinstating cultural identity.

LBH funding supported the rental of the lodge facility, food, transportation, facilitator fees, Elder and cultural support worker honorariums, and supplies.



GRIEF & LOSS

TSA KWA LUTEN LODGE
NOVEMBER 19TH-24TH 2023

This 5-day empowering workshop offers an opportunity to identify healing processes after experiencing grief and loss. Everyone experiences grief, loss, and sorrow at some time in their life. The emotions can be enormous, join **Tammie Myles** as she helps guests navigate through their personal journey.

SESSION WILL BE ACCOMPANIED WITH ELDER/TRADITIONAL/CLINICAL SUPPORT

[HTTPS://WWW.EVENTBRITE.CA/E/GRIEF-AND-LOSS-TICKETS-742448482397](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/grief-and-loss-tickets-742448482397)

Meals, Accommodation, travel reimbursement provided within FNHA guidelines.

Must commit to entire program and stay at the lodge. Guests must be 19+

Any questions or concerns please contact Mellissa by email intake@lkthealth.ca or 250 287-0215 after hour calls will be returned following day

Full-Waitlist Available

4.6 OFFERING CULTURALLY SAFE, LAND-BASED SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT AND SUPPORTS


A significant number of LBH-funded initiatives focused on individuals struggling with substance use disorders. Most initiatives took place out on the land and provided wrap-around support from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and mental health and wellness clinicians. Multi-day camps for group cohorts were a popular activity that helped participants build relationships, trust and accountability, and foster support networks in-community.

Chiefs, leaders and healing practitioners described how LBH initiatives in their communities supported members' healing and journey towards recovery and sobriety. This included enabling people to remain in their community and carry out their familial and community duties instead of accessing bed-based treatment, as well as supporting members waiting to access bed-based treatment services. All groups emphasized the value of taking individuals with substance use disorders away from urban centres to participate in healing and substance use treatment on the land. One representative suggested each Nation would benefit from having their own ongoing healing-on-the-land camps for individuals awaiting treatment, given the severity of the toxic drug supply crisis, shortage of detox facilities and supports, and long treatment centre waitlists.



"LBH and addictions healing mesh well together. We work diligently to ensure community members can access the narrow pathways into treatment."

– FNHA regional addictions specialist



"Land-based healing saves lives. We take men that are young parents stuck in addiction and do one-on-one counselling. It's so powerful, the changes that the men have . . . That is our treatment centre, being outside. We have the ability to bring people who may be in a critical space to do the protocol, and call the spirit back. Sweat lodge ceremony, traditional songs, our healing and cultural tools, the hand drum, rattle. They are coming back to it through opening the doors of land-based healing."

–Land-based healing practitioner

"The program ran Friday evenings and Saturday daytimes - times chosen to coincide with common trigger times for participants who had recently become sober. LBH programs are designed as part of a continuum of services supporting the healing process. Throughout the program, Elders and spiritual workers would visit, either to spend time with participants, offering teachings on the meaning of the work they were producing or to make garments themselves and encourage others."

–Community staff leading LBH initiative

"The safe spaces created in this project allowed individuals to experience their traditional lands in a fresh way by asking the lands to help them recover."

–Community staff leading an LBH initiative

SPOTLIGHT

SQUAMISH NATION HARM REDUCTION AND SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORTS

In the Vancouver Coastal Region, the Squamish Nation collaborated with the FNHA to provide community staff with online and in-person harm reduction training.

The community also hosted a National Overdose Awareness Day, inviting individuals affected by overdose for a day of remembrance and learning. Activities included members in community as well as those living urban and away-from-home.

Other activities supported through LBH funds included initiatives to show solidarity with substance users, promote clinical alternatives to street supply, encourage cultural understandings of harm reduction, translate harm reduction phrases into the Squamish language, promote Naloxone training and encourage healing and support through ceremony, drumming and singing.

Initiatives were supported by community staff and an FNHA harm reduction educator.



SPOTLIGHT

NISGA'A VALLEY HEALTH AUTHORITY MULTI-DAY WELLNESS CAMP

In the Northern Region, the Nisga'a Valley Health Authority delivered the Transformations Retreat, an alternative drug and alcohol treatment program to help members cope with long treatment centre waitlists. A community outreach worker operated a support group to help clients build toolkits to support community members for success and healthy living. Community members received mental health programs and services close to home, including art therapies, and access to an Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) specialist level 2, a registered nurse, neuropsychologist, crisis response coordinators and traditional wellness coordinators.



SPOTLIGHT

THUNDERBIRD WOLF CULTURAL CONSULTING

In the Vancouver Coastal Region, external contractor Thunderbird Wolf Cultural Consulting was hired to provide year-round one-on-one support on the land for men, women and families within the southern Stl'atl'imx communities who wanted to make a change in their substance use behaviours and overall well-being. Services focused on healing from trauma and substance use disorders and included camping, hunting, fishing, smudging, ceremony and berry picking.

Funding supported consulting fees/salaries, supplies (e.g., food or traditional medicines), transportation and fuel.



4.7 BUILDING RESILIENCE AND SUPPORTING HEALING AMONG FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

Many LBH-funded initiatives supported youth by engaging in life promotion and building resilience towards mental health and substance use challenges. Youth initiatives facilitated intergenerational learning, building community connections and deepening cultural identity, as illustrated by the following quote from a participating Elder who described the importance of sharing knowledge about ancestry and youth's place and connection within their clan and community:

"The important thing is that young people recognize who they are – who their mother and father are in the context of clans. We can learn songs, make canoes, support food security, but we have to have a base to work from: teaching individuals about clans, their crests, and their songs."

– Community Elder

Numerous initiatives specifically targeted male youth, a group identified as struggling from greater disconnection, underserved by existing services and supports, and requiring tailored programming and supports to meet their needs.

"In our Gawgi group (men's group), the primary mentors for men were the uncles. There is a lack of mentorship because of how our society works today and there is no time to foster those teachings. We bring older and younger men to learn from each other, about our place within our families, and who we are as males. "

– Community traditional wellness worker

Community members involved in initiatives described participating youth as having "smiles from ear to ear" and reported outcomes of increased self-esteem, pride and sense of place within the community among participants.

Communities emphasized the importance of conducting adequate background checks and references for all employees and volunteers to support youth safety, as well as the need for youth mental health workers at camps to make disclosures necessitating involvement from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and/or follow-up support.

SPOTLIGHT

NAWALAKW YOUTH CULTURAL CAMP



Nawalakw is a cultural camp and territorial reclamation movement that provides week-long cultural camps for Kwakwaka'wakw school children and annual community camps at Hada (Bond Sound) in the traditional and unceded territory of the ƛ̓w̓ik̓w̓as̓ut̓in̓ux̓w people, one of the four tribes of the Musg̓amakw Dzawad̓a'enux̓w.



Located in the Vancouver Island Region, the helicopter or boat accessible camp is delivered by Nawalakw with full support from the Nation. The movement includes youth employment and training opportunities for Nawalakw, local businesses and within the ecotourism industry. It also supports the long-term vision of operating a social enterprise that encompasses a seasonal eco-lodge, adult healing programs, climate change research programs and, most importantly, the revitalization the Kwakwaka'wakw culture and Kwak'wala language within the traditional territories.



Programs offered at hi'mānis ƙakūtł̓a'atsi – a place of forever learning – include:

- School camps for students in band-led schools and those living within Kwakwaka'wakw territories, as well as for classes in School District 85 that have a significant percentage of Kwakwaka'wakw students
- Community camps in the summer
- Year-round language and cultural revitalization programs
- Camps specifically tailored to at-risk youth, and children and youth in care
- Adult wellness programs offered through relationships with local organizations

Considerations were underway to host 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific youth camps.



Individuals involved in delivering the camps reported participants' increased confidence in cultural knowledge and ability to speak words in Kwak'wala, increased school engagement, positive behavioural changes and a reduction in RCMP involvement among participating youth.

Nawalakw camps are operated by 35 staff and term students who work as members of the language team, operations for Hada, maintenance workers, housekeepers, guides, cooks and support staff. Available supports include an FNHA youth counsellor, Knowledge Keepers and Elders. Infrastructure and supplies include a 2,500 square foot facility with sleeping quarters for participants, Elder rooms, staff quarters, a full-sized kitchen, outdoor food preparation shelter, indoor washroom facilities, storage shed, shelter boats, fishing equipment and outdoor gear.



Federal funding supported the feasibility study and planning. Philanthropic and private donations funded capital investments, and program and operational expenses were supported by various funding sources including LBH funding. Student wages were funded by Canada Summer Jobs and private donations.



SPOTLIGHT

BABINE LAKE REDISCOVERY YOUTH PROGRAM

In the Northern Region, the Lake Babine Nation Health Department offered an outdoor cultural education program that provided youth with positive lifestyle examples and encouraged them to explore nature, foster self-discovery and build community relationships. As a Nation-wide initiative, the project connects members from the communities of Donald's Landing, Pendleton Bay, Tachet, Old Fort, Sunny Side and Fort Babine.



Youth participated in storytelling, songs, drumming, personal reflection, ceremony and a canoe trip on Babine Lake.

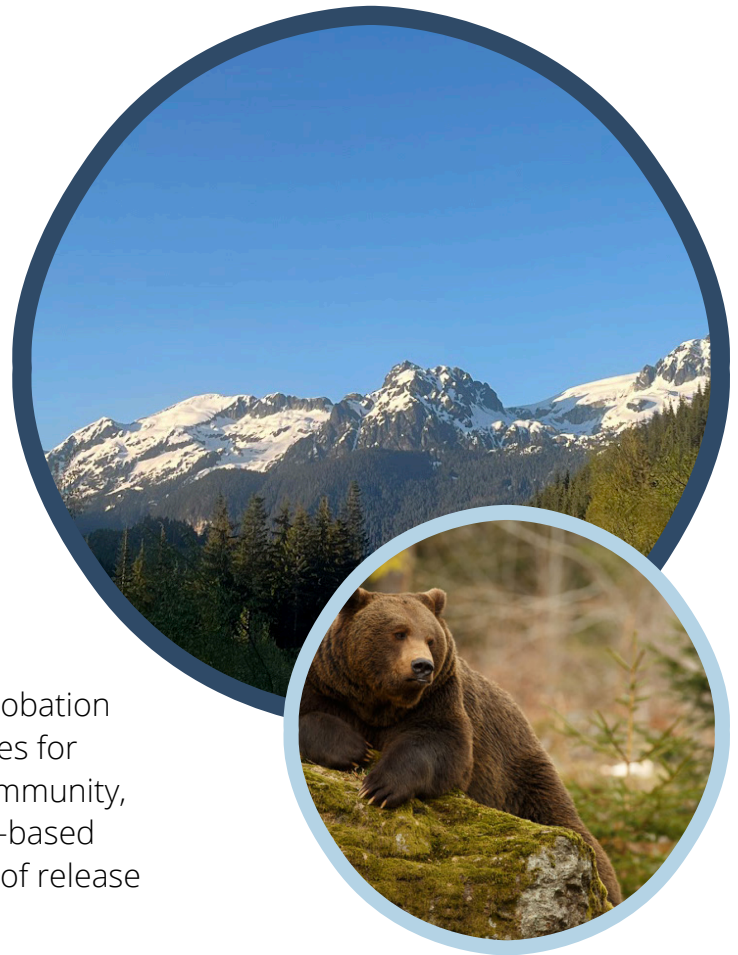
Participating youth and Elders described the youth canoe trip as an emotional experience. Individuals observed improved cultural preservation, stronger community connections and the greater unity and mutual support.

The youth program was supported by the traditional wellness coordinator, camp coordinators and facilitators, a camp cook, Elders and summer students. Funding was used to cover costs for tents and camping supplies, safety and expedition equipment, arts and crafts supplies, food, transportation and fuel, mandatory training (guide, first aid and safety), Elder honoraria, and instructor and facilitator salaries.

4.8 SUPPORTING COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION: CORRECTIONS, MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

A small number of LBH-funded initiatives supported individuals reintegrating into their community after being involved in care, in treatment, or in the justice system. Ktunaxa Nation, for example, provided opportunities for individuals involved in the criminal justice system or in recovery to connect with the land and begin healing from trauma by completing court-mandated community service hours on the land.

Key informants working in Corrections (such as probation officers) described the importance of LBH initiatives for individuals during their transition back to their community, although they also recognized that providing land-based healing can be challenging due to the constraints of release conditions or scheduling.



"I'm a big fan of land-based healing programs, and clients I work with are big fans . . . This one cultural wilderness camp is amazing. It's about repairing harm while working on their addiction. Sometimes they participate in Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous. Sometimes Chief and Council come in; some families participate, as do some probation officers . . . It's wraparound, it's in community. This is the way to go."

– Partner in the Corrections system

There is also evidence of land-based healing initiatives supporting the reintegration of children to a community following an intervention from MCFD. Reporting describes how traditional healers advocated to MCFD about the need for protocol and ceremony for returning youth. The Bringing Our Children Home initiative immersed children and families with MCFD involvement in tradition and culture. There were also suggestions from Chiefs and leaders that land-based healing initiatives could meet the requirement of mandated parenting/life skill classes.

4.9 SUPPORTING NETWORKS, RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS, AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

The LBH Fund supported further development of networks, relationships and partnerships between communities, Nations, regions and system partners. Partners identified by recipients as having participated in LBH-funded initiatives included FNHA regional teams, regional health authorities, treatment centres, the First Nations' Emergency Services Society, BC Parks, wilderness tourism businesses and other local businesses, college film students, post-secondary institutions, private consultants and facilitators, the RCMP, Indigenous support workers and medicinal gardens. In one example, an initiative developed a relationship with the Real Estate Foundation of BC to secure infrastructure investment for their project.

Some Chiefs and community leaders described how they developed shared initiatives with neighbouring communities to increase member access to more diverse and frequent services, and to support lateral knowledge sharing. One example of a collaborative initiative in discussion is the development of an "Auntie's Village" whereby communities in the Vancouver Island Region could repurpose COVID-19 isolation trailers as transition housing for survivors of sexual and domestic violence (both in-community and urban and away-from-home).

There is strong agreement among FNHA provincial and regional staff and community staff that LBH initiatives contributed to community capacity building. Examples from reporting include creating policies and plans, convening advisory and wellness committees, and hiring and mentorship of community staff (e.g., Champion Mentorship program, youth mentoring/capacity-building/funding).



5. LEARNINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE LAND-BASED HEALING FUNDING

This section summarizes feedback and reflections on opportunities to enhance the design and implementation of the LBH Fund to better support Nations and communities' self-determination and increase the reach and impact of land-based healing activities for First Nations in BC.

5.1 OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE FUND DESIGN

Opportunity for longer-term, sustainable funding to support Nations and communities' vision for land-based healing and revitalization and reclamation of traditional practices

Chiefs, other community representatives and FNHA executives and staff perceive the LBH Fund to be a crucial part of the province's plan for advancing the mental health and wellness and substance use continuum of care. All groups suggest there is a need for more long-term sustainable funding to reclaim and revitalize traditional wellness and healing practices, and to realize communities' visions for healing. This suggestion is supported by a 2004 review of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's national survey of healing projects. The survey found that on average it took 36 months to move through the process of needs identification, outreach, and implementation, and that on average communities required 10 years of ongoing healing supports such as those provided by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.^{1,2}



"Land-based healing needs to have sustainable funding – we need to get away from the two-year pots of funds if we truly want First Nations people to heal in a holistic way."

– FNHA executive

¹Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2010). The Aboriginal Healing Foundation: 2010-2015 Corporate Plan. Available from: <https://www.ahf.ca/files/2010-corp-plan-eng.pdf>

²The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was created in 1998 in response to the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The AHF was a non-profit organization that delivered funding to support community-based healing initiatives for Aboriginal people affected by the legacy of residential schools. The AHF was closed in 2014.




"We've been disconnected from the land for generations; it'll take more than one year of programming to get back out. Reclaiming and retaking that space is a process."

– Traditional wellness coordinator

Chiefs, Health Directors and FNHA executives and staff suggest sustainable funding directed towards larger contribution agreements could better address Nation and community needs to plan, staff, deliver and report on initiatives, by:

- Allowing communities to recruit and retain the necessary staff more effectively, pay salaries and wages aligned with the advanced and specialized nature of the work, and invest in workforce mentorship and training. Community staff leading LBH initiatives were particularly concerned about the equity of compensation for traditional Knowledge Keepers and cultural practitioners relative to those trained in western professions
- Enabling communities to prioritize investments in equipment and supplies needed for larger-scale and more impactful initiatives
- Allowing communities to allocate funding across fiscal quarters in accordance with seasonal variances in land-based healing opportunities and expenses
- Providing funding to expand land-based programming to accommodate both in-community and urban and away-from-home members
- Enabling communities to fund longer-term upstream resilience-building initiatives and preventative programming for members with less complex substance use challenges to help mitigate the need for acute bed-based treatment interventions downstream



“Land-based healing coordinator positions worked out to be pretty entry-level jobs at \$20-\$25/hour. We have people coming in with counselling backgrounds and PhDs and then what do you pay them? If we want these higher-level programs, we need to be open around these conversations.”

– FNHA regional staff

“Hiring Haida mentors to teach the language and arrange curriculum is not cheap. Those young people have dedicated five to seven years to learn the language. A lot of our folks carry so much knowledge, but they get beans because they don’t have a PhD behind their name . . . They are our next Elders.”

– Elder supporting land-based healing initiative

Opportunity for the FNHA provincial and regional offices to determine together if existing disbursement approaches meet strategic priorities and needs, or whether the LBH Fund should target larger-scale Nation, sub-regional, family and multi-community initiatives for culturally safe stabilization, substance-use treatment and aftercare

The FNHA provincial office was intentionally non-prescriptive when providing regions with the funding. Regions received a brief description and high-level guidelines, and were responsible for determining their own allocation strategy, approach and assessment criteria.

Input from regional staff and the review of program reporting reveal that the flexible guidelines, short-term funding cycles and input from communities on disbursement led to funding allocation for initiatives spanning healing and traditional wellness programming more broadly, rather than a targeted focus on substance use stabilization, treatment, aftercare and related supports. A small number of LBH-funded initiatives were designed to engage underserved groups needing support with substance use, notably men and youth.

Engagements with FNHA executives, provincial and regional staff suggest that there is an opportunity for a collective discussion regarding the purpose, intended use and eligible expenses to determine if the current approach is meeting needs or if a more strategic allocation focused on larger initiatives targeted to culturally-safe stabilization, substance-use treatment and aftercare would be more impactful.



“I think the intention of LBH is connecting community members to their land, culture and traditional ways of healing to uplift their wellness. The original focus was to support addiction and treatment programming; however, it’s been challenging as communities are seeking the ability to connect to culture within their own traditional territories, not having to travel elsewhere.”

–FNHA traditional wellness coordinator

“We heard ‘we all want to do our own projects in our own backyard, and we know what we want to do so just give us the money.’ Some communities were outspoken at the meeting; communities were at different stages and most needed more supports, but they were the ones who weren’t speaking.”

– FNHA regional staff

Some Nation and community representatives and FNHA provincial staff expressed interest in maintaining a standalone LBH Fund and targeting allocation to larger Nation, sub-regional, family and multi-community initiatives. This strategy would support sustainability, alleviate infrastructure and health human resource constraints, create efficiencies and economies of scale, reduce the administrative burden on individual communities and enhance the reach and impact of programming.

Other representatives and staff suggested if the funding is to support a broader range of land-based healing and wellness programming, planning, implementation and reporting could be streamlined by integrating land-based healing funding into existing community funding agreements.

“I think having land-based healing funding be part of the core annual budget received at our health centre would be good. Both land-based healing and traditional wellness dollars are not part of core funding.”

–Community-based traditional wellness coordinator

When the FNHA has reached consensus on the preferred allocation approach, it can develop more detailed LBH Fund guidelines and templates of diverse initiative models. This would support both regional offices (when communicating funding opportunities) and eligible recipients (when developing and implementing initiatives).

Opportunity for greater alignment with FNHA-Funded Treatment Centre services, including incorporation of land-based activities in bed-based treatment programs and provision of land-based stabilization and aftercare programming

While most FNHA-funded treatment centres incorporate aspects of land-based healing into their model of care, program data shows only two centres received formal LBH funding. Regional and provincial FNHA staff suggest LBH-funding could allow for the greater incorporation of land-based healing in bed-based treatment and could provide an opportunity to foster positive relationships between centres and First Nations communities.

FNHA-funded Treatment Centre Services Evaluation informants also emphasized the opportunity to use the LBH Fund for pre-treatment stabilization on the land before bed-based treatment services. However, they acknowledged the need for adequate clinical supports to accommodate some individuals' complex care needs. The needs of individuals using Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) were specifically cited as an accessibility barrier. FNHA provincial and regional staff indicated that the FNHA and communities are interested in connecting land-based healing with OAT programs and involving Elders and traditional Knowledge Keepers in this therapy.



SPOTLIGHT

LAND-BASED HEALING AND OAT THERAPY IN ONTARIO

An Ontario program has been working to incorporate land-based healing and traditional knowledge keepers in OAT therapy. The program collaborated with Elders and traditional Knowledge Keepers to develop programming that is adaptable depending on individual's health and where they are in their recovery journey. All participants are connected to an Elder who shares knowledge of traditional medicines and self-care practices. The individual's partner, children and other important supports are included, with whole families taken out on the land together. Elders also play a role in spreading knowledge about OAT among the community, fostering support for this harm reduction practice.



LBH-funded initiatives could also help address a significant unmet need for aftercare, as identified in the 2024 Evaluation of FNHA-Funded Treatment Centre Services. National partners consider aftercare to be an ideal fit for land-based healing programs. Chiefs and leaders described the value of LBH initiatives in providing aftercare support for members returning to community, including life skills development, resilience building and grief counselling. All parties see opportunities to support re-integration, and encourage continued use of the cultural practices foundational to the success of treatment in FNHA-funded treatment centres.

"Treatment centres are for getting people off substances. After that, how do we teach people the foundation of land-based healing as a tool for keeping them healthy and supporting further healing?"

– FNHA executive

5.2 OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE FUND ADMINISTRATION

Opportunity to allocate a percentage of total funding to support FNHA regional offices to administer and provide planning and implementation support to participating communities and Nations

Regional teams experienced challenges with limited capacity to administer the Fund and provide support to recipients. There is an opportunity for part of the administrative fee initiated in FY 2022/23 to be transferred to FNHA regional offices to support fund administration.



“Having to get funding out without having a funded position has been extremely challenging, and figuring out how land-based healing funding works. The pandemic has definitely put a wrench in our plans and made things challenging . . . We’ve gone from communities saying they’ll just do programming, to realizing we need to focus on planning and capacity-building. Internal structures, communication and work plans are really needed to make the programming a success.”

– FNHA regional staff


Opportunity to integrate reporting templates or processes across complementary funding streams and permit alternative reporting formats to reduce administrative burden

There is a desire among recipients, regional staff, Chiefs and leaders to identify what information is critical to centrally manage the program, eliminate unnecessary reporting requirements and align reporting across complementary funding sources (e.g., MH&W MOU). Suggestions included creating a common reporting portal and integrating LBH reporting within community annual reporting.

Key informants across all groups also expressed interest in examining opportunities to decolonize reporting formats. Regional staff described feeling a contradiction and dissonance in using colonial reporting systems to support the unique, diverse decolonizing work of LBH-funded community initiatives. Provincial partners described the challenge of reducing the reporting burden while providing evidence to warrant the continuation of the fund. Some suggestions included using hybrid reporting inclusive of quantitative data, and oral or written narratives and stories (e.g., telephone interviews, submission of audio and video recordings, talking circles with funding recipients).

Similarly, there are opportunities for MMHA and FNHA to work together to reduce the FNHA's burden of reporting to the MMHA and revisit the current required indicators. Specifically, purely quantitative indicators – such as the number of program participants or the number of participants reporting increased connection to culture – are difficult to measure and capture across all funded initiatives. Some indicators could be captured more meaningfully in narrative and story-based reporting.



The background image shows a dense green forest with tall trees. In the foreground, a yellow canoe with a white interior is resting on a pile of weathered logs and driftwood. Another canoe, partially visible, has a red interior. The scene is outdoors, likely on a riverbank or a clearing.

"We put so much money and energy into data surveillance. What if we put the same amount into celebrating stories and successes?"

– FNHA executive

"When communities already have so many initiatives to report back on, creating another reporting requirement was a challenge . . . Perhaps we could report in a way that honours our own traditions as First Nations people."

– Traditional wellness lead

"We were left to our own devices to make our own grant applications, report forms, etc., so we shifted to storytelling reporting – they could fill out part of their forms by storytelling, and had the option of sending me a recording. Everybody loved it."

– Traditional wellness lead

5.3 OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Opportunity for the FNHA to support lateral knowledge translation and exchange of land-based healing among First Nations in BC

Nations and communities expressed a strong desire for the FNHA to facilitate lateral knowledge translation and exchange, celebrate successes, and lift wise and innovative land-based healing initiatives reflecting diverse cultural practices and land-based knowledge. Suggestions included hosting a traditional wellness gathering and creating a dedicated FNHA webpage that includes a repository of summary videos highlighting wise and innovative LBH-funded initiatives.



One promising example of such a knowledge exchange venue was traditional wellness circles in the Northern Region, which honoured First Nations oral traditions and allowed communities to learn from each other, reflect and share successes:

"We started a wellness circle on Zoom with all communities invited. They would report back to the group and we'd record the session . . . We got so much more information than what they'd put on a reporting template."

– Traditional Wellness Lead

Opportunity to help mitigate community capacity challenges and avoid the commodification of cultural practices by providing planning and implementation support; funding for mentorship and apprenticeship of Knowledge Keepers, traditional healers and cultural workers; and providing self-care resources and supports for community staff

Due to ongoing health human resource shortages province-wide and the negative impacts of concurrent public health emergencies on recruitment and retention, staffing was a barrier to participation for some eligible recipients and a constraint to implementing other funded initiatives.

FNHA provincial and regional staff suggest community capacity shortages could in part be mitigated by establishing dedicated FNHA regional project developers with the necessary capacity, time and skillsets to support land-based healing initiatives in Nations and communities.

"For the MH&W MOU, I have a project developer and a dedicated team member for support and reporting. We need someone with the capacity, time and skill set to support LBH in each region."

– FNHA executive

Communities and regional staff suggest the FNHA and partners could support mentorship and training opportunities to increase the availability of local Knowledge Keepers, traditional healers and cultural workers. Community representatives described the years of training required for mastery, the underfunding of cultural and language revitalization training compared to western education, and increasing pressures on existing human resources.

“Having Haida staff who understand the relationships, connections, history is so important for successful programming . . . We still struggle with training. We bring in a lot of off-island professionals.”

– Community traditional wellness coordinator

Community representatives emphasized the importance of designing funding agreements to support the development and procurement of local Knowledge Keepers and practitioners, and not contribute to a dependence on external healing and wellness contractors and facilitators. Private businesses were described by some representatives as more costly and less sustainable than locally developed non-profits. Some regional FNHA staff and community staff leading LBH initiatives were concerned that land-based healing funding could unintentionally contribute to cultural appropriation and the commodification of traditional healing practices by private businesses not affiliated with communities.



“In the North, a business applied for the funding . . . it worked out to \$25K per person for a two week program. The [private, for-profit] model does not work.”

– FNHA regional staff

“We need a vetting process for healers. If we throw money around, we run the risk of commodifying our culture and supporting private training on cultural supports and healing. The commodification is wild - we need to be aware and protect against this”

– FNHA regional staff

Community members described the impacts of the concurrent public health emergencies on the retention and burnout rates of community staff and cultural workers. They also identified a need for greater self-care resources, such as counselling and cultural supports, to promote workforce resilience and retention.

Opportunity for the FNHA to facilitate greater inclusion of clinical supports for individuals with complex care needs and child and youth workers in land-based healing activities

The emphasis of the LBH funding remains on supporting community or Nation-based healing and wellness programming grounded in culture and traditional wellness. However, providing clinical training and connections to clinical supports specializing in complex trauma and harm reduction would enable land-based healing initiatives to include members with more complex care needs.

Access to child and youth workers is also needed for land-based healing initiatives involving children and youth to support disclosures that require MCFD involvement, debriefing and follow-up care.



Opportunity for the FNHA to support Nations and communities in developing “Plan B” strategies for initiatives impacted by climate emergencies, and for proactive use of LBH funding to meet member needs during or following evacuations

Due to the intrinsic connection between land-based healing and the health and well-being of the land, the impacts of climate change and extreme weather-related events continue to affect LBH programming. To avoid postponing or cancelling initiatives because of climate-related events, FNHA regional staff suggest that recipients develop a mitigation strategy or “Plan B” as part of planning. Nations and sub-regions could also examine the potential to use LBH funds for proactive programming and supports to meet climate-emergency related needs. For example, Interior and Northern regions could examine using LBH funds to stand up programming and supports to help wildfire evacuees manage their well-being during an evacuation and support post-evaluation recovery, given the annual recurrence of wildfires every summer.



“Communities are dealing with the climate crisis. Droughts, fires. We need to make climate change mitigation plans for our land-based camps. Rather than developing a cabin that’s a lodge, we’ve had to make mobile land-based camps so that there’s a chance to move it if there’s a wildfire. We’ve had very large gatherings cancelled last minute when highways are shut down due to forest fires.”

– FNHA regional staff

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

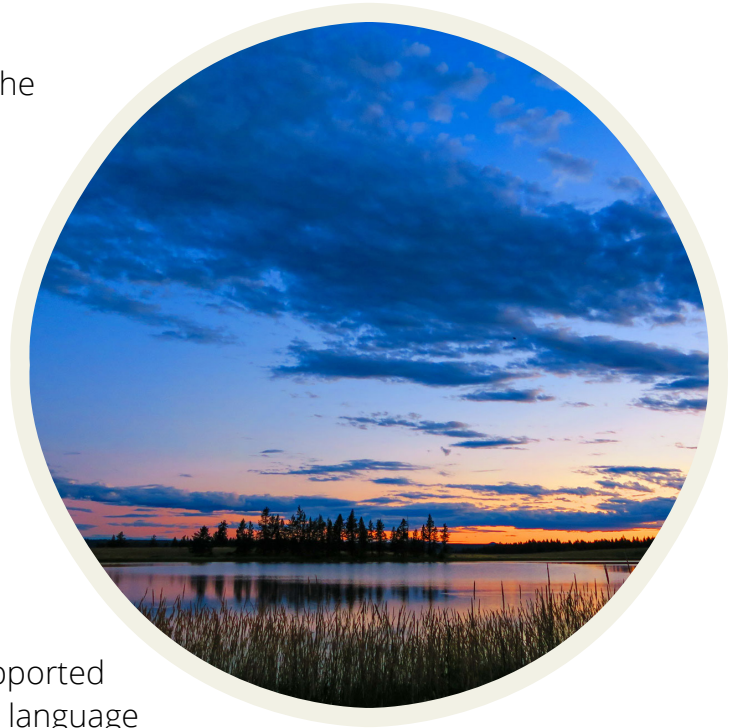
This section summarizes feedback and reflections on opportunities to enhance the design and implementation of the LBH Fund to better support Nations and communities' self-determination and increase the reach and impact of land-based healing activities for First Nations in BC.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

The LBH Fund strongly aligns with the FNHA and the Province of BC's vision and strategic priorities for a continuum of mental health and wellness and substance use services and supports for First Nations in BC, and First Nations vision for self-determination in relearning, reclaiming and revitalizing traditional medicines and wellness and healing practices. There is strong support from FNHA leadership and staff, and from Nation and community representatives, for ongoing and expanded LBH funding to support Nations and communities in addressing unmet and emerging needs.

The funded initiatives examined in this report supported the healing of diverse population groups through language revitalization, traditional hunting and gathering practices, traditional medicine gathering and use, ceremony and culture. Key informants close to the initiatives reported positive impacts on participating members' physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness.

The reach and impact of land-based healing initiatives for First Nations in BC can be strengthened through changes to the funding mechanism and its administration, and the planning and implementation supports provided to recipients. Communities and Nations would also benefit from additional support with developing community capacity and lateral knowledge exchange of wise and innovative land-based healing initiatives.



6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are informed by the above opportunities and evaluation learnings:

1. The FNHA provincial and regional offices should clarify the intended purpose and use of LBH funding and revise eligibility criteria and reporting requirements in accordance with the fund design and purpose.
 - Determine if the LBH Fund is intended to provide substance use treatment and healing programming, or if the fund can be used to support a broader range of substance use and mental health and wellness initiatives.
 - Clarify in the funding guidelines if LBH-funded activities must be conducted on the land or if indoor activities are also eligible.
 - In consultation with the FNHA provincial and regional offices, examine opportunities to enable recipients to use alternative reporting formats (e.g., sharing circles, video submissions).
 - Examine opportunities to align MMHA's reporting requirements and timelines for the FNHA with reporting requirements and timelines for funding recipients.
2. The FNHA and MMHA should examine the feasibility of creating more sustainable multi-year LBH funding in line with the intended purpose.
 - Funding that targets substance use treatment and healing initiatives could continue as a standalone multi-year stream with higher-value contribution agreements.
 - Funding that targets a broad range of land-based healing activities along the continuum of care could be integrated as earmarked funding within existing community funding mechanisms or the MH&W MOU funding stream.
3. The FNHA should allocate a portion of the funding received to regional offices so they can provide fund oversight and administration, planning and implementation support for communities and knowledge translation and exchange of wise and innovative LBH models.





First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

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