



St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver BC

# Enhancing Indigenous Health Care Employee Recruitment and Retention in British Columbia

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## Context

Providence Health Care (PHC) provides programs and services on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) peoples. Many of these programs are delivered within a large urban Indigenous community.

PHC is on a journey of reconciliation, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, in order to improve the care provided to Indigenous patients, clients, residents, and families and to reduce health inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in BC.

Enhanced recruitment, training, and retention of Indigenous health professionals is needed to address the disproportionate number of these professionals in the health care system to help respond to the health and wellness needs of Indigenous populations.

A more representative workforce has the potential to create more culturally safe and accessible health care services. Enhancing the Indigenous health workforce can reduce the power imbalances that have defined the Canadian health care system and shaped the care delivered to Indigenous people since colonization. Indigenous professionals are in the best position to offer a familiar worldview to their patients and bring Indigenous perspectives to health care policies.



## Strategy for Change

Our strategy was to explore the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous employees using individual interviews and small discussion circles. A literature review and environmental scan of health human resources strategies to enhance recruitment and retention were conducted to inform this qualitative research.

We aimed to answer the question: *What are the factors that encourage and support Indigenous professionals to enter and remain employed in mainstream health care organizations?*

In listening to Indigenous health professionals discuss their employment-related experiences, including the ways in which they are impacted by the ongoing colonialism within our health care system, we hoped to identify potential areas for meaningful change within our organization.

## Participants

Ten PHC employees participated in this study. Interviews and discussion circles took place between April and September 2019.

Participants were clinicians, including nurses and allied health, clinical support staff, researchers, and managers. Length of employment at PHC ranged from 1 month to 7 years. Participants self-identified as Métis, First Nations, and mixed ancestry.



## Results: Key Themes

### ❖ Indigenous programming and community

“ I want to feel included and feel like there’s programming... that includes me as an Indigenous employee. ”

### ❖ Cultural safety and humility

“ Employees need to feel safe for their patients to feel safe. ”

### ❖ Human Resources practices

“ How do I bring in Indigenous people and... interview them in a way that is considerate of their lived experience? ”

### ❖ Employment support

“ Scholarships and bursaries are important too. And student preceptorships, having them finishing here (at PHC). ”

### ❖ Truth-telling and organizational culture

“ Put the Truth back into Truth and Reconciliation. You can’t have reconciliation without speaking the truth. ”

## Next Steps

Our study suggests that strategic changes to leadership structures, working environments, and human resources practices have the potential to create a safer, more inclusive organizational culture for Indigenous employees and encourage Indigenous people to work within mainstream health care.

We encourage health care leaders to engage with existing Indigenous Health and Wellness Teams and Indigenous employees to develop a roadmap for Indigenous-led policy -- with timelines and dedicated funding -- to enhance Indigenous employee recruitment and retention within their organizations.

Essential elements of this roadmap include mandatory cultural safety and humility training for all health care employees, as well as strengthening of partnerships and internal and external collaboration with organizations such as post-secondary institutions and Indigenous community groups. Regular updates on progress towards implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action establishes accountability.

By combining a genuine commitment to Indigenous health with concrete actions and mechanisms to ensure accountability, mainstream health care organizations can create policies and work environments that will attract and retain Indigenous staff.



Photos: Jeff Topham. All Nations Sacred Space, St. Paul's Hospital, April 2019

## Acknowledgements

We thank the PHC employees who openly and generously gave their time to participate in interviews and who trusted us to gather and document their experiences and recommendations for change.



How you want to be treated.

SFU