

# Traditional Models of Wellness Environmental Scan Summary

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The importance of Traditional Medicine as a means of improving the health and quality of life for Aboriginal people is increasingly being recognized. For instance, one of the principles for implementing the *Tripartite First Nations Health Plan* states 'Cultural knowledge and traditional health practices and medicines will be respected as integral to the well being of the First Nations.'

Many Canadian government reports and strategies recognize the need and responsibility to support Aboriginal choices of health care, including the integration of more traditional philosophies of health care services. *The Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan* acknowledges the gap in culturally appropriate health care and the need for First Nations to be directly involved with the decision-making and have equitable access to quality, culturally appropriate health services. *The Tripartite First Nations Health Plan* recognizes the importance of looking at health and wellness from a holistic perspective 'encompassing the physical, spiritual, mental, economical, emotional, environmental, social and cultural wellness of the individual, family and community.'

Traditional medicine refers to health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral-based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises. Traditional medicine follows a holistic model health. Similarities are seen between the modalities of Traditional Medicine and those of many alternative therapies that use a holistic model of health such as Naturopathic Medicine.

The FNHC along with Kahui Tautoko Consulting Ltd (KTCL) completed the Best Practices of Traditional Models of Wellness Scan March 2010. This scan was developed to help communities support Traditional and Alternative medicine practices in their health programs and to follow up on the Archive Research Project that commenced December 2009. KTCL prepared a *First Nations Traditional Models of Wellness Environmental Scan in BC* from the findings. Here is a brief summary of the final outcomes from the scan and the Archive Research Project.

### Purpose of Scan

This scan was developed to identify Traditional Models of Wellness in BC communities through:

- Definitions of Traditional Wellness Indicators
- Current practices and desired future practices
- Roles of healers and elders
- Integration of traditional practice with western practice
- Role of the First Nations Health Council in this area

- Role of alternative practices and medicines in First Nations Health Centers
- Current documentation of traditional practices and/or medicines

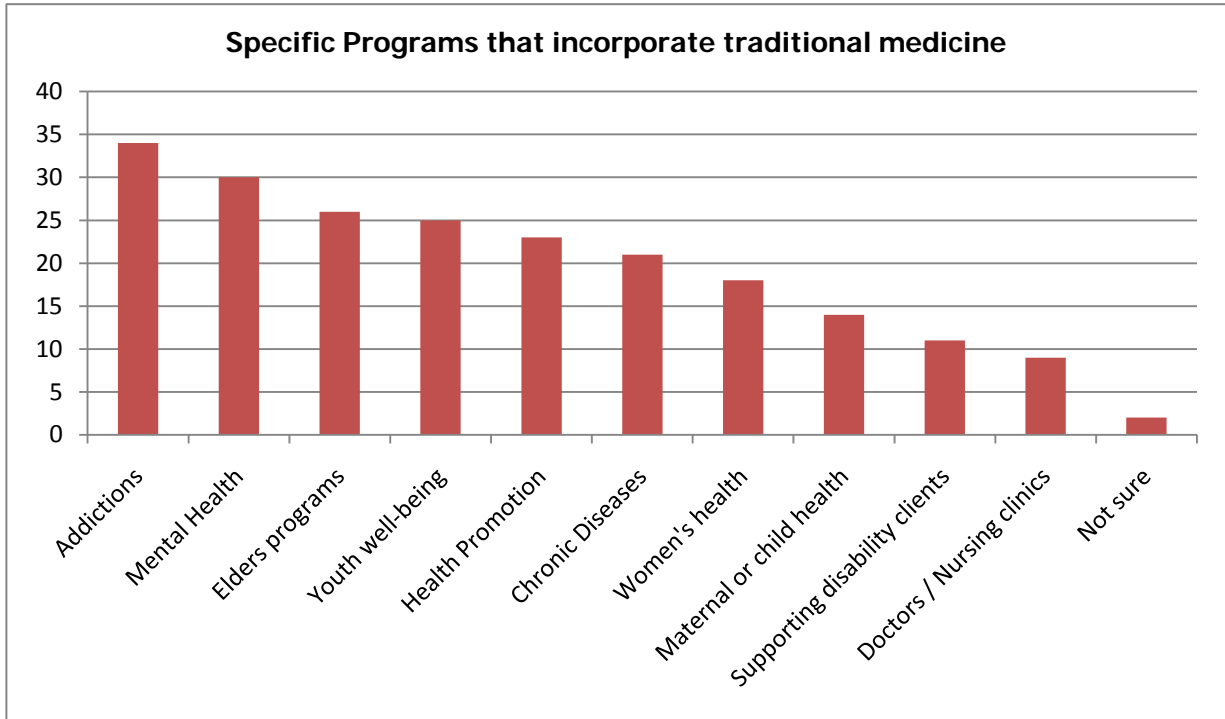
### **Summary of Scan**

Overall the scan showed positive support for Traditional Models of Wellness in the communities. In total 91 health centres responded representing 167 of the 203 communities in BC therefore 74% of the communities in BC gave their input into this scan.

Most respondents believe a traditional healer is somebody with knowledge in traditional ways, practices and culture. Currently 66% stated that they have traditional healers practicing in their communities and 33% stated that the traditional healers operate through their health centres. Moreover 55% do incorporate traditional medicines and practices into their health programs by:

- the medicine wheel being integrated into all programs;
- Healers and elders attending important meetings or gatherings (especially where they were able to have funded roles in their health centers);
- Opening and closing prayers;
- Incorporating traditional medicines, feasts and ceremonies;
- holding a sweat at least once a week;
- having gatherings where they shared and gave people a chance to talk and teach;
- having sessions with community members and staff to learn about traditional medicines in the health center;
- promoting use of traditional medicine; and
- linking clients with elders that had appropriate skills to address their needs.

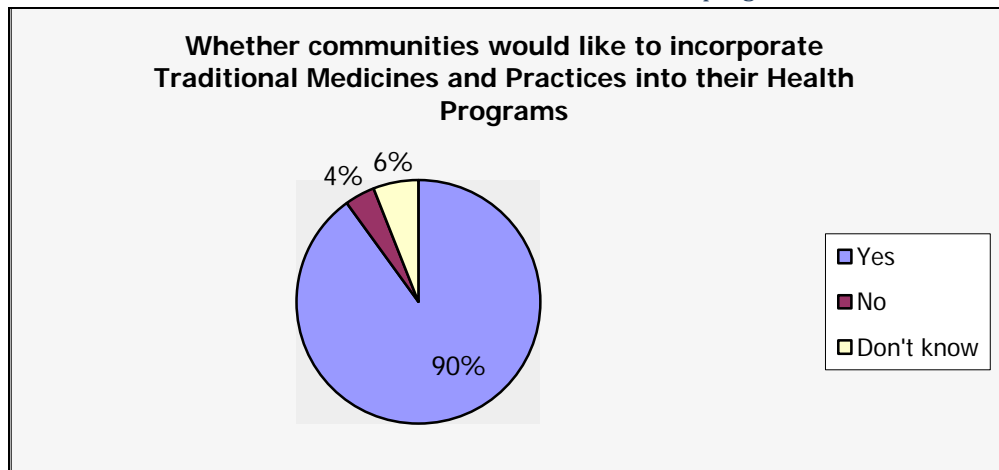
Specific programs that incorporate Traditional Medicine



Communities listed specific programs that incorporated traditional medicine and practices within their communities.

90% of the respondents said they would like to see traditional medicines and practices incorporated into their health programs; see below. Not one respondent disagreed that traditional practices and medicines would be beneficial in addressing health issues of the communities. Most of those surveyed believed it was time for Traditional Medicine to be recognized in Health Centers and that there was an over-reliance on western medicine when often it was not proven to work.

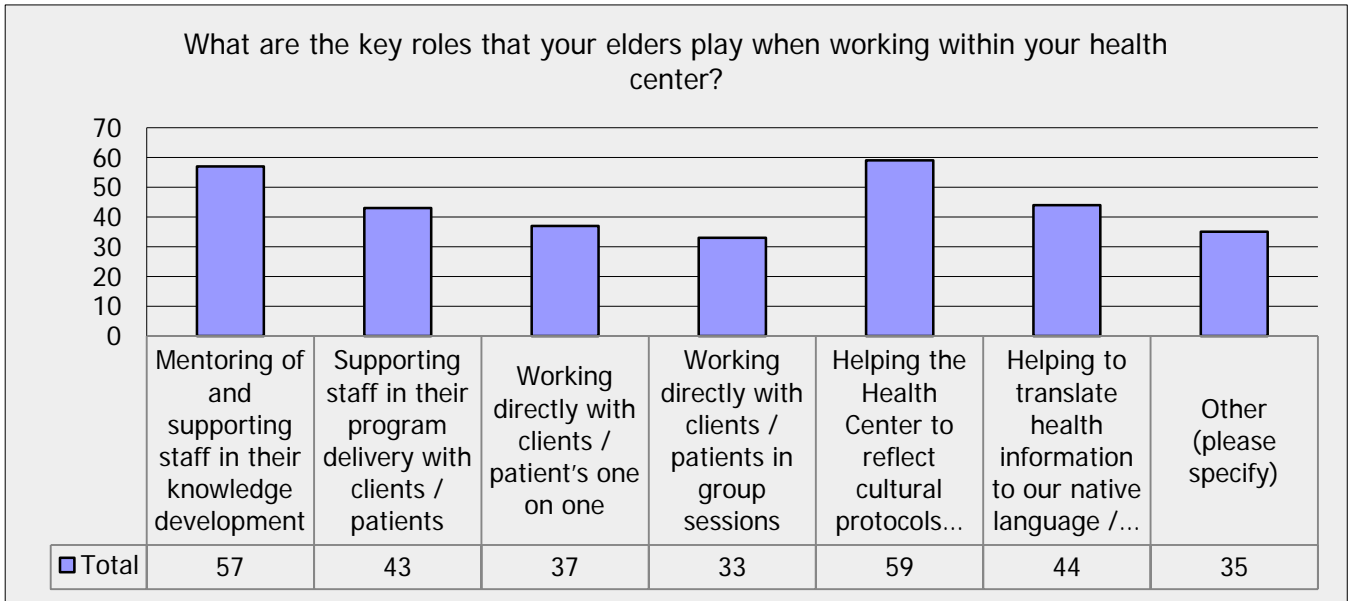
Whether Communities would like Traditional Health in their health programs



Furthermore 87% have an interest in alternative therapies, such as naturopathic medicine, that align with traditional wellness philosophies. Over half of the respondents stated that they had access to alternative therapies such as massage, chiropractic, and energy work. 77% would integrate alternative practices into their communities if they had the opportunity to do so.

Over 75% of respondents acknowledged the importance of involvement of elders into the traditional wellness of the community. This is being done in many ways but mainly through cultural protocols at the health centres and providing wisdom and knowledge while mentoring and supporting community members.

Specific Roles of Elders in Health Centers



Positively, over half of the respondents agreed that western and traditional health care practitioners worked together in their community. 85% of communities agreed there should be a professional relationship between traditional healers and western health care practitioners.

**Traditional Wellness Indicators**

Traditional Wellness Indicators were identified from a traditional perspective as a *'healthy mind, body, and spirit'*, with a connection to the land and generations past and future. Traditional wellness is practicing traditions from the past and keeping the knowledge alive.

**The main indicators for Traditional Wellness were identified as follows:**

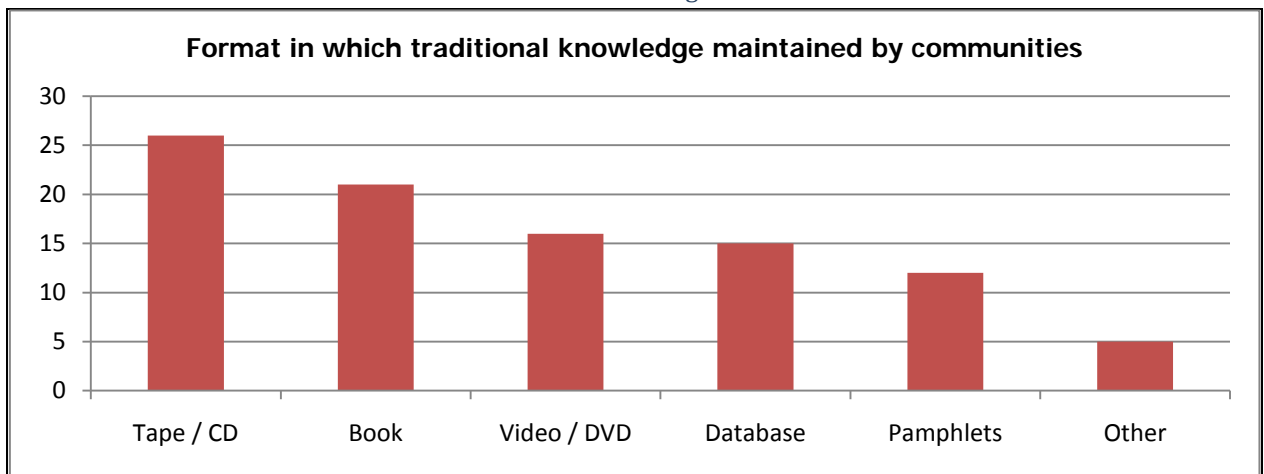
- Cultural sharing (drum classes, sweats, language classes)
- Connection with the land (medicine gathering, traditional foods (gathering berries, fishing, hunting), baths, camping)
- Healing circles

- Involvement of youth and elders in the community; integration of their knowledge into the community
- Being active and eating healthy
- Role models in the community who are drug and alcohol free
- Support from community leaders in traditional ways

### Traditional Medicine Archive Research project

A section of this scan was intended to follow up on the Traditional Medicines Archive Research Project which commenced the winter of 2009. 60% of respondents stated that traditional medicines and practices were documented in some form, usually through Tape/DVD.

Format in which communities maintain traditional knowledge



Others mentioned were hand written papers, transcripts, mapping, research and pictures.

68% of communities interviewed are interested in participating in traditional medicines/practices research. There were some concerns and barriers in sharing knowledge on traditional medicines and practices:

- trust and communication
- some feel medicines should be private and protected
- concern about commercializing knowledge
- funding

Currently communities hold their own knowledge, there has been no central database for communities to access information on local and regional traditional medicines and practices.

## **Role of FNHC in Traditional Models of Wellness**

The First Nations Health Council has a role in promoting Traditional Models of wellness. 88% of participants agree that FNHC has a role and the suggested support is in:

- Advocating for / funding of traditional medicines and practices
- Developing policy to have traditional models formally recognized
- Advocating to Federal and Provincial Government for recognition of traditional models (and to resource it accordingly). This was particularly the case with FNIH-funded health program arrangements.

## **Future Direction**

Community input has helped shaped some potential future directions of holistic wellness in the communities in BC:

- Establish a database of integrated, traditional centres in BC
- Form a traditional healer Advisory committee
- Define traditional wellness indicators
- Restructuring of MSP billing to reward interdisciplinary and integrated approaches to services

Holistic health care is an integrative approach, balancing the mind, spirit, and body. Healthcare needs to be brought around into a full circle. First Nations Traditional Medicine emphasizes the basic elements of compassion for others and for self. There needs to be a shift, moving away from a dependence model, not only in government but in health care, to allow people to take ownership for their health and to be open to a multidisciplinary approach to health. As the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Health* states “Restoring health and well-being to Aboriginal people requires services and programs founded on an integrated, or holistic view of human health”. With this mind change and shift towards ownership, comes the need for availability of alternative options in health care services that parallel similar philosophies of Traditional Medicine.