

Email

Hello everyone,

On behalf of the Women and HIV Research Program and the Women-Centred HIV Care Hub, I am writing to honour Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

As settlers, we must do more than simply acknowledge this day — we must commit to continuous learning, unlearning, and action. Here are practical ways settlers, can contribute meaningfully to Truth and Reconciliation:

Educate Ourselves and Others

Start by deepening your understanding of Canada's colonial history and its ongoing impacts on Indigenous peoples. Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Read the Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Theory with lead author Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose, one of the PIs of the Women-Centred HIV Care Hub.

Watch Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose's presentation on cultural responsiveness to deepen your understanding of ongoing efforts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uqjrtmUE&k>

Share what you learn with your family, colleagues, and networks, encouraging them to reflect on their own responsibilities in reconciliation.

Commit to Active Listening and Amplify Indigenous Voices

Instead of assuming you know what's best, prioritize listening to Indigenous voices. Support Indigenous women by reading works such as:

1. Calling My Spirit Back by Elaine Alec
2. In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience by Helen Knott
3. Becoming a Matriarch by Helen Knott

These stories are not only healing journeys but also powerful reflections on resilience. Share these works and amplify the voices of Indigenous women through your platforms, while acknowledging their experiences and perspectives.

Challenge Colonial Systems and Acknowledge Settler Privilege

Recognize the privilege you hold as a settler in benefiting from colonial systems. Examine how systemic racism and colonial policies continue to harm Indigenous communities today. Use your privilege to challenge and dismantle these systems in your daily life and professional spaces, whether by advocating for Indigenous-led policies, supporting land acknowledgments with action, or pushing for representation in decision-making bodies.

Ask yourself: How do I benefit from colonialism, and how can I use my position to support Indigenous sovereignty? Consider how you can align your personal and professional life with reconciliation efforts,

such as advocating for Indigenous land rights or integrating Indigenous perspectives into your workplace.

Elder Sheila Nyman reminds us that reconciliation is not just a day to reflect on the past but a continued responsibility to educate ourselves. We must understand that the impacts of colonization still affect Indigenous communities today. Settlers must actively work to disrupt harmful legacies, acknowledging that this is not the burden of Indigenous peoples alone.

Support Indigenous-Led Initiatives - Engage in Long-Term Commitment, Not Performative Allyship

True reconciliation is more than attending one event or wearing an orange shirt on September 30th. It's about making a long-term commitment to engage in decolonization and stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. Whether through sustained advocacy, ongoing education, or financial contributions to Indigenous initiatives, settlers need to MOVE beyond symbolic gestures.

Look for Indigenous-led programs, especially those focused on women's health, education, and cultural preservation, and support them through donations, volunteer work, or attending events. Prioritize Indigenous voices in your advocacy work, and where possible, redirect resources and opportunities to Indigenous communities rather than speaking on their behalf.

Be Humble and Open to CHANGE

Reconciliation requires humility. Be open to feedback and correction from Indigenous peoples when your actions may be harmful or misinformed. Apologize sincerely and learn from these moments. Reconciliation is an ongoing process, and we must recognize that mistakes are part of learning and growth.

As settlers, we have a responsibility to do better — to be accountable and act toward a future rooted in justice and equity for Indigenous peoples. Thank you for your commitment to these steps, and let's continue to walk this path together.

For clips from Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Framework with Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose:

1. The Legacy of Colonialism on Indigenous Health (4:36)
 - The ongoing effects of colonialism have led to severe health disparities in Indigenous communities. Systemic inequities and unmet treaty obligations (like the Medicine Chest Clause) have deepened the healthcare crisis, particularly with alarming HIV rates in Saskatchewan. Many remain undiagnosed, highlighting the urgent need for culturally appropriate, accessible healthcare.
 - **“These statistics reflect a healthcare failure that calls for immediate action to fulfill treaty obligations.”**
2. Colonial Policies and Current Health Challenges (6:40)

- Colonial policies like the Pass System created lasting health impacts for Indigenous peoples. To rebuild trust, healthcare providers must acknowledge this history and its ongoing effects.
 - **Recognizing history is the first step toward healing.**
 - **"Healthcare providers must recognize this history and its continued effects to rebuild trust."**
3. Adverse Childhood Experiences and Health Outcomes (8:10)
 - Adverse childhood experiences lead to long-term health issues for Indigenous communities, including HIV. Policies need to honor Indigenous traditions to stop perpetuating trauma.
 - **Policies must honor Indigenous ways of life.**
 - **"Policies must honor Indigenous ways of life and not exacerbate existing traumas."**
 4. The Impact of Decontextualized Birth Experiences (9:11)
 - The forced separation of individuals from their communities during childbirth has devastated traditional practices of midwives and doulas. This loss underscores how vital community support is during such a crucial life event.
 - When policies strip away these connections, they disrupt healing and well-being within our communities. It's essential to recognize the importance of context in birthing experiences.
 - **"The decontextualization of birth out of the community has been one of the most destructive things our communities have ever experienced."**
 5. Trauma-Informed Care and Culturally Safe Practices (9:43)
 - Trauma-informed care means understanding historical trauma and empowering healing. The Cultural Responsiveness Framework integrates Indigenous knowledge into healthcare.
 - **"We need trauma-informed care that acknowledges the past and empowers healing."**
 6. Restoring Indigenous Health Systems (12:15)
 - We're focused on reviving community-based health and wellness practices that have been lost due to colonization and societal disruption. By looking back at traditional systems, we can collaboratively reintegrate what once thrived.
 - Creating an ethical space for engagement between mainstream health systems and Indigenous worldviews is crucial for fostering respectful partnerships.
 - **"We must establish that middle ground for engagement between mainstream systems and Indigenous worldviews."**
 7. Transforming Service Delivery for Cultural Responsiveness (14:00)
 - We're committed to a culturally responsive approach that is trauma-informed, strength-based, and spiritually grounded. This transformation requires harmonizing Indigenous knowledge with evidence-based practices to enhance healthcare delivery.
 - The concept of 'two-eyed seeing' emphasizes the integration of Indigenous perspectives alongside Western practices, creating a future that benefits everyone.
 - **"It's not enough to simply put two approaches together; they must truly harmonize to be effective."**

8. Understanding Indigenous Healing Practices and Trauma Responses (18:11)
 - Trauma impacts us on emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical levels, often leading to hypervigilance, emotional numbing, or dissociation.
 - Indigenous healing practices, like land-based ceremonies, seek to restore balance and address trauma in a holistic way, complementing Western medical approaches.
 - **"Our medicines aren't necessarily miracles; they are protective mechanisms that harmonize and work alongside our actions."**

9. Intergenerational Trauma and Its Impact (20:21)
 - Intergenerational trauma involves the transmission of trauma across generations, affecting not only those who directly face colonial violence but also their descendants.
 - This trauma shapes emotional and behavioral patterns, often rooted in historical experiences rather than personal choices. The legacy of residential schools, where parents were separated from their children, perpetuates cycles that impact parenting skills and emotional well-being.
 - **"When your parents are kidnapped and put in a school and never allowed to learn how to parent, they can only reenact what they experienced."**

10. Health Disparities in Indigenous Communities (22:23)
 - Indigenous peoples experience significantly higher rates of PTSD, substance abuse, anxiety, and depression, increasing vulnerability to health risks like HIV.
 - Social determinants of health, rooted in the lasting impacts of colonialism, complicate access to healthcare. Geographic isolation, mistrust, and systemic inequities create barriers, particularly for Indigenous women, leading to higher rates of chronic diseases and poorer health outcomes.
 - **"Colonialism is a social determinant of health."**

11. Building Trust Through Cultural Trauma-Informed Care (27:19)
 - Culturally safe trauma-informed care is vital for fostering trust in Indigenous communities. This approach honors past traumas and Indigenous identities while promoting resilience and healing through cultural revitalization.
 - Personal experiences of loss illustrate how reconnecting with culture can transform lives. For instance, group drumming has positively impacted one speaker's son, boosting his self-identity and confidence.
 - **"I watched him change as the culture found him; I watched him become more confident and proud of who he was."**

12. Community-Led Health Initiatives (29:52)
 - Community-led initiatives are essential for driving change and enhancing health outcomes. Success stories highlight collaborations between physicians and Indigenous communities to develop care models tailored to local needs.
 - Programs focused on traditional practices like hunting, fishing, and gardening help individuals reconnect with their heritage and promote well-being.
 - **"We need to create some knowledge systems and really think about integrating traditional healing with biomedical medicine."**

13. Accountability in Indigenous Health Initiatives (36:28)

- Highlights key issues around accountability in health authority evaluations for Indigenous peoples. Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose stresses that it shouldn't be up to non-Indigenous entities to assess their performance regarding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls to action; Indigenous communities must lead these evaluations.
- Many organizations attempt self-evaluations without Indigenous input, resulting in ineffective measures and maintaining the status quo instead of driving meaningful change.
- **"It is for Indigenous people, First Nations, and Métis Peoples to say whether this is working or not working."**

14. Importance of Culturally Safe Care (37:51)

- Many report feeling unwelcome in healthcare settings, and personal stories reveal the lasting effects of past trauma on those seeking care.
- Implementing trauma-informed communication and active listening is vital, though challenging in brief appointments. Successful healthcare interactions hinge on kindness, respect, and dignity—not just cultural appropriateness.
- **"It's about kindness and respect and dignity."**

15. Call to Action for Healthcare Providers (39:51)

- A key takeaway is the urgent need for healthcare providers to engage with Indigenous knowledge and collaborate with communities for equitable care.
- Providers are called to create trauma-informed and culturally safe environments, actively reducing stigma and fostering trust through patient-centered practices.
- **"Healthcare providers must commit to creating culturally safe, trauma-informed environments."**