

Board of Health Briefing Note

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
Date: October 5, 2022.
Topic: **Land Acknowledgement Adoption**
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RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended:

1. **THAT** the Timiskaming Board of Health receive the briefing note Land Acknowledgement Adoption for consideration;
2. **AND FURTHER THAT** the Timiskaming Board of Health endorse the use of the proposed district-wide Land Acknowledgement for use by the Timiskaming Board of Health staff including at Board of Health meetings and events.

Overview

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TCR) of Canada has heard and documented the voices of many Indigenous people impacted by the residential school system.
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.
- The Ontario Public Health Standards recognizes the requirement for boards of health to engage with Indigenous communities in ways that are meaningful for them.
- The land is significant to the health and well-being of Indigenous people.
- Formal land acknowledgment practices are an example in literature of a respectful practice for Indigenous engagement.
- A Board of Health supported land acknowledgement is a small but important step toward developing and nurturing meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities and a step toward reconciliation.

Ontario Public Health Standards (2018) and Timiskaming Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019-2023

- **Health Equity, Foundational Standard:** Public health practice results in decreased health inequities such that everyone has equal opportunities for optimal health and can attain their full health potential without disadvantage due to social positions or other socially determined circumstances.¹
Standard Requirement(s) Addressed: Requirement #3: The board of health shall engage in multi-sectoral collaboration, including engagement with communities and organizations, such as Indigenous communities.¹ The Relationship with Indigenous Communities Guideline, 2018 emphasizes the importance of engaging with Indigenous communities to foster and create meaningful relationship and collaborative partnerships to work towards decreasing health inequities.^{1,2}
- **Strategic Plan 2019-2023 Strategic Directions: #1** We infuse our work with learning and passion: *we apply a health equity lens in all of our work*; **#3** We collaborate with partners to make a difference in our communities: *we nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public*

health; and #4 We adapt to address the diverse and changing local needs: *we engage in meaningful relationships that respect and respond to our cultural and linguistic diversity.*³

Background:

Ontario's public health units deliver a broad range of population health programs aimed at improving the health of the community, protecting the health of all, and ensuring everyone has equal opportunities for health. The Ontario Public Health Standards (2021) have enhanced language which explicitly calls for boards of health to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations as well as with First Nation communities.

Engagement is strongly encouraged within several health-related calls to action within the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada defines reconciliation as “. . . an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.”^{4, p.16}

Respect is one of four principles of Indigenous engagement that emerged from a literature review to identify an underlying philosophy and approach needed for local public health agencies to engage successfully and work in meaningful ways with First Nations communities. Respect focuses on the need for non-Indigenous people to understand, acknowledge, and appreciate both the history and current context of Indigenous peoples. Formal land acknowledgment practices are an example in literature of a respectful practice.⁵

In October of 2021 the Timiskaming Health Unit Board of Health received a [Briefing Note](#) '*Relationship Building with First Nation and Métis Communities in Timiskaming: A Land Acknowledgement as a Next Step*'.

As the development and use of a land acknowledgement is a step toward reconciliation, the October 2021 report to the Board outlined a need for Timiskaming Health Unit to finalize a comprehensive, district-wide Land Acknowledgement in consultation with local Indigenous partners.

Land Acknowledgements involve making a statement that recognizes the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and still call it home today.^{6,7} They help build awareness of Indigenous history and affirm the need to respect rights of Indigenous peoples set out in treaties, agreements and other constructive agreements.⁸ Land Acknowledgements have been increasingly used across Canada by governments, non-government organizations and various institutions as a practice of reconciliation and to acknowledge the legacy of historical and intergenerational harm resulting from colonial practices and policies including the residential school system and the sixties scoop. They must take place within the broader context of authentic work towards Reconciliation.

Development of a Land Acknowledgement for Timiskaming Health Unit

In finalizing a comprehensive, district-wide Land Acknowledgement, THU engaged with local First Nations and Métis partners to ensure accuracy of information, pronunciation, and interpretation. The consultation process was a small but important step in building meaningful relationships and valuable information and points for consideration were received.

As a practice, Land Acknowledgements are fluid and change in consultation with Indigenous partners as new information becomes available. Land Acknowledgements can also be amended based on the location of the meeting or event. As pointed out by local Indigenous leaders, it is the responsibility of the speaker to learn the history of the land on which the event is taking place and to acknowledge that history. Although the proposed Land

Acknowledgement is generalized to the entire THU catchment area, again, it can be adjusted accordingly to reflect the history of a specific area of the district or to reflect the personal experiences of the speaker.

Land Acknowledgement for Timiskaming Health Unit Catchment Area

We/I respectfully acknowledge that the Timiskaming Health Unit operates within the Robinson-Huron Treaty, Treaty 9 and unceded Indigenous territory, specifically within the traditional territories of Beaverhouse, Matachewan, Temagami and Timiskaming First Nations. Today these lands encompass communities with enduring presence of Algonquin, Anishnabai, Ojibwe, Cree, and Métis Peoples.

We/I acknowledge that original Peoples have been stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters since time immemorial and acknowledge that they continue to maintain this responsibility for generations to come.

With honour and respect we/I say miigwetch and affirm our commitment and responsibility to reconciliation.

Next Steps

Land acknowledgements are standard practice for local public health agencies and typically delivered verbally at the opening of each of the following:

- Board of Health meetings
- Formal meetings including virtual meetings, workshops and training sessions
- Public events or gatherings

Or in writing in each of the following:

- Website
- Publications, reports and strategic documents

It is recommended that the Board of Health approve the above Land Acknowledgement for Timiskaming Health Unit including use at Board meetings and events.

Staff will ensure the Land Acknowledgement is translated and posted on THU's website.

Staff will also create an internal Land Acknowledgement Guidance Document that will background on THU's Land Acknowledgement, when and where to use it, preparing for delivery and formal gathering and links to additional resources. Such as [camh-landacknowledgements-2022.pdf](#) This will support staff in reflecting for meaningful use of THU's Land Acknowledgement and consider our responsibilities to do the work of reconciliation before strategic meetings and formal in-person and virtual gatherings. A version will also be created for publications and some staff may opt to use the Land Acknowledgement in their email signature as well.

To support ongoing meaningful relationships that come from a place of trust, mutual respect, understanding and reciprocity, ongoing internal work will continue to further support cultural safety development and learning.

Summary

The use of a comprehensive, district-wide Land Acknowledgement demonstrates our acknowledgement of the colonial harms of the past and present and our willingness to work towards Reconciliation. Continuous engagement with Indigenous partners based on identified principles and wise practices will foster opportunities to explore meaningful action by public health towards Reconciliation and improved health and well-being outcomes.

References

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2. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2018). Relationship with Indigenous communities guideline, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Relationship_with_Indigenous_Communities_Guideline_en.pdf
3. Timiskaming Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019-2023. Retrieved from <https://www.timiskaminghu.com/145/strategic-plan>
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5. Talking Together to Improve Health Project Team. (2018). Talking Together to Improve Health: Ontario. Retrieved from <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/L/2018/lhcp-firstnations-engagement-survey-report.pdf>
6. City of Toronto. (n.d.). Land acknowledgement: What is a land acknowledgement and why do we do it? Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairsoffice/land-acknowledgement/>
7. Jones, A. (n.d.). Territory acknowledgment. Native Land. Retrieved from <https://native-land.ca/territoryacknowledgement/>
8. Government of Canada. (2021). Why implement the Declaration? Why does Canada want to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/why-pourquoi.html>