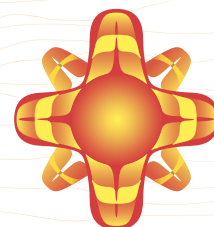


CULTURE IS HEALING

**An Indigenous
Child & Youth
Mental Wellness
Framework**



Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors
A Forum to Strengthen Our Children Our Way
ourchildrenourway.ca



Acknowledgements

The Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors (ICFSD) Society sits gratefully within the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society whose offices are located on the unceded territory of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation).

We extend our gratitude to the ICFSD Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness Steering Committee who shared their wisdom, knowledge, and experience to develop Culture is Healing. The steering committee comprised of:

ICFS Agency Representatives
ICFSD Elder Advisor
ICFSD Secretariat

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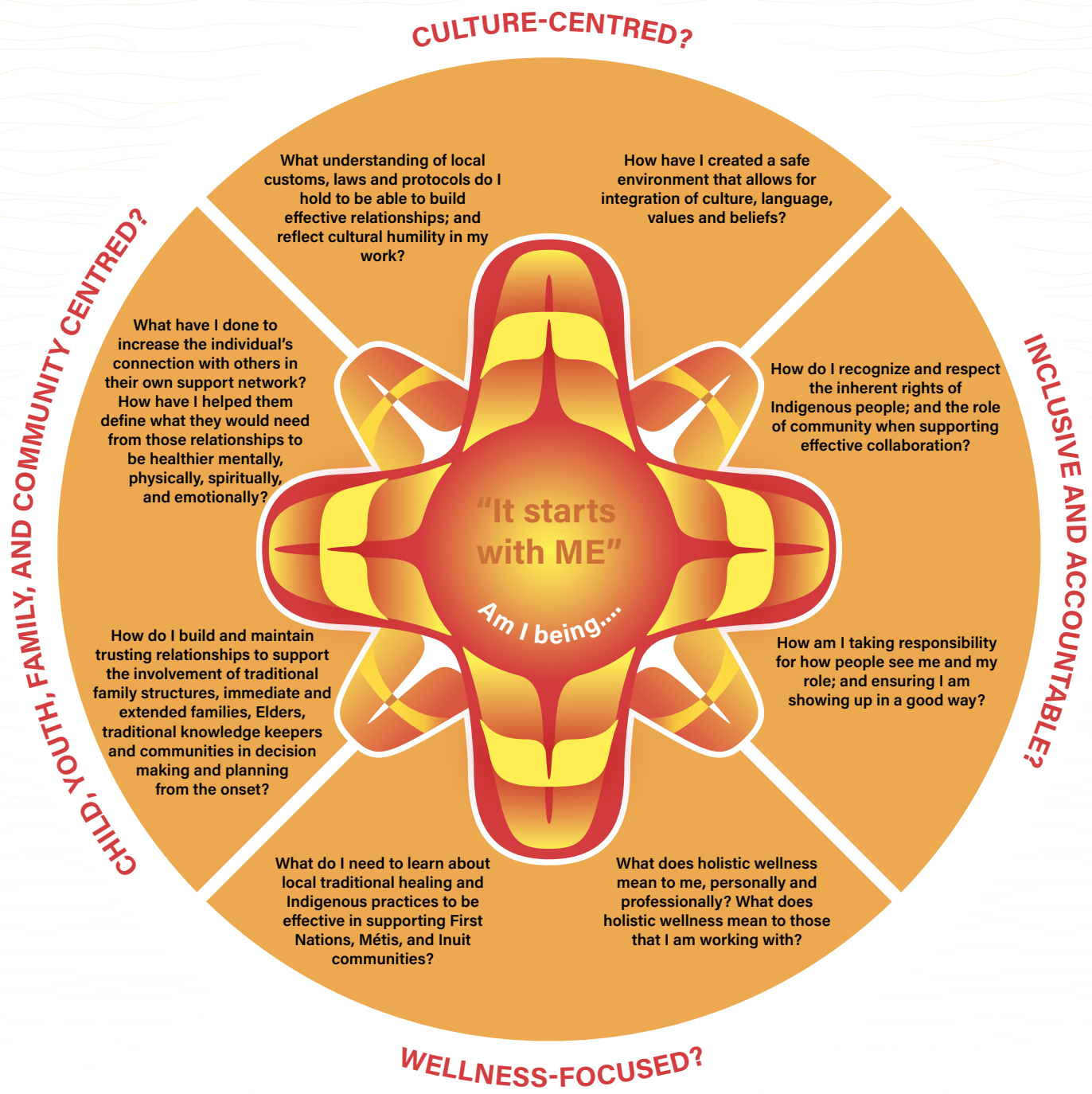
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IS HEALING



Culture is Healing is an Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness Framework developed by BC Indigenous Child and Family Service Directors and practitioners in response to the mental health crisis facing Indigenous children, families, and communities. Indigenous Child and Family Service (ICFS) agencies have been providing culturally based child and family services to over 120 First Nations communities, as well as Métis and urban populations throughout British Columbia for over 30 years. This experience has positioned Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors to expertly inform approaches to wellness that are rooted in Indigenous values and beliefs. Despite this expertise, ICFS agencies have neither been adequately resourced nor recognized to provide the full continuum of wellness supports, including for Child and Youth Mental Health.

Culture is Healing is grounded in the Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework (APPF, 2015) and shares the same goal of improving outcomes for Indigenous children, youth, families and communities through restorative policies and practices. *Culture is Healing* takes a holistic approach to wellbeing by integrating the four guiding principles drawn from the APPF and adopted by the ICFS Forum:

- Culture-Centered,
- Inclusive and Accountable
- Wellness Focused
- Child, Youth, Family and Community Centered

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Indigenous peoples have a long and rich history of thriving Nations and families, grounded in holistic well-being and supportive social, emotional, physical (medical) and cultural systems. Colonialism undermined these systems- inflicting trauma and disrupting Indigenous wellness; it continues today in new forms, including in child welfare and justice systems - as evidenced by the disproportionately negative outcomes experienced by Indigenous peoples.

The resilience, strength and responsibility Nations hold and honour in taking care of their own underpin Indigenous efforts to overcome the ongoing impacts of colonialism. As shared in *Liberating Our Children - Liberating Our Nation* (White & Jacobs, 1992), "The issue of the wellbeing of families and children is of major importance in our Nations and communities. The stories and concerns related to us are but a very small sample of a real determination by Aboriginal Nations and communities to exercise their responsibility to find resolutions that will enable our children to live a fuller and richer life."

The disproportionately negative outcomes for Indigenous peoples involved in mental wellness services has been a long-standing issue in British Columbia. For example, in 2021 First Nations people died of toxic drug poisoning at 4.8 times the rate of other BC residents in (Chief Coroner of BC, 2022). Although Indigenous peoples have demonstrated continued determination, advocacy and resilience, funding inequalities and colonial policy and practice parameters have left Indigenous organizations without the funding or autonomy to provide services in a way that aligns with their values and beliefs.

The gap in funding and culturally appropriate services persists despite multiple state of emergency declarations and calls to action by Indigenous Leaders, Nations, and organizations across BC. The current epidemic of toxic drug poisonings has hit particularly hard among Indigenous communities and has deepened the mental health crisis as many Indigenous communities' struggle to find support and treatment for their members. This is especially critical for Indigenous youth, as current mental wellness

OUR SHARED CONTEXT - KEY TERMS

The Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors (ICFSD) Society represents the 24 First Nation, Métis and urban Indigenous child and family service agencies in British Columbia (formerly known as Delegated Aboriginal Agencies). Indigenous Nations who receive services from ICFS agencies have chosen to receive child and family services from these agencies rather than from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

ICFS agencies receive their mandate to provide culturally based child and family services to their member communities through Band Council Resolutions, Métis approvals, and Urban Indigenous community endorsement.

For decades, the ICFSD have been advocating for the resumption of our own inherent authority to provide support and care for our children and youth.

To learn more about the ICFSD please visit: ourchildrenourway.ca for information and resources- such as the [ICFSD Orientation Manual](#).

Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework (APPF) is an overarching framework intended to improve outcomes for Indigenous children, youth, families and communities through restorative policies and practices.

The APPF applies to policy and practice involving Aboriginal children, youth, and families on and off reserve regardless of if they are being served by a DAA or the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Restorative policies and practices are culturally safe and trauma-informed, supporting and honouring Aboriginal peoples' cultural systems of caring and resiliency.

The APPF was endorsed by the ICFSD forum and MCFD in 2015; and is the foundation for *Culture is Healing: An Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness Framework*.

supports and services are not culturally grounded and carry additional barriers to access.

Delivering a culturally relevant continuum of supports that wrap around Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities is critical. The ICFS have routinely highlighted the urgency of addressing the lack of mental wellness and substance use services, of the need for additional and more flexible funding to ensure alignment of services with Indigenous cultures and worldviews. To date little has changed, and the crisis continues.

'Since time immemorial, this has been the responsibility of our chiefs—to take care of their own' To support our leaders in fulfilling their responsibilities, the ICFS Directors are committed to improving mental wellness supports for our children, families, and communities to thrive once again. *Culture is Healing* is a path forward to meaningfully address our mental health crisis through implementing changes at the practice and systems levels.



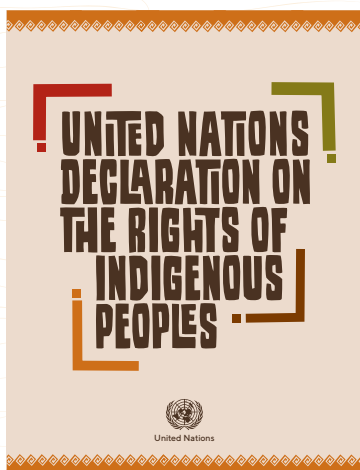
Figure 1
Timeline of the States of Emergency Declared over the Mental Health Crisis in BC (2016 -2021)

Indigenous includes individuals who identify as being First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. While preference is given to the term Indigenous in place of Aboriginal throughout *Culture is Healing*, the term Aboriginal is also used when appropriate to accurately reference or discuss existing legislation, policy, practices or programs- such as the Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework.

A Distinctions-Based Approach recognizes and respects the distinct histories, interests and priorities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

The province has formally recognized that a distinctions-based approach is needed in BC through inclusion in its [Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous People](#).

INDIGENOUS HUMAN RIGHTS



The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007, by a majority of 144 states in favour, 4 votes against and 11 abstentions. Since then, the four countries voting against UNDRIP have reversed their position and are now in support.

UNDRIP establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of all Indigenous peoples and elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of Indigenous peoples. Further, it is underscored that UNDRIP provides the minimum standards for Indigenous peoples and goes hand in hand with other human rights- not diminishing or extinguishing the rights Indigenous peoples now have or may acquire in the future (Article 45). Meaning there are several other key national and international instruments through which Indigenous Children, Youth and others have protected rights that must be considered, including the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.



The BC provincial government passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) into law in November 2019; and in March 2022 released DRIPA Action Plan which articulates specific commitments and steps the province will take between 2022 and 2027 to achieve its goals and outcomes that have been drawn from the UN Declaration. The Action Plan identifies the ministry or ministries responsible for leading the implementation of each action and highlights that all actions must be implemented in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples in BC, as described in the Declaration Act.

There is a lot of work ahead for the province to fully implement the action plan and achieve the fulfilment of these rights. Extensive inequalities within BC's health and child welfare systems have been called out for perpetuating discrimination against Indigenous peoples (e.g., *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care; At a Crossroads: The roadmap from fiscal discrimination to equity in Indigenous child welfare*). Discrimination within the child welfare system has been debilitating report; and most recently, through the ordered reform of the Child and Family Service system in the Agreement-in-Principle reached on December 31, 2021 following a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling, to which Dr. Cindy Blackstock of the First Nation's Caring Society has stated that:

“This case is about First Nations children, youth and families. It is to them that we owe a sacred duty of ensuring their safety and wellbeing. We are committed to seeing through what the residential school survivors have made their top Calls-to-Action – ending the

discrimination in child welfare and ensuring the full and proper implementation of Jordan's Principle. And there is still much work to be done."

(Blackstock, as cited in Milloy, 2021, p. 5-6)

It is essential that all practice, policy, and legislation emerge from a place of understanding, recognition, and respect of Indigenous rights to move away from these discriminatory systems. *Culture is Healing* is designed to advocate for the fulfillment of rights and provides direct guidance and support for achieving British Columbia's commitments made in Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan 2022 to 2027. These commitments include:

4.7 Demonstrate a new and more flexible funding model and partnership approach that supports First Nations to plan, design and deliver mental health and wellness services across a full continuum of care and to address the social determinants of health and wellness. (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)

4.11 Increase the availability, accessibility and the continuum of Indigenous-led and community-based social services and supports that are trauma-informed, culturally safe and relevant, and address a range of holistic wellness needs for those who are in crisis, at-risk or have experienced violence, trauma and/or significant loss. (Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)

4.12 Address the disproportionate impacts of the overdose public health emergency on Indigenous Peoples by: ... applying to the Government of Canada to decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use, and continuing campaigns and other measures to help end the stigma and shame associated with addiction; ... expanding prescribed safer supply and other harm reduction measures; and ... ensuring accessibility of recovery beds, and evidence-based, culturally relevant and safe services to

meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples, including youth. (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Ministry of Attorney General)

4.13 Increase the availability and accessibility of culturally safe substance use services, including through the renovation and construction of Indigenous-run treatment centres and the integration of land-based and traditional approaches to healing. (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)

4.14 Increase the availability and accessibility of resources to Indigenous partners in COVID-19 pandemic health and wellness planning and response, including the implementation of the Rural, Remote, First Nations and Indigenous COVID-19 Framework¹⁵ to ensure access for all Indigenous Peoples to immediate and culturally safe and relevant care closer to home. (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)

4.26 Strengthen the health and wellness partnership between Métis Nation British Columbia, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and support opportunities to identify and work to address shared Métis health and wellness priorities. (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions)

With both federal and provincial legislation affirming Indigenous human rights and the expectations set out in the provincial action plan, we are at a pivotal moment in history. The ICFSD is fully prepared to work in partnership with the province and its ministries to ensure we take advantage of the opportunities ahead of us.

The rights in the resource below are those with significant implications and considerations for reforming the Mental Wellness and Child and Family Services systems to better serve Indigenous child, youth and families. These outlined articles contribute to a total of 46 articles within UNDRIP. We encourage you to read, and reflect, on the full Declaration – it can be found here: [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

RECOGNIZING AND RESPECTING OUR INHERENT RIGHTS

Article 1	Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law
Article 2	Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their Indigenous origin or identity.
Article 3	Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
Article 7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person. 2. Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.
Article 8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture. 2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities; (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources; (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights; (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration; (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them
Article 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. 2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination. 3. States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language
Article 15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information. 2. States shall take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.
Article 18	Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 19	States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them
Article 21	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security. 2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities
Article 22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration. 2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.
Article 23	Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions
Article 24	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services. 2. Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right
Article 38	States in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the ends of this Declaration
Article 39	Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.
Article 43	The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world.
Article 45	Nothing in this Declaration may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights Indigenous peoples have now or may acquire in the future.

INTENT

ICFS Directors work with many partners in supporting mental wellness amongst Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities. ICFS agencies often work with organizations providing services in health; emergency response; psychiatric care; outreach; overdose prevention; safe injection; and public safety. Some of these partners may be working through different lens than that of ICFS agencies. The intent of *Culture is Healing* is to share with practitioners, front-line helpers, and partner organizations how to integrate the ICFSD's four principles, values, and beliefs into culturally grounded practices in their work with our families and communities. This Framework further invites those involved in decision-making, policy and legislative development to take a new shared approach in addressing our current crisis within the mental wellness system.

Culture is Healing is designed to advocate for and support the fulfilment of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of which the Province of British Columbia has been the first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt through the Declaration Act and have released the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan](#) in response.

Furthermore, *Culture is Healing* supports the principles outlined in the Agreements-in-Principle between the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (Caring Society), Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Attorney General of Canada (on behalf of Canada), Chiefs of Ontario (COO) and Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) on December 31, 2021. The Agreements-in-Principle include compensation for young First Nations people harmed by Canada's discriminatory child welfare system and future investments in First Nations communities to reform this system.

CULTURE IS HEALING

An Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness Framework

The Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors believe the changes required to create a culturally responsive Mental Wellness system for children, youth and families require full integration of our four principles:

- Culture-Centered,
- Inclusive and Accountable
- Wellness Focused
- Child, Youth, Family and Community Centered

A culturally responsive mental wellness system also needs to uphold the importance of belonging as it is a foundational piece to *Culture is Healing*. In *Skye's Legacy: A Focus on Belonging* (RCY, 2021), the domains of belonging are highlighted as key in supporting children and youth to develop a strong foundation and sense of identity. For Indigenous children and youth, a strong sense of identity is formed through the relationships they have with family, culture, community and land. Which is why the following three dimensions of belonging are essential for work in Indigenous communities: *Relational Belonging*- focusing on strong and sustainable relationships with family, extended family, friends, community, and service providers; *Cultural Belonging*- strengthening an individual through connections to ancestry, traditional customs, and support from their community through interactions with language, land, ceremonies; and *Physical Belonging*- offering a place of stability, connection, and safety.

As shared in *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* (Brendtro, 1990), through experiences of belonging – to family, community, school, and culture, young people come to discover themselves, their place in the world and their interconnections with others.

Practitioners, policy, and legislative drafters need to recognize that the domains of belonging, and our four principles are integral to how we can change our behaviours and ways of thinking to engage in innovative practice that upholds *Culture is Healing* and centers Indigenous children, youth and families.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Culture-Centered

Innovative Practice results within a “sacred space where culture can be freely expressed, shared, learned and supported” (Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, as cited in the APPF, 2015, p. 13) Indigenous Mental Wellness approaches thrive when practitioners take the time to create a culturally safe place for their work. A culture-centred approach supports the integration of cultural understandings of wellbeing, and its interconnection to family, community, culture, and land. Those working with Indigenous children, youth and families have the supporting policy, resources, and community connections needed to provide safe, culturally grounded services.

Wellness Focused

Wellness focused is ensuring practice and policy work to serve the strengths of individuals, with an understanding of culture as a defining protective factor in adverse circumstances. Practice must proactively promote holistic understandings of health and wellness and advance harm reduction approaches. Emphasis is placed on the strengths of culturally grounded practice and how practitioners and policy makers can include them moving forward.

Child, Youth, Family and Community Centered

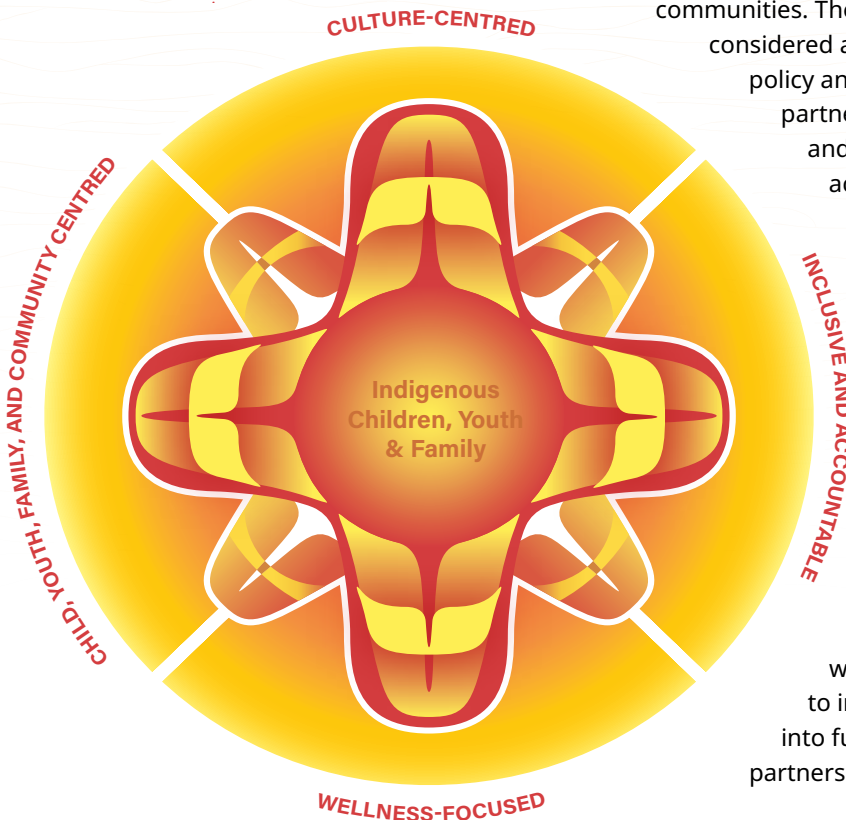
Supporting the involvement of traditional family structures, immediate and extended families, Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, customs and communities in decision making and planning from the onset; inclusive of community processes, protocols, ceremonies, values, and sacred teachings grounded in holistic wellness. Using the Circle as a strength-based and holistic way to support policies and practices to be healing and restorative.

Inclusive & Accountable

Policy and practice need to be inclusive and accountable of all practitioners and organizations that have a role to play in addressing the mental wellness of Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities. Inclusive and accountable means recognizing that solutions are found through the efforts and input of many and require a commitment to building and maintaining meaningful relationships.

The goal of Innovative Practice is to deliver the best possible culturally grounded services that promote holistic supports and strength-based approaches to intervention within a culturally safe environment to Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities. The ICFSD principles are to be collectively considered and fully integrated into all mental wellness policy and innovative practices; and meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities, Child and Family Services, and partners need to be held accountable to create a culturally safe mental wellness continuum of care for our Indigenous communities.

Culture is Healing integrates our four principles into Innovative Practice resulting in trusting and meaningful relationships being developed between helpers and people facing mental wellness challenges. Specifically, non-Indigenous practitioners need to understand and support the integration of cultural teachings and Indigenous knowledges to effectively engage in innovative practice grounded in Indigenous worldviews. Policy and legislative drafters need to incorporate these principles and approaches into future practice changes and amendments in partnership with the ICFSD and Indigenous leadership.



SYSTEM, PRACTICE & INDIVIDUAL CHANGE STRATEGIES

A key component of *Culture is Healing* is to address how we can create change to promote a strong Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness system of care. The framework draws on the First Nation's Health Authority's Policy Statement on Cultural Safety and Humility that recognizes system-wide change "it starts with me". We all must begin on the collective journey towards improving Indigenous mental wellness by first making conscientious and intentional efforts to ground our work and ourselves in the guiding principles.

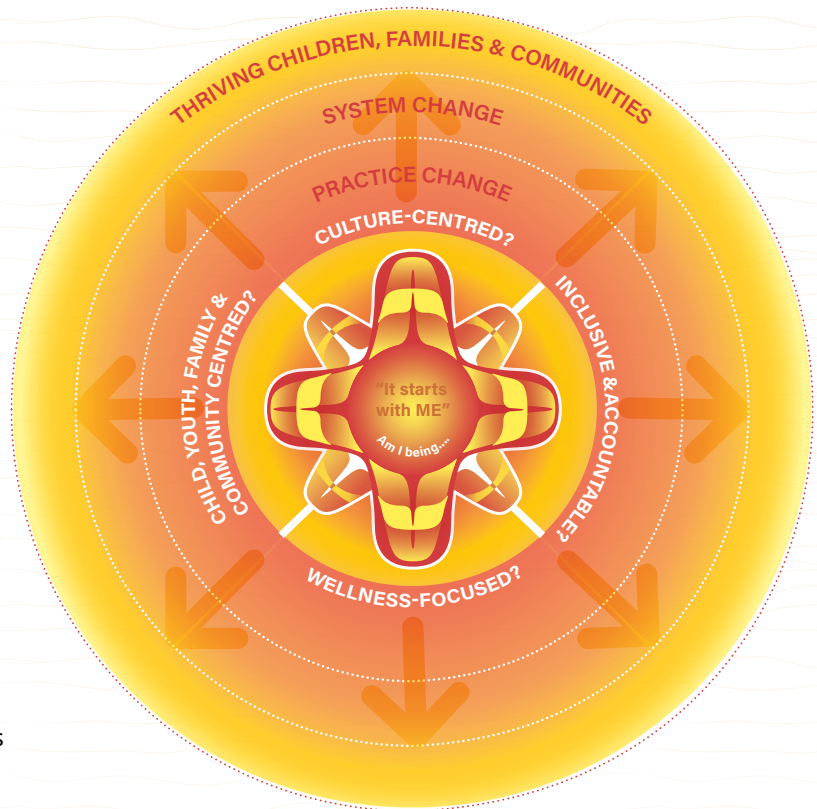
The following strategies identify areas where change is needed to support mental wellness among Indigenous children and youth. The strategies address three interconnected areas of change: system, practice, and individual change. We cannot change the trajectory and current state of crisis without working together to make this paradigm shift throughout all three levels.

System

Better outcomes for Indigenous children, youth, and families requires a systems level shift. That shift must recognize the important roles of Indigenous communities and Indigenous child & family service providers in addressing Mental Wellness and the ongoing drug toxicity crisis. Real change will require significant investments, as illustrated by the \$20 billion cost of reforming the federal First Nations Child & Family Services program.

The significant investments needed should draw from the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy's *Measuring to Thrive Framework* from *Funding First Nations Child and Family Services: A Performance Budget Approach to Well-being* (IFSD, 2020) (See Appendix B). This will promote better understanding of community needs; and highlight key areas of investment to improve the Indigenous child and family services system of care.

The system change strategies we present below highlight the ways in which the overall Mental Wellness system – particularly legislation and policy – need to integrate the approaches of the Framework. Implementation of these system level strategies further enables and supports changes needed at the practice and individual levels.



Approaches

Provincial Investments

- Federal and provincial governments must refer to the Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework and *Culture is Healing* to effectively support and engage with Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.
- As a result of the CHRT orders, our federally funded services are significantly expanded, particularly prevention services and the wrap-around supports that offer pathways to wellbeing for our children, youth, and families. The Ministry of Child and Family Development needs to adopt the principles of the CHRT orders, align with the reform principles articulated in the Agreement-in-Principle on long-term reform, and ensure provincially funded services meet the same standards as federally-funded services.
- Conduct a financial review of Indigenous mental health and wellbeing services to identify gaps and increase funding and autonomy for Indigenous-led organizations to provide services that are culturally appropriate and specific to the needs of the communities they serve.

Provincial Collaborations

- Establish in collaboration with the ICFSD a Provincial Cross Ministry Working Group and youth-led task force to develop an integrated approach to address Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness and bring a focus to the principles and approaches of *Culture is Healing*. We see the critical need to jointly develop a workplan to advance these recommendations and develop training to support implementation of this Framework.
- Partner with the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy to integrate the Measuring to Thrive Framework into new funding models and data strategies—including identifying measures that are culturally grounded and based on the best interests of the child to monitor outcomes in Indigenous mental wellness that are focused on thriving children and youth.

Research, Training and Education

- Collaboration with ICFS agencies and Indigenous organizations in research and education (e.g., curriculum development, therapy techniques) related to Indigenous counselling, mental wellness, prevention, and support services (MCFD, MoH, MMHA and Post-Secondary Institution).
- Joint training and dialogue with health providers and community partners on Indigenous anti-racism, structural and individual discrimination, and how to integrate a *Culture is Healing* approach (MCFD, MoH, MMHA, FNHA)
- Provincial and national monitoring and reporting of current statistics of Indigenous children and youth, including for overdose rates, suicide rates, out-of-home placement rates, number of moves in care, children placed with kin and/or Indigenous families in their community.
- Direct increase of resources and training for restorative practices and sharing of culture and wellness teachings (i.e., parenting, relationships) that are innovative in reaching communities, such as through social media and other platforms with children, youth, and families (urban and non-urban).

Service Delivery

- Needs-based, wraparound prevention services and resources focused on land-based, family and intergenerational healing are needed to support a culture-centered approach
- Increase service availability and accessibility for:
 - Specialized services for children and youth with support needs (e.g., FASD, substance misuse, trauma, and mental health diagnosis)
 - Treatment services focused on multi-generational trauma, substance misuse, grief, and loss
 - Culture and land-based family healing
- Establish regional Indigenous youth treatment centres across BC increase access for post-treatment care/supports
- Increase supervised consumption spaces across our province, with consideration for increased access for those under 18.
- Increase access and availability of youth supported housing
- Increase funding, resources and capacity for ICFS agencies and Indigenous-led organizations to share and uplift wise practices that are reflective of a Culture is Healing approach.
- Provincial policy and funding need to uphold and recognize the integral roles of Elders as knowledge keepers and how they support wellbeing and healing in service delivery. All service providers across sectors need to ensure this is financially supported.

Practice

A *Culture is Healing* approach to Mental Wellness is relational, holistic and focuses on the wellness of the person, as well as the wellness of their relationships with family, community, culture, and land as they are intrinsically woven together. Culture is the foundation of wellness—we must recognize that all intervention should begin from a cultural perspective and emerge from it. Practice change strategies are intended to guide practitioners in taking this new shared approach that will better support our Indigenous children, youth, and families through engaging in innovative practice that is grounded in *Culture is Healing*.

Approaches

- Practitioners take a trauma-informed approach incorporating the three key elements of:
 - (1) **REALIZING** the prevalence of trauma.
 - (2) **RECOGNIZING** how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including its own workforce; and
 - (3) **RESPONDING** by putting this knowledge into practice.

(SAMHSA, as cited in the APPF, 2015, p. 29)

Circle:

Refers both to a group and to a process whereby a group of people come together as a Circle to collectively plan, make decisions, and commit to action that will ensure the safety, support and well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families.

Appreciative Inquiry:

The primary principles are that inquiry starts with appreciation; the questions it addresses should be tested out in practice; it should create new knowledge compelling to those involved; and it should be collaborative, involving system members in the design and execution of the inquiry.

(Bushe and Kassam, 2005)

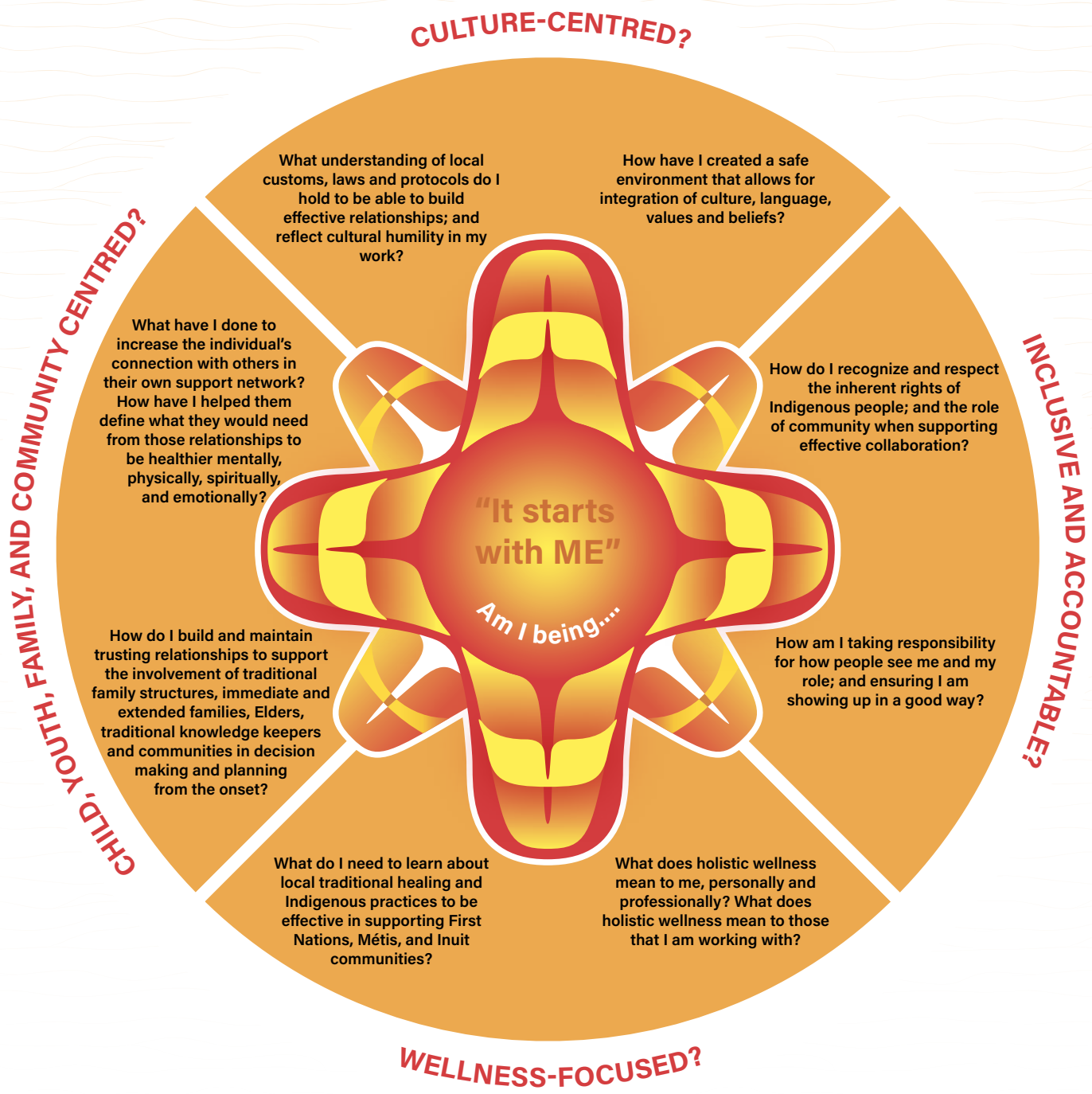
- Practice needs to shift to honour and uphold **circle** processes and uphold spaces where culture can be expressed, shared, cultivated and supported across all service lines.
- Practitioners take an **appreciative inquiry** approach to understanding the strengths of individuals, families, and communities and how these strengths can be built upon.
- To build upon the existing strengths of individuals, families and communities, practitioners need to integrate an appreciative inquiry approach into their practice. Increase opportunities for community voices to be included in their planning and engagement with children, youth, and communities.

Individual Change – ‘It starts with me’

The four guiding principles of being culture-centred, inclusive, and accountable, wellness focused, child, family, youth, and community centred can be viewed as a set of protocols for how to show up in a good way when providing mental wellness services to Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.

Practitioners, policy, and legislative drafters should engage in ongoing reflexive practice to consider how you can integrate the key sources and principles highlighted in the Framework into your own work; and ultimately ask yourself *‘how am I showing up in a good way to work with and for Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities?’*.

To assist you with this, the framework offers a set of reflective questions on the following page to support preparation for practice.



PROMISING PRACTICES

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF- MAINTAINING A CULTURE IS HEALING APPROACH

The Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services (SCCFS) leadership team always encourages the agency at large to think about how they are not only on the traditional territories of the lək'wəŋən people, but also that they (and all Indigenous cultures) had systems in place to care for and protect their children and youth and that the safety of children is not new to our people. Colonization and child welfare-systems-were forcefully imposed onto our people – destroying the intricate systems that worked since the beginning of time. Their team is reminded that when talking about our children, youth, families, and community to speak as if they are with them in the room – to speak with respect and mindfulness of our words. Staff are supported by being reminded that every single member of their team should feel proud to be Indigenous and remember that they are experts too. For cultural grounding and starting the day in a good way, a drumming circle is held every morning.

Bi-weekly, SCCFS hosts Feeding Our Spirits in the Workplace, which creates time and space for staff to care for their spirits and wellness during working hours. Staff come together to drum, to sing, to share cultural teachings and at times traditional foods. Guest speakers from various Nations have also been invited in to share their cultural teachings, including many presentations from local Knowledge Keepers to ensure that SCCFS always remains mindful about the territory it is located upon. This is a time for staff to focus on themselves, their spirits, and their wellness.

CULTURE IS HEALING IN PRACTICE

In November 2020, Carrier Sekani Child and Family Services (CSFS) opened Sk'ai Zeh Yah "Children of Chief's House" Centre in Prince George. Sk'ai Zeh Yah aims to be a place where children and youth can try new skills, make mistakes and still be welcome. At the centre's opening CSFS Director Mary Teegee shared an anecdote about a study in which youth who had overcome addiction and homelessness were asked how they were able to come to wellness. Teegee recounted how the youth involved in the study consistently replied that, "they had one person who could be counted on, someone they could always go to and not be judged." This is the exact void that Sk'ai Zeh Yah aims to fill by providing a family-like atmosphere for the children and youth who have lived experience of being in care or unstable households.

There are two complimentary programs at the Sk'ai Zeh Tah Centre: the Walk Tall program and the Youth Drop-in Centre. The Walk Tall Program, which pre-dates that Sk'ai Zeh Yah Centre, is for school-aged children aged 8-18. The second part of the Centre is a drop-in style Youth Centre that is open 7 days a week. Walk Tall is an afterschool program grounded in Carrier values and customs for children and youth aged 8-18: junior (8-12) and senior groups (13-18). In the Walk Tall program, Indigenous children and youth participate in programming in the areas of culture, recreation, prevention and education, and youth leadership and development. The Walk Tall program also ensures that poverty and food insecurity are not barriers to participation by picking the children and youth up from school and sharing a meal together before programming begins. Participants can also make a lunch for school the following day. There is an Elder mentoring program as many children and youth are living away from family or are in care. Programming is aimed at prevention by providing the knowledge, skills and a sense of belonging to Indigenous children and youth who are carrying the weight of intergenerational trauma, grief and loss.

Lastly, care extends outside of the Center doors: if a service cannot be provided at Sk'ai Zeh Yah, rather than send the youth out the door with a referral, staff will drive or walk with the youth where they need to go, much like a caring relative would do. So many Indigenous children and youth have been denied the stable and safe homes required to build the confidence and skills required to live well.

By providing a low barrier family-like setting and by providing the basic necessities of life without judgement, Sk'ai Zeh Yah aims to create a place where Indigenous children and youth can build their skills, connect with culture and gain the confidence to Walk Tall into the next phase of life.

SUMMARY

Culture is Healing builds on the principles in the APPF and identifies strategies to shift the Child and Youth Mental Wellness system into an inclusive and accountable; culture-centred; child, youth, family, and community focused; and wellness focused system. These mental wellness practice and system changes are needed now to support Indigenous children, youth and families in their journeys' to reclaiming wellness, and for us all to collectively come back to a place where all Nations and communities are thriving.

We invite those involved in practice, policy, and legislative development to join us in taking a new shared approach, using the Culture is Healing framework to change the trajectory of Indigenous child, family, and community mental wellness.

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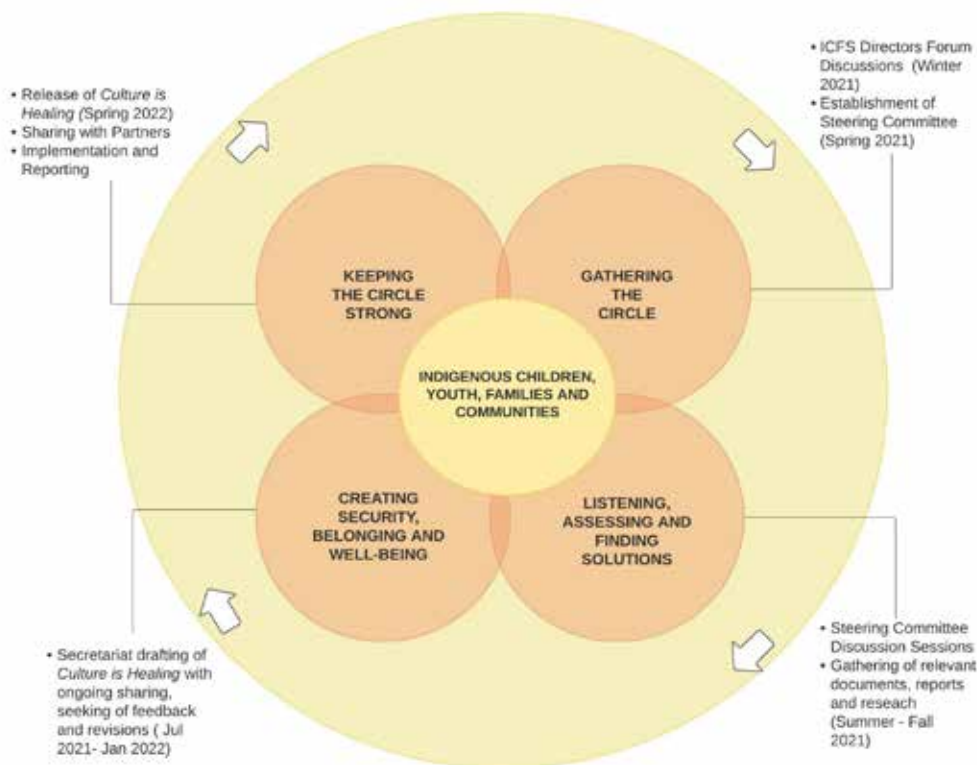
APPENDIX A DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The APPF is the foundation for *Culture is Healing: An Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness Framework*. It has been integrated through adoption of the ICFS's four guiding principles and drawing from the Circle Process in our development process.

THE CIRCLE as a RESTORATIVE PROCESS: The Circle process, which is grounded in our shared context, our values and our foundations, provides a pathway towards improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities through restorative policy and practice. The Circle process brings people together to collectively plan, make decisions and commit to action that will ensure the well-being of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities.

The Circle process – with Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities at the centre – includes Gathering the Circle; Listening, Assessing and Finding Solutions; Creating Security, Belonging and Well-being; and Keeping the Circle Strong. If the Circle process is followed and grounded in all the framework's components, it will lead to a model that is: Child, Youth, Family and Community-Centred; Culture-Centred; Culturally Safe; Inclusive, Collaborative and Accountable; and focused on Resiliency, Healing and Wellness.

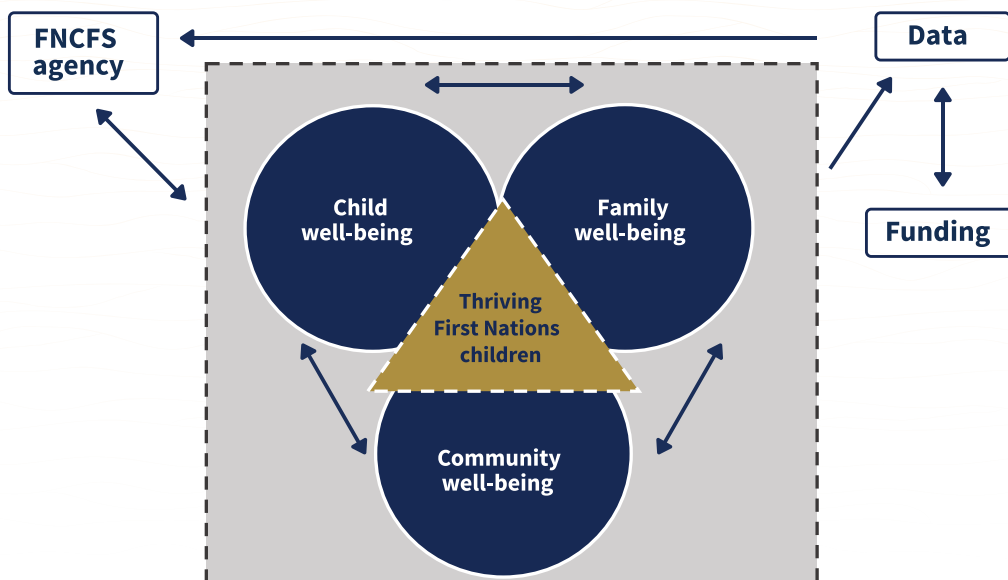
(APPF, p. 4)



APPENDIX B MEASURING TO THRIVE FRAMEWORK, INSTITUTE FOR FISCAL STUDIES AND DEMOCRACY

The **Measuring to Thrive Framework** offers a perspective on the well-being of First Nations children, families, and communities in keeping with the legislatively defined principles of substantive equality, the best interests of the child, and a culturally informed approach.

The intent of Measuring to Thrive is to provide First Nations Child and Family Service agencies with a portrait of the people they serve and the context in which they operate to support enhanced decision-making and eventually, to better inform funding approaches. What you measure, you manage. This framework is a tool to promote better understanding of community in order to ensure an agency has the resources required to meet the needs of the people it serves. Measuring to Thrive is a vision to promote better results for children; it is not about measuring an agency's individual performance.





Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors

A Forum to Strengthen Our Children Our Way

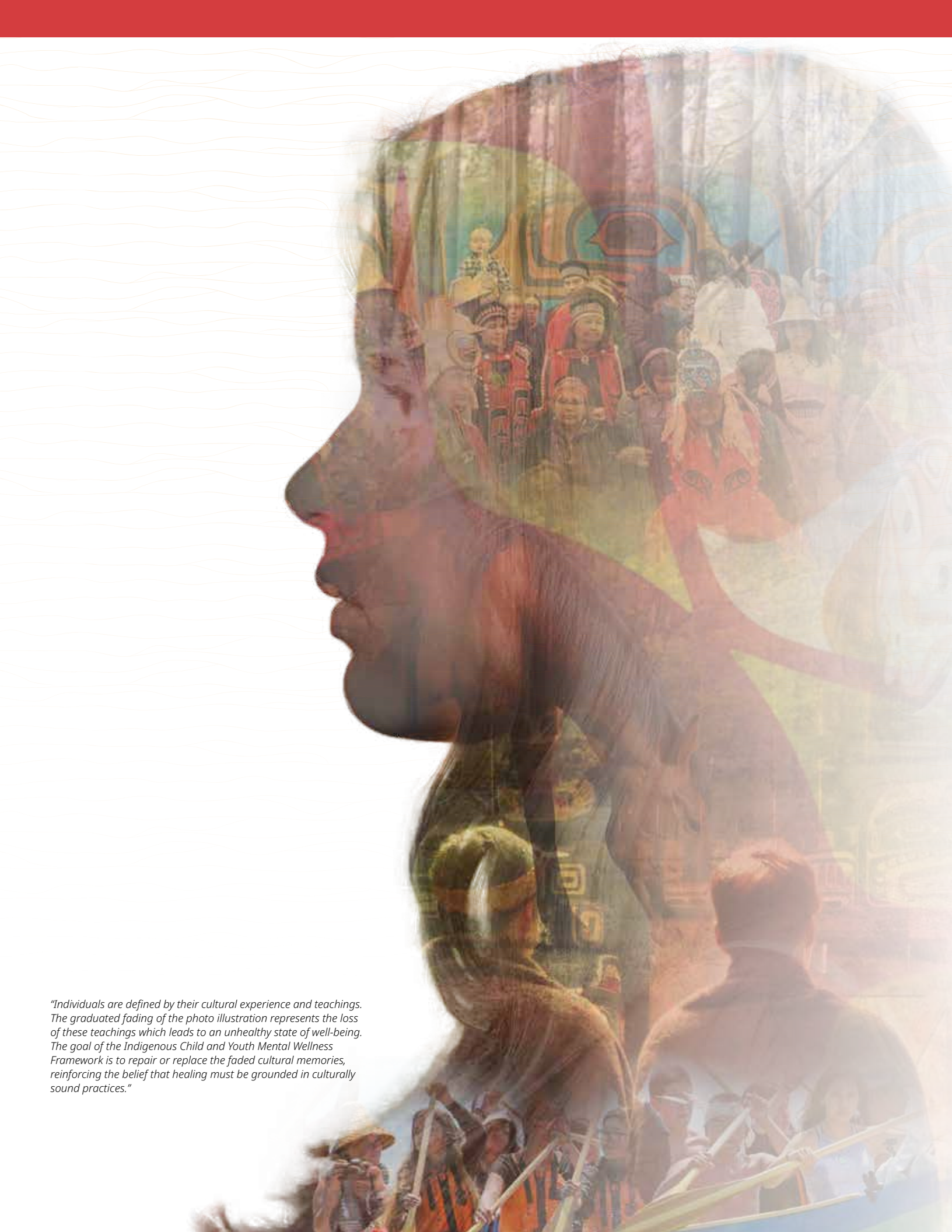
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CULTURE IS HEALING: AN INDIGENOUS CHILD & YOUTH MENTAL WELLNESS FRAMEWORK

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"Individuals are defined by their cultural experience and teachings. The graduated fading of the photo illustration represents the loss of these teachings which leads to an unhealthy state of well-being. The goal of the Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Wellness Framework is to repair or replace the faded cultural memories, reinforcing the belief that healing must be grounded in culturally sound practices."



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