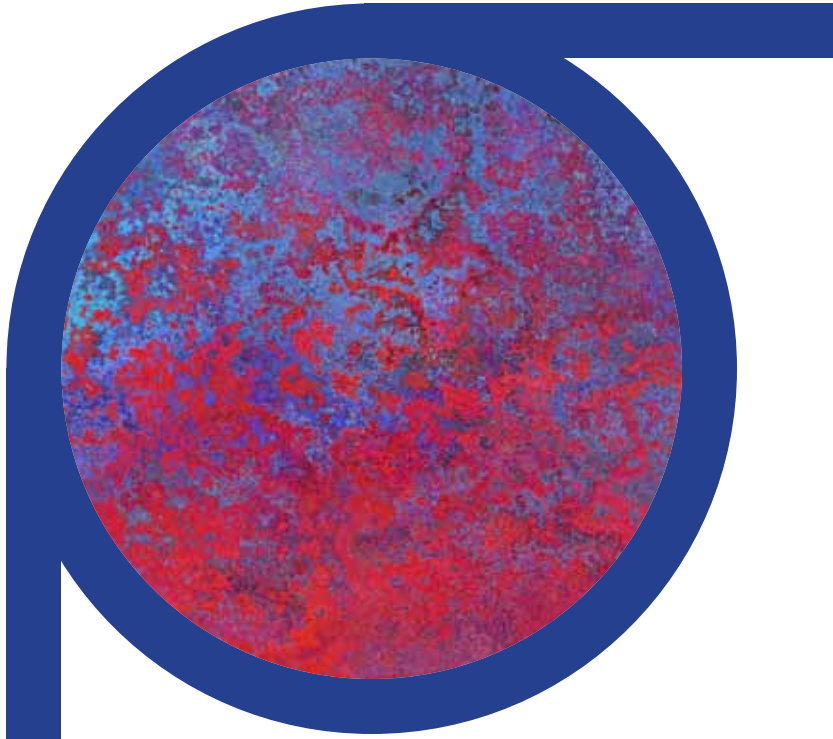
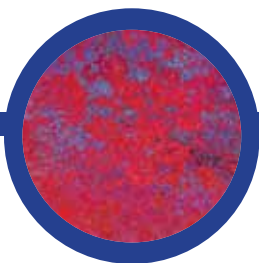


# INDIGENOUS APPROACHES TO FASD PREVENTION



**WELLNESS**



## INTRODUCTION

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) affects individuals whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy, and can include lifelong physical health problems, behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities.

In many parts of the world, Indigenous communities have taken a leadership role in developing collaborative and culturally relevant approaches to addressing alcohol use during pregnancy. These approaches recognize the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of alcohol use during pregnancy. They also work to promote Indigenous women's health and wellness overall.

This booklet provides a brief introduction to how activities and interventions to support individual and community wellness can help prevent FASD.

This booklet is intended as a starting place for individuals, organizations, and communities who are interested in learning how they can be involved in supporting FASD prevention in Indigenous communities in ways that are respectful of history, culturally aligned and supportive of Indigenous self-determination and cultural resurgence.



# HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO FASD PREVENTION

While there is enormous diversity globally in Indigenous worldviews, traditions, and cultural practices, most Indigenous peoples view wellness from a holistic point of view that promotes balance between the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of life.

For example, Elder Jim Dumont has defined wellness as: “Wellness from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one’s connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment.”<sup>1</sup>





▶ **LEARN MORE**  
Indigenous Wellness Framework  
<http://thunderbirdpf.org>

Holistic approaches based on promoting individual and community wellness have guided FASD prevention activities in many Indigenous communities. Holistic approaches make connections between alcohol use and pregnancy and diverse aspects of women's lives, including their connections to family and community.

Many approaches move beyond a focus on alcohol use or pregnancy and look at women's health overall. FASD prevention is then incorporated into family planning, safe sexual practices, HIV/AIDS prevention, violence prevention, and contraceptive choices.

### **NIMI ICINOHABI PROGRAM**

Nimi Icinohabi Program is a school-based substance use prevention program developed by the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation in Alberta. It includes the community's cultural beliefs, values, language and visual images. The program is an example of a preconception initiative as it addresses alcohol use before pregnancy by helping to build life skills in children and youth.<sup>2</sup>



**LEARN MORE**

Canada Best Practices Portal

<http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca>







Harm reduction programs are an important strategy for preventing FASD. Harm reduction approaches focus on “meeting women where they are at” and take a pragmatic approach to preventing FASD. Rather than focusing on abstinence from alcohol and other substance use, women are given choices about what aspects of their health they would like to address first and individualized approaches to mental wellness are explored.

If women are pregnant and not ready to stop drinking, harm reduction approaches create other opportunities for reducing the harmful effects of alcohol on a fetus, including improving nutrition, reducing other substance use, accessing safe housing, and reducing stress.



▶ **LEARN MORE**  
Harm Reduction and Pregnancy: Community-Based Approaches to Prenatal Substance Use in Western Canada  
<http://bccewh.bc.ca>



Connection to land has been shown to be important to women’s health in a number of ways. Land can provide a sense of belonging, provide the environment in which to practice cultural traditions, and provides the physical context for housing and home.<sup>3</sup>

Indigenous women have also drawn clear connections between the health of their bodies and the health of land, food, water, and climate. Reproductive health and environmental health activists have shown how promoting mental wellness requires a holistic approach to issues such as sexual violence, reproductive health, and alcohol and substance use.<sup>4-6</sup>

In some Indigenous communities, discussions about preventing FASD have included topics such as access to contraception and ensuring that Indigenous women’s choices are not limited by personal circumstances such as poverty or distance from health care services.

Movements towards reproductive health and justice have included bringing together Indigenous and Western knowledge and practices about sexuality and health and the development of culturally safe reproductive health services. Culturally-relevant FASD prevention activities are increasingly recognizing how Indigenous women’s choices about having children have been affected by racist and colonial policies. FASD prevention can have an important role in supporting Indigenous women to have access to information and services that allow them to make decisions that are right for them.<sup>7</sup>

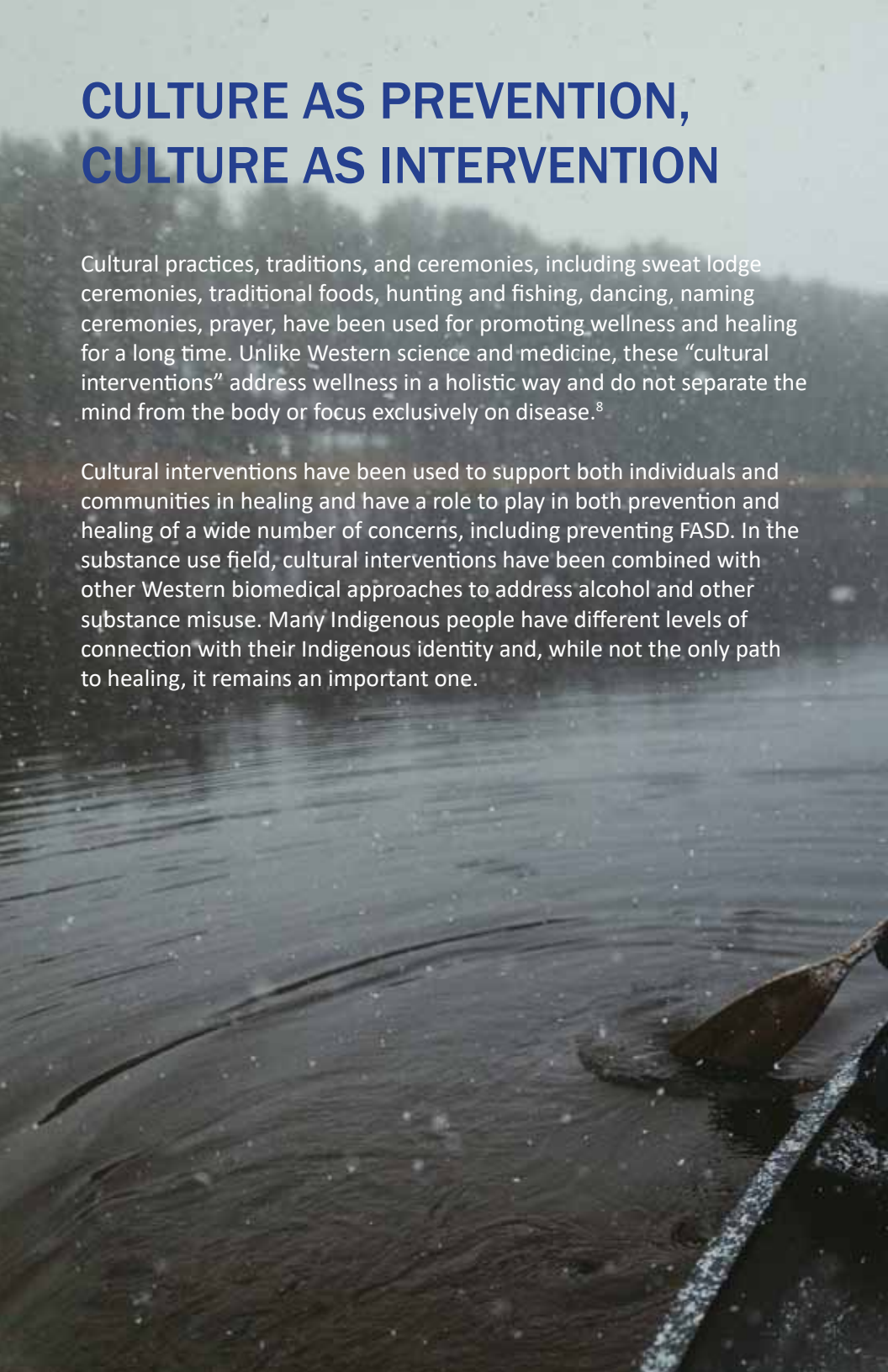


▶ **LEARN MORE**  
First Nations Women’s Healing: Moving from Hardship to Resilience  
<http://bccewh.bc.ca>

# CULTURE AS PREVENTION, CULTURE AS INTERVENTION

Cultural practices, traditions, and ceremonies, including sweat lodge ceremonies, traditional foods, hunting and fishing, dancing, naming ceremonies, prayer, have been used for promoting wellness and healing for a long time. Unlike Western science and medicine, these “cultural interventions” address wellness in a holistic way and do not separate the mind from the body or focus exclusively on disease.<sup>8</sup>

Cultural interventions have been used to support both individuals and communities in healing and have a role to play in both prevention and healing of a wide number of concerns, including preventing FASD. In the substance use field, cultural interventions have been combined with other Western biomedical approaches to address alcohol and other substance misuse. Many Indigenous people have different levels of connection with their Indigenous identity and, while not the only path to healing, it remains an important one.





# CONNECTING WITH CULTURE: GROWING A WELLNESS FLOWER

The *Connecting with Culture: Growing Our Wellness* resource ([tinyurl.com/GrowingOurWellness](http://tinyurl.com/GrowingOurWellness)) includes a Facilitators Handbook and a Client Activity Guide.

It was developed by Colleen Anne Dell and a team of researchers based at the University of Saskatchewan in partnership with the Native National Addictions Partnership Foundation. Led by Carol Hopkins and Elder Jim Dumont, the group visited communities across Canada to talk about ways of connecting to Indigenous culture as a pathway to healing.

During one of the visits, Elder Gladys Wapass-Greyeyes shared a story about a growing flower as a way to think about connecting further with culture. The growth and beauty of a flower can symbolize the renewal of culture for Indigenous people.

The activity book contains simple step-by-step exercises to help individuals think about how to connect with culturally based supports to increase wellness.

► **LEARN MORE**  
Growing Our Wellness Activity Guide  
<http://thunderbirdpf.org>



PHYSICAL WELLNESS  
INVOLVING THE

**BODY**

CREATES PURPOSE

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS  
INVOLVING THE

**SPIRIT**

CREATES HOPE

MENTAL WELLNESS  
INVOLVING THE

**MIND**

CREATES HEARING

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS  
INVOLVING THE

**HEART**

CREATES BELONGING



THE GROWTH OF A  
FLOWER IS LIKE THE  
RENEWAL OF CULTURE  
AND WELLNESS FOR  
MANY PEOPLE.

MY FAVORITE CONDOM FLAVOR IS...



SALMON

#RESPECTYOURSELF  
#PROTECTYOURSELF  
#BEPROUDOFYOURCULTURE

[WWW.NATIVEYOUTHSEXUALHEALTH.COM](http://WWW.NATIVEYOUTHSEXUALHEALTH.COM)



MY FAVORITE DENTAL DAM FLAVOR IS...



SWEETGRASS



#RESPECTYOURSELF #PROTECTYOURSELF  
#BEPROUDOFYOURCULTURE

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# CULTURAL APPROACHES TO SAFER SEX

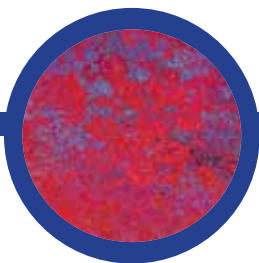
The Native Youth Sexual Health Network is an organization by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice throughout the United States and Canada. The Network is led by and for Indigenous youth under the age of 30.

One of the central activities of the Network is to provide culturally safe sex education. All of their activities recognize how sexual health is connected to healthy relationships and violence prevention, substance use and harm reduction, HIV/AIDS prevention and youth and human rights.

This holistic approach to supporting mental wellness addresses contraception, alcohol use, pregnancy planning and other areas of FASD prevention at the individual and community levels.

Internet memes are one fun tool the Network has used to share sexual health information and support connections to culture.

▶ [LEARN MORE](#)  
Native Youth Sexual Health Network  
[www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com](http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com)



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does FASD prevention connect to sexuality, contraception, self-esteem, and cultural identity?
2. What do you already know about the role of harm reduction approaches in preventing FASD? If you struggle with the concept of harm reduction, how can you learn more about the effectiveness of these approaches and programs? How might harm reduction align with Indigenous ways of healing?
3. What cultural interventions can you think of (e.g., ceremonies, traditional foods, talking circles)? How do they support healing and mental wellness?
4. What does a holistic approach to FASD prevention look like for you? For your community? What are the most important factors or issues to consider? In what ways is it helpful or unhelpful to narrowly focus on alcohol use during pregnancy?

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# Indigenous Approaches to FASD Prevention

This resource grew out of the Dialogue to Action on Prevention of FASD held in May 2017 that was co-organized by the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, and the Canada FASD Research Network. The event was held in Vancouver, British Columbia on the Unceded Territories of the Coast Salish Peoples including the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwu7mesh (Squamish), Sto:lō and Səl'íl' Iwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

This meeting brought together experts from across Canada working in the areas of prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Indigenous health and wellness to discuss opportunities for collaborative action on Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call-to-Action #33. Together, participants developed a Consensus Statement which includes eight tenets for how the Call could be met. The full text of this Consensus Statement can be downloaded from the following organizations:

[www.canfasd.ca](http://www.canfasd.ca) | [thunderbirdpf.org](http://thunderbirdpf.org) | [www.bcewh.bc.ca](http://www.bcewh.bc.ca)