

Interweaving Relationality – Inawendiwin (Connection)

Women Revitalizing Resurgence and Reciprocity

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous women’s leadership in medicine, health, and education continues to flourish across generations despite the enduring pressures of colonialism and industrialized care. This article interweaves storywork and conversational methods to illuminate seven interconnected, primarily women-led perspectives intersecting with the Center for Indigenous Land-Based Education, Research, and Wellness at x^wcičəsəm, at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver: The Medicine Camp; the Medicine Collective; the Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy Collective; the ekw’i7tl Doula Programs; Women’s Wellness Gathering; Water Collective, and the Matrilineal Mentorship Collective. These sites address decolonial trauma, environmental justice, and food sovereignty through practices that restore reciprocity among land, body, memory, and community. We present a five-practice framework—research coordination, protocol engagement, preparation and access, application on the land, and reflection and storywork—as a model for weaving Indigenous relational ethics into education, health, and policy. We conclude with recommendations for Indigenous-led governance in health, and higher education as pathways toward planetary wellbeing.

Keywords: Indigenous women, resurgence, relationality, land-based education, matriarchal leadership, reciprocity, knowledge translation

Introduction

This article emerges from long-term, primarily women-led work at the Medicine Camp in rural Manitoba. It traces forward to the Center for

Indigenous Land-Based Education, Research, and Wellness (CLERW) at x^wcičəsəm (“hw-ts’its’usum” in the hənqəmīnəm language) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and allied community sites across the Prairies and Pacific Coast.³

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Its pedagogical foundation draws on place to examine how agency circulates through human and non-human worlds in the creation and maintenance of society from an Indigenous point of view.^{4,5,6}

Through processes of colonization, the corruption of the essential bond between the feminine and land has severed how this agency manifests in society.^{7,8,9} This work includes the voices of participants compiled through critical ethnography, oral histories, storywork, and conversation methods.^{10,11,12,13}

Vanessa Watts compares the colonial epistemological-ontological divide with the Indigenous conception of Place-Thought, arguing that colonial frameworks render

agency exclusive to humans, thereby removing non-human agency from what constitutes a society.¹⁴ It is in this limited space of human-only thought that colonial tactics of violence against Indigenous territory and Indigenous women are most rampant; this is accomplished in part by mythologizing Indigenous origin stories and separating communication and treaty-making from historical agreements held with the animal world, the sky world, and the spirit world. Thus, for colonialism to operationalize itself, it must attempt to make Indigenous Peoples stand in disbelief of themselves and their histories. This work reaffirms the sacred connection between place, non-human, and human to access Indigenous ways of knowing

⁴ Jennifer M. Redvers, “‘The Land Is a Healer’: Perspectives on Land-Based Healing from Indigenous Practitioners in Northern Canada,” *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 15, no. 1 (2020): 90–107, <https://doi.org/10.32799/ijih.v15i1.34046>.

⁵ Tabitha Robin, “Land, Kinship, and Healing,” *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* (2001).

⁶ Alannah Young and Denise Nadeau, “Embodying Indigenous Resurgence: ‘All Our Relations’ Pedagogy,” in *Sharing Breath: Embodied Learning and Decolonization*, ed. Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2018).

⁷ Lydia Ayame Hiraide, “Land of Indigenous Feminist Resurgences,” *The Feminist Center*, 2024, <https://thefeministcenter.org/land-of-indigenous-feminist-resurgences-with-dr-leane-betasamosake-simpson/>.

⁸ Cutcha Risling Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms & the Revitalization of Women’s Coming-of-Age Ceremonies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018).

⁹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011).

¹⁰ Jo-ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

¹¹ Julie Cruikshank, “Are Glaciers ‘Good to Think With’? Recognising Indigenous Environmental Knowledge,” *Anthropological Forum* 22, no. 3 (2012): 239–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2012.707972>.

¹² Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

¹³ Alannah Young, “Indigenous Elders’ Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs: Gee-Zhee-Kan’dug Cedar Pedagogical Pathways” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0135696>.

¹⁴ Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 20–34.

and translating knowledge as part of matrilineal education responsibilities.^{15,16,17,18,19,20}

Inequities within Western imperialized education remain stark. In 2021, only 67% of Indigenous adults aged 25–54 had completed high school, compared to 83% of non-Indigenous adults.²¹ Furthermore, only 14% of Indigenous women held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 35% of non-Indigenous adults. These disparities mirror those in healthcare, where Indigenous peoples remain overrepresented as patients and underrepresented as practitioners. It is within this landscape that Indigenous women continue to serve as undocumented mobilizers of resurgence: they comprise the majority of participants and embody the intergenerational responsibilities that link medicine, food, and water.^{22,23}

Through this work, we contribute an applied practice-based account that interweaves

Indigenous feminist and womanist frameworks with clinical and community applications of traditional medicine. We examine seven interconnected sites at and around the CLERW at x̄w̄c̄ic̄əs̄əm to illuminate how Indigenous women's leadership revitalizes relational law, land-based pedagogy, and trauma-informed practice. Drawing on storywork,²⁴ Indigenous methodologies, and womanist tribalism,^{26,27,28} we articulate a five-practice framework for land-based education and healing that can guide implementation within both community and institutional settings.

The Frameworks

Indigenous Feminist Law

Our work arises from a shared responsibility to mobilize, educate, and regenerate Indigenous knowledge systems for social justice, parity, and

¹⁵ John Borrows, "Learning Anishinaabe Law from the Earth," *Review of Constitutional Studies* 29, no. 2 (2025): 209–37.

¹⁶ Aimée Craft, *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinaabe Understanding of Treaty One* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2013).

¹⁷ Aimée Craft, "Decolonizing Canadian Water Policy: Lessons from Anishinaabe Nibi Inaakonigewin (Our Water Law)," *UCL Open Environment* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.000055>.

¹⁸ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 144–61.

¹⁹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2025).

²⁰ Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency."

²¹ Alexandria Melvin, "Postsecondary Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, Findings from the 2021 Census," Statistics Canada, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00012-eng.htm>.

²² Lindsay Allen et al., "Indigenous-Led Health Care Partnerships in Canada," *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal* 192, no. 9 (2020): E208–16, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.190728>.

²³ Simpson, "Theory of Water," 144–61.

²⁴ Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork*.

²⁵ Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*.

²⁶ Emily Snyder, "Indigenous Feminist Legal Pedagogies," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 58, no. 2 (2021): 385–417, <https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.3681>.

²⁷ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

²⁸ Young and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence."

planetary survival. It draws upon a womanist tribal Indigenous health education model developed through a four-year rural and land-based program that began in 2003.²⁹ Since 2003, Elders have guided this work, and reference to Indigenous Matriarchs continues to shape our understandings of Indigenous resurgence and reciprocity.

We center Indigenous women's perspectives on our own understandings of territory, community, and our relationship to lands where we are the original peoples. We weave these perspectives into narratives of Indigenous matriarchal constitutional governance.

Our primary leadership responsibility is to demonstrate our understanding of Indigenous relationships as a fundamental law;³⁰ this challenges colonial and patriarchal distortions of leadership and health, repositioning Indigenous women as central to the governance of medicine, education, and wellbeing.³¹ Matriarchal law teaches that holistic health is relational and that continuance of life depends on these laws and languages being practiced.^{32,33}

Inawendiwin (Connection) as Governance

Inawendiwin is an Anishinaabemowin word meaning connection or relationship, both of which are a foundation and methodology of this work. It frames our ethics of care and research, requiring us to act as helpers and relatives within a broader kinship web.³⁴ Relational governance shifts the focus of health education and clinical practice from individual achievement to collective renewal. It repositions healing as an act of restoration rather than a biomedical intervention. Within this framework, pedagogy and medicine are inseparable.³⁵ In Inawendiwin, there is room for Western modalities when appropriate and needed. Kinship teachings are inclusive of Western and Indigenous modalities together.

Storywork and Conversational Method

We draw upon storywork, Indigenous literary traditions, and conversational methods as interrelated methodologies, honouring

²⁹ Alannah Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership: Protocols, Pedagogy & Practice," in *Women, Adult Education, and Leadership in Canada*, ed. Darlene Clover, Shauna Butterwick, and Laurel Collins (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2015).

³⁰ Snyder, "Indigenous Feminist Legal Pedagogies," 385–417.

³¹ Alannah Young, "Elders' Teachings on Leadership: Leadership Is a Gift," in *Living Indigenous Leadership: Native Narratives on Building Strong Communities*, ed. Carolyn Kenny and Tina Ngaroimata Fraser (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

³² Lorena Sekwan Fontaine, *Living Language Rights: Constitutional Pathways to Indigenous Language Education* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2025).

³³ Ardith Alison Walkem, "Bringing Water to the Land: Re-Cognize-Ing Indigenous Oral Traditions and the Laws Embodied within Them" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0077604>.

³⁴ Lindsay Borrows and Jessica Eisen, "Our More Than Human Constitutions," *Review of Constitutional Studies* 29, no. 2 (2025): 173–208.

³⁵ Teresa Howell et al., "Sharing Our Wisdom: A Holistic Aboriginal Health Initiative," *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 11, no. 1 (2016): 111–32, <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijih111201616015>.

knowledge as living relationships.^{36,37,38} We actively mobilize Elders' leadership teaching, challenging colonial methods. Echoing Kelm and Townsend,³⁹ we notice how women's perspectives have been overlooked, and we set out to explore this gendered gap and convey our reflections.

Throughout this inquiry, we share multiple conversations with Indigenous Knowledge Holders.^{40,41} The female Indigenous Elders and Matriarchs in this inquiry describe neglected knowledge systems, the context and impact of colonialism, and how their leadership fulfills the holistic health education needs of communities. In our collective storywork, stories are not only data; they are teachings that move through and across time.⁴²

Archibald & Parent remind us that in *čsimlenəx*^w Vincent Stogan's teachings of 'hands back, hands forward', storywork requires honouring ancestral guidance and extending one's hands forward to future relatives.⁴³ Through these narrative practices, we recognize that these stories

from camps, collectives, and applied practices are both archives of memory and protocols for living in good relational accountability.

Indigenous Knowledge Translation

Knowledge translation (KT) is commonly defined as the exchange and application of knowledge within a complex system of interactions.^{44,45} While research institutes emphasize KT as a link between academic research and health outcomes, Indigenous approaches to KT operate through fundamentally different principles. Here, the "users" of knowledge are not clinicians or researchers but community members who practice orality in kinship.

Orality refers to non-text-based sources of knowledge. This includes community-based, long-practiced transmissions of knowledge through speaking and embodying stories and teachings (e.g., songs, art and material culture, dance, regalia, pictographs, birchbark scrolls

³⁶ Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork*.

³⁷ Margaret Kovach, "Conversation Method in Indigenous Research," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 5, no. 1 (2010): 40–48.

³⁸ Deanna Reder, *Autobiocritical Narrations: The Enfolded Self in Indigenous Literature* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2022).

³⁹ Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend, eds., *In the Days of Our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

⁴¹ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

⁴² Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork*.

⁴³ Jo-ann Archibald and Amy Parent, "Hands Back, Hands Forward for Indigenous Storywork," in *Applying Indigenous Research Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315169811-1>.

⁴⁴ Canadian Institutes of Health Research, *Knowledge Translation Strategy 2004–2009: Innovation in Action* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2004).

⁴⁵ Alannah Young and Denise Nadeau, "Embodied Pedagogy: All Our Relations," in *Embodying Decolonization: Methodologies and Indigenization*, ed. Heather Ritenburg, Alannah Young, Warren Linds, et al., vol. 10 (2014).

and sand teachings, tracking community, genealogy, treaty, land rights, etc.), crucial for maintaining self-determined cultural continuity despite historical efforts to suppress it. Within Indigenous contexts, KT occurs through ceremony, storywork, and the living practices of Elders, healers, and matriarchs. It is functional—relational, not transactional; embodied, not abstract.

KT is a living decolonizing process, connected to specific lands and ancestral blood memory. This decolonizing framework aligns with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,⁴⁶ which called for the reorganization of health systems under Indigenous control. Our work responds to these calls by demonstrating how Indigenous-led collectives enact those principles through relational governance, appropriate digital adaptation, and land-based education practices.

Next, we present the seven intersectional perspectives: The Medicine Camp; the Medicine Collective; the Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy Collective; the ekw'í7tl Doula Programs; Women's Wellness Gathering; Water Collective; and the Matrilineal Mentorship Collective.

We then analyze the practices for their implications to trauma, genocide-informed relationality, consent, and restoring Body-Land connections. Food sovereignty, environmental justice, planetary health, and knowledge governance are also discussed. Then, we present five interwoven practices that form the foundation of transdisciplinary, land-based pedagogy and holistic health models.

The Sites of Practice

Medicine Camp: Land-Based Education and Matriarchal Law

Established in 1992, the Medicine Camp continues to demonstrate that, despite colonialism, Indigenous knowledge and leadership education endure.⁴⁷

The camp's pedagogy is rooted in Midewiwin and Matriarchal kinship law, drawing upon Indigenous constitutional orders where women's leadership is understood as both spiritual and practical governance. It arises from the need to create a land-based Indigenous response to inequities centered on reciprocity, cultural continuity, and collective wellbeing. It builds on Eshkakimikwe Kandosowin (*Earth Ways of*

⁴⁶ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol. 3, Gathering Strength* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996), <https://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-03.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Medicine Camp was created in part as a response to systemic inequities facing Indigenous peoples, their underrepresentation in higher education, and overrepresentation in healthcare systems as patients rather than practitioners. The 2021 census data indicate that while Indigenous peoples comprise 5.0% of the population, they represent less than 1% of physicians and 3% of nurses. See Statistics Canada, "The Indigenous Population Continues to Grow and Is Much Younger than the Non-Indigenous Population, Although the Pace of Growth Has Slowed," September 21, 2022, <https://www150.statecan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>; Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, *Indigenous Nursing Student and Faculty Survey Report, 2020–2021* (2022), <https://www.casn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2020-21-CASN-Indigenous-Nursing-Student-Faculty-Survey-Report-EN.pdf>; and Future Skills Center and The Conference Board of Canada, *Increasing the Number of Indigenous Physicians in Canada: Key Findings and Recommendations* (Summary for Executives) (Ottawa: Future Skills Center, 2025), https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/summary-answering-the-call_jun2025.pdf.

Knowing), where land is both teacher and curriculum.⁴⁸ Through the camp, Matriarchs and Elders transmit health education, leadership ethics, resurgence, and Indigenous law across generations.^{49,50,51}

These pedagogical practices help shape a generation of Indigenous educators, health workers, and community mentors, grounded in Indigenous values of respect, relational accountability, and service. Matriarchs' transmission of knowledge demonstrates the persistence of Tribal women's governance despite the pressures of assimilationist Canadian state narratives and genocidal policies and practices.⁵²

The camp's cycles of teaching represent a living pedagogy of resurgence and resilience, modelling what decolonized health education looks like in practice: land-based, intergenerational, and guided by matriarchal and kinship laws.

The Medicine Collective: Ethical Relationality, Plant Medicines, and Protocol

The Medicine Collective is a group of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers who provide mentorship, guidance, and traditional teachings within and beyond the CLERW at x^wçicəsəm, at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Dedicated to Indigenous land-based learning, the Collective works to reconnect students and community members through the principle of “plants and food as medicine,” facilitating workshops on traditional plant medicines and ensuring the garden's protocols are guided by Indigenous ethics, reciprocity and applied orality practices.^{53,54,55,56}

Academic literature references Aboriginal health practices, such as the Medicine Collective, as successful models of decolonizing health education. Research highlights how the Medicine Collective's mentorship fosters cultural continuity

⁴⁸ Young, “Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs.”

⁴⁹ Kathleen Absolon, *Kaandossiwin, 2nd Edition: How We Come to Know: Indigenous Re-Search Methodologies* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2022).

⁵⁰ Jeff Cornthassel and Tiffanie Hardbarger, “Educate to Perpetuate: Land-Based Pedagogies and Community Resurgence,” *International Review of Education* 65 (2019): 87–116, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-018-9759-1>.

⁵¹ Matthew Wildcat et al., “Learning from the Land: Indigenous Land-Based Pedagogy and Decolonization,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1–V.

⁵² Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership.”

⁵³ Samantha Lenore Fuller and Tabitha Robin, “Animal Relations and the Ethics of Living a Good Life,” *CABI One Health* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1079/cabonehealth.2025.0028>.

⁵⁴ Tabitha Robin, “Our Hands at Work: Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Western Canada,” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 9, no. Suppl 2 (2019): 85–99, <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2019.09B.007>.

⁵⁵ Alannah Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership: Protocols, Pedagogy & Practice,” In *Women, Adult Education, and Leadership in Canada*, edited by Darlene Clover, Shauna Butterwick, and Laurel Collins (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2015).

⁵⁶ Alannah Young Leon et al., “Decolonizing Framework for Land-Based Pedagogies,” *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 41, no. 1 (2019): 37–59.

among urban Indigenous youth, providing a critical counter-narrative to colonial health systems.^{57,58,59,60} At Simon Fraser University (SFU), we are conceptualizing health technologies grounded in land and water relationality, incorporating Matriarchal guidance, fostering distinctions-based modalities crucial for health equity.⁶¹

IFOT Collective: Genocide-Informed, Land-Based Psychotherapy

The Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy (IFOT) Collective represents another layer of Matriarchal leadership. This genocide-informed, land-based therapeutic model centers body wisdom, relational ethics, and intergenerational mentorship.⁶² The majority of trainees and instructors are women, another lineage of Matriarchal responsibility in health and healing. IFOT situates holistic health within the context

of community, land, and connects to ancestral wisdom through blood memory.⁶³

The training model is culturally neutral (i.e., not based on the ceremonial or distinct teachings of a specific Nation or Community, but rather is person-centered within a collective relationship of interconnections), integrating body-based techniques with land kinship, sensory awareness, and cultural protocols that restore relational connectedness.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Collective shifted to online and hybrid delivery models, led by dedicated Matriarchs from across Turtle Island with a long history of facilitating the IFOT training. This adaptation extended the reach of Indigenous holistic health to remote communities, demonstrating that digital technologies, governed by Matriarchal ethics, can become appropriate conduits of connection.^{64,65,66}

⁵⁷ Tonya Gomes et al., “Indigenous Health Leadership: Protocols, Policy, and Practice,” *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 11, no. 3 (2013): 565–75.

⁵⁸ Howell et al., “Sharing Our Wisdom,” 111–32.

⁵⁹ Wilson Pereira Mendes, “Growing Connections: Regenerative Land-Based Education for Indigenous Urban Youth at Xwçičəsəm Garden ‘the Place Where We Grow,’” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2023), <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/84765>.

⁶⁰ Krista Stelkia et al., “Letsemot, ‘Togetherness’: Exploring How Connection to Land, Water, and Territory Influences Health and Wellness with First Nations Knowledge Keepers and Youth in the Fraser Salish Region of British Columbia,” *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 16, no. 2 (2021): 356–69, <https://doi.org/10.32799/ijih.v16i2.33867>.

⁶¹ Patricia May-Derbyshire, “Kitot’sattook: Indigitalized Spaces, Time Travel, and Kinship Computing Interconnection (KCI),” in *Future Spaces of Power: The Cultural Politics of Digital and Outer Spaces*, ed. Caroline Alphin, E. Leigh McKagen, and Shelby Ward, 181–204 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025).

⁶² IFOT Collective et al., “Indigenous Tools for Living: Decolonizing Genocide-Informed Health Education,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180125135606>.

⁶³ Leilani Holmes, “Heart Knowledge, Blood Memory, and the Voice of the Land: Implications of Research among Hawaiian Elders,” in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ IFOT Collective et al., “Indigenous Tools for Living.”

⁶⁵ May-Derbyshire, “Kitot’sattook,” 181–204.

⁶⁶ Lisa Richardson and Allison Crawford, “COVID-19 and the Decolonization of Indigenous Public Health,” *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal* 192, no. 38 (2020): E1098–100, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.190618>.

Midwifery and Doula Programs: Water, Birth, and Women's Responsibilities

Indigenous women's leadership in birth work and maternal health represents another vital site of resurgence, grounded in *nibi* (water) as both life and law. Water teachings guide women's roles as life-givers, caregivers, and extend Matriarchal governance to reproductive and community health.^{67,68} The re-emergence of Indigenous midwifery and doula collectives in Manitoba and British Columbia, *ekw'í7tl* (ah-quay-tull, family, in *Skwxwú7mesh sníchim*), builds on matriarchal ancestral teachings.

In 1990, Dr. Alannah Young became the first documented parent to have a home birth in her family in over five generations, followed by her sister's home birth, and the first Nation-registered birth certificate in five generations. Métis midwife Darlene Birch delivered their babies.

This reawakened midwifery as both cultural continuity and political assertion of Indigenous jurisdiction over women's bodies and birthing practices. Initiatives at the University of Manitoba and UBC anchored Indigenous Doula Collectives to ensure community control.

Importantly, the initiatives reaffirm women's inherent governance over life itself, reclaiming birth as a site of sovereignty, ceremony, and health justice. The *Ekwi7tl* Indigenous Doula Collective, which partners with the Medicine Collective at *x'wícicəsəm*, continues this lineage. They provide culturally grounded support for birthing people in both urban and rural settings,

guided by matriarchal law.

Indigenous doula care responds to a wide range of issues that affect Indigenous women's experiences of pregnancy, birth, and the post-partum period. Indigenous doulas play a critical role in countering medical racism in hospital settings and advancing the resurgence of Indigenous birthing sovereignty.^{69,70} These programs have been linked to improved perinatal outcomes, stronger breastfeeding support networks, and increased access to culturally relevant continuity and care.^{71,72}

Women's Wellness, Ceremony, and Indigenous Mental Health Gathering

Mental health inequities experienced by Indigenous women represent a persistent challenge within global health discourse.^{73,74} As

⁶⁷ Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*.

⁶⁸ Simpson, *Theory of Water*.

⁶⁹ Archibald and Parent, "Hands Back, Hands Forward for Indigenous Storywork."

⁷⁰ Jaime Cidro et al., "Putting Them on a Strong Spiritual Path: Indigenous Doulas Responding to the Needs of Indigenous Mothers and Communities," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 20 (2021): 189, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01521-3>.

⁷¹ Danette Jubinville et al., "Relationships to Land as a Determinant of Wellness for Indigenous Women, Two-Spirit, Trans, and Gender Diverse People of Reproductive Age in Toronto, Canada," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 115, no. Suppl 2 (2024): 253–62, <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-022-00678-w>.

⁷² Richardson and Crawford, "COVID-19 and the Decolonization of Indigenous Public Health," E1098–100.

⁷³ Karlee D. Fellner et al., "Reconciling Relations: Shifting Counselling Psychology to Address Truth and Reconciliation," *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* 54, no. 4 (2020).

⁷⁴ Karlee D. Fellner, "Embodying Decoloniality: Indigenizing Curriculum and Pedagogy," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 62, no. 3–4 (2018): 283–93, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12266>.

part of a CIHR-funded project on Indigenous peoples' wellness, 25 Indigenous women, Matriarchs, and Knowledge Holders came together in 2022 to discuss Indigenous women's wellness and ceremony.⁷⁵ The gathering was structured by the five-practice framework, which connects research, ceremony, community, land kinship, and Indigenously reparative matriarchal knowledge.^{76,77,78}

The dialogues were permeated by a personal and collective desire for restoring health, for women and by women. The initial days focused on setting intentions and establishing cultural protocols. Four Matriarchs, guided by long-practiced women's teachings and protocols, used the storywork methodology. The group applied Matriarchal governance principles to enhance Indigenous women's capacity to walk alongside one another as relational responsibility.^{79,80} The gathering balanced the healing work with laughter and gratitude, calling on all to recognize their gifts, honour boundaries, and uphold ancestral protocols.^{81,82}

Nibi Inaakonigewin (Water Law), Relational Governance and Water Collectives

Further demonstrating the centrality of nibi (water) to Indigenous women's governance, Anishinaabe Métis lawyer Aimée Craft connects water rights, the legal personhood of water, and the broader rights-of-nature movement.⁸³ Craft's work with the "Decolonizing Water" initiative and the Nibi Declaration of Treaty 3 operationalizes Anishinaabe law as a foundation for water governance.

The granting of legal personhood status to the Magpie River (Muteshekau Shipu) in Quebec in 2021, a legal innovation aligning with the agency and spiritedness of water that Craft advocates for, is a testament to the effectiveness of weaving Indigenous legal traditions with Western legal training. These principles are supported by actions on the ground. The Vancouver Women's Water Collective, guided by Matriarchs including Dorothy Cucw-la7 Christian, Rita Wong, and Alannah Young, actively supports initiatives. One of them is the Peace & Dignity Journeys, an intercontinental run that started in 1992 and runs every 4 years, reinforcing relational protocols and responsibilities across Turtle Island.

Matrilineal Policy and Mentorship: The Downstream and the Legacy of the Longhouse

Indigenous women's protocols are also applied as matrilineal policy and sovereign governance

⁷⁵ Karlee D. Fellner, *Indigenous Approaches to Wellness & Psychotherapy as a Response to the COVID-19 Mental Health Crisis in Indigenous Communities* (Ottawa: Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2022).

⁷⁶ Lily George et al., *Indigenous Research Ethics: Claiming Research Sovereignty beyond Deficit and the Colonial Legacy* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2020).

⁷⁷ Mary-ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900–50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

⁷⁸ Young and Nadeau, "Embodying Indigenous Resurgence."

⁷⁹ Fuller and Robin, "Animal Relations and the Ethics of Living a Good Life."

⁸⁰ Robin, "Our Hands at Work."

⁸¹ Fuller and Robin, "Animal Relations and the Ethics of Living a Good Life."

⁸² Robin, "Our Hands at Work."

⁸³ Aimée Craft, "Decolonizing Canadian Water Policy: Lessons from Anishinaabe Nibi Inaakonigewin (Our Water Law)," *UCL Open Environment* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.000055>.

within complex institutional environments. Christian and Wong's *The Downstream: Reimagining Water* archives testimonials of Matriarchs using Indigenous protocols as policy to restore relational responsibilities as law, exemplified by the Vancouver Water Walks in 2013.^{84,85,86}

This event demonstrated that governance is procedural, requiring explicit adherence to protocols (e.g., securing the consent of local Nations). This governance is sustained by active mentoring and reciprocity, embodying the “Hands back, hands forward” through platforms like the Full Circle First Nations Performance Society.^{87,88}

At UBC, Matriarchs, including Rosalind Ing, Verna Kirkness, Madeleine MacIvor, Joann Archibald, Ethel Gardner, Jan Hare, and many others, paved the way for institutional change within the Faculty of Education and the

First Nations House of Learning (FNHL). Dr. Ing established Indigenous student seats and supported programming within the Faculty of Medicine.

Alannah Young helped to establish the Longhouse Leadership program.⁸⁹ This work confirms that establishing Indigenous spaces within academia is a crucial example of Matrilineal responsibility applied as an informal form of institutional policy.⁹⁰

Cross-Site Practices and Implications

Across the seven sites, Indigenous women's leadership is expressed through a shared ethic of relational law. Though each site is distinct, they form an interdependent ecology of resurgence that restores responsibilities between land, body, and community while addressing the ongoing impacts of colonial trauma and structural inequity.^{91,92,93,94,95,96}

⁸⁴ Isaac K. Oommen, “Women Waters Ceremonial Walk,” Vancouver Media Co-op, June 12, 2013, Video, <https://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/fr/video/women-waters-ceremonial-walk/16425.html>.

⁸⁵ Tsleil-Waututh Nation Sacred Trust, “Water Ceremony at Whey-Ah-Wichen / Cates Park, North Vancouver,” 2023, <https://twnsacredtrust.ca/water-ceremony-at-whey-ah-wichen-cates-park-north-vancouver/>.

⁸⁶ Rita Wong and Dorothy Christian, *Downstream: Reimagining Water* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017).

⁸⁷ Archibald and Parent, “Hands Back, Hands Forward for Indigenous Storywork.”

⁸⁸ Young and Nadeau, “Embodying Indigenous Resurgence.”

⁸⁹ First Nations House of Learning, “Longhouse Teachings: Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Reverence,” University of British Columbia, accessed October 22, 2025, <https://fnhl.ubc.ca/longhouse/longhouse-teachings/>.

⁹⁰ Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership.”

⁹¹ Dwayne Donald et al., “Relational Ecologies of Indigenous Leadership,” *Journal of Indigenous Education Studies* 5, no. 2 (2012): 34–52.

⁹² IFOT Collective et al., “Indigenous Tools for Living.”

⁹³ Dawn Morrison, “Back to the Roots: Restoring Indigenous Food Landscapes,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2020).

⁹⁴ Dawn Morrison, “Reflections and Realities: Expressions of Food Sovereignty in the Fourth World,” in *Indigenous Food Systems: Concepts, Cases and Conversations*, ed. Priscilla Settee and Shailesh Shukla (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2020).

⁹⁵ Young, “Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs.”

⁹⁶ Young and Nadeau, “Embodying Indigenous Resurgence.”

These initiatives demonstrate that women's traditional medicine functions not as static cultural heritage but as an applied system of governance, education, and clinical care capable of guiding ethical practice across institutions and territories. Together, they reveal that health, education, and leadership are interwoven when grounded in Matriarchal principles of relationship, reciprocity, and renewal.^{97,98,99}

Trauma, Genocide Informed Relationality, and Consent

Safety and consent are ceremonial rather than administrative checkboxes. Within Indigenous frameworks, consent arises through protocol, kinship, and the pacing of relationships.¹⁰⁰ At the Medicine Camp, spiritual and cultural kinship begins with the land itself; each teaching opens with protocols and acknowledgments, locating learners in relationship.¹⁰¹ Within the IFOT Collective, this becomes clinical practice: facilitators attune to bodily signals and collective energy to establish relationality before work begins.^{102,103}

The IFOT Collective's online gatherings during COVID-19 modelled ethical accompaniment, maintaining reciprocity and cultural continuity across distance.^{104,105} The midwifery and doula programs extend this principle to perinatal care: birth is approached through ceremony, water law, and relational accountability rather than as a medicalized event.¹⁰⁶ The Women's Wellness Gathering in 2022 fostered kinship among women and the land, IFOT training principles and protocols, and the necessary conditions for individual and collective healing.

This relational ethic extends further through Nibi Inakonigewin, where consent is recognized as a legal obligation to the natural world, acknowledging that the agency of water demands that we seek permission from the land itself,¹⁰⁷ treating Nibi not as a resource to be managed, but as a relative with rights. The water owns itself, and the Matrilineal Policy Collective operationalizes genocide-informed care and consent through governance, asserting that legal and institutional engagement requires protocol

⁹⁷ Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork*.

⁹⁸ Archibald and Parent, "Hands Back, Hands Forward for Indigenous Storywork."

⁹⁹ Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies*.

¹⁰⁰ Kovach, "Conversation Method in Indigenous Research."

¹⁰¹ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

¹⁰² Stephanie Daniel Tipple, "Decolonizing the Conceptualization of Trauma: An Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Approach" (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.11575/PRISM/39371>.

¹⁰³ Shirley Turcotte and Jeffery J. Schiffer, "Aboriginal Focusing-Oriented Therapy (AFOT)," in *Emerging Practice in Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy: Innovative Theory and Applications*, ed. Greg Madison (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ IFOT Collective et al., "Indigenous Tools for Living."

¹⁰⁵ Richardson and Crawford, "COVID-19 and the Decolonization of Indigenous Public Health."

¹⁰⁶ Simpson, *Theory of Water*.

¹⁰⁷ Lee Maracle, "Water," in *Downstream: Reimagining Water*, ed. Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017).

as a form of collective consent.^{108,109,110} Across these contexts, relational consent acts as the first protocol that affirms agency and care within the community.

Holistic Health, Colonial Trauma, and Restoring the Body-Land Connection

Each initiative treats colonialism as an ongoing condition expressed through body, memory, and land. The seven sites collectively deconstruct trauma, grief, and chronic disease as outcomes of disconnection from Indigenous legal and kinship systems.^{111,112} The IFOT Collective explicitly frames its work as genocide-informed, situating trauma within colonial violence rather than individual pathology.¹¹³

At the Medicine Camp, embodied pedagogies like song, movement, and ceremony restore physiological regulation and spiritual grounding.¹¹⁴ Within the Medicine Collective, plant and food medicine are reframed as kinship responsibilities, reconnecting metabolic health to soil, seasons, and ancestral biocultural

ecosystems.¹¹⁵ The midwifery and doula programs bring this similar logic to reproduction, reconnecting birth to land and water as sacred sources of kinship, balance, and vitality.^{116,117}

This reverence for water is codified through Nibi Inaakonigewin, where the legal personhood of water asserts that planetary health and human wellbeing are indistinguishable; protecting Nibi is an act of protecting the collective body. Similarly, the Women's Wellness Gathering in 2022 operationalizes this restoration through material culture, where shawls and medicines serve as relational technologies to knit together body, mind, and spirit as a part of women's restorative action.

Matrilineal policy structurally supports these actions, recognizing that institutional presence, such as x^wci^cas^m at UBC, and direct action, such as Water walks, are necessary acts of re-membering, or returning fragmented relationships among body, land, and community to wholeness.^{118,119} This holistic understanding

¹⁰⁸ Courtney Defriend and Celeta M. Cook, "Reawakening of Indigenous Matriarchal Systems: A Feminist Approach to Organizational Leadership," *Healthcare Management Forum* 37, no. 3 (2024): 160–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08404704231210255>.

¹⁰⁹ George et al., *Indigenous Research Ethics*.

¹¹⁰ National Collaborating Center for Indigenous Health, *Informed Choice and Consent in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Women's Health Services: Summary Report* (Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Center for Indigenous Health, 2021).

¹¹¹ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

¹¹² Alannah Young and Denise Nadeau, "Moving with Water: Water Relationships and Responsibilities," in *Downstream: A Water Anthology*, ed. Rita Wong and Dorothy Christian (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017).

¹¹³ IFOT Collective et al., "Indigenous Tools for Living."

¹¹⁴ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

¹¹⁵ s²əyələq Larry Grant et al., "Indigenous Restorative Land-Based Practices for Urban Youth," *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing* 6, no. 3 (2021): 16–30.

¹¹⁷ Simpson, *Theory of Water*.

¹¹⁸ Young and Nadeau, "Embodied Pedagogy: All Our Relations."

¹¹⁹ Oommen, "Women Waters Ceremonial Walk."

of health challenges industrialized biomedicine and advances applied practices of Indigenous self-determination in health governance when appropriate.^{120,121}

Food Sovereignty, Environmental Justice, and Planetary Health

Food and medicine are inseparable from holistic health and environmental governance at each site. The Medicine Collective and the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) illustrate that cultivating food is an act of both medicine and kinship responsibilities. WGIFS, grassroots, primarily Indigenous women-led organization, advances food sovereignty by applying ancient knowledge to critically analyze related issues—food, land, health, sustainability, and engaging in policy, advocacy, and land-based initiatives.

Guided by a Matriarch advisory group, WGIFS is supported by IFOT training and the

Medicine Collective’s ongoing grant support for Indigenous food systems network initiatives like the Cwelcwelt Kuc “We are Well” program and advocates for the wild salmon caravan initiatives.^{122,123} Medicine Camp pedagogies and IFOT workshops integrate harvesting ethics and plant and food as relatives and are medicine foundations for wellness.^{124,125,126,127}

Here, the act of gathering and wrapping oneself in the medicines that stand and feed and nurture us and being “held” by the waterways acts as an ecological relation where the land itself participates in education and the repair of spirit.^{128,129,130,131}

The water-focused sites, from Nibi Inaakonigewin to the Vancouver Water Walk, are actions of matrilineal work, underscoring that water law is fundamental to planetary health. By upholding Nibi as a legal person with rights, these collectives challenge the commodification

¹²⁰ Carla M. Dhillon, “Indigenous Feminisms: Disturbing Colonialism in Environmental Science Partnerships,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6, no. 4 (2020): 483–500, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649220908608>.

¹²¹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.

¹²² Morrison, “Back to the Roots.”

¹²³ Morrison, “Reflections and Realities.”

¹²⁴ Joni Adamson, “Medicine Food: Critical Environmental Justice Studies, Native North American Literature and the Movement for Food Sovereignty,” *Environmental Justice* 4, no. 4 (2011): 213–19, <https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2010.003>.

¹²⁵ Jeffrey Ansloos et al., “Indigenization in Clinical and Counselling Psychology Curriculum in Canada: A Framework for Enhancing Indigenous Education,” *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 63, no. 4 (2022): 481–92, <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000344>.

¹²⁶ Grant et al., “Indigenous Restorative Land-Based Practices for Urban Youth,” 16–30.

¹²⁷ Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women’s Leadership.”

¹²⁸ Shelby Henry, “Water Walkers,” *Indigenizing Learning*, accessed March 14, 2026, <https://indigenizinglearning.educ.ubc.ca/water-walkers/>.

¹²⁹ Holmes, “Heart Knowledge, Blood Memory, and the Voice of the Land.”

¹³⁰ Daniel Heath Justice, “Review of *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*, by Eva Marie Garrouette,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 20, no. 1 (2005): 201–3.

¹³¹ Tabitha Robin Martens et al., “Feeding Indigenous People in Canada,” *International Social Work* 65, no. 4 (2020): 652–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820916218>.

of nature, situating water protection as a responsibility to kin, biocultural ecological restoration, and preventive medicinal practices. Together, these movements link Indigenous women's medicine within environmental justice and planetary survival.¹³²

Knowledge Governance and Anti-Extraction

Each site enacts a distinctive form of Indigenous knowledge governance. Permissions are relational, authority is grounded in kinship and responsibility rather than ownership.^{133,134,135} Matrilineal Policy work is key, establishing that institutional and community engagement must be guided by intertribal protocols as embodied in the Water Walks.

This framework is reinforced by Nibi Inaakonigewin, governance that extends beyond human jurisdiction; by recognizing water's legal personhood, Indigenous law acts as an anti-extraction mechanism, which demands consent from the land.^{136,137}

The Medicine Collective maintains ethical guidelines to safeguard Traditional Knowledge from appropriation, with benefits being returned to communities. IFOT trainers uphold cultural and clinical protocols that are person-centered and held within the collective.¹³⁸ Similarly, the Women's Wellness Gathering demonstrated that governance is also an embodiment of reparation and restores kinship connection-inawendiwin.

Elders at the Medicine Camp determine what knowledge and teachings may be shared, when,

and with whom.¹³⁹ The institutional leadership of matriarchs, Elders, and advisories, in establishing the FNHL as a component of Matrilineal legacies, ensures that knowledge governance is placed within Indigenous jurisdiction in the academic sphere. This exemplifies community-determined research in action, aligning with the Four R's—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility—and the relational ecologies of Indigenous leadership.^{140,141} They clarify appropriate roles for non-Indigenous collaborators: to act as Helpers under Indigenous Elders' guidance, accountable to the relationships that make collaboration possible.

Five Interwoven Practices

Across the different sites, Indigenous women's leadership is expressed through five interwoven practices that form the foundation of transdisciplinary, land-based pedagogy. Articulated by Young as eshkakimikwe

¹³² Dhillon, "Indigenous Feminisms."

¹³³ Kovach, "Conversation Method in Indigenous Research."

¹³⁴ Ritenburg et al., "Embodying Decolonization: Methodologies and Indigenization," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 10, no. 1 (2014): 67–80.

¹³⁵ Robin, "Land, Kinship, and Healing."

¹³⁶ Marlow Gregory Sam, "Oral Narratives, Customary Laws and Indigenous Water Rights in Canada" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0074307>.

¹³⁷ Walkem, "Bringing Water to the Land."

¹³⁸ IFOT Collective et al., "Indigenous Tools for Living."

¹³⁹ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

¹⁴⁰ Donald et al., "Relational Ecologies of Indigenous Leadership."

¹⁴¹ Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt, "First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility," *Journal of American Indian Education* 30, no. 3 (1991): 1–15.

kandosowin (*Earth Ways of Knowing*): the Gee-zhee-kan'dug (*Cedar*) pedagogy encompasses research, protocol, preparation, application, and reflection, constituting a cyclical and relational framework for Indigenous education and governance.¹⁴² Grounded in relational law and guided by matriarchal and Elder governance, they operationalize Indigenous law.

This cyclical framework ensures that each act of knowledge creation is relational, accountable, and regenerative.^{143,144,145,146,147} It demonstrates that education and medicine are not separate domains but interwoven responsibilities that sustain both communities and living systems that support all life. Indigenous law is realized when it is embodied—living the teachings (e.g., in foraging, dance, ceremony, or song).¹⁴⁸

Research Coordination: Relationship Before Knowledge

Research within Indigenous frameworks begins not with hypothesis or extraction but with relationship-building; this means coordinating with local Nations, Elders, and resource people so that inquiry is grounded in place and protocol.^{149,150,151,152,153}

Indigenous legal orders are broadly understood as the foundational, living systems of relational accountability and obligations derived from the land, ancestors, and the spiritual worlds.^{154,155} Inawendiwin is an example of legal ordering that restores connection, balance, and the maintenance of cyclical, reciprocal responsibilities therein.^{156,157} Protocol describes

¹⁴² Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women’s Leadership.”

¹⁴³ Grant et al., “Indigenous Restorative Land-Based Practices for Urban Youth,” 16–30.

¹⁴⁴ Henry, “Water Walkers.”

¹⁴⁵ Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women’s Leadership.”

¹⁴⁶ Young and Nadeau, “Moving with Water.”

¹⁴⁷ Young Leon et al., “Decolonizing Framework for Land-Based Pedagogies.”

¹⁴⁸ Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women’s Leadership.”

¹⁴⁹ Jo-ann Archibald, “Creating an Indigenous Intellectual Movement at Canadian Universities: The Stories of Five First Nations Female Academics,” in *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, ed. Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Madeline Dion Stout, and Éric Guimond (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Howell et al., “Sharing Our Wisdom.”

¹⁵¹ Kirkness and Barnhardt, “First Nations and Higher Education.”

¹⁵² Kovach, “Conversation Method in Indigenous Research.”

¹⁵³ Brian Schnarch, “Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary First Nations Research and Some Options for First Nations Communities,” *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 1, no. 1 (2004): 80–95.

¹⁵⁴ Borrows, “Learning Anishinaabe Law from the Earth.”

¹⁵⁵ Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women’s Leadership.”

¹⁵⁶ Young and Nadeau, “Moving with Water.”

¹⁵⁷ Young, “Weaving Indigenous Women’s Leadership.”

the specific, culturally situated ethical actions required to activate and access knowledge, thereby upholding specific legal orders.^{158,159}

At the Medicine Camp, for example, research coordination is expressed through the seasonal return to the land-based health education Camps, where knowledge generation is embedded in the cyclical renewal of land-based relationships.^{160,161}

The Medicine Collective enacts this through collaborative design with community members, ensuring that teachings about plants and food medicines arise from shared responsibility, rather than institutional agendas. Similarly, the Women's Wellness Gathering in 2022 connected community, land kinship, and Indigenously reparative Matriarchal knowledge. Research occurred in Circle, and a shared inquiry into material culture and holistic wellness was led by Matriarchs from diverse Indigenous Nations, in a spirit of respect for the lands and waterways.

Research coordination, across all sites, reflects the core principle that knowledge gathering requires accountability to its carriers. This accountability manifests in IFOT through the participatory co-development of trauma-informed curricula with Indigenous practitioners.^{162,163}

Similarly, in the Matrilineal Policy context, coordination is evident in the sharing of testimonial stories, as expressed in *The Downstream: Reimagining Water* (2017). This publication features self-determined community engagements, in which knowledge keepers from each host Nation open the daily gatherings by sharing their relationships to bodies of water.

Protocol Engagement: Governance Through Relationship

Protocol is not a preliminary step but a governance system that structures relationships, permissions, and responsibilities.¹⁶⁴ In each site, protocol functions as the interface between knowledge and ethics. At the Medicine Camp, for example, protocol governs the use of sacred teachings and materials, ensuring the safety and integrity of the land-based pedagogy.¹⁶⁵

The Matrilineal Policy Collective's work aims to formalize this into a legal policy framework, where protocols such as local nation and intergenerational representation serve as principles for collective action, exemplified by the Vancouver Water Walks and Mediwiwin waters walks.¹⁶⁶ Aimée Craft's work on Nibi Inaakonigewin deepens this by framing protocol as Indigenous legal orders for water itself.

¹⁵⁸ Grant et al., "Indigenous Restorative Land-Based Practices for Urban Youth."

¹⁵⁹ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

¹⁶⁰ Diane Simon et al., "Embodied in Indigenous Research: How Indigeneity, Positionality, and Relationality Contribute to Research Approaches and Understanding," *Healthy Populations Journal* 3, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.15273/hpj.v3i1.11475>.

¹⁶¹ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

¹⁶² Francesca Maximé, "All My Relations with Shirley Turcotte, RCC," *Be Here Now Network*, September 21, 2021, Podcast. <https://beherenetwork.com/francesca-maxime-ep-51-all-my-relations-with-shirley-turcotte-rcc/>.

¹⁶³ Turcotte and Schiffer, "Aboriginal Focusing-Oriented Therapy (AFOT)."

¹⁶⁴ Donald et al., "Relational Ecologies of Indigenous Leadership."

¹⁶⁵ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

¹⁶⁶ Ayse Gursoz, "Meet Josephine Mandamin (Anishinaabekwe), The 'Water Walker,'" *Mother Earth Water Walk*, 2017, <https://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?p=2845>.

The midwifery and doula programs weave protocols into ceremony, marking key phases of lifegiving through water, welcoming, naming, and coming-of-age ceremonies. At the Women's Wellness Gathering, protocol served as the container for relational accountability, where matriarchs modeled adherence to women's responsibilities; this required participants to recognize and carry their gifts, honour boundaries, and uphold protocols with one another. Across these sites, protocol engagement functions as an ethical infrastructure to ensure that Indigenous knowledge is grounded in self-determined sovereignty, respect, and continuity.

Preparation and Access: Creating the Conditions for Learning

Preparation involves making access possible, not only through materials and logistics, but through emotional, physical, and spiritual readiness and community inclusion. In Indigenous pedagogy, preparation means setting the table before teaching begins.^{167,168} At the Medicine Camp, preparation includes logistical planning for land-based accommodations, setting up the lodges for teachings, and engaging in personal and spiritual readiness.¹⁶⁹

The Medicine Collective prepares by introducing Indigenous ethical research methods and local plants as kin relationships, engaging Indigenous-led land-based pedagogies and protocols, and by offering alter-narratives demonstrating cultural continuity. The WGIFS prepares its staff and researchers by weaving IFOT principles into its governance to ensure policies for restorative ecologies are genocide-

informed and benefit all kin relations, and learning from the land (e.g., salmon cycles).

The institutional work of matriarchal leaders at UBC represents a foundational act of preparation. By establishing the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) and the Institute for Aboriginal Health, these leaders, in collaboration with intertribal Elder advisories, men, faculty, youth, gender-diverse persons, and the broader community, created the essential physical and intellectual infrastructure for Indigenous students.

Such systemic efforts remain rare in higher education, as they require the difficult labor of embedding Indigenous Matriarchal Law within the typically rigid and hierarchical structures of Western institutional systems. This labor paved the way for land-based initiatives like the Indigenous Health Research and Education Garden (IHREG) and the current Center for Land-based Education, Research and Wellness at x^wcicəsəm, ensuring that students can access and embody ancestral knowledge within the academy. Through these diverse expressions, preparation ensures that learning unfolds within conditions that apply relational connection, collective care, and reciprocity, enabling many generations to access holistic wellness as an applied intergenerational responsibility.

¹⁶⁷ Archibald and Parent, "Hands Back, Hands Forward for Indigenous Storywork."

¹⁶⁸ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

¹⁶⁹ Young, "Weaving Indigenous Women's Leadership."

Application on the Land: Embodied Practice and Experiential Learning

Application transforms relational teachings into lived practice. The moment when knowledge returns to the land and theory, it becomes an embodied experience. At the Medicine Camp, for example, this occurs through active participation in ceremonial cycles and harvesting practices, embodying matriarchal law as lived governance unfolds.^{170,171,172}

The Matrilineal Policy collective applies its governance principles through direct action, supporting the Peace and Dignity and Coastal Canoe Journeys and conducting the Water Walks, physically asserting relational responsibilities through movement on the land. Nibi Inaakonigewin's work, for example, applies this legally, as seen in the granting of personhood to the Magpie River, enhancing awareness and translating water law into tangible protection.

Within IFOT, land-based application integrates sensory, environmental, and ethical awareness into trauma healing, repair, and reparation if and when desired.^{173,174} At the Women's Wellness Gathering, application was always present and embodied: women weaving together mind, body, and spirit responsibilities.¹⁷⁵ In all cases, application represents the moment when knowledge ceases to be abstract and becomes embodied relational law.

Reflection and Story Sharing: Transformation and Continuity

Reflection and story sharing complete the cycle by returning learning to the community. This is

where knowledge becomes collective memory, an archive of lived experience that informs current and future generations.^{176,177} At the Medicine Camp, reflection occurs through storywork and sharing of personal journeys.¹⁷⁸ Matrilineal Policy work formalizes reflection through the stories in *The Downstream* and WGIFS, both of which translate lived experience into shared lessons for intertribal governance and institutional navigation.

The Women's Wellness Gathering facilitated such reflection through relationship-building, sharing laughter and gratitude, and balancing the healing work with the joy of reestablishing kinship networks.

The creation of the Longhouse Leadership program at FNHL ensures that reflections on leadership teachings become a core part of the institutional curriculum.^{179,180} On all sites, reflection closes each cycle and opens the

¹⁷⁰ Heidi Kiiwetinepinesik Stark et al., eds., *Indigenous Resurgence in an Age of Reconciliation* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2025).

¹⁷¹ Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency."

¹⁷² Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

¹⁷³ IFOT Collective et al., "Indigenous Tools for Living."

¹⁷⁴ Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy, "Aboriginal/Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy (A/IFOT)," YouTube video, 11:34, posted March 29, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DmyCXT_iJc.

¹⁷⁵ Robin, "Land, Kinship, and Healing."

¹⁷⁶ Archibald, "Creating an Indigenous Intellectual Movement."

¹⁷⁷ Kovach, "Conversation Method in Indigenous Research."

¹⁷⁸ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

¹⁷⁹ First Nations House of Learning, "Longhouse Teachings."

¹⁸⁰ Young, "Elders' Teachings on Leadership."

next. They affirm that Indigenous education is transformative, regenerative, and medicine, always returning to the land, story, kinship, and interconnectedness.

Practice and Policy Recommendations

The collective teachings of the seven sites of practice make clear that Indigenous women's leadership in traditional medicine is not an adjunct to public health or education. Meeting the Indigenous health indicators in Indigenous communities requires a holistic approach, foundational to relational governance and community wellbeing.^{181,182,183}

Inawendiwin is practiced by living in right relationship with all living relations as a shared responsibility. This includes matriarchal leadership, access to cultural continuity, interconnection with land relatives, and remembrance of ancestral laws that have sustained the People since time immemorial.

Policy and practice must therefore move beyond consultation to shared or delegated governance with Indigenous Nations and matriarchal leaders. Health and education systems could embed Indigenous relational law as operational ethics in decision-making, research, and care.^{184,185}

Long-term resourcing is essential for Indigenous-led and land-based education, which has proven transformative in programs like the Medicine Camp and the Center for Land-Based Education Research and Wellness at x^wçicəsəm at UBC.^{186,187,188}

Impactful and sustained funding structures are necessary for community-defined curricula, matriarchal governance, and mentorship models that bridge ceremony, land-based learning, and digital access for rural communities.^{189,190,191} These investments cannot be symbolic gestures; they are structural acts of redress that restore continuity to the knowledge systems sustaining Indigenous health.

¹⁸¹ Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*, 2nd Edition.

¹⁸² Jamie Donatuto et al., "Developing Responsive Indicators of Indigenous Community Health," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 13, no. 9 (2016): 899, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13090899>.

¹⁸³ Kathleen Heggie, *Indigenous Wellness Indicators: Including Urban Indigenous Wellness Indicators in the Healthy City Strategy* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2018).

¹⁸⁴ Rachele K. Gould et al., "Exploring Indigenous Relationality to Inform the Relational Turn in Sustainability Science," *Ecosystems and People* 19, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/26395916.2023.2229452>.

¹⁸⁵ Lisa N. Aguilar et al., "Critical Relationality in Research: A Framework for Engaging in Research Alongside Indigenous Communities," *Journal of School Psychology* 110 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2025.101430>.

¹⁸⁶ Redvers, "The Land Is a Healer."

¹⁸⁷ Young, "Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs."

¹⁸⁸ Alannah Young Leon et al., "Restorative Indigenous Land Based Practices for Urban Youth," *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing* 4, no. 1 (2019): 21–32.

¹⁸⁹ Defriend and Cook, "Reawakening of Indigenous Matriarchal Systems."

¹⁹⁰ IFOT Collective et al., "Indigenous Tools for Living."

¹⁹¹ May-Derbyshire, "Kitot'satook."

Protecting Indigenous Traditional Knowledge requires community-controlled ethical frameworks and Indigenous-led research governance.¹⁹² Knowledge must circulate relationally, not just transactionally, under the jurisdiction of the peoples who hold it.¹⁹³ This includes supporting the publication of testimonial works like *The Downstream* as essential forms of Indigenous knowledge dissemination, protocols, practice, and policy creation.^{194,195,196,197,198}

In parallel, clinical systems should integrate Indigenous holistic health methods, including focusing-oriented therapy, plant medicine, midwifery, and doula care, through partnerships that uphold cultural sovereignty.

Implementing these sovereign health initiatives is both a necessary and overdue response to a healthcare system under immense stress. Clinical systems can support new initiatives that build capacity by leveraging the inherent strengths of Indigenous community-led care. This transition would be an act of institutional preparation that creates the structural space for Indigenous Matriarchal Law to function within both the academy and clinical care. By establishing these frameworks, the system moves from skepticism and reactivity to providing care that upholds cultural continuity.

New Indigenous women-led initiatives, such as the Survivors Circle for Reproductive Justice, continue to challenge ongoing genocidal policies and practices of sterilizing Indigenous people.¹⁹⁹ Their efforts are resulting in significant shifts in

reproductive justice, including the introduction of Bill S-228,²⁰⁰ which is under review to criminalize forced or coerced sterilization by amending the Criminal Code.

Organizations such as Dr. Karlee Fellner's L'ŕŕŕ Maskihkiy Wellness are, at the time of writing this paper, supporting survivors and community members' access to culturally safe birth and parenting support as a fundamental right. Expanding access to trauma/ genocide-informed and decolonized reproductive health services must be prioritized.

Health policy must also recognize that land, food, and water are central to wellness. Indigenous women's leadership in food sovereignty and environmental justice, through seed repatriation, water ceremonies, land stewardship, and ecological restoration, demonstrates that planetary

¹⁹² First Nations Information Governance Center, "The First Nations Principles of OCAP," 2018, <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>.

¹⁹³ Kovach, "Conversation Method in Indigenous Research."

¹⁹⁴ Gomes et al., "Indigenous Health Leadership."

¹⁹⁵ Howell et al., "Sharing Our Wisdom."

¹⁹⁶ Morrison, "Back to the Roots."

¹⁹⁷ Lyana Patrick, "Decolonizing Planetary Health: Rebuilding Social, Cultural, and Environmental Relationships for Indigenous Well-being," Health Research BC, 2024, https://healthresearchbc.ca/award_researcher/lyana-patrick/.

¹⁹⁸ Young and Nadeau, "Moving with Water."

¹⁹⁹ Survivors Circle for Reproductive Justice, "What Is the Survivors Circle?" accessed October 22, 2025, <https://www.reproductivejusticesurvivors.ca/what-is-the-survivors-circle>.

²⁰⁰ Canada, Parliament, Senate, *Bill S-228: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Sterilization Procedures)*, 45th Parl., 1st sess. (2025), <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/45-1/bill/S-228/third-reading>.

health is Indigenous health.^{201,202,203,204,206,207} The legal precedents set by Aimée Craft and Nibi Inaakonigewin offer a roadmap for policy that treats water not as a resource, but as a relative with rights.

Centering Indigenous women's governance within policy, research, and clinical practice represents a shift from extraction to relationship—from systems that connect inawendiwin, life to those that sustain it. When matriarchal ethics guide policy, it becomes reparative, restoring balance between land, body, and community.

Conclusion

Across the seven sites, Indigenous women's leadership sustains systems of medicine, repair, education, and upholding governance systems rooted in relational law. These initiatives show that resurgence is not abstract but an embodied, intergenerational practice in which land, body, and story create a continuous pedagogy of care.

These initiatives demonstrate how Indigenous women sustain clinical and community care through matriarchal governance, protocol, and ceremony. Guided by womanist and Indigenous feminist frameworks and grounded in inawendiwin (connection), we show how land-based pedagogy, genocide-informed therapies, and land, water, and birth-centered practices enact Indigenous law as relational governance.

The Medicine Camp reaffirms that learning begins with the land. The Medicine Collective

restores ethical relations in urban spaces. The IFOT Collective reasserts Indigenous psychotherapeutic practice, while the Midwifery and Doula programs return birth and water to their rightful place in community governance. The Women's Wellness Gathering demonstrates the power of material culture (made by hand) in 'walking back' one's spirit with care and the support of women, while Nibi Inaakonigewin asserts that water law is planetary law.

The Matrilineal Policy elements show that matriarchal protocols function as self-determined law in institutional and public advocacy spaces. Together, these sites demonstrate that traditional medicine is a living governance system capable of transforming health, education, and policy.

The five interwoven practices—research coordination, protocol engagement, preparation and access, application on the land, and reflection and story sharing—provide a framework for translating relational ethics into daily practice. They show that knowledge is

²⁰¹ Dhillon, "Indigenous Feminisms."

²⁰² Mary Kate Dennis and Tabitha Robin, "Healthy on Our Own Terms: Indigenous Wellbeing and the Colonized Food System," *Journal of Critical Dietetics* 5, no. 1 (2020): 4–11.

²⁰³ Morrison, "Back to the Roots."

²⁰⁴ Morrison, "Reflections and Realities."

²⁰⁵ Redvers, "'The Land Is a Healer.'"

²⁰⁶ Young and Nadeau, "Moving with Water."

²⁰⁷ United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295 (2007).

renewed through relationship, ceremony, and reciprocity.

As Indigenous women continue to lead the regeneration of medicine, food, and water systems, they demonstrate the principle that health and sovereignty are inseparable. Their work reminds us that planetary wellbeing depends on relational governance and that health begins and ends in connection. Inawendiwin.

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