

What is land-based healing?

Land-based healing refers to traditional Indigenous health and spiritual wellness practices that recognize people’s relationship to the land. As Indigenous people work to decolonize their lives, interest in land-based healing is growing. From harvesting traditional food and medicine plants to engaging in ceremony, recreation and cultural-based counselling, land-based healing is a dynamic integrative practice. Land-based practices are centered in Indigenous pedagogy and recognize that cultural identity is interwoven with and connected to “land.”

What does “culturally grounded” mean?

Culturally grounded refers to adapting services in ways that make them relevant, accessible, and engaging to the culture being served. At VAHS, this means delivering medical, dental, and social services that are rooted in traditional Indigenous practices and ways of relating.

First Nations population in BC and Vancouver

Today, there are approximately 270,000 Indigenous people in British Columbia. They include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. There are more than 200 distinct First Nations in the province, each with their own unique traditions and history.

Vancouver has the third largest urban Indigenous population of any Canadian city. In Vancouver, there is often a distinction between urban Indigenous Peoples (people who live away from their traditional territories) and Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. But this doesn’t mean Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh people don’t live in urban areas.

In 2016, there were 270,585 Aboriginal people in British Columbia, making up 5.9% of the population. The majority of the Aboriginal population reported a single Aboriginal identity—either First Nations, Métis, or Inuk (Inuit).

In British Columbia (B.C.), most Indigenous people live on what is referred to as "unceded lands or territory."

* [Ninety-five percent of B.C.](https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/chapter/acknowledging-traditional-territories/#:~:text=Ninety%2Dfive%20percent%20of%20British,the%20Crown%20or%20to%20Canada.) is unceded traditional First Nations territory.
* Unceded means that First Nations people never ceded or legally signed away their lands to the Crown or Canada

Traditional Territory refers to the geographic area identified by a First Nation as the land their ancestors lived on since time immemorial (or were forced into by the encroachment of Settlers).

What is the Indian Act?

The *Indian Act* is the primary law the [federal government](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/federal-government) uses to administer [Indian status](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-status), local [First Nations](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-nations) governments and the management of [reserve](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-reserves) land. It also outlines governmental obligations to First Nations peoples. First introduced in 1876, the Act subsumed a number of colonial laws that aimed to eliminate First Nations culture in favour of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society.

 A new version of the Act was passed in 1951, and since then, has been amended several times, most significantly in 1985, with changes mainly focusing on the removal of discriminatory sections. It is an evolving, paradoxical document that has enabled trauma, human rights violations and social and cultural disruption for generations of Indigenous peoples.

<https://nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/The-Indian-Act-Said-WHAT-infographic.pdf>

**21 restrictions imposed at some point by the Indian Act in its 140 years of existence:**

1. Denied [women status](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/indian-act-does-not-violate-ontario-woman-s-charter-rights-court-rules-1.3103927)
2. Introduced [residential schools](http://preview.hs-sites.com/_hcms/preview/content/629005622?portalId=374848&_preview=true&preview_key=V-5Arivd&__hstc=16239081.29cc5eab52868ecdcba860fefb6affb4.1460559943544.1460559943544.1460559943544.1&__hssc=16239081.1.1460559943545&__hsfp=3406616591)
3. Created [reserves](http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/8-first-nation-reserve-faqs)
4. [Renamed](http://www.ictinc.ca/indian-act-naming-policies) individuals with European names
5. [Restricted First Nations from leaving reserve without](http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/dark-history-canada-s-pass-system-1.3454022) [permission](http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indian-act-and-the-pass-system) from Indian agent
6. Enforced enfranchisement of any First Nation admitted to university
7. Could expropriate portions of reserves for roads, railways, and other public works, as well as move an entire reserve away from a municipality if it was deemed expedient
8. Could lease out uncultivated reserve lands to non-First Nations if the new leaseholder would use it for farming or pasture
9. Forbade First Nations from forming political organizations
10. Prohibited anyone, First Nations or non-First Nations, from soliciting funds for First Nation legal claims without special license from the Superintendent General. (this 1927 amendment granted the government control over the ability of First Nations to pursue land claims)
11. Prohibited the sale of alcohol to First Nations
12. Prohibited sale of ammunition to First Nations
13. Prohibited pool hall owners from allowing First Nations entrance
14. Imposed the "[band council](http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indian-act-and-elected-chief-and-band-council-system)" system
15. Forbade First Nations from speaking their native language
16. Forbade First Nations from practicing their traditional religion
17. Forbade western First Nations from appearing in any public dance, show, exhibition, stampede, or pageant wearing traditional regalia
18. Declared [potlatch](http://www.ictinc.ca/the-potlatch-ban-abolishment-of-first-nations-ceremonies) and other cultural ceremonies illegal
19. Denied First Nations the [right to vote](http://preview.hs-sites.com/_hcms/preview/content/620852809?portalId=374848&_preview=true&preview_key=0lv2OW0k&__hstc=16239081.29cc5eab52868ecdcba860fefb6affb4.1460559943544.1460559943544.1460559943544.1&__hssc=16239081.1.1460559943545&__hsfp=3406616591)
20. Created [permit system](http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indian-act-and-the-permit-system-) to control First Nations ability to sell products from farms
21. Created under the British rule for the purpose of subjugating one race—Aboriginal People

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/21-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-indian-act-1.3533613>

Health of Indigenous People in BC

Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples possessed rich and diverse healing systems due to an active lifestyle and healthy traditional diets. These diets were balanced and included protein, healthy fats, and some fruits and vegetables. This good health included ceremonial, spiritual, and physical elements.

Settlers’ introduction of new and contagious diseases placed these healing systems under considerable strain. Europeans also brought profound social, economic, and political changes to the well-being of Indigenous communities. These changes continue to affect the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada today.

Some of the findings found in a report released in 2019 by the BC First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and the BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) found that:

* Life expectancy among Status First Nations people improved between 2005 and 2015 but the life expectancy for other residents of B.C. improved at a faster rate, so the health status gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents actually widened.
* The age-standardized mortality rate, which measures death from all causes, improved somewhat since 2005, but the health status gap increased.
* The infant mortality rate decreased slightly since 2005 but the gap between the population groups increased.

<https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/indigenous-health-improves-but-health-status-gap-with-other-british-columbians-widens>

Indigenous children made up 53.8 per cent of all children in foster care

Data from theStatistics Canada’s 2021 census reported that Indigenous children made up 53.8 per cent of all children in foster care. This went up slightly from the 2016 census, in which 52.2 per cent of children in care under age 14 were Indigenous. At the time, only about eight per cent of kids that age in Canada were Indigenous.

More than three percent of Indigenous children living in private households in 2021 were in foster care compared to the 0.2 per cent of non-Indigenous children. Nationally, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7 per cent of all children 14 years of age and younger.

In recent years, there has been a significant push from Indigenous leaders and child welfare advocates across the country to address the myriad systemic issues contributing to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. But experts say factors like colonialism, chronic underfunding of child welfare systems, discriminatory practices and poverty remain.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/census-indigenous-children-care-1.6590075>

UN Declaration & Indigenous Right to Health

The UN Declaration outlines the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous right to health means that Indigenous peoples should have full access to health care services in ways that reflect and are responsive to Indigenous worldviews and conceptions of health, without discrimination.

The Indigenous right to health is also inextricable from the Indigenous right of self-determination and the inherent right of self-government. Self-determination speaks to control by Indigenous peoples over their health and well-being, including through their own governing institutions, jurisdiction, and laws.

The Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified the UN Declaration as “the framework for reconciliation”. In November 2019, the B.C. government passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA). The federal government has also committed to pass legislation to implement the UN Declaration.

<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/613/2020/11/In-Plain-Sight-Summary-Report.pdf>

What is colonialism?

Colonialism occurs when groups of people come to a place or country, steal the land and resources from Indigenous peoples, and develop a set of laws and public processes that are designed to violate the human rights of the Indigenous peoples, violently suppress their governance, legal, social, and cultural structures, and force them to conform with the colonial state.

History of Indian Hospitals in BC

Segregated facilities, underfunding, low standards of care, violations of individual integrity and autonomy – including of the physical bodies of Indigenous individuals – and a failure to address needs expressed by communities and support Indigenous self-determination are all part of Canada’s own history of health services for Indigenous peoples.

This includes a history of Indian hospitals, established primarily to allay white settler fears associated with the communicability of tuberculosis (TB). Another major rationale for a segregated hospital system was to help the federal government save money; government found it could operate Indian hospitals at half the cost of caring for First Nations and Métis patients in community hospitals. Three hospitals were located in B.C.: Coqualeetza Indian Hospital in Sardis (1941 to 1969), Miller Bay Indian Hospital near Prince Rupert (1946 to 1970) and Nanaimo Indian Hospital (1946 to 1967).

At the same time, Indigenous peoples were being used for medical research and experimentation, again primarily to aid in the discovery of treatments for the settler population. Residential schools were the sites of many scientific research experiments throughout the 20th century. As sanatoria care increased, these too became places where trials and research were carried out, typically on infants and children who were classified as wards of the state.

The lives of many Indigenous young people at this time were characterized by a shuttling between segregated institutional systems – mandatory attendance at residential schools, exposure to TB as a result of poor living conditions in those schools, followed by legally compulsory treatment at hospitals. The history of these experiences within Indian hospitals has not been as well documented as that in the residential school system. The voices and stories of survivors need to be heard if we are to truly comprehend what must be confronted with respect to Indigenous-specific racism in today’s health care system.

First Nations women continue to be denied status

One legal expert estimates that nearly 50,000 children of First Nations women have been denied status since 1985 because of the way Aboriginal Affairs assumes that the unnamed father on their birth certificate is non-Aboriginal.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/indian-act-does-not-violate-ontario-woman-s-charter-rights-court-rules-1.3103927>

Overrepresentation of Indigenous women in custody in B.C. reaches all-time high

The numbers in B.C. provincial prisons are climbing and Indigenous women account for up to 41 per cent of the total female inmate population. As of May 18, 2022, there were 93 women in provincial custody in B.C., 38 of which self-identified as Indigenous, confirmed the provincial Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

<https://bc.ctvnews.ca/overrepresentation-of-indigenous-women-in-custody-in-b-c-reaches-all-time-high-1.5924945>

What is the Medicine Wheel?

The Medicine Wheel represent the alignment and continuous interaction of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realities. The circle shape represents the [interconnectivity](https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-does-indigenous-connectivity-mean) of all aspects of one’s being, including the connection with the [natural world](https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/first-nation-relationship-to-the-land). Medicine wheels are frequently believed to be the circle of awareness of the individual self; the circle of knowledge that provides the power we each have over our own lives.

Homeless in Vancouver

Homeless counts have taken place across the Metro Vancouver region every three years since 2002. The City of Vancouver started conducting an annual count in 2010. Each year, the count takes place throughout the city over a 24-hour period in March, inside shelters during the evening, and on the streets the next day.

For the 2020 Metro Vancouver count, a total of 3,634 people were identified as experiencing homelessness in the Metro Vancouver region, including Vancouver 2,095 in Vancouver. Twenty-nine more people were experiencing homelessness in the Metro Vancouver region compared to the 2017 homeless count, representing a change of less than one per cent. This suggests regional homelessness remained somewhat consistent prior to the pandemic.

In a continuing trend, Indigenous people are overrepresented in those experiencing homelessness, with 711 individuals identified in the count or 33 per cent of survey respondents overall. When compared to what their presence in the general population would predict, Indigenous people are 13.2 times more likely to experience homelessness.

[**https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/2020%20HomelessCount%20PressRelease.pdf**](https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/2020%20HomelessCount%20PressRelease.pdf)