

NATIONAL HEALTH FELLOWS

SEEDING HEALTH AND CARE SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

Current Reality

We know that our health and care systems across Canada are at breaking point. We have been focused on sick care when we also need a system that helps us all move towards health and well-being. We know that many people - especially Indigenous and other marginalized groups - have been harmed by interpersonal and system racism. We need a new operating system.

Mobilizing for Impact

The National Health Fellows program aims to support leaders, organizations, and communities in the emergence of a new future that goes beyond sick care towards health and wellbeing for all. Our **Charter**, which articulates our collective interdependence, serves as a foundational tide for learning from Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to correct the disconnect that keeps us from lifting all boats.

The intention of the Charter is brought to life through a **Sacred Artifact**, a stone with the etching of a maple key, gifted through ceremony by Elder and Grandmother Renée Thomas-Hill (Cayuga Nation, Bear Clan of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory). The stone serves as a reminder that we need the courage and humility to make room at the table for all voices and take risks to try new ways of working together that break from the status quo. The maple key represents the seeds of change that we need to spread far and wide. The two 'arms' of the maple key reflect our need for what Mi'kmaq elder Albert Marshall called 'two-eyed seeing'; the integration of the kind of deep relational work exemplified in Indigenous ways with the strategic, analytical Western ways of thinking about systems transformation.

Achieving Shared Purpose

We imagine our shared purpose for making impact as three complementary and intersecting streams that cohere our effort at different levels of health and care systems.

- **Inspiring a new public narrative** - The NHF and the HLA want to be at the forefront of starting a new public conversation that leverages the principles and language of the Charter and values of two-eyed seeing embodied by the artifact (described below). Through thought leadership, convening leaders in dialogue, and serving as a platform for connecting and amplifying fellows' actions we aim to catalyze a shift to a new operating system for health and care.
- **Embody the change we desire through deep relational work** - Achieving the human-level transformation to embody the intention of the charter requires leaders to learn, unlearn, and grow

together. The NHF program fosters experiential learning with fellows within and between cohorts through engagements that build meaningful and authentic relationships across boundaries and build their capability to support systems change beyond their organizational and regional silos.

- **Gift the teachings to others to spread and scale change** - We need a social movement that scales and spreads the principles and intentions for transforming ourselves as leaders and how we work to make impact. Rather than a singular, one-size-fits-all approach, we invite fellows to take the Charter and Artifact into their own communities and organizations and work with others to find ways of putting the principles in action that reflect local context.

Theory of Change

IF WE:

- **Start a new public conversation** about transforming our health and care systems rooted in the values of two-eyed seeing from the NHF Charter
- **Learn, unlearn, and grow together** through building meaningful and authentic relationships across boundaries and build our capabilities
- **Gift the teachings** in own communities and organizations and work with others to find ways of putting the Charter principles in action

THEN THERE WILL BE:

- **New language and new stories** emerging that point to how we upgrade our 'operating system' and ways of thinking about systems change
- **New connections and embodiment of the change** we desire through the capability for deep relational work and systems thinking that transcends organizational and regional silos
- **Diverse, ground-up efforts** that reflect local context rather than a singular, one-size-fits-all approach

SO THAT EVENTUALLY:

- **We have a social movement** that scales and spreads the principles and intentions for transforming ourselves as leaders and how we work to make impact
- **Courageous, inclusive, and collaborative actions** will correct the disconnects that prevent improved health and well-being for all

NATIONAL HEALTH FELLOWS CHARTER

With each cohort of the National Health Fellows program, we are dedicated to building new capabilities in leaders that align with the intricacies and complexities of the health and care systems in Canada. The program aims to create spaces for novel ways of understanding and embodying leadership within and beyond organizations and regions, thereby enhancing individual and collective capacities to advance health and wellbeing nationwide.

In our inaugural cohort, the emphasis was on addressing the complexity of colonialism's impact on leaders, organizations, and the communities they serve. We embarked on a path of attending more deeply to the inner places we see and work from actively engaging with the challenge of how we might commit to dismantling systemic, interpersonal, Indigenous-specific, and other forms of racism. This involved continuous self-reflection, seeking knowledge about Canada's history with Indigenous communities, and fostering respectful relationships. We began to understand that being in "right relationship" with ourselves and with Indigenous peoples is the foundation for how to address inequities between all people.

Like a rising tide that lifts all boats, we acknowledge that correcting the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples and communities will benefit everyone. Indigenous ways of knowing and being centre our fundamental interdependence with the land, each other, and all life. Through recognizing and reconciling how colonialism has severed these relationships for Indigenous peoples, it becomes possible attend to the myriad ways in which all of us are disconnected from the broader ecology of living relationships that bring forth health and well-being.

As we launch our second cohort, we build on our commitment to embedding Indigenous ways of knowing and being as the correction for health and wellbeing in our country while we explore the potential for bringing a broad range of people, organizations, and capabilities to work together in ways we have yet to. **With our next build, we will focus on the question: "How might we enhance the collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors to create positive health outcomes for all Canadians"?** We will root our exploration of this question in the NHF commitment to the principle of interdependence on one another and the values of the Seven Sacred Teachings (love, respect, humility, courage, honesty, truth, and wisdom) as the basis for how we support each other as a community and in how we make choices that impact the health and well-being of others.

Leaders will build networks and learn to navigate the complexities of cross-sector partnerships with new tools and practices for creating shared value. Our aim is to foster innovation and cooperation for the betterment of our nation's health and wellbeing, while remaining true to the values our health and care systems are built upon. Join us on this unique leadership development experience, where each cohort is tailored to address the

evolving challenges in health and care, equipping leaders with the skills and mindset needed for transformative change.

Abbreviated Summary:

As National Health Fellows, we're committed to addressing the impact of colonialism on ourselves, our organization, the people we lead and the people we serve. We'll continuously question our beliefs, seek knowledge about Canada's history with Indigenous communities, and actively dismantle systemic, interpersonal, Indigenous-specific, and all other forms of racism with humility, honesty, and love. Our pledge is to lead while learning, fostering respectful relationships, and supporting each other through this transformative journey.

COMMITMENT STATEMENT

The Fellowship will embody the principle of interdependenceⁱ and the values of the 7 Sacred Teachings (Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, and Truth) in how we support each other as a community and in how we make choices that impact the health and well-being of others.

Specifically, we commit to question what we believe to be true. We will continue to seek out new knowledge and understanding including the impact of Canada's shared history on the lives, experiences and outcomes of Indigenous people, their communities, and Canadians from all walks of life.

We commit to learn, act, and change with courage. We will listen to and build respectful relationships with Indigenous leaders and communities (all other leaders that bring diverse perspectives to the table). The truth, wisdom and solutions will come forward when we listen and learn together.

We commit to acting with respect and curiosity. We will use our power and influence to dismantle and eliminate systemic, interpersonal, and Indigenous-specific racism, and all other forms of racism. We will do this work humbly, bravely, and lovingly, taking care of ourselves and each other to stay resilient amidst the challenges and discomfort.

Bringing the Charter and Statement to Life

Based on the feedback we've received, the most immediate ways for bringing the Charter to life include:

- Using an abbreviated version of the charter in email signatures
- Speaking the charter as a pledge or covenant to other fellows
- Providing an opportunity for subsequent cohorts to contribute to the Charter as a living document.
- Fellows collectively signing the document to signal commitment.
- Sharing the commitment with others in our networks by using it with the artifact (see below) in talking circles/conversations, in email signatures.



ARTIFACT

We heard clearly from our first cohort that both our intentions and actions need to be aligned; head, heart and hand need to work together in bringing forth change. To this end, the Commitment Statement and Charter act as conceptual ‘north stars’ that clarify our intention and what National Health Fellows and the Fellowship program will pay primary attention to. To embody the values and principles named in these documents, we require concrete actions, guides and tools that can both remind us of our commitments and help shape how we individually and collectively act. One of these actions is to co-create and use an artifact.

Grandmother Renée proposed that we adopt **Maple Keys** as our artifact. The maple, of course, is a tree that we can find across a vast swath of Canada and Indigenous territories. The maple provides us with many things, not the least of which is the sweet treat of its syrup. The keys are an ingenious design of nature, which can spread away from whence it came, spreading new life for the next generation.



We are currently engaging an Indigenous artist to create a stone with the maple key etching. In ceremony during Module 1 of Cohort 2, each fellow will be gifted two stones by Grandmother Renée. Cohort 1 fellows will gift one of their stones to the incoming fellows and we will invite a co-creative conversation about how fellows might use the artifact as a means of putting the charter and commitment into practice.

Suggested Reading

Bateson, N. (2023). *Combining*. Triarchy Press.

Bouchard, D. & Martin, J. (2009/2020). *Seven Sacred Teachings | Niizhwaaswi gagiikwewin. More Than Words* Press.

Kimmerer, R.W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions. (see chapter Maple Nation)

Lafontaine, A., Lidstone-Jones, C., & Lawford, K. (2020). Seeing with Two Eyes: Indigenous Leadership and the LEADS Framework in G. Dickson and B. Tholl (eds.) *Bringing Leadership to Life in Health: LEADS in a Caring Environment* (pp.279-298). Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Two-Eyed Seeing – Institute for Integrative Science and Health, Cape Breton University
<http://www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/>

Insights into Healthcare: Sharing Indigenous Teachings - Interview with Dr. Amy Montour Leah Fleet and Joanna Williams, McMaster University
<https://www.degrootemcmaster.ca/articles/insights-into-healthcare-sharing-indigenous-teachings/>

Grandmother's Wisdom - Grandmother Renée Thomas-Hill ([4 min video](#))

ⁱ Our interdependence with each other and all life is a principle reflected in cultures and traditions throughout the world and expressed in many ways. From the Coast Salish *nuts amáht* or *nə́hčá?mat*, translated as “we are one” to the African “ubuntu” of Zulu and Xhosa origins roughly translated as “humanity towards others” or “I am because we are”, the unity of humanity is a fundamental truth that speaks to our responsibility to care for others. In recognizing others for their unique differences, we affirm our own humanity, a quality we owe to each other. The Seven Sacred Teachings originate in the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishnaabe and have been adopted by many Indigenous nations across North America/Turtle Island. The teachings include love, respect, honesty, courage/bravery, truth, wisdom, and humility and represent universal values found in many cultures around the world.