



The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) welcomed delegates from Indigenous communities of Northern Ontario to the Indigenous Research Gathering 2016 in the territory of the Anishinabek (Ojibway) Peoples of Baawaating and where the Métis have resided. The two day Gathering, preceded by an afternoon and evening of ceremony and reflection, provided many opportunities for the delegates, invited guests, and organizers to interact and talk about how research can be better incorporated and be more meaningful for the communities of Northern Ontario.

The Indigenous Research Gathering was organized to review the past and present research practices, to acknowledge negative research experiences of the past, and also reflect on the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they relate to research. Five research groups, whose successful research has made positive impacts on the health of communities, talked about what they had learned on the important aspects of conducting Indigenous community research. All five research groups involved Indigenous researchers and community members, and the messages were very similar regarding the importance of community, education, time, and ownership. Recommendations for the future of health research in the North were then discussed in the form of a large community meeting.

The following four elements are the starting point for researchers to adopt when they aspire to work with Indigenous communities:

COMMUNITY

The community is at the heart of any research study, and for research to have a positive impact, it must address issues that are meaningful and relevant to community. It is important to develop a collaborative, participative, and meaningful approach that connects researchers with community priorities and connects communities to researchers who have been successful in conducting research with Indigenous communities.

EDUCATION

Researchers need to be aware and have a good understanding of the history, language, and culture of the Indigenous communities they are working with. They must also have a good understanding of how research has not always been beneficial to Indigenous communities. In keeping the community at the heart of any research, it is important that research projects also provide opportunities for Indigenous communities to build on their understanding of research and that the project itself supports capacity building of Indigenous researchers.

TIME

Research requires time to form and build trusting, respectful, and long-term relationships between researchers, community members, leaders, and Elders. It is important to take the time to build a strong understanding of the impact that colonization has had and continues to have on Indigenous communities. This understanding combined with building an understanding of the Indigenous community history, culture, and language are imperative in building trust and developing meaningful relationships, and needs to be incorporated in the research program. Funding models for research need to reflect the time required to develop solid relations between researchers and communities.

OWNERSHIP

Research in the community is a shared resource of the community and research data and the outcomes from research must be freely available in a form that is meaningful for community. The research groups spoke of the importance of adhering to the OCAP principles: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. Clear understanding of ownership, sharing, and intellectual property needs to be established from the outset of a research project.



Facilitated group discussions engaged participants at NOSM's Indigenous Research Gathering.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine was established with an explicit social accountability mandate and the School's Indigenous Gatherings have provided a means to hear from communities on topics and issues of importance to the community. Building on this tradition and the clear messages from the Indigenous Research Gathering 2016, the following recommendations are provided.

- Adopt, at a minimum, the four elements of Community, Education, Time, and Ownership as guiding principles to building relationships with Indigenous communities.
- 2. Develop a Research Toolkit that encompasses the educational needs of the communities and researchers with sections to include best practices, information on communities, research protocols/guidelines (including procedures for community and academic research ethics approvals), examples of successful research projects, and descriptions of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. It is important to ensure training about the Toolkit for community members and researchers and to ensure a mechanism is in place to follow-up on research and that research outcomes are implemented.
- 3. Develop a web-based Network that includes a system where community members and researchers can connect on priorities and where communities can find researchers that have been successful in conducting research with Indigenous communities. One example of a model that could be adapted to assist communities with partnering with researchers is the First Nations Environmental Health Innovative Network (FNEHIN), which was developed by an Advisory Group of First Nation Peoples from across Canada in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations. This type of model could be added to NOSM's public website, providing both researchers and communities easy access.



GATHERING REPORT

The full report of the Indigenous Research Gathering 2016 can be found at icemen2016.ca/irgreport.

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