

Strengthening Our Relations: A Two Year Plan Moving Forward with Indigenous Peoples

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Introduction

Even before NOSM's Charter MD Class was welcomed in 2005, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine demonstrated its commitment to improving the health of the peoples and communities of Northern Ontario. At the earliest stages of development, NOSM engaged the Indigenous communities of Northern Ontario as part of its mandate to be accountable to the cultural diversity of the region. The School has always recognized the need for guidance and direction from Indigenous peoples and communities to shape education and research that can address their identified health priorities. In 2003, NOSM conducted a workshop titled *Follow Your Dreams*, hosted by Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation.

The three-day gathering brought together over 130 delegates from Indigenous communities across the North, including political treaty organizations, Elders, physicians, nurses, and other health-care professionals with experience in Indigenous health settings. Addressing issues of importance and relevance to Indigenous Peoples, participants discussed with NOSM leaders and faculty their ideas about student admissions criteria, curriculum development, NOSM governance, the need to engage Indigenous youth, and how to provide adequate financial and emotional support to Indigenous learners. Many recommendations from this gathering served as a blueprint for the development of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. The Follow Your Dreams report recommended that NOSM should be an "Indigenous-friendly medical school." Two of the key recommendations were that NOSM MD graduates be culturally competent in issues related to Indigenous health and the need for the School to build and strengthen partnerships with Indigenous communities. This led to the establishment of Indigenous Affairs Unit and the Indigenous Reference Group, as well as development of partnerships with Indigenous communities so that all NOSM medical students have a mandatory four-week cultural immersion experience in their first year.

Four subsequent gatherings have taken place: *Keeping the Vision* hosted by Fort William First Nation in 2006; *Living the Vision* hosted by the Métis Nation of Ontario in Sudbury in 2011; *Walking the Vision* hosted by Chapleau Cree First Nation in 2014; and; *Gathering Together for Well-Being* hosted by Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation. Two additional gatherings focused specifically on research have also occurred, and include the *Partnership Opportunities in Research Gathering* in Thunder Bay in 2008 and the *Indigenous Research Gathering* in Sault

Ste. Marie in 2016. Each of these gatherings—and a variety of additional yearly meetings—honour the participants’ continued commitment to the School, and provide an opportunity for the School to report back on the progress and successes achieved with respect to the recommendations and to receive further guidance into the development and on-going operations of NOSM.

As NOSM developed and evolved, there has also been a significant change in the environment in which we relate with Indigenous communities. Internationally, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has delineated and defined the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples, including their rights to cultural and ceremonial expression, identity, language, employment, health, and education; inclusive of rights to traditional medicine and healing practices. Within Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Policy on Indigenizing the Academy provide further guidance for NOSM to make lasting change in the health and wellbeing of all Northern Ontarians.

Internally, NOSM has recently received a report from an Expert Panel Review on Indigenous Relations. The Executive Group and senior leadership at NOSM sees it as essential that we recognise the “meta-message” of the Expert Panel report which is that although we have made great progress in meeting our social accountability mandate there is still much to be done. The ultimate sign of success will be a future in which Indigenous people do not experience systemic racism or colonial practices within NOSM. Decolonization is not a metaphor for our ongoing efforts to realize our social accountability mandate or achieving social justice, but rather a process of self-reflection to understand and change our roles in perpetuating injustice and marginalizing Indigenous peoples, communities, and knowledge. In order to accomplish this there must be visible, meaningful, lasting change in all aspects of the organization.

The Expert Panel report presents a clear distillation of what the Panel members saw and heard, organized into 44 recommendations. It is important that we do not undertake one-off activities or make changes that may be perceived as tokenism. For example, the Indigenous Cultural Safety training at the last Board meeting was important and valuable for Academic Council and the Board of Directors but, if that is all that we do in terms of cultural safety training, this may be viewed as tokenism.

There are five major domains to be addressed in responding to the Expert Panel report:

- Learner Recruitment and Support
- Curriculum Development and Delivery
- Cultural Safety and Anti Racism Training
- Decision Making
- Policies and Procedures

Goals and Actions Planned for the Next Two Years

Connecting With All Our Relations

NOSM is currently hosting a series of focused planning sessions on the implementation of the Expert Panel Report within the breadth of our Indigenous relations. This process involves the assessment and prioritization of the recommendations and facilitated planning with identified leads. We are utilizing a user centered planning approach that focusses on working backwards from an ideal future state and develops a path forward. Together we are embarking on a generative planning process that will result in shared goals and metrics. The plan for the next two years involves building on our assets by strengthening our relations and increasing our capacity through strategic actions. As we undertake the actions outlined we will continue to seek guidance from all our relations on those that affect them. These relationships include:

- Present medical students, residents and other learners
- NOSM graduates
- Indigenous Local Community Coordinators
- Executive Group members and their portfolios
- Staff of all NOSM portfolios and units
- Academic Council and its standing committees
- Faculty including employed and stipendiary faculty members
- Elders from all parts of Northern Ontario
- Indigenous community institutions such as Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), Indigenous Friendship Centers, and children's agencies

- Political entities such as bands, Political Territorial Organizations (PTOs), and tribal councils
- Indigenous health professionals and organizations such as physicians, hospitals, regional health authorities, Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, and public health agencies

Learner Recruitment and Support

Our goal is to ensure all Indigenous learners have seamless academic and cultural support to maximize their likelihood of success as learners and physicians in the future.

Actions initiated:

- Broadening relations with Indigenous student groups of the partner universities, Lakehead University and Laurentian University.
- Strengthening admissions processes to improve recruitment and support for Indigenous applicants.
- Strengthening relations between Indigenous Affairs, Learner Affairs and the Postgraduate Resident Wellness Office for improved academic and cultural support to Indigenous learners during medical school and residency related to both informal help and formal remediation.
- Involving Elders who are representative of the diverse Indigenous communities and ways of knowing in Northern Ontario.
- Establishing a Knowledge Keepers Circle and formal roles for Elders/ Knowledge Keepers within NOSM to support ceremonial/ spiritual/ cultural support to all learners.
- Support continued cultural and community connection for Indigenous learners.

Actions to be initiated by:

June 2020

Facilitating formal mentorship of Indigenous medical students by Indigenous faculty and residents, while ensuring that the mentors and mentees are supported through policies, resources and faculty / professional development to maximize the impact of the mentorship.

June 2021

Exploring the potential for implementing a distinctions-based approach to learner recruitment which will mean enhancing pathways for First Nations and Inuit youth towards health professional careers

Curriculum Development and Delivery

Curriculum Development and Delivery focused on Indigenous history, tradition and culture will be undertaken by Indigenous peoples.

Academic Council is discussing the possibility of creating of an Indigenous Health Committee which could oversee the:

- Development and implementation of a longitudinal spiral Indigenous health curriculum throughout the four years of medical school.
- Integration of the core requirements for Indigenous health into the formal curriculum, resident assessment system and program evaluation of all residency programs at NOSM as outlined by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) through the identification of key competencies that build upon the roles within the CanMEDS Framework.
- Development of an Academic Network focused on Indigenous Health
- Development and implementation of a formal network for Indigenous faculty
- Ensure the continuing professional development (CPD) in Indigenous Health for all clinical and non-clinical faculty members must be made mandatory.
- Work collaboratively with NOAMA and the Associate Deans to develop mandatory academic deliverables related to Indigenous Health for the Local Education Groups (LEGs).

The idea of the Indigenous Health committee and the draft terms of reference have been presented to Academic Council with the IRG Co-Chairs in attendance. Feedback has been received and the revised TOR will be sent out to Indigenous faculty and learners and to Academic Council for review and discussion by all standing committees.

Cultural Safety and Anti Racism Training

Cultural Safety and Antiracism Training is an organized, systematic approach that will involve everyone in the school in a progressive program with a series of sessions over time that each builds on the previous one.

Actions initiated:

- The Director of Human Resources is developing a clear cultural safety and anti-racism policy that applies to learners, faculty members and staff and an accessible and supportive process for reporting and follow-up.
- Cultural safety and anti-racism training will be mandatory for all faculty members, staff, residents, medical students and other learners.
- All people who participate on the Admissions Committee and in the Admissions process will complete Indigenous Cultural Safety training and Intrinsic Bias training.

Actions to be initiated by:

June 2020

All Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators who lead sessions in the Indigenous health curriculum to be trained in anti-racist / anti-colonial pedagogical approaches

Developing sufficient support to create a safe learning environment for learners and facilitators to debrief following difficult sessions.

June 2021

Engage senior leadership at the academic health science centres, hospitals, and other clinical institutions / spaces that are associated with NOSM to ensure that they are culturally safe and supportive clinical learning environments for all learners, faculty members and staff. Consideration will be given to the inclusion of assessment of cultural safety and anti-racism in clinical evaluations of learners and on annual performance reviews and reappointments for faculty.

Decision Making

Contribution to decision making within NOSM by Indigenous Peoples relates to ensuring the relevance and realization of our social accountability mandate. With a strong internal commitment to honouring our responsibilities to

Indigenous communities, NOSM is evolving our structures to strengthen the integration of Indigenous peoples and knowledge in our decision making processes.

Actions initiated:

- Engaging in bilateral negotiations with key Indigenous partners focused on appropriate relationships, governance and accountability mechanisms.
- Evolution of the IRG into a distinctions-based model reflective of the diverse Indigenous peoples, health practices, and ways of knowing.
- The creation of an Indigenous Health Committee of Academic Council that embeds Indigenous peoples throughout the academic decision making process.
- Establishing a Knowledge Keepers Circle to support continued cultural and community connections.

Actions to be initiated by:

June 2020

The creation of a Dean's level senior administrative position focused on Indigenous Health

Policies and Procedures

All NOSM Policies and Procedures require revision and updating to ensure freedom from colonial practices and systemic racism. These include policies relating to learners, human resources, planning, and community relations.

Actions initiated:

- Revision and updating of NOSM HR policies and procedures for recruitment and appointment of staff and faculty members.
- Ensure a fair and safe admissions process, including the development and use of selection tools that assess for attitudes and behaviours related to Indigenous peoples in all applicants.
- Emergencies procedures for CBM 106 are being updated and communicated to all those responsible in issues related to student wellbeing or lapses in professionalism during the placements.
- Involve elders who are representative of the diverse First Nations and Métis communities that are served.

- Establishing an Elders/ Knowledge Keepers Circle to support the IAU/ new Indigenous Health Academic Unit/Network.
- Employ a Distinctions-based approach to community engagement and evolution of the current Indigenous Reference Group into a new Indigenous Advisory Group
- Identify resources to allow NOSM to have more of a visible presence in the Indigenous communities it serves, with opportunities for Senior Administration, the Board, faculty and staff to visit and engage local leaders.

Actions to be initiated by:

June 2020

- Mentorship and leadership coaching will be made available to Indigenous leadership.
- Develop and implement an Indigenous Health Workforce Development Plan, including policies which require specific recruitment of Indigenous peoples for job opportunities.
- Integrate Indigenous planning into the larger strategic plan
- Medical school applicants will acknowledge and commit to meaningful and respectful participation in CBM 106. Engagement of the unions in the development of supportive policies.
- Integrate the assessment of cultural safety and anti-racism in hiring.
- Provide culturally appropriate professional assistance in mediation and conflict resolution.
- Establish a Code of Conduct that is clear and that people are equally held accountable to.
- Explore means of reporting, while protecting confidentiality, the number of complaints, investigations, and the outcomes in order to send a clear message about the unacceptability of culturally unsafe or racist behavior.

Moving Forward Together

This plan serves as a living document accountable to all communities in Northern Ontario. Designed as a framework for ongoing work, the generative process that emerges will measure progress with regular reporting to the NOSM community while creating space for ongoing input and guidance. The School will invite all collaborators for ongoing input as we continue to address the spirit and intent of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, and our own Expert Panel Report on Indigenous Relations.