

Land Acknowledgement Practices to Inform Public Health Professionals



Report
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Public Health Ontario

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Summary

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, the practice of land acknowledgements (LA) have become more common among public institutions – to acknowledge the treaty, unceded and/or traditional lands Indigenous Peoples who have and continue to live upon and steward the territory, and recognise the significance of land. It is a challenge for non-Indigenous people to deliver a LA which extends beyond oversimplified or tokenistic gestures and truly contributes to the process of reconciliation. Adopting and meaningfully articulating a LA in partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities, and maintaining these relationships/partnerships, are steps towards reconciliation.

Currently, there is no synthesis of practices to provide guidance for developing and integrating LAs in the public health field. This scoping review describes LA practices from Canadian contexts to inform public health professionals. The scoping review engaged collaborators from various sectors, including Indigenous researchers from the Toronto, Ontario area. Published and grey literature indexed in 12 databases from when they were established to May 2022 were assessed for inclusion. In addition, open access sources (e.g., newspapers, organizational websites) were searched to May 2022. A total of 54 articles or documents met the inclusion criteria. Relevant data were extracted and categorized with their contributions summarized. This review included published information that was publicly-available at the time of the search.

Land acknowledgement was not consistently or clearly defined by regions or organizations, but there were consistencies in their content. However, land acknowledgements are not static statements and are intended to evolve and change as our understandings and knowledge changes. All land acknowledgements named Indigenous Peoples, and recent land acknowledgements cited “unceded” land, along with naming of ancestral and traditional lands. Many land acknowledgements cited Reconciliation explicitly, but very few land acknowledgements made mention of carrying out of further Reconciliation actions beyond making the land acknowledgement. Mention of Treaties was common across land acknowledgements; for example, the Dish with One Spoon and Two Row Wampum, as well as numbered Treaties. Some land acknowledgements used Indigenous language, with this sometimes limited to a single word, often ‘migweech’.^a

^a Migweech is noted as having different spellings from different sources. Spelling within the document is drawn from the source cited. Our understanding is that migweech translates to ‘thank you’ in English, from Anishnaabe/Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwa. While this term was observed the most, blanket use of the term across all land acknowledgements is not appropriate. For example, since the term is Anishinaabemowin, it would likely not feature in land acknowledgements that talk about Cree Peoples. The use of language is further mentioned in the limitations section of this document.

While the true purpose of land acknowledgements is not proposed by this scoping review without further Indigenous engagement, the institutional guidance located was most consistently linking the purpose of land acknowledgements with Reconciliation. The guidance recommended ongoing learning and self-reflection, building and maintaining meaningful relationships/partnerships with Indigenous communities, with strategies for making land acknowledgements meaningful. Guidance indicated that land acknowledgements should evolve over time and gave direction to engage Indigenous people in their development and also in their review and evolution.

Questions and gaps uncovered by the scoping review reinforce the need for further Indigenous knowledge keeper consultation to determine how best to move land acknowledgement practices forward in a meaningful way.

Background

Land acknowledgement (LA), also referred to as acknowledgement of Indigenous territories and connection to the land, is a traditional Indigenous process/practice of acknowledging the traditional territories and ongoing presence of Indigenous people. This has been done by Indigenous groups for many years, has cultural and political significance, and now is increasingly used as a tool of truth or starting point for reconciliation. From the worldviews of Indigenous peoples, health is a holistic view of wellness, central to which is connection to the land, along with language, beings of Creation, and ancestry, with support from a caring family and environment.¹ Connection to the land is an integral part of Indigenous peoples' identity and a determinant of health.²⁻⁴ Connection to the land is also a tool among Indigenous populations, along with revitalization of culture and language, and reinforcing the importance of identity.⁵ The land loss and relocation through colonization have triggered detrimental cultural loss, as well as destruction of families and degradation of Indigenous peoples' life circumstances.⁴ Indigenous populations are marginalized, vulnerable and underrepresented on their own homelands via colonization and assimilation over centuries.⁶

Residential schools were one way that colonization, segregation, assimilation, and genocide were planned and carried out, with children forcibly separated from their families, preventing them from, or punishing them for, speaking their language and for following the cultural and spiritual practices of their homes.⁷ The intergenerational impact of colonization and genocide has been confirmed and should now be part of the consciousness of Canadians with the recent discovery of unmarked graves and mass grave sites on the grounds of former residential schools.⁵ There were more than 130 known residential schools across Canada.⁸ The first school opened in 1831, and it was not until 1958 that Indian Affairs regional inspectors recommend the abolition of residential schools.⁹ The last residential school closed in the 1990s^b and investigations into deaths at the schools are ongoing, following the recovery of the remains of 215 children at a former residential school in Kamloops.⁸ Since that discovery, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg, which holds records gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) continues to document remains of children reported at sites across Canada, which numbers in the thousands (4,118 one year ago in September 2021).¹⁰

The consequences for survivors are marked and varied repercussions on health.¹¹ Impacts are yet unfolding and include trans-generational and intergenerational transmission processes, including psychosocial, developmental, environmental, and neurobiological mechanisms and trauma responses.¹² Thus trauma affected not only the victims, but also the generations that followed. Residential school survivors' descendants have greater risk of ending up in child welfare services, compared to Indigenous participants without residential school exposure, and those odds increased if the exposure happened to a parent.⁷ First Nations youth with a parent who attended a residential school also had increased odds of not living with either biological parent, and this situation independently predicted greater psychological distress.¹³ Distress and depressive symptoms shown to be associated with system-led family separations

^b Work is ongoing to reconcile a date for the last residential school closure. As a date is confirmed, this document will be updated accordingly.

calls for First Nations-led interventions to address inequities in child welfare practices of removing Indigenous children and youth from their homes.¹³

The experience of racism extends across the healthcare system as well.⁶ The segregation of Indigenous peoples took place not only in residential schools but also in “Indian hospitals”, introduced by the government in the 1930s, when Canadian society was warned against “Indian tuberculosis” by sanatorium directors and medical bureaucrats.¹⁴ For example, 1,274 Inuit and Cree sufferers of tuberculosis from the Eastern Arctic were relocated to Mountain Sanatorium in Hamilton, Ontario, from 1950 to 1965.¹⁵ Canada began a program that segregated and detained Indigenous and Inuit peoples with tuberculosis in these hospitals (ca. 1936 and 1969) and justified this under the pretext of “population health, benevolence, and care.”¹⁶ The first-person accounts of patients and their families assert that their treatment was in fact harmful and caused by their detainment in these facilities.¹⁶ Indigenous peoples detained in so called “Indian hospitals” expressed a need for care and treatment within their own communities and networks.¹⁶ However, by the 1940s these government-run, racially-segregated Indian hospitals institutionalized those unwelcome in modern community and provincial hospitals; for example, the opening of the Charles Camsell Indian Hospital in Edmonton (1946), was a public demonstration of the government’s commitment to “national health”, while isolating Indigenous people from their communities.¹⁴ Racial segregation in these hospitals limited Indigenous peoples’ access to equitable healthcare and extended the isolation to which they were already subjected on both reserves and in residential schools.¹⁴ Decades after the opening of these hospitals (1970-81), rates of Tuberculosis were 16 times higher among Indigenous peoples and 24 times higher among Inuit in Canada; a clear failure of population health and care principles on which they were theoretically founded.¹⁷

Colonialism and racism are embedded in healthcare, health policy and health research. Indigenous people continue to be subjected to racial discrimination in health and social services, including witnessing, absorbing, and facing racism from non-Indigenous service providers.¹⁸ Those who witness and experience these types of racial discrimination in health care can also be subjected to denial, as in the case of Joyce Echaquan’s recent death, in which a coroner ruled systemic racism in health care was a cause.⁸

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015) released 94 Calls to Action that compel Canadian institutions to acknowledge colonization as driving past and ongoing population-level health inequities experienced by Indigenous people, across sectors (education, child welfare, criminal, justice, healthcare). In 2022, seven years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), not much action has been taken for reconciliation in health care.⁸ Eva Jewell and colleagues at the Yellowhead Institute measure progress on the 94 TRC calls to action and reported no progress on any of the seven calls to action related to health within the past two years.⁸ Lack of movement reinforces the need to change calls into meaningful action.⁸ Land acknowledgements represent one opportunity for meaningful action.

With continued rollout of TRC Calls to Action and the need to address inequity, individuals and organizations are continue to revisit their approaches and are enriching their evolving understanding around how to implement the Calls to Action locally (e.g., cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals, and addressing health inequities and risk factors). The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) has recently released a policy statement on Indigenous relations and reconciliation (Oct, 2019).¹⁹

There are LA policies', protocols and practices that have been integrated in health-related settings (e.g., Interior Health, SickKids, and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health).²⁰⁻²² However, LAs have been criticized as tokenistic, patronizing,^{23,24} disingenuous or hollow gestures²⁵⁻²⁹ that do not meaningfully improve the outcomes of Indigenous communities^{25-27,29,30} or offer little more to these communities than box ticking.^{23,25,27,29}

Given that land acknowledgement is an important practice for truth and reconciliation, and knowing the strength of connection between the land and Indigenous health, it is important to understand the land acknowledgement practices of Canadian health organizations and relevant local institutions, and to ensure that such practices do not represent a token effort and instead contribute toward multiple meaningful actions toward reconciliation.

The purpose of this document is to enhance our understanding of current land acknowledgement practices and how they are developed and delivered. Since these practices are in early stages within most local and provincial public health institutions, it is timely to map out practice elements as public health professionals are revisiting their frameworks and approaches, and starting to integrate LAs in their respective settings. There are many resources related to LAs and the process of reconciliation (e.g., LA statements on Canadian university websites and municipality websites), but there are gaps in the literature in terms of practices to inform, guide, and support meaningful integration of LA for public health. This scoping review identifies LA practices from public health-related organizations across Canada in order to inform LA integration in public health. This synthesis is intended to provide a foundation. Further learning and consultation with Indigenous knowledge keepers will be planned, ultimately to inform our understanding in a deeper way:

- Are land acknowledgements addressing their purpose?
- Can purpose, and degree to which it is addressed be authentically measured?
- Would/could anything beyond the land be noted in acknowledgement?

This document provides an overview of methods used to inform the initial synthesis, a description of how land acknowledgement has been defined, with their development and delivery within the sources located, as well as how organizations have guided their people on generating and delivering land acknowledgements. This synthesis is proposed as a first step in a more comprehensive process to inform land acknowledgement practices for public health settings.

Methods

A scoping review approach was selected as the most suitable to report on LA practices found in the evidence available. A scoping review is a synthesis approach that describes the body of evidence on a particular topic, field, concept, or issue, and is typically more inclusive with respect to the type of source (e.g., primary research, reviews, non-empirical evidence) within or across different contexts. This land acknowledgement synthesis was done via scoping review methods in order to capture a description of the landscape across public health contexts in Ontario and in Canada, in a way that allowed for different types of contributions from a wide range of sources, without an expectation of detailed and complete answers to questions within single sources.

The authors (CS, SKO) used the five-stage approach described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), plus an engagement process.³¹ External collaborators were engaged in the scoping review as it progressed, enabling search refinement, additional sources and feedback on the extraction variables and results. The seven external collaborators were Indigenous and /or had understanding of Indigenous values and experiences with a range of public sector contexts (see Acknowledgements). Some collaborators indicated an ongoing interest in being involved and others offered to provide ad-hoc feedback. This scoping review met the PHO Research and Ethics "Low Risk Project Exemption Criteria Checklist" (June 2018) and did not require full ethics approval.

This scoping review aimed to answer one core question: What are current practices of land acknowledgements in health organizations across Canada to inform land acknowledgement integration in public health?

To identify articles, we searched indexed and non-indexed databases, open sources hand-searched sources and additional resources suggested by experts.

All published literature were searched from inception to May 12-15, 2022 by PHO Library services. The 10 databases searched were: MEDLINE, ProQuest Public Health, PsycINFO, ERIC, Health Policy Reference Center, Scopus, Bibliography of Native North Americans, SocINDEX, and Academic Search Premier. Key terms included, but were not limited to: Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal, Native, Indian, acknowledge, recognize, land, territorial, unceded, territory, as well as truth and reconciliation. Specific public sector fields included were health, justice and education, due to their similar contexts (provide services at provincial and federal levels).

Non-indexed (grey) literature in June 2022 were identified through a repository (Indigenous Studies Portal), targeted web searches of individual sites (Ontario's Public Health Units, Canadian Health Departments and Agencies, and Canadian Government for Federal, Provincial, Territorial, and Municipal documents), and web searches using the Google search engine. The same search terms from the published literature were used for non-indexed literature search. The external collaborators viewed the preliminary list of included literature and suggested any additional resources (any source type) and organizations to hand-search, based on their knowledge and insights. Preliminary findings were

presented at a regular meeting of the Associate Medical Officers of Health, with whom the resource list (Appendix A) was also shared.

One author (VD) screened 100% of the articles and documents for eligibility. A second reviewer (TO) independently screened 25% of the articles (title and abstracts). Two reviewers (TO) and (ST) single screened the non-indexed literature searches. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion. The inclusion criteria for articles were: Canadian literature, published in English, public sector disciplines (education, health, justice), focused on policies, practices, and protocols that had been implemented (i.e., that could be implemented). For sources from the non-indexed literature search, the inclusion criteria was further narrowed to only include from health-focused organizations at the provincial and federal levels and public health units/authorities. Since LA are a fairly new area of publication, we did not restrict the publication year. The authors excluded commentaries, sources outside of Canada, advocacy focused content, and if there was no LA provided. From the 3404 total articles, documents, and websites identified, 48 met the inclusion criteria, verified by the team members.

Results

Description of Available Sources

The search yielded information from regional, provincial/territorial/federal sources, as well as only a few published documents. Most sources were regional (26) followed by provincial and federal organizations (19) with only a few from published sources located by database searches (3). Regional land acknowledgements were drawn from multiple types of sources including web pages, policy documents, briefing notes, and presentations. The majority of LA information located originated in Ontario, with other sources from Manitoba, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Following is a description of how land acknowledgement has been defined in the sources located, their development and delivery, as well as how organizations have guided their people on generating and delivering land acknowledgements.

How Land Acknowledgement was defined

Indigenous peoples have been practicing land acknowledgement since time immemorial; however, practices surrounding land acknowledgement for non-Indigenous people have evolved over time.³² Published literature available at the time of the search describes land acknowledgement as dynamic statements^{33,34} that vary based on a multitude of factors including where they are being delivered, to whom they are being delivered, and by whom they are being delivered.³⁵ Land acknowledgements are formal statements designed to recognize and respect Indigenous peoples as traditional stewards of the land and acknowledge the enduring relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.³⁶ Land acknowledgements for provincial and federal-level organizations tended to provide rationale for their land acknowledgements more consistently than local/regional-level organizations (discussed in more detail below under Rationale Cited). This section of the document describes land acknowledgement practices for federal, provincial and territorial, and regional organizations collectively.

There was not one standard, accepted definition of land acknowledgement used across sources, or even by most of the sources. Where a definition was provided, the majority of sources did not provide a reference for that definition, save for three:

“Currently, a territorial or land acknowledgement is an act of reconciliation that involves making a statement recognizing the traditional territory of the Indigenous people who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and in many cases still do call it home”, referenced from Inaakonigewin Andaadad Akid: Michi Saagiig Treaties: Defining Relationships Between Peoples by Peterborough Public Health.³⁷

A similar definition, referenced from Laurier Students’ Public Interest Research Group³⁸, was given by Whitmore and Carlson (2022), “land acknowledgements are formal statements acknowledging the original, Indigenous inhabitants of the land where an event is taking place”.

Algoma Public Health’s definition, “an important way to help build awareness of Indigenous history, presence, and rights in everyday life, and reignites the traditional territory of the Indigenous people who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and still call it home today”, was credited to the city of Toronto.³²

Following are descriptions of the content of land acknowledgements, with rationale cited in the sources located by this synthesis, as well as any guidance offered by these sources for their delivery. The content outlined here covers common areas observed across the land acknowledgements yielded in the search: rationale cited for land acknowledgement, naming Indigenous Peoples and Nations, connection to the land, relating with Treaties, unceded lands, Reconciliation, and the incorporation of Indigenous Languages in land acknowledgements.

Rationale Cited for Land Acknowledgement

Approximately half the regional (Ontario) land acknowledgements indicated the rationale for use of a land acknowledgement and twelve of 19 provincial and federal sources^{20,21,39-49} provided a rationale for adopting LA practices. While many sources located in the scoping review did not cite their rationale, those that did offered the following:

- Most cited ‘Reconciliation’ as the primary reason; referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call-to-Action report.^{42,45-47}
- Other reasons provincial and federal organizations gave for performing LAs as a first step included:
 - recognizing Indigenous presence and land rights,^{40,42,43}
 - building relationships/partnerships,^{20,43,44,47}
 - dismantling impacts of colonialism,^{42,47}
 - learning from Indigenous people and their cultures,^{20,21,44,47} and
 - reflecting on changes that should be made moving forward.^{40,41}

Naming Indigenous Peoples and Nations

All land acknowledgements mentioned the names of Indigenous peoples. It was not clear whether naming of Indigenous peoples was done in a consistent way or by consulting any authoritative source to list the peoples whose lands were included. The reference to Indigenous peoples was sometimes done by using terms for a collective (e.g., First Nations, Inuit) as opposed to particular Indigenous nations or groups:

“Ottawa Public Health (OPH) honours the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people, on whose unceded traditional territory the City of Ottawa is located. OPH extends this respect to all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, their ancestors, their Elders

and their valuable past and present contributions to this land. OPH recognizes the impact and legacy of colonization and ongoing systemic racism on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, aspires to be a culturally humble and safe organization, and is strongly committed to public health actions that promote reconciliation.”⁴⁹

In some cases, the LA made a distinction between whose ancestral Indigenous territory it was, and the Indigenous peoples who reside on the land at the time of the acknowledgement being given. This is significant given the tremendous forced and chosen migration among Indigenous peoples over time, in response to war, famine, disease, environmental change, or economics. Canada's First peoples have been in the lands we now call Canada for 12,000 years at minimum, with distinct cultural groups and self-government, recognizing the sovereignty of other groups.⁵⁰ For almost all that time, these groups migrated seasonally for food and resources, formed trade and military alliances, and maintained complex social systems.⁵⁰ Some Indigenous peoples did not migrate but instead built societies and practiced agriculture, of which there has been evidence in the Americas for at least 10,000 years.⁵¹ Indigenous peoples' lives were intertwined with their environment and they learned from a very young age that the animals, birds, plants, and the land and water provided them with the things they needed to survive.⁵⁰ Knowledge was passed on orally from person to person and across generations. Before colonization and in the present, First peoples believe no one owns the land, and that they were caretakers of the land that sustained them.

Connection to the Land

Indigenous worldviews emphasize the interconnectedness of Indigenous lives with the land; specifically, among the person, their health, and the land in a holistic way. Holistic health is “the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and cultural aspects of one’s life.”⁵² This brings into focus the impact that displacement from ancestral lands, forced movement across lands, and conflict over the occupation and use of unceded territories have had on Indigenous peoples over generations, reinforcing the importance of a meaningful and well-developed land acknowledgement.

Some land acknowledgements described Indigenous peoples as “stewards” or “caretakers” of the land with only a few referring to relationships, “allyship” and mutual respect. However, the Hastings Prince Edward County land acknowledgement (2022) made an explicit link between the land and environment and sustaining optimal health:

“...We recognize the importance of the land and environment in establishing and sustaining optimal health, and we vow to respect this land as we undertake our work. Our organization pledges to build relationships with Indigenous friends and neighbours and recognizes the rich contributions they have provided and continue to provide to this region. This acknowledgment is a first step in our ongoing commitment to reconciliation.”⁵³

While the physical geography of these lands are a literal common ground for Indigenous peoples and settlers, the meaning of those lands is not the same for both groups. It is with the backdrop of Canadian

government or settler hegemony that this foundational aspect of understanding land acknowledgement is being interpreted by the institutions where land acknowledgements are now used.

Indigenous Peoples' connection to the land and its significance in making land acknowledgements is an area in which sharing of Indigenous worldviews will greatly enrich understanding.

Relating with Treaties

Indigenous Peoples' connection to the land is evident in treaty making. In Canada, treaties that acknowledge respect and trust between the signing partners go back centuries, well before the formation of Canada as a country.⁵⁴ "Treaties are legally binding agreements that set out the rights, responsibilities and relationships of First Nations and the federal and provincial governments."⁵⁵ Two widely-recognized treaties that were commonly cited across the land acknowledgements reviewed are the Two-Row Wampum Belt agreement between the Haudenosaunee people and the Dutch (1613), and the Dish with One Spoon law, agreed to by the Anishinabe and Haudenosaunee (1701).

The Two-Row Wampum treaty is the oldest recorded treaty between Indigenous people and European settlers.⁵⁴ The principles upon which this treaty was made were: friendship, peace, and [to last] forever. The two-row wampum belt has two purple rows running parallel to each other representing two boats: the Haudenosaunee canoe and the other the Dutch ship, with the intention for each nation to respect each other's ways without interference. "Together we will travel in Friendship and in Peace Forever; as long as the grass is green, as long as the water runs downhill, as long as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, and as long as our Mother Earth will last."⁵⁴

*"...Intended to guide the relationship between the First Nations and Europeans, the TwoRow Wampum is an important symbol of everlasting equality, peace, and friendship. It remains the foundation upon which Canada was built, and we recognize that this mutually respectful relationship between nations is essential for reconciliation today. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today. The Regional Municipality of Niagara stands with all Indigenous people, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live. We recognize that we must do more to learn about the history and current situation of Indigenous people. This will help us better understand our roles and take responsibility towards reconciliation as treaty people, residents, and caretakers."*³³

The Dish with One Spoon law (as a principle, used as early as 1142) was agreed between Indigenous people of the Americas to describe the sharing of hunting territory by two or more nations without bloodshed ("no knife near our dish"). Carried forward from generation to generation, this treaty between the Anishinabe and the Haudenosaunee people was made formal in Montreal in 1701 as part of the Great Peace of Montreal.⁵⁴ The land to which it refers includes a large swath of Southern Ontario, wherein many acknowledge the traditional lands of The Dish with One Spoon Treaty today.⁵⁴

“I acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.”⁵⁶

These types of treaties for sharing of the land and its resources, without intent of ownership of the land, have existed over the thousands of years Indigenous peoples inhabited the land. In the time of colonization, treaties have meant an “agreement” or “purchase” and have been interpreted by colonizing peoples as land ownership, or land that is ceded to the government. There are both historic Treaties with First Nations peoples, and modern treaties (land claim agreements) with Indigenous groups.⁵⁷ Modern treaties cited in land acknowledgements that were reviewed here are agreements made between the Government of Canada, Indigenous groups and sometimes also provinces and territories, defining rights and benefits for partners in the treaty. Treaty rights are commonly referred to as Indigenous rights and are affirmed in Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, committed to by the Government of Canada.⁵⁸⁻
⁶⁰ There are over 40 Treaties and land agreements in Ontario, of which a few are notable for their scope:

- Treaty 3: originated from the original Between the Lakes Purchase (1784), with Treaty 3 clarifying what was ceded, including all the land “lying and being between the Lakes Ontario and Erie”, currently taking in the communities known as St. Catharines, Guelph and Simcoe.⁶¹
- Treaty 13 (1805), also known as the Toronto Purchase (1787), was originally signed by Crown and Mississauga peoples and covered approximately 250,800 acres. A 2010 settlement of a land claim regarding the 1805 Treaty involved \$145 million for this land that includes the Greater Toronto Area.⁶¹
- The Williams Treaties (1923) were signed by seven Anishinaabe First Nations and Crown representatives to address (unceded) lands not surrendered via treaty. The included lands stretched from the northern shore of Lake Ontario to Lake Nipissing, covering approximately 52,000 km² and taking in communities like Huntsville and Bracebridge.⁶¹

Land acknowledgements across Canada that were located in this review commonly referred to the Treaty number associated with the land or territory being acknowledged. Most used a Treaty number to indicate a geographic area or agreement, with one (Brockville) outlining the role of Treaties in how the region is referred to in the present:

“Brockville and Smiths Falls (when using videoconferencing) is/are located on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples dating back countless generations. We would like to show our respect for their contributions and recognize the role of treaty making in what is now Ontario. Hundreds of years after the first treaties were signed, they are still relevant today.”⁶²

Hamilton's land acknowledgement used the term "purchase" alongside Treaty: "We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase, 1792, between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation."⁶³ Hamilton's land acknowledgement also used non-specific and mild language to mention "harms and mistakes of the past", but did not name or further describe the harms cited.⁶³ Outside of Ontario, other institutions similarly used Treaty numbers in their land acknowledgements:

"AHS acknowledges that its services are provided on the territories of Treaty 6, Treaty 7 and Treaty 8; the 8 Métis Settlements and the Métis Nation of Alberta. We also recognize the Indigenous Peoples who dwell in urban centres across this land. These territories are the home for many Indigenous Peoples, including the Anishinabe, Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Inuit, Métis, Stoney Nakoda Sioux, and the Tsuut'ina.

We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

In Talent Acquisition we take seriously our responsibility under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action number 23, for all levels of government to increase the number of Indigenous professionals working in the healthcare field and ensure the retention of Indigenous health-care providers."⁴⁶

The Peterborough health unit (Ontario) land acknowledgement ends in the phrase "we are all Treaty people":

"We respectfully acknowledge that Peterborough Public Health is located on the Treaty 20 MichiSaagiig territory and in the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig and Chippewa Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations, which include: Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Alderville, Scugog Island, Rama, Beausoleil, and Georgina Island First Nations. Peterborough Public Health respectfully acknowledges that the Williams Treaties First Nations are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters in perpetuity, and that they continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come. We are all Treaty people."³⁷

Ontario has the largest First Nations population in Canada (236,685 or 24 per cent of the total First Nations population in Canada).⁶⁴ Thunder Bay, Ontario is the Census Metropolitan Area with the highest proportion of Indigenous people in Canada (12.7 per cent of the population).⁶⁴ Indigenous people of Ontario reside within urban reserves, and have experienced displacement from their ancestral lands. Thus there is a distinction between traditional or ancestral land, and treaty land. Land acknowledgements may speak to both ancestral lands, where Indigenous people originally lived, or the traditional lands known as being lands of particular Indigenous group(s), and also may recognize the lands taken in by treaties. Land acknowledgements may also mention Indigenous peoples who inhabit the land at the present day, due to migration, whether forced displacement or movement chosen by Indigenous peoples' decisions about where to live. In Ontario, the Indigenous population grew by 54 per

cent from 2006 to 2016, due in part to natural growth, but also due to the increase in people voluntarily self-identifying as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis.⁶⁴ Thus self-identification of Indigeneity is important for decolonization and the potential to see which Indigenous groups inhabit which lands in the present, from a census perspective and also for the purpose of meeting Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

Unceded Lands

Land acknowledgements located in this review typically named the region or organization, and named associated land and or places, with the most recent (2020-2022) land acknowledgements using language such as “traditional”, “unceded”, and “ancestral” to describe land/territories.^{22,49,53,65-68} Territories that are ‘unceded’ “were never signed away by the Indigenous people who inhabited them before Europeans settled in North America.”⁶⁹ Examples of unceded territory exist across Canada, including many that have been in the news, such as territory of the Wet’suwet’en in Northern British Columbia in pipeline disputes, Mi’kmaq territory in Nova Scotia, and Algonquin territory in Ottawa on which the Supreme Court of Canada building stands.⁶⁹

It is not clear from the land acknowledgement statements gathered in this review, whether any particular source is used for describing the territories/land, or knowing which boundaries are used in the territory named in the land acknowledgement. Several regions’ land acknowledgements refer to the fact that their boundaries include unceded territory or territories:

“PHSA provides specialized health care services to communities across British Columbia, on the territories of many distinct First Nations. We are grateful to all the First Nations who have cared for and nurtured the lands and waters around us for all time, including the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səlílwəta? (Tseil-Waututh Nation) on whose unceded and ancestral territory our head office is located.”⁷⁰

Vancouver Coastal Health has an Indigenous Cultural Safety policy that gives specific direction for how recognition should be given, based on conducting business on a single First Nation compared to overlapping First Nation jurisdictions, with both options using the term “unceded”:

“For conducting business on a single First Nation: “I would like to acknowledge that we are conducting our business today on the unceded homelands of the [xxxxxxxxxx] First Nation/ Indian Band”⁷¹

For conducting business on an area with overlapping First Nation jurisdictions: “I would like to acknowledge that we are conducting our business today on the shared, unceded homelands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tseil-Waututh people” “I would like to acknowledge that we are conducting our business today on the unceded homelands of the Coast Salish People”⁷¹

It was not clear from the land acknowledgement statements located within this search whether there is a key source or sources that should be consulted in describing the territories/land, or whether certain boundaries are used in the territories mentioned in the land acknowledgement. Thus there may not be a

clear, common standard for terminology for referring to land, or a clear standard for boundaries used to outline land or territory and or its people(s).

Reconciliation

Many land acknowledgements explicitly mentioned “Reconciliation”, in reference to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) report. The Commission was the result of a legal settlement between two groups: 1) Residential Schools Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives and 2) the federal government and church bodies, as the parties responsible for residential schools and their impacts. With a mandate to educate Canadians about residential schools, the TRC documented the residential school experience, resulting in 94 Calls to Action for Canadians.⁷² Since the Commission concluded in 2015, records of the TRC are now held at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR).⁷³

Call to Action 47 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada states:

*We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts.*⁷²

The Doctrine of Discovery was the principle relied upon in the time of European explorers to claim the lands on which they disembarked after leaving Europe, considering it uninhabited.⁷⁴ Land was considered vacant “terra nullius” if *Christians* didn’t already occupy it, although the land was not vacant.⁷⁴ Canada’s park system is an example of the ongoing application of these principles in recent times – the creation of Jasper National Park caused the expulsion of 25 First Nations Groups from their homes with limited compensation.⁷⁴ A paradigm shift across Canadian settler institutions with respect to implementing the Calls to Action is needed to protect Indigenous rights and institutionalize the principles of Reconciliation.

While most land acknowledgements cited the term Reconciliation, they did not typically describe specific actions linked to Reconciliation; for example, one institution indicated that “we must do more” but did not specify how “more” would be operationalized. Few institutions cited specific actions that would be taken by the institutions in moving toward Reconciliation:

“As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous peoples must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities... That is to say, our words are insufficient and need to be connected to real and meaningful action that contributes to improving the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people. In the Public Health context, examples of actions include, improving the state of Indigenous population health data, having programming that reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, hiring Indigenous

staff, as well as using our power and influence to shape public policy in ways that support the wellness and self-determination of Indigenous communities.”

“Health services across Manitoba are provided in facilities located on the original lands of First Nations, Inuit, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. Manitoba’s health authorities respect that First Nations treaties were made on these territories, acknowledge harms and mistakes, and we dedicate ourselves to collaborate in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in the spirit of reconciliation.”⁷⁵

Like the Middlesex London Health Unit acknowledgement above, Hastings Prince Edward County health unit also used the term “settlers” explicitly in their land acknowledgement:

*“We recognize that **when settlers came** to this land they created a legacy of inequities that are ongoing. We are committed to reducing these inequities, and through our work strive to improve health equity. We recognize the importance of the land and environment in establishing and sustaining optimal health, and we vow to respect this land as we undertake our work. Our organization pledges to build relationships with Indigenous friends and neighbours and recognizes the rich contributions they have provided and continue to provide to this region. This acknowledgment is a first step in our ongoing commitment to reconciliation.”⁵³*

While Kingston Frontenac Lennox and Addington Public Health does refer to ‘European colonies’, only Ottawa Health Unit explicitly uses the term ‘colonization’ and cites ‘ongoing systemic racism’ and its impacts:

“Ottawa Public Health (OPH) honours the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people, on whose unceded traditional territory the City of Ottawa is located. OPH extends this respect to all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, their ancestors, their Elders and their valuable past and present contributions to this land. OPH recognizes the impact and legacy of colonization and ongoing systemic racism on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, aspires to be a culturally humble and safe organization, and is strongly committed to public health actions that promote reconciliation.”⁴⁹

Thus, while it was common to cite Reconciliation within land acknowledgements, the land acknowledgements did not clearly “repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius” as in the TRC Call to Action number 47.⁷²

Indigenous Languages in Land Acknowledgements

Indigenous wisdom is passed on orally.^{76,77} Colonization and attempted assimilation detracted, and continue to detract, from Indigenous peoples’ ability to pass on their languages, and even prohibited it. Colonial policies like the Indian Act and residential schools prohibited Indigenous people from speaking in their mother tongues. Suppressing Indigenous language in this way has had a great impact. Of the 60

or more Indigenous languages in Canada, just three — Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibwa — are described as being more widely used, accounting for almost two-thirds of the 229,000 Canadians who claimed an Indigenous language as mother tongue and who reported in 2019 that they regularly spoke that language at home.^{76,78} One must be mindful that such a characterization frames Indigenous languages as defeated, and is a potential example of damage-centered research that could perpetuate underresourcing and disinvestment.⁷⁹ Regardless of the extent to which Indigenous languages have actually been eroded versus experiencing resurgence, erasure of Indigenous language has been harmful in a number of ways: Indigenous bands where youth had lower Indigenous language knowledge had more than six times the number of suicides (96.59 per 100,000) compared to bands in which Indigenous language knowledge was high. In fact, between 1987 and 1992, only one youth committed suicide from within those 16 bands that had higher language knowledge, compared to the remaining 136 bands, in which 84 youth committed suicide during this same time frame.⁸⁰ Language continues to have impacts on health care access, including addressing cardiovascular disease risk factors, and COVID-19 vaccine access.^{81,82}

Indigenous languages are fundamental to the culture and identities of Indigenous peoples, including spirituality, relationships to the land, world views and self-determination.⁸³ The Indigenous Languages Act that received Royal Assent June 21, 2019, declaring the implementation of Indigenous language rights aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action “fundamental to shaping the country, particularly in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action”, and aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁸³ The Act acknowledges that Indigenous languages were the first languages spoken on the land now known as Canada, where colonization and its associated assimilation, forced relocation, the Sixties Scoop and residential schools, harmed Indigenous languages and contributed significantly to their erosion.⁸³ The Indigenous Languages Act is intended to support and promote the use, reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages, and to respond to the TRC Calls to Action numbers 13 to 15.^{72,83}

13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights

15. We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.

Relevant to language, the land acknowledgements reviewed in this synthesis are mainly in English, which is one of Canada’s two official languages. While primarily written in English, some land acknowledgements used selected Indigenous terms in their respective land acknowledgements; most commonly, the term “miigwech”:

“We say miigwech to thank Indigenous Peoples for taking care of this land from time immemorial. We are all called to treat this sacred land, its plants, animals, stories and its Peoples with honour and respect. We commit to the shared goal of Reconciliation.”⁸⁴

Middlesex London Health Unit included in its land acknowledgement the pronunciations for the Indigenous peoples named in their land acknowledgement: “Anishinaabe (Ah-nish-na-baye) Haudenosaunee (Ho-deh-no-show-nee) Attawandaron (At-ta-won-da-ron) Wendat (Wan-dat) Odawa (O-dow-wa) Pottawatomi (Pott-a-wat-omi) Ojibway (O-jib-way)”.⁸⁵ It is not clear the extent to which this is a recommended approach for land acknowledgements, from the perspective of Indigenous peoples.

The recognition and implementation of rights related to Indigenous languages are at the core of reconciliation, along with resurgence of Indigenous culture and politics. For example, in the North, Indigenous-led organizations are increasing community-based culture and language resurgence programs to increase fluency in Indigenous languages, amplify Indigenous culture and languages via policy, and promote Indigenous ways of knowing and being.⁸⁶

Land Acknowledgement Development

How land acknowledgements were developed, and the processes for their development were not transparent for most of the included sources, based on details that were available publicly at the time of the search, with few exceptions. For example, Algoma Public Health (APH) staff consulted with Indigenous partners (First Nations Health Directors and staff and the Provisional Council of the Metis Nation of Ontario Region 4 Councillor) via phone and email from April – September 2021 to create their Land Acknowledgment. Responses were received from the following partners: Missanabie-Cree First Nation, Batchewana First Nation, Garden River First Nation, Thessalon First Nation, Mississauga First Nation, the Sault Ste. Marie Indigenous Friendship Centre, and the Métis Nation of Ontario. The feedback received suggested partners who were consulted viewed the Land Acknowledgement as a positive gesture. It was also strongly recommended that APH follows up with actionable steps that demonstrate APH’s commitment to the shared goal of Reconciliation. This feedback was incorporated into the Land Acknowledgement which was then circulated for further review.³⁴

Similarly, Toronto Public Health engaged in conversations with including the Aboriginal Advisory Committee as part of the 2018 Toronto for All Campaign.^{10,56} It is not clear whether such consultation is a standard for development of land acknowledgement.

For most land acknowledgements, the institutions that indicated they consulted Indigenous people and or groups did not report details of who was consulted in the generation of the guidance, and how consultations were carried out.

Institutional Guidance for Land Acknowledgements

Results of this synthesis demonstrate the value and necessity of knowledge keeper consultation. Given that what the published, available information offers is from a settler or more mainstream perspective, partnership/partnering with a traditional knowledge keeper or keepers is consistent with the spirit and intent of reconciliation. The content of this section is intended only as a starting point for continued learning and consultation around the use of land acknowledgements, and is not to be used as a checklist, as it is not a comprehensive guide. What follows is a description of what was learned from the published, available land acknowledgement content located in the scoping review, published in English, for further work and consultation.

Nature of guidance offered for acknowledgements

Some municipal governments with existing land acknowledgement protocols have implemented a trial period (e.g., six months) for their statement to allow Indigenous community members an opportunity to provide feedback. Six sources provided links to other resources, which are listed in Appendix A: Helpful Resources.^{39-42,87,88}

While the guidance summary that follows represents a synthesis across sources, an example of specific guidance from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario suggests an approach to development that is comprehensive and encourages critical reflection upon development, implementation, and revisiting the land acknowledgement after six months. The approach suggests considering situations in which the land acknowledgement would be used, what would be a pre-requisite to the land acknowledgement, and what may take the place of a land acknowledgement where appropriate:

Example of Tips for creating your municipality's Land Acknowledgement Protocol:

- Start with self-reflection: Why are we doing this land acknowledgment? What is our end goal? When and where will it have the largest impact?
- Do your homework: Research the history of the land within and in proximity to your municipal boundaries, including treaties, active land claim litigation and Indigenous histories. This information will be useful in helping the municipality craft a statement.
- Some of the history of specific areas may be complex and different sources could be contradictory. In these instances, it may be better to opt for a more general statement rather than trying to be specific. It will also be helpful to reach out to Indigenous community members for the history and context.
- Build real, authentic relationships with Indigenous people: Municipal governments do not have to craft a land acknowledgement statement on their own. Engage and work with local First

Nations, Métis, Indigenous organizations and community champions in your area. Advice from these groups may be useful in helping you develop a land acknowledgement protocol for your municipal government. Some may have also developed template acknowledgement statements for external use. That said, do not ask these groups to do the work for you while asking for advice.

- Use past, present, and future tenses: Indigenous people are still here, and they're thriving. Focus on your current neighbours and Indigenous residents with an eye towards acknowledging past usage and occupants. Remember that in some cases, First Nations communities may not be located on their traditional lands.
- Be prepared to make changes: Once your statement has been drafted, remember that it may be viewed as political. Some may critique the acknowledgement protocol your municipal government has created. While you may find it useful to consider their input and view the statement as a living document, do your best and remember that your municipality may not be able to make everyone happy.
- Some municipal governments with existing land acknowledgement protocols have implemented a trial period (e.g. 6 months) for their statement to allow Indigenous community members an opportunity to provide feedback.
- When, Where and How? Determine which type of meetings and events you might wish to begin using your land acknowledgement statement to make sure it continues to be meaningful. You may also wish to consider whether you want to have a traditional land acknowledgement statement on your municipality's website.
- Continue Learning: To avoid traditional land acknowledgement statements being used superficially and without an appreciation for their cultural meaning, some municipal governments have provided municipal elected representatives and staff with cultural awareness training before implementing the use of a statement.
- Some municipalities invite Indigenous Elders or leaders to participate in introduction protocols at civic celebrations or official events to bring greetings on behalf of the local Indigenous community. Sometimes this approach is used instead of a land acknowledgement statement.

The questions for critical reflection within the above guidance may be useful in generating an appropriate local approach. People generating land acknowledgements should do the hard work⁸⁹ of learning about the treaties, territories and peoples they should know about in order to develop a meaningful land acknowledgement. For example, while the guidance suggests organizations do not have to craft a land acknowledgement on their Other guidance examples below were more directive, with concrete do's and don'ts for the reader/user of the guidance:

When to do LA, based on guidance from the British Columbia Public Service:⁴⁴

- At ministry wide and divisional meetings and events.

- At meetings and events of cross-ministry committees.
- At meetings and events with external partners.
- If the practice is new to you start with a small team meeting.
- Practice with different approaches. Small meetings may require an acknowledgment of where we are calling in from and the business can proceed from there.

Do:

- Research whose land you are on and find out if you are gathering on treaty territory, unceded territory, or part of Inuit and Métis homelands.
- Find out how to pronounce a Nation's name, ask someone or check the Nation's website.
- Keep it simple, stay on topic, and speak from the heart.
- Recognize that Indigenous Peoples continue to have a relationship to the land, it is not only historical.
- Focus on resiliency of Indigenous Peoples.

Don't:

- Don't stray too far from the purpose of a territory acknowledgement.
- Don't feel pressure to innovate every time.
- Don't read a script, do use notes to help guide you.
- Don't feel bad if you make a mistake – acknowledge, apologize, and remember for next time.
- Don't let this be your only action to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

While these points offer direction, they lack some detail in how to operationalize that direction; for example, institutions recommended recognizing the specific lands, the peoples and communities the lands belong to, the history that binds them, and the changes that have happened over time is crucial, and some guidance acknowledged this:

- When performing health research within Indigenous communities, it is imperative to consider the colonial history and continued impacts of colonization on past and current populations.
- Likewise, in an institutional setting, recognizing the changes in the use of the lands before and after the establishment of the institution as well as acknowledging the communities that are still present is crucial.

How to appropriately recognize colonial history and changes in land use, preferred ways to acknowledge present communities (from an Indigenous perspective) and implement these considerations were not clearly specified.

Land Acknowledgement Delivery

The degree to which land acknowledgement was reported to be part of every day events differed regionally along a continuum. For example, it was part of board meetings⁹⁰, done for formal events⁶², or done for both internal events and other external facing events. Published literature described land acknowledgements delivered by the host or emcee at the start of presentations, meetings and other events.

- In Nicholson et al., the author described a collaborative (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the research team participated) acknowledgment of the land that was conducted at the beginning of each day on site, “In all our work, we first acknowledged the land that we are working on which was the territory of the Niitsitpiis-stahkoi (Blackfoot), Očeti Šakówiŋ(Sioux), Michif Piyii (Métis) and Cree. When we honour the land and the teachings of the land, the land will guide us in our work”.⁹¹
- Within the institution noted in Whitmore and Carlson, requesting the presence of an Indigenous representative to conduct the LA on behalf was deemed disrespectful. Although non-Indigenous speakers may feel hesitant to deliver a LA out of fear of doing it incorrectly, outsourcing LAs unjustly burdens Indigenous people with that work. Instead, the responsibility of doing the work to learn about the history and presence of Indigenous inhabitants of the land being acknowledged should fall upon the speaker or host organization.⁹²

There was no single, standard approach to how land acknowledgement was done, in keeping with the tailoring of the land acknowledgement to local context, although the extent of this tailoring varied widely. Both Niagara Region Public Health Department and Toronto Public Health had multiple different LAs that varied in length or content based on either the format (presentation, document, email) or location they were delivered.^{32,93} In the case of Niagara Region Public Health Department, three distinct versions of the LA were created and disseminated for review in 2021; a long version, which includes more details and is intended to be used during meetings or presentations wherein more context is provided, a short version designed to fit on a presentation slide and intended to be used for large public gatherings and official openings, and a further abbreviated document version meant for written text e.g. emails, job postings, reports etc. For comparison, the shorter version and the document version are below:

Short version: *“Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk (Hat-i-wen-DA-ronk), the Haudenosaunee (Hoe-den-no-SHOW-nee), and the Anishinaabe (Ah-nish-ih-NAH-bey), including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today. The Regional Municipality of Niagara stands with all Indigenous people, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live”. (2021 report)*

Document version: *“Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land has a rich history of First Nations such as the Hattiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today.”*³³

Three organizations included other considerations driving LA adoption in addition to reconciliation. Fraser Health promotes the use of LAs to formally recognize First Nations Peoples and their lands in order to establish an environment conducive to positive social change.⁹⁴ Similarly, Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark District Health unit is following the practice of other boards of health across Ontario by including LAs during meetings and presentations as a symbol of mutual respect.⁶² Finally, Niagara PH mentioned requests from community members and local municipalities as a key factor in their efforts to collaborate with Indigenous organizations to develop a revised edition of their LA.³³

Where institutions did provide guidance on when to do a land acknowledgement, it was recommended^{32,34,62,93,95,96} or mandated^{37,71,84,90} that LAs be delivered by a staff member or emcee/host during or at the beginning of events, meetings, presentations, gatherings etc. For reference, Peterborough’s policy on LA reads as follows, “Peterborough Public Health will incorporate a land acknowledgement as a regular practice at all meetings that are hosted by the organization”.³⁷ Likewise, Vancouver Coastal Health’s policy document stipulates, “As official VCH protocol, staff will give a land acknowledgment at formal meetings, public events, or conferences”.⁷¹ Four sources had a policy that LAs should be delivered at the beginning of formal gatherings, meetings, workshops, committees, and conferences that happen both in-person and virtually.^{40,41,43,44} Other institutions took a more optional approach; for example, by stating “Hosting a public gathering...? Please consider opening your public meeting, presentation or event with this Land Acknowledgement”.⁹⁵

Purpose Attributed to Land Acknowledgements

While the true purpose of land acknowledgements is not proposed within this document without Indigenous consultation, the intent was to demonstrate what published, mainstream sources provided as land acknowledgement guidance, which these institutions acknowledge needs to evolve over time. Few institutions clearly cited their purpose in doing land acknowledgement but purpose statements were based on recognition and understanding, with common linkages of land acknowledgements to reconciliation:

*“The purpose of land acknowledgements are to recognize that Canada is situated on Indigenous land and to encourage reflection on what changes should be made moving forward in order to further reconciliation.”*⁴⁰

*“A venue for recognizing what is known of past Indigenous usage and occupancy of a land.”*⁸⁷

“To reaffirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures. We do this to actively work toward reconciliation.”⁴⁴

Perhaps the most overarching purpose statement found in the documents reviewed was this one:

“Understand that land acknowledgements are not delivered to make the reader or listener feel good, but to deepen understanding of the truth and move everyone towards reconciliation.”⁴²

Much of the guidance provided around land acknowledgements can be captured in the aim of deepening understanding and moving toward reconciliation. While one of the above purpose statements used the phrase “past Indigenous usage”, other institutions offered guidance in alignment with the TRC report to recognize that Indigenous Peoples continue to have a relationship to the land, and that relationship is current and not only historical.⁴⁴ Almost every guidance source from institutions explicitly mentioned with calls to action, with examples below:

“Understand the efforts that have been made by the organization you are representing towards real understanding, truth and reconciliation.”⁴²

“Consider our responsibilities to the land and reconciliation work.”⁴¹

“Spend time reflecting on the responsibility Settler-Canadians and non-Indigenous people have in acknowledging, respecting, and reconciling relationships with Indigenous peoples and territories of Turtle Island.”⁴¹

“Read the Truth and Reconciliation Final Report and consider how you can support the calls to action.”⁴³

“Invite a speaker to your next meeting to talk about truth and reconciliation. Make employment equity a bargaining priority. Ensure a workplace that welcomes Indigenous workers by bargaining collective agreement language that responds to their needs.”⁴³

“Land acknowledgements should be delivered by a team member who is familiar with the history and current realities of colonization of Indigenous people in Canada, the importance of cultural safety practices, and an understanding of the rich history, culture and important contributions of Indigenous peoples in Canada.”⁴⁰

“Don’t let this be your only action to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.”⁴⁴

Land Acknowledgement Content

A number of institutions advised their people on land acknowledgements by providing a policy or practice guideline with a list of tips or guiding questions^{20,21,40-44,87,88} Their guidance appeared to be generated by the institution, as opposed to pointing to other existing guidance, or Indigenous sources

(or if Indigenous sources were consulted, they were not named). This section outlines content where institutions provided guidance on land acknowledgement provision/delivery.

Guidance that was given was a combination of concrete advice (e.g. use Indigenous places and language, find out how to pronounce terms) along with much more advice that was abstract in nature (e.g. understand, learn, be open, reaffirm). An example is Sick Kids' (2022) five guiding principles:

1. Self-determination: Partner with Indigenous stakeholders and communities toward development and execution of Indigenous health initiatives at Sick Kids.
2. Truth and reconciliation: Interpret work through the historical context of Indigenous peoples (in Canada and at Sick Kids), consistent with calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada.
3. Cultural safety and sensitivity: Learn from Indigenous peoples, be respectful of traditions, use appropriate language, and be open-minded in development work.
4. Honesty and transparency: Communicate with openness, clarity, and integrity with Indigenous partners, staff, and the public.
5. Efficient use of resource: Capitalize on the knowledge of local partners and minimize duplication.²¹

Additional work would be needed to determine how best to operationalize some of the direction in the guidance and to address specifics such as circumstances that call for a land acknowledgement, frequency, who should deliver the land acknowledgement, etc.

There appears to be potential for land acknowledgements to help meet the Calls to Action of the TRC report, via acknowledgement of the significance of that connection to the land, and to have an impact on Indigenous identity and reclamation of that identity and decolonization, including the promotion of Indigenous languages. The nature of the impact would be subjective for the listener, and may change over time. Regardless, it is clear that from an Indigenous worldview, ancestral lands and the land and environment are interwoven with identity and health, and this is an aspect that distinguishes Indigeneity from settler and other perspectives. Land acknowledgements did mention reconciliation, land, and peoples, and thus they may have potential to help meet the learning objective of Reconciliation and could potentially contribute positive impacts in a number of areas linking to the Calls to Action. It was not possible nor appropriate to evaluate the extent to which learning happened as part of land acknowledgement development, and it was obvious based upon gaps in current knowledge that much learning is yet to happen via ongoing and meaningful Indigenous engagement.

Making Land Acknowledgement Meaningful

Appropriateness and meaningfulness of land acknowledgements is best evaluated from an Indigenous worldview, and this document does not constitute a critique or evaluation of the land acknowledgement content located in the scoping review. Land acknowledgements should be practiced as a thoughtful and

meaningful approach to addressing the principles of Truth and Reconciliation and giving appropriate acknowledgement of the land on which the country known as Canada was founded, and its associated impacts of settler colonization. While LAs can support Indigenization and decolonization, they require the appropriate research and action to make them respectful and beneficial. For example, LAs that speak of Indigenous people as relics of the past or reiterate abuse and exploitation can further traumatize and stigmatize these populations. Similarly, failing to acknowledge the strengths and knowledge of Indigenous peoples in connection to the lands when attempting to take steps towards reconciliation would be equally unjust. Land acknowledgements reviewed did not comment on the connection to the land and life within as a common practice, nor did they explicitly associate the land and environment with sustaining optimal health. There was limited mention of Indigenous peoples' connection to the land that was proportional to its meaning according to Indigenous peoples and accounts from the published literature. Describing Indigenous peoples as caretakers or stewards of the land may not capture the true intent of the terminology used around connection to the land. In general, current versions of land acknowledgements did not strongly emphasize the interconnection among Indigenous peoples and their land, nor did they make a strong connection to how this interconnectedness enabled the institution to fulfil its mandate, how that connection benefitted the (Indigenous and mainstream) populations in the region. Recognition of the interconnection could result in more meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples for whom this is more obvious, and help realize benefits to the institutions and people within a geographic region from a relationship perspective and also from the perspective of fulfillment of the Calls to Action. Thus, the strengths and knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and their connection to the lands seem to call for greater emphasis and consistency across regional land acknowledgements. Bringing the language that has historical connotations into the present tense could help to ensure that the implication is that Indigenous peoples and their roles are of the present and avoid giving the impression that these roles are confined to the past.

Future updates to land acknowledgements were considered necessary by many of the organizations included in this review. Meaningful Indigenous knowledge-keeper engagement and consultation can deepen the authenticity of land acknowledgements and accompanying further actions toward reconciliation, and Indigenous advisors are most knowledgeable about what would be considered valuable plans for further action toward decolonization and reconciliation. Regardless of the nature of the consultation and relationship, it would be important to engage without further burdening Indigenous advisors in doing so.

Learning in Developing Land Acknowledgements

Another commonality across the sources located was mention of learning, consistent with the intent of the TRC Calls to Action. Learning was a key component of the guidance and multiple institutions used their guidance on land acknowledgements to educate the reader about the context in which land acknowledgements are to be done:

- Understand where you are on the path of learning about Indigenous history, culture and contemporary issues
- Do your homework. Put in the time necessary to research the following topics:

- The Indigenous people to whom the land belongs.
 - The history of the land and any related treaties.
 - Names of living Indigenous people from these communities. If you're presenting on behalf of your work in a certain field, highlight Indigenous people who currently work in that field.
 - Indigenous place names and language.
- Learn how to pronounce Indigenous words and names so that others also become familiar. Be open to ongoing learning — and be open to changing your land acknowledgement statement as you learn more.

Other institutions offered more specific advice around determining the territory “Seek out credible information about the history of that land prior to colonization. Understand whether there are treaties related to that land or if it is unceded.”⁴¹ The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (2018) acknowledged that “Some of the history of specific areas may be complex and different sources could be contradictory. In these instances, it may be better to opt for a more general statement rather than trying to be specific. It will also be helpful to reach out to Indigenous community members for the history and context.”⁸⁷ The guidance did not identify what would be considered the most reliable source but it can be inferred that Indigenous community members would be considered the gold standard for that information and could reconcile any discrepancies lie between sources or pieces of information.

Relationships with Indigenous Peoples and or Indigenous Groups

A key component of the guidance was Indigenous relationship building, although exactly how to build relationships was not described in detail. The guidance material from institutions consistently advised to “build relationships”, “partner” and “reach out” to Indigenous people and groups in the community:

*“Build real, authentic relationships with Indigenous people: Municipal governments do not have to craft a land acknowledgement statement on their own. Engage and work with local First Nations, Métis, Indigenous organizations and community champions in your area. Advice from these groups may be useful in helping you develop a land acknowledgement protocol for your municipal government. Some may have also developed template acknowledgement statements for external use. That said, do not ask these groups to do the work for you while asking for advice”.*⁸⁷

Institutions gave advice to connect with Indigenous people in their community in advance of land acknowledgement development and throughout the process, to learn about the history and context of the land, to understand how Indigenous people would like their land described, to advise on adaptations (e.g. removal of words or shortening of acknowledgements may be disrespectful or an inaccurate representation), and to review the final draft land acknowledgement (noting there may be more than

one Indigenous community or group with whom to consult.⁴¹ Where presenting one's work in a certain field, one institution recommended to highlight Indigenous people who currently work in that field.⁴²

Where Elders or leaders are involved, there was the suggestion they could open an event with a ceremony, and should provide the proper supports (e.g. adequate time and space, symbolic gift).⁹⁷ Others have indicated elders should receive payment.⁹⁸ One institution suggested inviting Elders or Indigenous community leaders to participate in introductions at civic celebrations or official events, to bring greetings on behalf of the local Indigenous community, potentially instead of a land acknowledgement statement.⁸⁵

While institutions did not typically specify who should deliver land acknowledgements, one indicated it should be delivered by a team member who is familiar with the history,⁴⁰ and another indicated it should be a non-Indigenous person who delivered the land acknowledgement.⁴¹ Having a non-Indigenous person deliver the land acknowledgement is intended to facilitate non-Indigenous people to better understand their responsibilities as treaty peoples and their responsibility to take care of the land on which they live, work and play. Having strong relationships with Indigenous community members is the most appropriate way to provide guidance on who is consulted, how Indigenous people are consulted, at which stages, and to consider the adaptation, delivery, communication approaches, and training and or preparation necessary before delivery of land acknowledgements. Given that land acknowledgements are anticipated to evolve over time, it may be useful to clearly outline a process for that evolution to happen in a meaningful way.

Overall the guidance asked the reader to “understand the power of a land acknowledgement to show respect and recognition for Indigenous Peoples, which are essential elements of establishing healthy, reciprocal relations”, with less clarity on how to operationalize this overarching goal.⁴² One institution highlighted the need to avoid using land acknowledgements superficially and without an appreciation for their cultural meaning, and suggesting to provide “representatives and staff with cultural awareness training before implementing the use of a statement.”⁸⁷ Cultural safety training as a foundation for land acknowledgement was cited clearly by the Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Working Group (2021) as part of their BSO Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Guiding Framework, which explicitly required it for delivery of land acknowledgements as part of their broader work on cultural safety:

“Land acknowledgements should be delivered by a team member who is familiar with the history and current realities of colonization of Indigenous people in Canada, the importance of cultural safety practices, and an understanding of the rich history, culture and important contributions of Indigenous peoples in Canada.”⁴⁰

Training in cultural safety and linking it to land acknowledgement was not common across land acknowledgement guidance.

Potential Considerations for Land Acknowledgements

Since land acknowledgements are suggested to be enhanced and evolve over time, changes and supporting rationale were not evident via the content located in this scoping review. If they are to be living statements once developed, it seems there the evolution could be documented for transparency and to enhance learning. Further consultation with Indigenous community members and further developing those relationships common across the land acknowledgement guidance that institutions provided. As part of such a consultation, Indigenous knowledge keepers may wish to comment on the appropriate application of some common elements of land acknowledgements:

Approaches to Land Acknowledgement

- How to engage with and consult Indigenous people in communities in land acknowledgement and preferred approaches, and how best to identify Indigenous knowledge keepers to advise on generating and updating land acknowledgements, if in fact they should be updated. Find out what constitutes meaningful Indigenous engagement and relationship building locally, to support an appropriate land acknowledgement.
- Consider any training (e.g. cultural safety) and preparation that should precede or happen in tandem with land acknowledgements, including (but not limited to) cultural safety, Truth and Reconciliation and the accompanying 94 Calls to Action, systemic racism, colonization, re-Indigenization/supporting the reclamation of Indigeneity, and decolonization.
- In tandem with the above bullet, consider the learning and reflection necessary to engage in land acknowledgements, how to properly identify lands and peoples, ensuring speakers/readers of the land acknowledgement can properly pronounce places and peoples' names.
- On which basis land acknowledgements should be revisited or evolve, and under which circumstances land acknowledgements should be updated. Given that land acknowledgements are anticipated to evolve over time, consider a suitable process for that evolution to happen for the land acknowledgement to evolve in a meaningful direction.

Land Acknowledgement Content

- How best to name and refer to Indigenous people and groups within land acknowledgements.
- How best to name and refer to Indigenous lands (ancestral/traditional/unceded) and preferred terminology and use of Treaty language. Identify in which circumstances non-Indigenous speakers should use Indigenous language and where appropriate, identify support to read the terms used.
- Reference to Indigenous peoples as “stewards” or “caretakers” of land, and preferred (non-historical) terminology
- Whether there are appropriate standard elements of land acknowledgements, and if so, what are additional local-level elements of land acknowledgements that should be tailored to context

- Use of Dish with One Spoon/Two Row Wampum and whether and what type of context is needed for the use of these terms
- Appropriate mention of Reconciliation and associated actions and their appropriate incorporation into land acknowledgements, and where appropriate, use of Calls to Action in land acknowledgements, and how other actions (i.e. Calls to Action toward reconciliation) should be linked or mentioned explicitly in land acknowledgements or elsewhere, to help ensure they are meaningful statements.
- How best to incorporate Indigenous languages, if and where appropriate, and what if any training or preparation is recommended for the use of Indigenous languages
- Use of terms ‘settlers’, colonies, colonization and whether there are any preferred ways for referring to colonization and its associated harms within land acknowledgements
- Missing elements of land acknowledgements not cited here, which should be added, if/where relevant
- Where, if in any circumstances, certain elements of land acknowledgements can be adapted
- If using different versions of a land acknowledgement, engage Indigenous knowledge keepers in identifying key elements that must be preserved across versions and which, if any elements, could be considered optional in which circumstances.

Limitations

This review's search scope and methods could have missed sources that could contribute to land acknowledgement from an Indigenous world view. As a result of the scope of the search, the available literature originates from settler or mainstream institutions, in English. This review would be unlikely to have captured information conveyed via Indigenous oral history and traditional practices, given its methods are fundamentally mainstream, originating from a mainstream evidence synthesis worldview. The available information at the time of the search demonstrated some gaps in the level of detail provided by the institutions whose sources were located in this scoping review. The findings from the included documents were not validated by the source institutions, and reviewers did not reach out to institutions or individuals to attempt to fill gaps in detail for the written documents. It is possible that more details could have been available from institutions directly.

Language used within the review is drawn from the sources, including spelling and naming of groups and peoples, with attributions preserved from within their sources. As such, there is some inconsistency in the use of language and spelling of terms (e.g. migweech, migwech), as noted in footnotes. It is anticipated that further Indigenous consultation is needed to reconcile the correct use of these terms where multiple spellings and ways of referring to peoples and languages are noted.

While this review was supported by some initial Indigenous engagement and consultation, there was not extensive and broad consultation that would be considered comprehensive. This document intends to support further Indigenous knowledge keeper consultation that will take place over time.

Conclusions

Land acknowledgements consistently referred to the land, and to the people whose ancestral land it was; how that was done varied slightly but recent land acknowledgements used “unceded” language, naming ancestral Indigenous peoples whose land it was traditionally, and may have also indicated who inhabited the land in the present day. The concept of connection to land and life within is central to Indigenous identity but was not prominent within the land acknowledgements located in this scoping review. The focus on the land was that of the Treaties, lands with boundaries or borders, and likely reflects a Western world view of the significance of land. There was some reference to Indigenous peoples as “caretakers” or “stewards” of the land, and it is possible these terms may not accurately convey the depth and meaning of Indigenous peoples’ connection to the land. This is one area among others where Indigenous knowledge keeper consultation can serve as the key source.

Institutions consistently offered guidance for Indigenous relationship building and engagement, with some recognizing the need to do so without burdening the Indigenous people and groups who are engaged. The guidance to engage was not structured or detailed, and while some tips were offered, how to engage meaningfully is another area where Indigenous knowledge keeper consultation will be particularly valuable for institutions.

Truth and reconciliation (sometimes referred to as reconciliation) was heavily cited throughout land acknowledgements. There was an awareness of purpose and reflection of the reconciliation requirement for learning to take place, and guidance on land acknowledgements suggested areas for learning and encouraged critical reflection by those doing land acknowledgement. It is likely that in identifying what needs to be learned, around land acknowledgement topics covered, there may be as much missing as there is present in the scoping review material gathered, since it may not be possible to see the gaps from a Western perspective; for example, actions beyond the land acknowledgement that should be taken by institutions can be informed by what Indigenous people prioritize and may change across contexts. The broad principles of Reconciliation may be more institutionalized than the knowledge of how to apply the 94 Calls to Action, and seem to call for local Indigenous engagement to answer the calls locally, and to realize the full potential of a land acknowledgement. Given the inconsistency across sources, there is no single approach to land acknowledgements that could be described. The many outstanding questions about which approach is most appropriate underscores the value of Indigenous engagement in land acknowledgement development, updating and future guidance.

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