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Celebrating 40 Years of the Ottawa Charter: Health Promotion in Action

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Stephanie Ross, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Brittany McBeath, University of Toronto

September 29, 2026

Rounds

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Disclosure

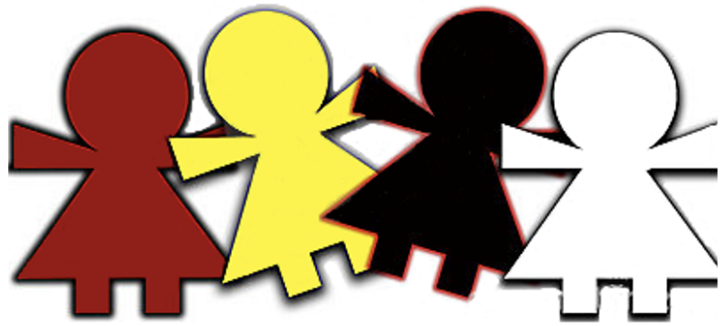
The speakers have no disclosures to declare.



Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen

“The words that come before all else.”

*Thanksgiving Address – Greetings to
the natural world.*



The People

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People.

Now our minds are one.



The Earth Mother

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.



The Waters

We give thanks to all the Waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. Water is life. We know its power in many forms—waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the spirit of Water.

Now our minds are one.



The Fish

We turn our minds to all the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that we can still find pure water.

So, we turn now to the Fish and send our greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.



The Plants

Now we turn toward the vast fields of Plant life. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come.

Now our minds are one.



The Food Plants

With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans and berries have helped the people survive.

Many other living things draw strength from them too. We gather all the Plant Foods together as one and send them a greeting and thanks.

Now our minds are one.



The Medicine Herbs

Now we turn to all the Medicine Herbs of the world. From the beginning, they were instructed to take away sickness. They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are happy there are still among us those special few who remember how to use these plants for healing. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the Medicines and to the keepers of the Medicines.

Now our minds are one.



The Animals

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life
in the world.

They have many things to teach us as people. We see them near our homes and
in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will
always be so.

Now our minds are one.



The Trees

We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who have their own instructions and uses. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty, and other useful things. Many peoples of the world use a Tree as a symbol of peace and strength.

With one mind, we greet and thank the Tree life.

Now our minds are one.



The Birds

We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them beautiful songs. Each day they remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader. To all the Birds—from the smallest to the largest— we send our joyful greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.



The Four Winds

We are all thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help to bring the change of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving us strength. With one mind, we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds.

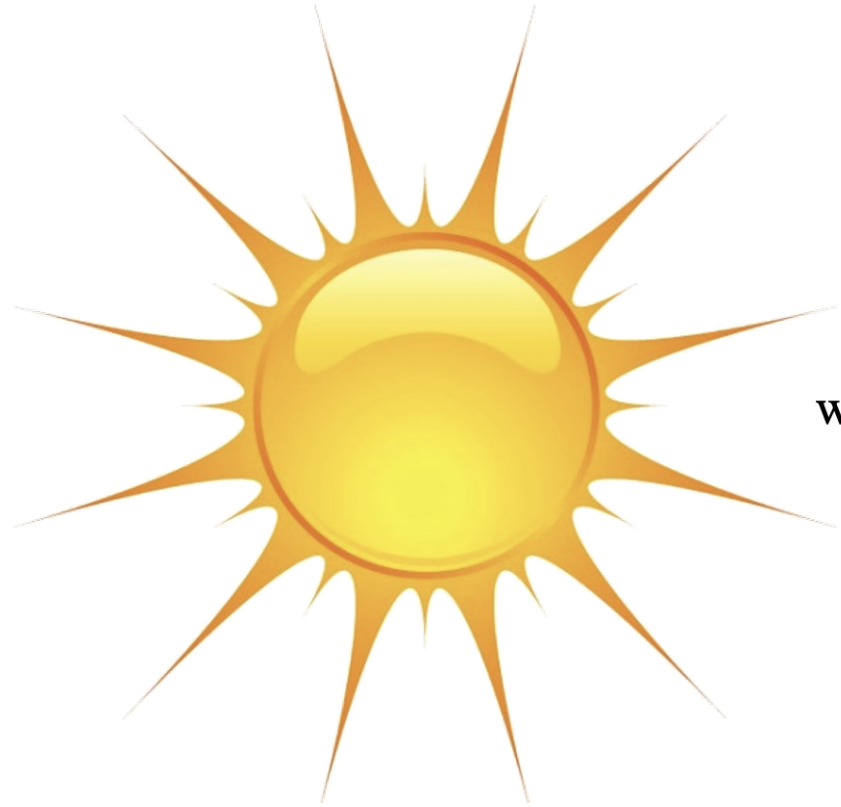
Now our minds are one.



The Thunderers

Now we turn to the west where our Grandfathers, the Thunder Beings, live. With lightening and thundering voices, they bring with them the water that renews life. We bring our minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to our Grandfathers, the Thunderers.

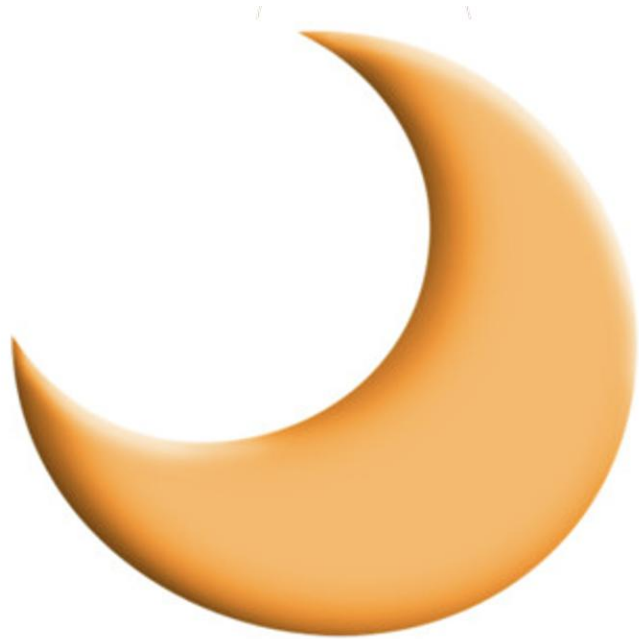
Now our minds are one.



The Sun

We now send greetings and thanks to our eldest Brother, the Sun. Each day without fail he travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of all the fires of life. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Brother, the Sun.

Now our minds are one.



Grandmother Moon

We put our minds together and give thanks to our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, who lights the nighttime sky. She is the leader of women all over the world, and she governs the movement of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time, and it is the Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon.

Now our minds are one.



The Stars

We give thanks to the Stars who are spread across the sky like jewelry. We see them in the night, helping the Moon to light the darkness and bringing dew to the gardens and growing things.

When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered together as one, we send greetings and thanks to all the Stars.

Now our minds are one.



The Creator

Now we turn our thoughts to the Creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on this Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.

Now our minds are one.

Closing Words

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.

And now our minds are one.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, including its strengths and weaknesses.
- Compare the Ottawa Charter to two examples of health promotion implementation.
- Explain five interconnected cultural domains and four core cultural knowledge translation processes for Indigenous health promotion

Today's Speakers



Stephanie Ross, RN, BScN, MA, CCHN(C)
Program Manager, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit



Brittany McBeath, PhD., Postdoctoral Fellow
Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education
University of Toronto



Introduction to the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion



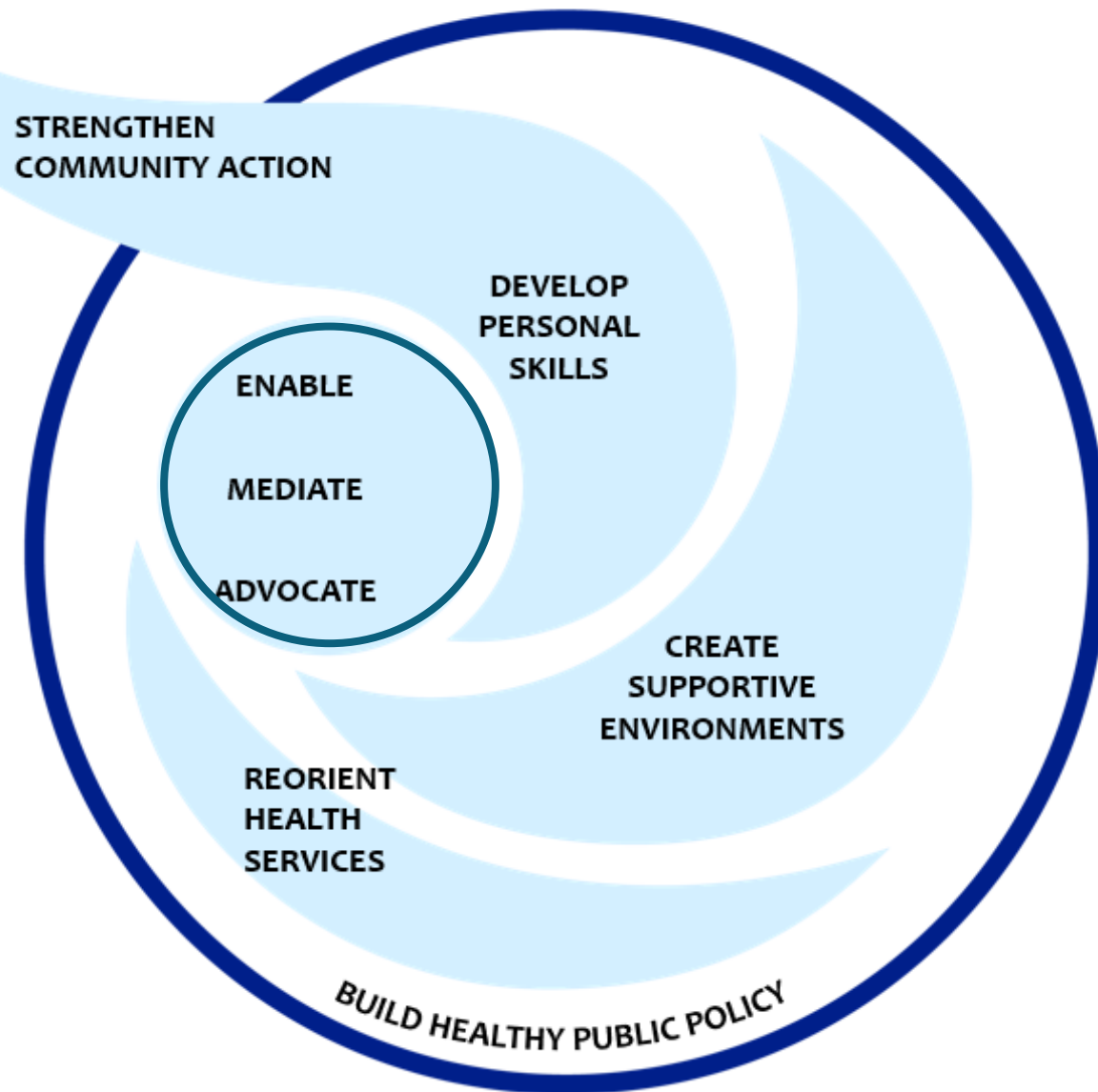
- ➔ Adopted at the First International Conference for Health Promotion in Ottawa, Ontario
- ➔ International recognition of the value of health promotion
- ➔ Sets the foundation for health promotion action

World Health Organization (WHO). The Ottawa Charter for health promotion: first international conference on health promotion [Internet]. Geneva: WHO; 1986 [cited 2026 Sept 11]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/healthpromotion/population-health/ottawa-charter-health-promotion-international-conference-onhealth-promotion/charter.pdf>

Health Promotion Is....

“The process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health and its determinants. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy lifestyles to well-being.”

World Health Organization (WHO). The Ottawa Charter for health promotion: first international conference on health promotion [Internet]. Geneva: WHO; 1986 [cited 2026 Sept 11]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/healthpromotion/population-health/ottawa-charter-health-promotion-international-conference-onhealth-promotion/charter.pdf>



Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion

- Pre-requisites for Health
- Three Enabling Functions
- Five Action Areas

World Health Organization (WHO). The Ottawa Charter for health promotion: first international conference on health promotion [Internet]. Geneva: WHO; 1986 [cited 2026 Sept 11]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/healthpromotion/population-health/ottawa-charter-health-promotion-international-conference-onhealth-promotion/charter.pdf>

Health Promotion as a Practice and a Normative Ideal



As a practice, health promotion is any combination of educational and environmental supports for actions and conditions of living conducive to health.

As a normative ideal, health promotion is a vision for how society should be.

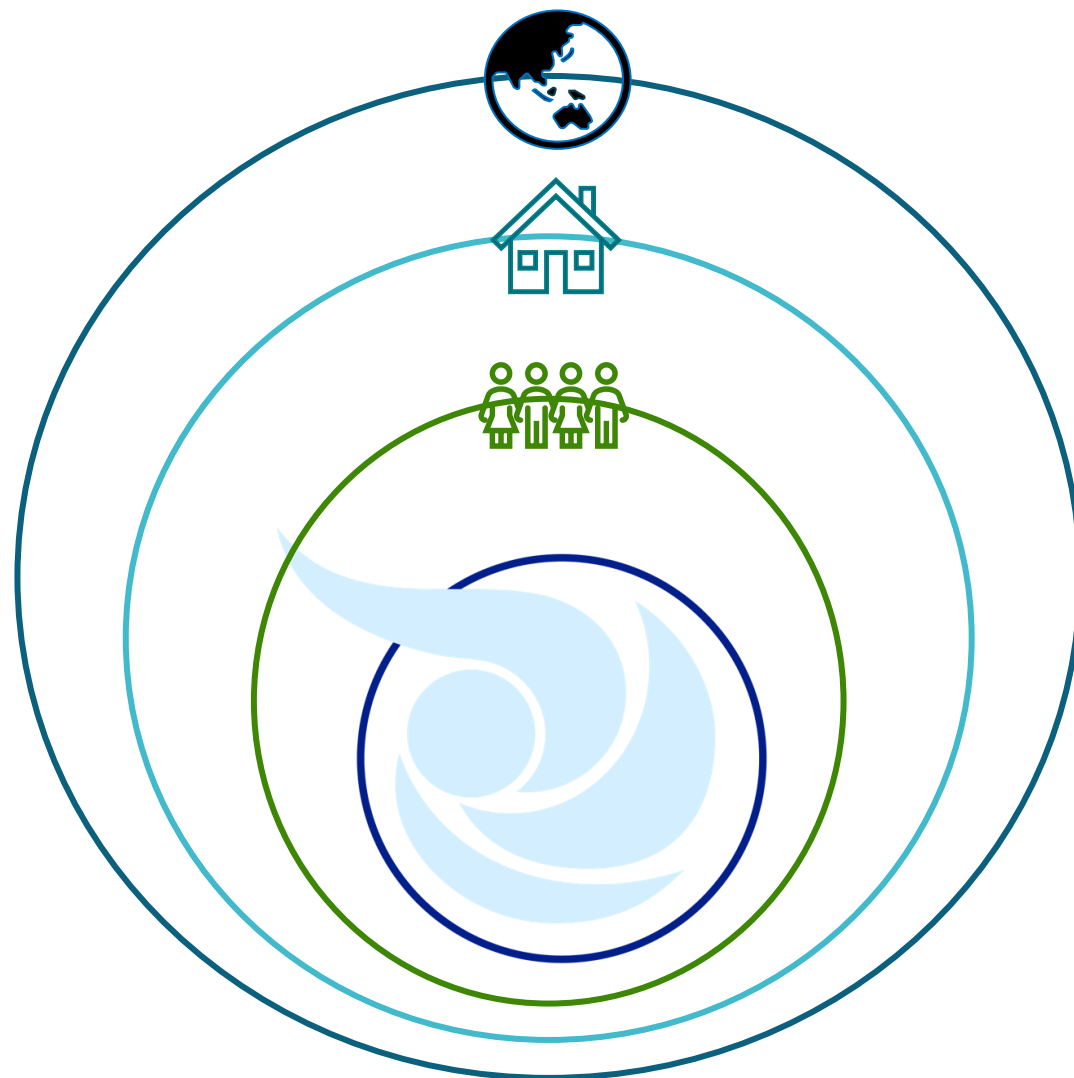
Carter SM. Health promotion: an ethical analysis. Health Promot J Aust. 2014;25(1):19-24. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1071/he13074>



Addressing the social
conditions in which
people are born, live,
learn, work and play, so
that they are able to
improve their health and
their determinants of
health

Potvin L, Jones CM. Twenty-five years after the Ottawa Charter: the critical role of health promotion for public health. Can J Public Health. 2011;102(4):244-8. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmc6973872/>

The Ottawa Charter in Context



Health Promotion in Practice



Chronic Disease Prevention at
Simcoe Muskoka District Health
Unit

Culturally Grounded Indigenous
Health Promotion

From Principles to Practice: Chronic Disease Prevention

Applying upstream health promotion strategies to shape local health outcomes

Stephanie Ross, RN, BScN, MA, CCHN(C)
Program Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention



September 29, 2026



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Land Acknowledgement



Learning Objectives

- Reflect on the importance of upstream health promotion strategies for chronic disease prevention.
- Illustrate how the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion strategies guide chronic disease prevention at one local public health unit.
- Introduce other key frameworks and cross-program efforts that contribute to promoting health and well-being across the life course.
- Highlight the importance of a health equity approach.

Our Local Context

SMDHU Vision: **Healthy Communities. Healthy People.**

- Total Population: 599, 843 people
 - Average age is 45.5 years
 - 20.8% of population ≥ 65 years
 - Growing diversity
- Mix of urban and rural geography
 - Four First Nation communities
 - 2 upper tier and 24 lower tier municipalities

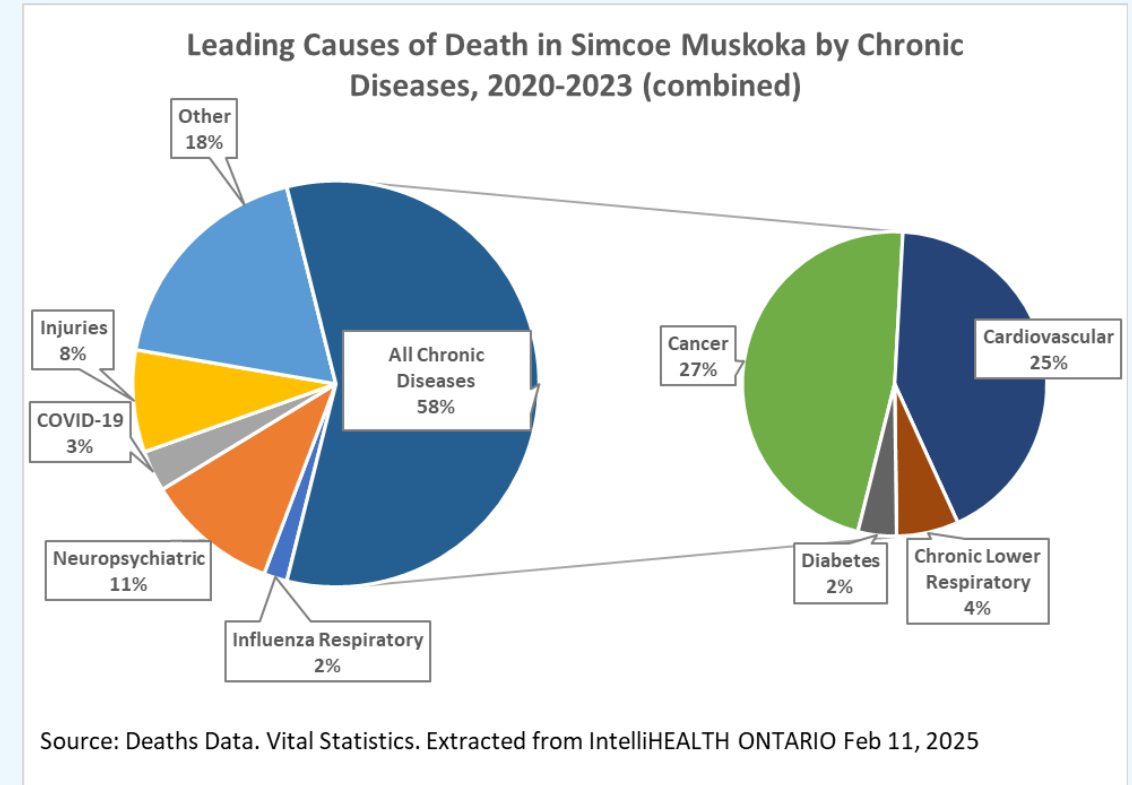


Sources:

1. Simcoe Muskoka HealthSTATS: <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Health-Stats/HealthStatsHome/PopulationDemographics>

Chronic Diseases in Simcoe Muskoka

- Leading causes of death.
- Highest prevalence among aging populations.
- Influenced by a range of factors throughout the life course.
- Exacerbate health inequities.
- Substantial health care costs.



Sources:

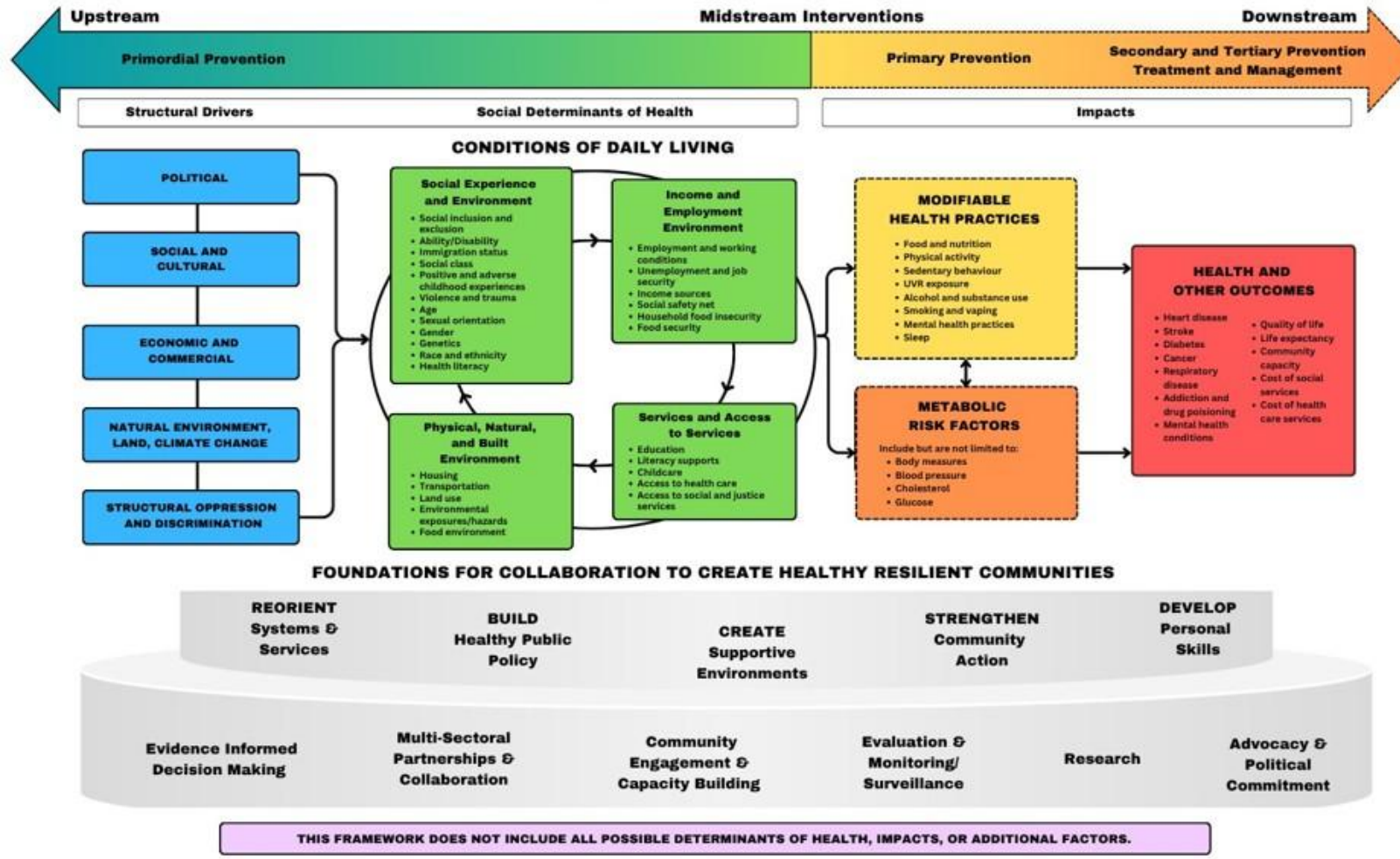
1. Simcoe Muskoka HealthSTATS: Chronic Diseases. <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Health-Stats/HealthStatsHome/ChronicDiseases>
2. CCO and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). The burden of chronic diseases in Ontario: key estimates to support efforts in prevention. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2019.
3. Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework Topic Summaries: Connections between Early Adversity, Resilience and Chronic Disease (March, 2026).

SMDHU's Chronic Disease Prevention Framework



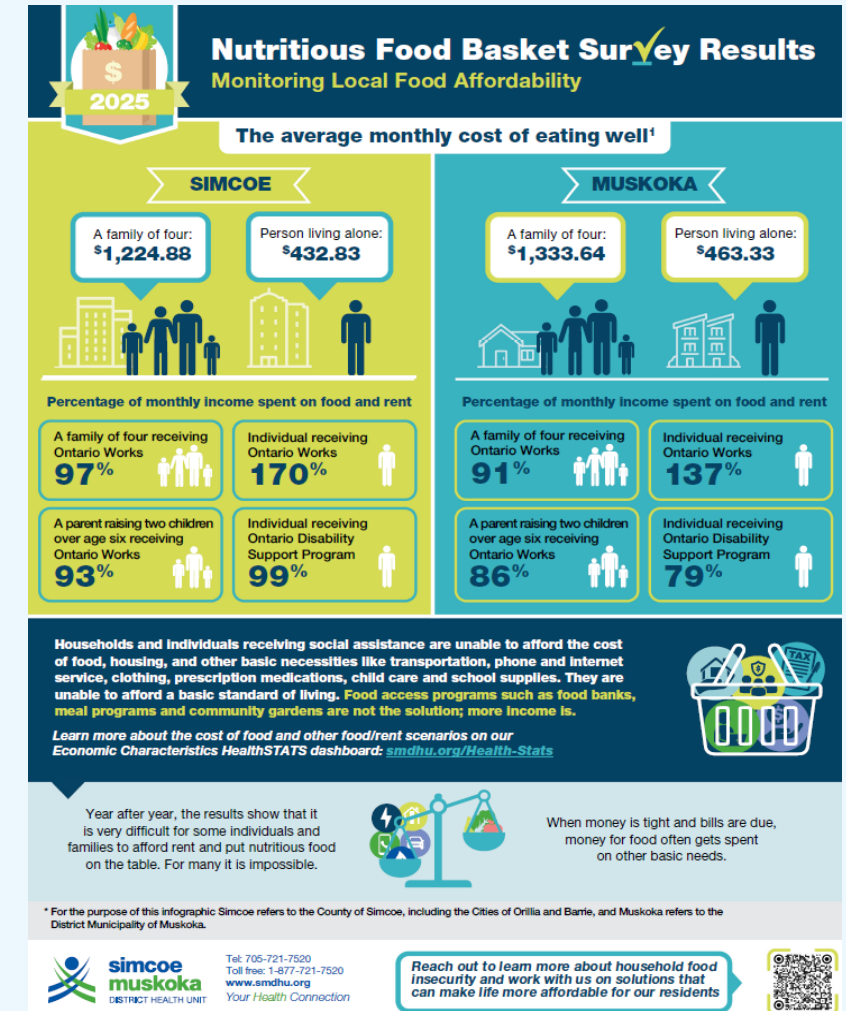
Chronic Disease Prevention Framework (2024)

Vision: Healthy, sustainable, and resilient communities in Simcoe Muskoka, where all residents have equitable opportunities to thrive and reach their optimal potential.



Local Need: Household Food Insecurity

- Food and nutrition support good health, human development across the lifespan, and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases.
- Food insecurity is a major public health issue.
- Food insecurity is primarily driven by inadequate income.
- Income-based solutions are necessary to address the underlying causes.



Sources:

1. Health Canada (2026). Nutrition and Healthy Eating. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/healthy-eating.html>
2. Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (2025). Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results. <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/FoodNutrition/poverty=hunger>

Moving Upstream: Applying Ottawa Charter Strategies

Household Food Insecurity (HFI)

- 1 Reorient systems and services:** Build awareness of HFI as a system issue.
- 2 Build healthy public policy:** Advocate for and inform income and policy solutions.
- 3 Create supportive environments:** E.g., food environment, transportation, etc.
- 4 Strengthen community capacity:** Engage & partner on community-led initiatives.
- 5 Develop personal skills:** Information to support food skills development and service navigation.

Cross-Program Efforts



Healthy Growth & Development

Healthy Babies Healthy Children

Early childhood experiences
Parent and family supports
Building resilience



School Health

School food environments
Active school travel
Mental health promotion prevent



Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction

Alcohol
Nicotine (tobacco, vaping, etc.)
Other substances



Clinical Services

Oral health screening & preventive services
Immunization (e.g., HPV)
Sexual health promotion



Environmental Health and Health Equity

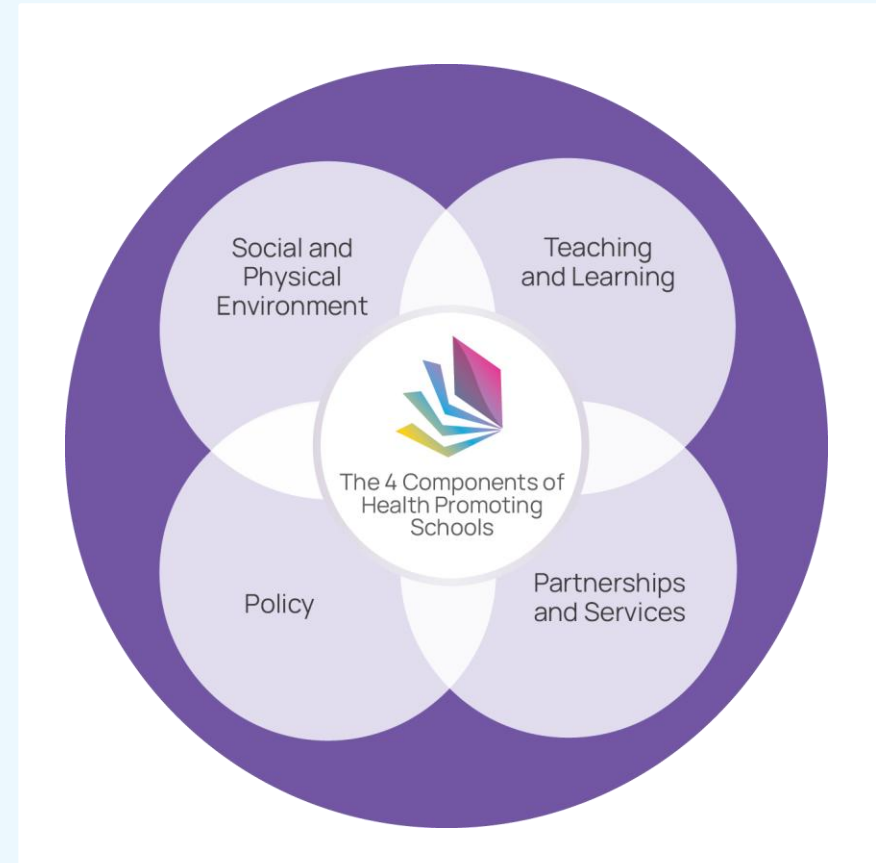
Healthy built environments
Health hazards
Health equity and engaging priority populations

Other Guiding Frameworks

Ontario early Adversity and Resilience Framework



Joint Consortium for School Health: Health Promoting Schools Framework

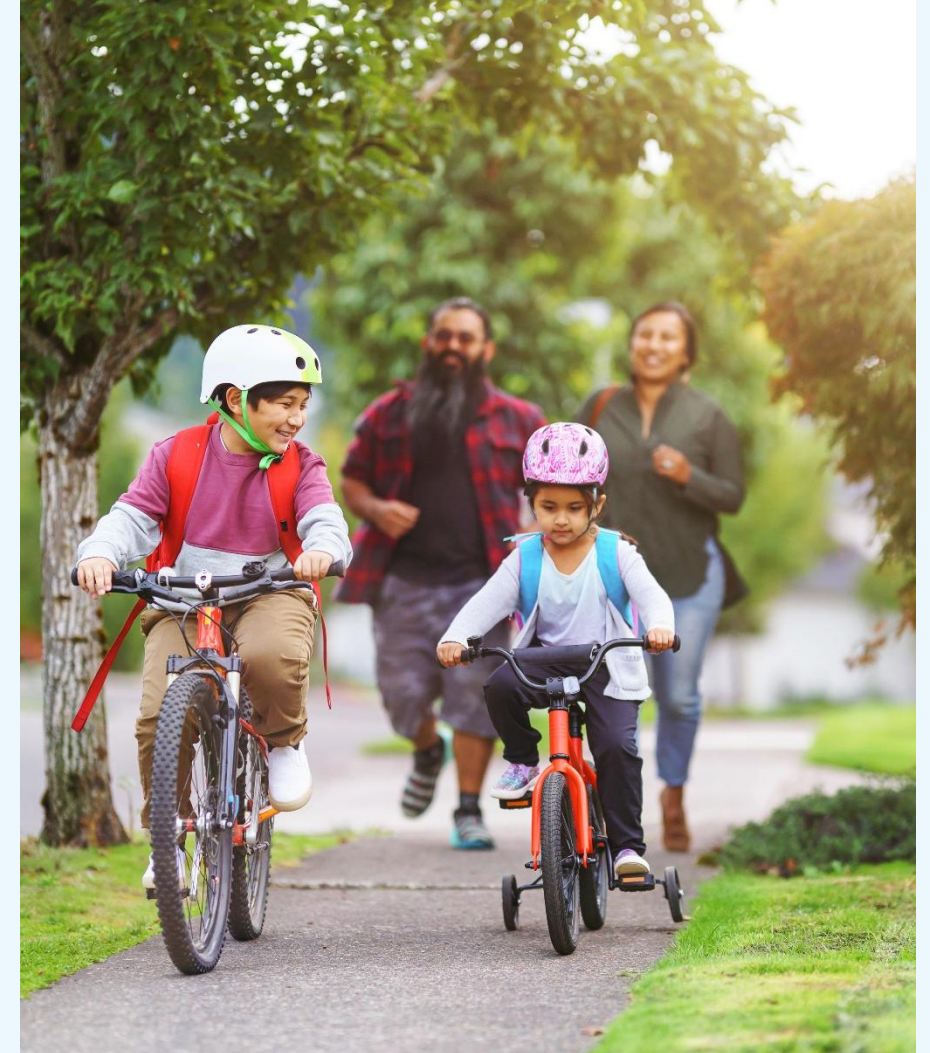


Sources:

1. Dawdy, J., Dunford, K. and Magalhaes Boateng, K. (2025). Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework. Public Health Ontario Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience Community of Practice.
2. Joint Consortium for School Health (2028/2026/2025). Health Promoting Schools Framework. <https://www.jcsh-cces.ca/en/concepts/health-promoting-schools/>

Partnerships Beyond Public Health

- Municipal governments
- Planning departments
- Recreation
- School boards and schools
- Healthcare providers
- Community partner organizations
- Members of the community
- Priority populations, and those with lived and living experience



Bringing It All Together

- Chronic disease prevention starts long before disease appears.
- Health outcomes are shaped across the life course.
- The Ottawa Charter can help guide upstream actions that address underlying social and structural determinants of health.
- Internal and external partnerships are essential.





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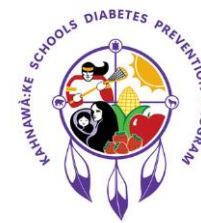
**simcoe
muskoka**
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

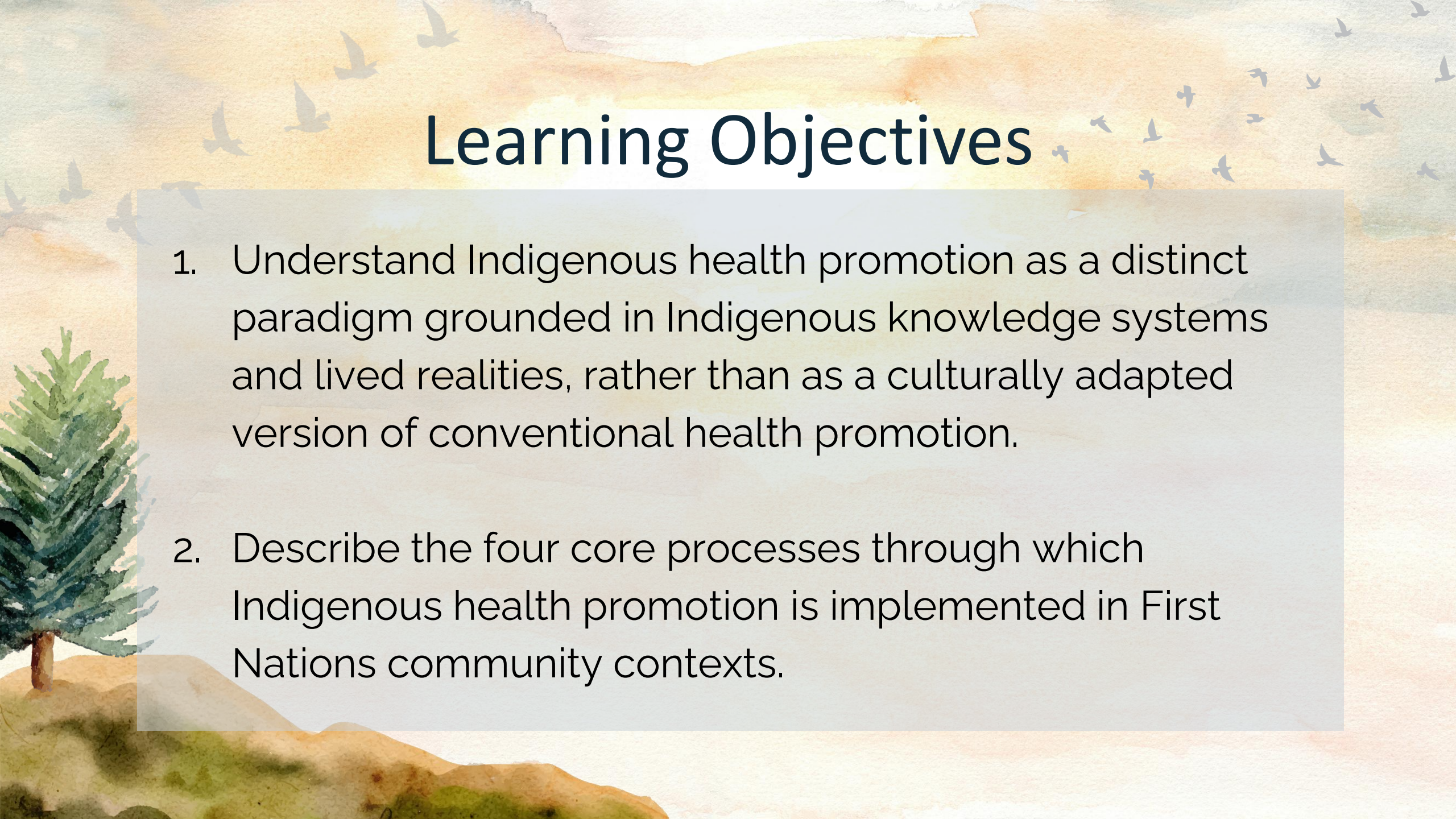
Indigenous Health Promotion

What does it look like? How is it implemented?



Brittany McBeath, PhD
b.mcbeath@utoronto.ca



The background is a watercolor illustration. At the top, there's a warm, orange and yellow sky with several small, grey birds in flight. On the left side, a green evergreen tree stands on a small, brown and green mound. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Learning Objectives

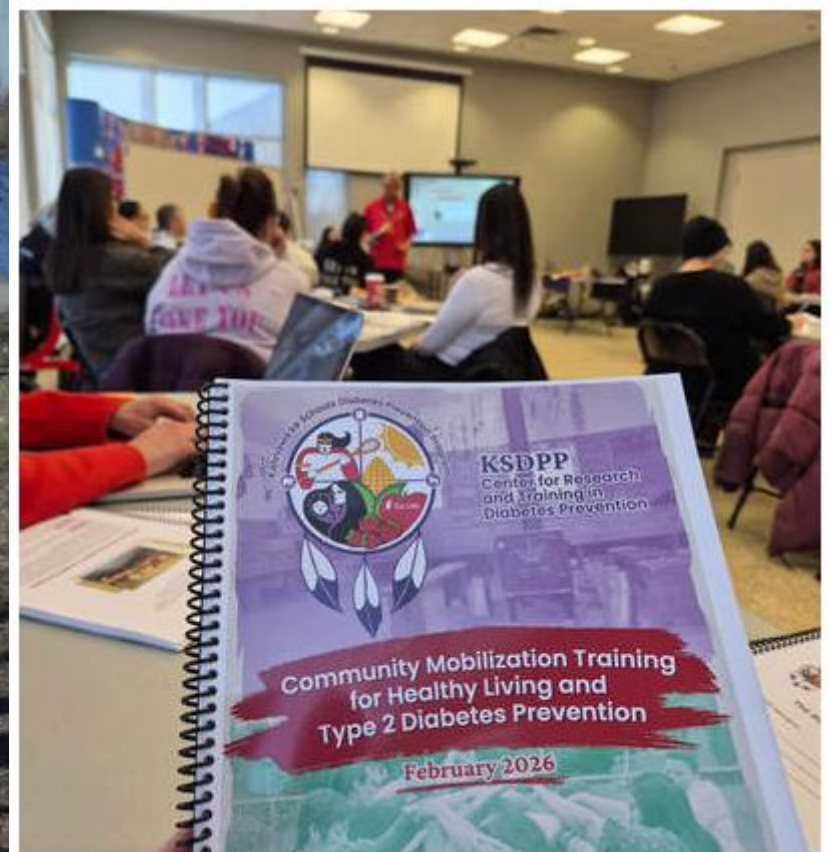
1. Understand Indigenous health promotion as a distinct paradigm grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and lived realities, rather than as a culturally adapted version of conventional health promotion.
2. Describe the four core processes through which Indigenous health promotion is implemented in First Nations community contexts.

Introducing Community Context



KAHNAWÀ:KE SCHOOLS DIABETES
PREVENTION PROGRAM
CENTER FOR RESEARCH & TRAINING
IN DIABETES PREVENTION

KAHNAWÀ:KE
TSI IONTERIHWAIENSTÁHKHWA
TEIAKONEK WENHSATSIKHÈ:TARE
ROTIIO'TÁTIE' TAHATÍ:TAHSTE



Community Context and catalyst



The background is a soft watercolor illustration. It features a warm, golden-yellow sky with numerous small, grey birds in flight, scattered across the upper half. In the bottom left corner, there is a small, dark green evergreen tree growing on a brown, rocky outcrop. The overall style is gentle and artistic.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate how diverse First Nations communities currently understand and implement culturally grounded health promotion, despite colonial influences.

Methods



The background is a watercolor illustration. At the top, there's a warm, yellowish-orange sky with several small, dark birds in flight. Below the sky, there's a white, cloud-like shape. In the bottom left corner, there's a green, coniferous tree on a small, brown, rocky outcrop. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Results

Five Cultural Domains

- Traditional knowledge and teachings
- Traditional foods and food practices
- Land-based activities
- Traditional arts and ceremonies
- Use of Indigenous languages

Four Core Cultural Knowledge Translation Processes

- Experiential education processes
- Social-collaborative processes
- Adaptive processes
- Personal cultural healing

The background is a watercolor illustration. The top half features a warm, yellowish-orange sky with numerous small, dark grey birds in flight. The bottom left corner shows a green, coniferous tree on a brown, rocky outcrop. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Conclusions

- Cultural resurgence and self-determination are central to promoting Indigenous health.
- Coming together as one mind (community mobilization), strengthens Indigenous health promotion sovereignty.

The background is a soft watercolor wash in warm tones of yellow, orange, and light green. Numerous small, grey birds are scattered across the upper half, appearing to fly. In the bottom left corner, there is a small, stylized evergreen tree with green needles and a brown trunk, growing on a small patch of green ground.

Acknowledgements

- I would like to acknowledge and thank the entire KSDPP Research Team, and CMT project Community Partners for their leadership of this work and for the knowledge they have shared with me, entrusting me to share these stories.
- This work was supported by funding for the Mobilizing Indigenous knowledge for community-driven wellness project provided through a grant (CIHR#IAW-151691) from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health, to Dr. Lucie Lévesque (nominated principal investigator) at Queen's University. In-kind support was provided through several organizational and community partners.

The background is a soft watercolor illustration. It features a warm, yellowish-orange sky with numerous small, grey birds in flight. In the bottom left corner, there is a green evergreen tree on a small, brown and green hill. The overall style is artistic and gentle.

References

- McBeath, B., Lévesque M.C., Lévesque, L., Périllat-Amédée, S., Sahajpal, R., Tremblay, MC., Delormier, T. (2025). An exploration of cultural grounding in Indigenous health promotion: Perspectives from First Nations communities in Canada. *Health Promotion International*, 40, daaf211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf211>.
- **KSDPP Website:** <https://www.ksdpp.org/>

A watercolor illustration of a sunset or sunrise scene. The sky is filled with warm, golden-yellow and orange hues, with a bright, glowing sun in the center. Numerous small, dark birds are scattered across the sky, appearing to fly. In the bottom left corner, a small, dark green evergreen tree stands on a patch of brown and green ground. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible watercolor textures.

Nyá:wen
Thank You

Andrea Bodkin

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[PublicHealthOntario.ca](https://www.publichealthontario.ca)