

2025 REGIONAL INDIGENOUS STUDENT LEADERSHIP SUMMIT ON MENTAL HEALTH

**MAY 1 & 2, 2025
KAMLOOPS, BC**



**INDIGENOUS MENTAL HEALTH
REPORT**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



*Secwepemcúl'ecw yi7élye ell, re tmicws re
Tk'emlú'semc n7élye.*

*We would like to acknowledge that the Summit was gathered on the
unceded territories of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc of the Secwépemc
Nation.*

HOSTED BY:

OMRIE: Okanagan Mainline Regional Indigenous Education Council and School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson)



SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 73
Kamloops-Thompson

OMRIE COUNCIL

SD73 Kamloops-Thompson	SD22 Vernon	SD83 North Okanagan
SD53 Okanagan	SD23 Central Okanagan	Shuswap
Similkameen	SD74 Gold Trail	SD8 Kootenay Lake
SD19 Revelstoke	SD58 Nicola-Similkameen	SD93 Consiel scolaire
SD67 Okanagan Skaha	SD27 Cariboo Chilcotin	francophone

VENUE AND SUPPORT PROVIDED BY



Thompson Rivers University

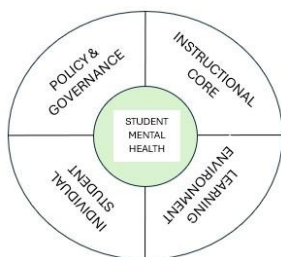
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2025, over 150 Indigenous youth from eleven school districts across the southern interior of British Columbia gathered on the territory of the Secwepemc Nation, specifically T'kemplúps te Secwépemc to participate in a landmark Indigenous Student Leadership Summit on Mental Health. Grounded in traditional knowledge and lived experience, the Summit explored mental health and wellness through four interconnected domains of the Provincial Equity in Action Framework: Policy & Governance, Instructional Core, Learning Environments, and Individual Student Needs. Each was examined through the lens of Indigenous youth, using the Circle of Courage as a guiding model for personal and collective well-being: Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity.

This report presents the voices of Indigenous students and the actionable recommendations they have for schools, districts, governments, and communities. Their vision calls for culturally grounded mental health supports, safe learning environments, authentic relationship-building, and systemic changes that reflect Indigenous worldviews and lived realities.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The 2025 Indigenous Student Leadership Summit on Mental Health was chosen by Indigenous student leaders as a topic for discussion to ensure Indigenous youth voice shapes decision-making about student wellness. The Summit used the Provincial Equity in Action Framework as a structure for systems change, understanding that equity in mental health cannot be achieved without transformation in all four pillars:



- ❖ **Policy & Governance:** Ensuring Indigenous voices guide the creation of culturally safe policy.
- ❖ **Instructional Core:** Integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into daily learning.
- ❖ **Learning Environment:** Building safe and welcoming schools with visible Indigenous presence.
- ❖ **Individual Students:** Supporting youth in personalized and relational ways.

This framework complements the Circle of Courage, a resilience-based model developed by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002), rooted in Indigenous understandings of child development. The Circle identifies four core values essential for youth thriving:



- ❖ **Belonging:** Emotional safety and connection to culture, family, and community.
- ❖ **Mastery:** Opportunities to succeed, contribute, and build confidence.
- ❖ **Independence:** Voice, choice, and responsibility for one's healing journey.
- ❖ **Generosity:** Sharing stories, teachings, and support with others.

Together, these frameworks ensure that change is holistic. It is centering the mental, emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of Indigenous wellness. As the literature shows, youth 'at risk' do not lack resilience but require supportive systems that affirm identity, restore relationships, and promote empowerment (Brendtro et al., 2002).

STUDENT CALLS TO ACTION

What We Need from Schools, Districts, and the Province. Throughout the 2025 Indigenous Student Summit on Mental Health, Indigenous youth across the southern interior of British Columbia expressed not only their experiences but also their clear and courageous vision for change. These calls to action are grounded in real-life stories, cultural values, and everyday challenges of Indigenous students.

We the students call on Schools to:

- ✓ Create safe, culturally grounded spaces for Indigenous students to smudge, meet Elders, and feel spiritually safe.
- ✓ Integrate Indigenous mental wellness into daily learning from Kindergarten onward.
- ✓ Ensure Indigenous culture is visible in classrooms and hallways, not just on designated days.
- ✓ Support land-based learning through regular outdoor learning and traditional seasonal practices.
- ✓ Uplift Indigenous student voice through Indigenous leadership groups with school-level influence.
- ✓ Respond meaningfully to racism and lateral violence with restorative, Indigenous-informed approaches.
- ✓ Offer consistent access to Indigenous counsellors and support workers.

"Give us space to breathe and heal without having to fight for it."

We the students call on School Districts to:

- ✓ Fund and support Indigenous mental health teams including Elders, cultural workers, and counsellors.
- ✓ Provide cultural safety and trauma-informed training for all staff.
- ✓ Recognize youth as partners in district mental health planning.
- ✓ Allocate time and funding for year-round land-based and culture-based programming.
- ✓ Ensure consistency across schools so supports are equitable for all Indigenous students.
- ✓ Create permanent cultural spaces for mental health and wellness, not temporary or marginal spaces.
- ✓ Promote kindness and relational safety through district-wide initiatives.

"Make your words real. We are watching if you follow through."

We the students call on the Province and Ministry of Education and Child Care to:

- ✓ Provide sustainable funding for Indigenous-specific mental health supports.
- ✓ Mandate Indigenous mental wellness curriculum across all districts.
- ✓ Create Indigenous youth advisory councils to influence provincial mental health planning.
- ✓ Recognize land-based wellness in provincial education standards.
- ✓ Ensure trauma-informed policies that address colonization and intergenerational trauma.
- ✓ Publicly support Indigenous-led initiatives like this Summit as acts of reconciliation.

"We don't want to be a side note in policy. We want to be partners."

MENTAL HEALTH FRAMEWORK IN ACTION

Equity in Action: Policy & Governance

- ✓ Indigenous student councils and leadership groups must be empowered to shape mental health planning.
- ✓ Elders and Knowledge Keepers should help guide the development and review of district and school policies.
- ✓ Policy must explicitly address the impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma.
- ✓ Mental health and wellness should be embedded in Local Education Agreements and Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreements.
- ✓ Ensure transparency and accountability - students expect districts and governments to follow through on commitments.

Equity in Action: Instructional Core

- ✓ All students should learn about Indigenous understandings of wellness, including emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical balance.
- ✓ Mental health education should begin in elementary school and be integrated across subjects.
- ✓ Teachers must be supported to respectfully bring traditional knowledge and practices into classrooms.
- ✓ Land-based learning should be acknowledged as vital to mental wellness and curriculum.
- ✓ Indigenous-led instruction, including languages, cultural practices, and history, should be recognized and credited.

Equity in Action: Learning Environments

- ✓ Culturally safe spaces must be available in all schools for smudging, gathering, and ceremony.
- ✓ Schools must visibly reflect Indigenous cultures through signage, language, student artwork, and medicine gardens.

- ✓ Bullying, racism, and lateral violence must be addressed seriously through restorative and trauma-informed approaches.
- ✓ Outdoor and land-based learning environments must be accessible and supported.
- ✓ Mental wellness spaces should be peaceful, private, and open to students beyond moments of crisis.

Equity in Action: Individual Student Needs (Circle of Courage Lens)

- ✓ **Belonging:** Students must feel emotionally safe, connected to culture, and supported by peers and adults.
- ✓ **Mastery:** Recognize success in many forms, including cultural knowledge, art, leadership, and relational skills.
- ✓ **Independence:** Give students voice and choice in their learning and wellness journey.
- ✓ **Generosity:** Encourage youth to lead and support one another through peer mentorship, storytelling, and shared teachings.
- ✓ Supports must be tailored, flexible, and holistic, affirming the full identity and lived reality of Indigenous students.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Indigenous Student Leadership Summit on Mental Health brought together voices of Indigenous youth from across the southern interior of British Columbia to share their lived experiences, cultural strengths, and visions for well-being. Through courageous conversations and deep reflection, students articulated clear hopes for schools that are safe, inclusive, healing, and empowering. It was not a consultation; it was a call to action. These youth are not passive recipients of support; they are leaders with solutions. They have lived the systems that education leaders are trying to improve. This report honours their wisdom and vision.

This report is not just a record of student voice; it is an invitation. It invites schools, districts, and the provincial education system into deeper relationship with Indigenous youth. It encourages us all to walk in partnership, aligned with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, and the First Peoples Principles of Learning.

As one student said: ***"We are not our trauma. We are still here. And we're ready to lead."***

These principles remind us that:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, experiential, and relational.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

By listening to Indigenous students and acting on their ideas, we honour these teachings and uphold the responsibility to co-create spaces of healing and hope. We do this not out of obligation, but because it is the right thing to do, for our children, our schools, and the future we all share.

Let this report serve as a step forward in that shared journey, grounded in truth, guided by youth, and strengthened by our collective commitment to equity and reconciliation.