

The Story of the Promoting Life Together Collaborative

In the words of the
Promoting Life Together (PLT) Guidance Group and
the Northern and Indigenous Health Team at
Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC)



Figure 1 The Eagle Feather in the Sacred Bundle of the Promoting Life Together Collaborative

Overview

2021

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge all of the members of the Promoting Life Together (PLT) Collaborative Guidance Group and the Northern and Indigenous Health Team, past and present, for their contributions and support. In particular, we thank former team members Katrina Dumont and Meghan McKenna for their valuable contributions.

This story represents our collective learning and connection of spirits.

The book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* recommended by Will Landon, PLT Guidance Group Youth Representative was a foundational resource to the PLT Collaborative. The author Shawn Wilson expresses his *intention to build a relationship between the readers of his story, himself, and the ideas he presents as a form of relational accountability.*¹ We hope to do the same with our PLT Collaborative story and our readers.

The Guiding Principles of the PLT Collaborative continue to resonate deeply at the knowledge sharing phase of the collaborative. We relied on our trust-based relationships to navigate the challenges that our collaboration brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person gatherings that we had relied on to strengthen our relational work in the past became impossible. We practiced consensus-based collaborative writing and knowledge sharing with the help of virtual meetings, phone calls and emails.

Alphabetical List of Authors

- **Kelly Brownbill**, Indigenous Educator/Consultant, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member, PLT Coach/Mentor
- **Ed Connors**, Psychologist, Member of the Mohawks of Kahnawá:ke, Board member, *First Peoples Wellness Circle*, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member, PLT Coach/Mentor
- **Albert Dumont**, Spiritual Advisor, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member
- **Carol Fancott**, Director, Patient Engagement and Partnerships, HEC and former Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement, Co-chair, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group
- **Carol Hopkins**, Executive Director, *Thunderbird Partnership Foundation*, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member
- **Will Landon**, Youth Representative, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member
- **Marion Maar**, Associate Professor, Northern Ontario School of Medicine, External Evaluation Lead, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member, Lead Writer for Story
- **Denise McCuaig**, Métis, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member, PLT Coach/Mentor

- **William (Bill) Mussell**, Adult Educator, Coast Salish/Stó:lō “People of the River” Board Member, *First Peoples Wellness Circle*, Co-Chair, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group, PLT Coach/Mentor
- **Despina Papadopoulos**, Senior Program Lead, Northern and Indigenous Health Team, HEC and former Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member
- **Nancy Parker**, Executive Director, *Marymound*, Board Chair, *Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention*, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member, PLT Coach/Mentor
- **Brenda Restoule**, Psychologist, Anishinabek from Dokis First Nation, CEO, *First Peoples Wellness Circle*, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member, PLT Coach/Mentor
- **Mariette Sutherland**, External Knowledge Translation Lead, PLT Collaborative Guidance Group member

Overview

This is the *Story of the Promoting Life Together Collaborative* as seen through the eyes and the experiences of the Promoting Life Together (PLT) Collaborative Guidance Group and the Northern and Indigenous Health (NIH) Team of the former legacy organization, Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement (CFHI), which amalgamated with the Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI) to form the new organization Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC). HEC is an independent, not-for-profit charity funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

It is the story of the process of collaboration and relationship development that was required to integrate different world views and to facilitate the life promotion work of the PLT Collaborative teams across the country.

It is also the story of a pan-Canadian health organization (CFHI and now HEC) and its staff, and how they worked with and learned from Indigenous leaders, organizations and communities. It is the story of how these groups collaborated with the goal of integrating community voices and Indigenous ways of knowing in life promoting work, and how they, in turn, supported teams to do the same in six geographic regions. Finally, it is a story of why respect for Indigenous knowledge, values and people and culturally appropriate engagement are essential to the successful collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health organizations.

Indigenous Peoples, cultures as well as mainstream organizations are diverse and much of the work of the PLT Collaborative was, and is, context-specific. Our intention to share the PLT Collaborative story is not to provide a step-by-step guide for others to duplicate. Instead, it is to share our processes and learnings of what worked and what did not, as we strove to enact culturally safe principles and practices alongside our PLT Collaborative partners. We are sharing our processes so others can learn from our experience and develop their own processes appropriate to them and their partners.

The way we share knowledge in this document is guided by Knowledge Sharing Protocol developed by a Guidance Group, to determine what and how information gathered through the PLT Collaborative would be shared in continued adherence to the First Nations Principles of OCAP™ (ownership, control, access and protection) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which were incorporated into the Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with First Nations and Métis partners, Elders, Leaders and Knowledge Keepers of the PLT Collaborative.

The Story of the Promoting Life Together Collaborative shares the following reflections and learnings about the PLT Collaborative journey:

- What is the PLT Collaborative?
- Why We Share our Story
- The Story of Our Beginnings
- Building and Maintaining Relationships
- Creating Guiding Principles

- Collaborating as a Guidance Group and Coaches/Mentors
- Honouring Indigenous Worldviews through Ceremony
- Respecting Indigenous Worldviews in Policy and Practice
- Transformation

The Promoting Life Together (PLT) Collaborative

The PLT Collaborative was a 20-month life promotion and community wellness initiative convened by CFHI. The creation of the collaborative arose from discussions between the NIH team of CFHI, the Canadian Northern and Remote Health Network (CNRHN), and Indigenous knowledge holders and organizations, including the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and First Peoples Wellness Circle, regarding suicide prevention/life promotion in northern and remote regions of Canada.

The PLT Collaborative modeled a co-designed learning approach that brought together six multi-disciplinary teams from across northern, rural and remote parts of Canada. Each team in the collaborative worked alongside their communities and First Nations and Métis coaches, to deliver an initiative that addresses life promotion and community wellness for people living in northern and remote regions across Canada. The collaborative offered in-person learning opportunities and teleconferences, which enabled coaching and mentorship by experienced practitioners, and offered a supportive curriculum to formally enhance the learning.

The five main goals of the PLT Collaborative:

1. To support the development of meaningful partnerships with teams to work alongside community members (First Nations, Inuit and/or Métis), health authorities, persons with lived experience and other community partners.
2. To provide learning opportunities for understanding and application of wise practices for life promotion and Indigenous mental wellness frameworks.
3. To support teams to enhance their capacity towards culturally safe environments to promote health transformation.
4. To enhance the capacity of teams to design, implement and evaluate improvement initiatives together/alongside their communities.
5. To strengthen the capacity of CFHI to collaborate with, and learn from, Indigenous partners and communities on health improvement initiatives.

The PLT Collaborative was also guided by seven Guiding Principles, first drafted by the CNRHN members and subsequently refined by the PLT Collaborative Guidance Group. The joint development of the Guiding Principles by Indigenous knowledge keepers and leaders within CFHI was critical foundational work that contributed to the ability of the collaborative to move forward in a good way, with commitment to mutual understanding and a shared vision.

The Guiding Principles of the PLT Collaborative:

1. Cultural humility/safety and reconciliation is an ongoing journey, and opportunities to further knowledge and capacity will be emphasized throughout the collaborative.
2. The voice of Indigenous peoples, families, communities, patients, youth, caregivers and individuals with lived experience will guide the collaborative, and teams will be expected to model this approach.
3. Indigenous knowledge is recognized as evidence and will guide all stages of the collaborative (development, implementation and evaluation).
4. An Indigenous social determinants of health lens has been, and will continue to be, applied to the work of the collaborative. Mental health is influenced by many factors including culture, life experiences, colonization workplace or other environments, and the social and economic conditions that shape our lives.
5. Respect, listening to and valuing other perspectives and other ways of knowing, learning together and collaboration will be modelled and championed.
6. A strength-based approach that fosters hope to address life promotion/suicide prevention will be applied.
7. Collaborative action in health transformation promotes equity through mutual recognition, respect, sharing and responsibility.

¹ Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Publishing.