



INDIGENOUS HEALTH EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM 2024

ACHIEVING ACTION-ORIENTED HEALTH EDUCATION SYSTEM REFORM TOGETHER

Date

21-22 March 2024

Executive Summary

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) emphasized the urgent need to address significant health inequities faced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. This Symposium focuses on the response of health sciences programs and in Canadian universities to the TRC's calls to action, highlighting the necessity to overcome systemic barriers for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders in health education. Dr. Paul O'Byrne, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University, and the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge will co-host an Indigenous health sciences education symposium to discuss successes, challenges, and strategies. The symposium aims to raise awareness about Indigenous education reform, emphasizing Indigenous ways of knowing and being, traditional healing practices, and the harmonization of knowledge systems. Through dialogue and the identification of short, medium, and long-term strategies, participants will work towards advancing Indigenous education reform in health sciences, bridging gaps between education and clinical practice. The symposium aims to guide stakeholders in the current health sciences education environment and identify individual and collaborative institutional paths forward.





Abstract

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in its final report, provided a path forward to address the serious health inequities experienced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada. The Commissioners situated the need to collectively address the serious health inequities experienced by Indigenous Peoples as an urgent priority. They called for the provision of cultural safety training for all health-care professionals, and a strategic focus to retain and increase the numbers of Indigenous health professionals.

While health sciences programs in universities across the country are engaged in variable strategic initiatives to respond to these calls to action, an important factor related to the broader vision of health education reform is the need to address existing systemic barriers experienced by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous administrators, faculty and clinical practitioners engaged in this work. Institutional systemic racism, lack of Indigenous health curriculum, low numbers of Indigenous faculty and leaders and competition for existing resources and donor funds are a few examples of systemic barriers.

Over the past six years, the Faculty of Health Science at McMaster University has leaned into their response to the TRC Calls to Action and established a robust strategic health initiative that included a cross-Faculty investment in resources to establish the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge (IHLL). The IHLL builds on a pre-existing 10-year program to support the needs of Indigenous learners through the development of Indigenous-led pathways that will complement and indigenize existing health science programs. Collaboration with Indigenous Elders, traditional healers and community leaders will support and inform the work to harmonize Indigenous ways of knowing and being into education and practice.

The IHLL team aims to work with Indigenous clinical, teaching and research faculty, our clinical partners and our senior administrative leaders to inform and indigenize administrative processes, health science curriculum, and health research activities and policy. While early developmental work is underway, engaging those invested in the policy and health education/services realm is also necessary.

Dr. Paul O'Byrne, Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University and the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge will be co-hosting an Indigenous health sciences education symposium that will bring together health sciences education and clinical stakeholders from inter-disciplinary health professional regulatory bodies, health standards organizations, representatives from various health sciences programs and Indigenous health sciences program alumni and current practitioners and health services representatives both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

The overall goal of the conference is to raise awareness about Indigenous education reform regarding successes achieved and lessons learned. A key topic is Indigenous ways of knowing and being and traditional healing practice with a focus on how to harmonize knowledge systems and approaches.

Through dialogue and identification of short, medium and long-term strategies, participants will gain an understanding of how to move this work forward with Indigenous leaders, practitioners and collaborators. This approach will inform those invested in the current health sciences education environment with respect to Indigenous education reform. Participants will also explore and identify gaps between health sciences education and entry to the clinical environment. The yield will be the identification of both individual and collaborative institutional paths forward.

