

Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Guiding Framework



Behavioural Supports Ontario
Soutien en cas de troubles du comportement en Ontario

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Graphic Art:

The art featured in this document is intended to create a broader awareness of Indigenous culture and iconography. The Woodland style art, created by Ojibway Artist Patrick Hunter from Red Lake, Ontario, sees beyond the exterior of the subject(s) and depicts the spirit through an internal view. This document was further brought to life by Graphic Artist, Kiana Sheldon, from Lakeside, Ontario. The BSO Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Working Group is pleased to have had the opportunity to collaborate with such skilled artists.

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Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Guiding Framework

Land acknowledgements are an important piece of reconciliation in the context of Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) teams providing care to Indigenous people and in our broader work towards cultural safety. This guiding framework can support the incorporation of land acknowledgements into knowledge and capacity-building events and other meetings hosted by, or in partnership with BSO.

Please note that this resource is intended to serve as a guide rather than a script:

“It’s giving them language but it’s not meant to be set language. It’s built to be fluid enough so it resonates within yourself when you’re saying it, so that it’s not just words you’re reading from a script, but that it comes more from the heart.”

[\(Shana Dion, Assistant Dean of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students at the University of Alberta.\)](#)

Relationships Should Be at the Centre of This Work

In order to further activities that action reconciliation, it is important to continue to work in partnership with, and be informed by, local Indigenous peoples and organizations. In some areas of the province, there may be established processes for how to proceed with land acknowledgements and we encourage BSO teams to reach out to Indigenous Health Leads in their local area to ensure that they are respecting local protocols.



What is a Land Acknowledgement and What is its Purpose?

Land acknowledgements are an honest and historically accurate way to recognize and honour the traditional Indigenous territories of a place and the spirit of the land itself.¹ Given the various meanings and significations of the term 'land', other terms such as 'Mother Earth', 'Natural World', 'Turtle Island' and 'Earth' may be used alongside or instead in certain contexts, however, in this document the term 'land' will be used.^{2,3} A land acknowledgement involves making a statement to recognize the traditional territory of the Indigenous people(s) who have called the land home long before the arrival of settlers all while paying respect to the land and recognizing our role as its caretakers.^{4,5} Consider a land acknowledgement as a starting point to changing how land is seen and discussed.¹ 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.⁶ Land acknowledgements have been part of Indigenous protocols historically and have since become more common in mainstream practices. Using and participating in a land acknowledgement is a way to recognize the enduring presence and resilience of Indigenous peoples across Canada. They are also a reminder that we are all accountable to these relationships and for caring for the land.^{2,3} "It reminds us we are accountable to these relationships and to remind us every day, for example in school systems, of the accountability that everybody has to listen to the concerns of the community and how we can align to our [Indigenous] community".⁵

Land acknowledgements are not meant to:

- Threaten or alienate non-Indigenous or Indigenous people
- Speak for or represent Indigenous communities
- Appropriate Indigenous ideas and knowledge
- Be the only action we take towards truth and reconciliation.⁷



When Should Land Acknowledgements Take Place?

Land acknowledgements are verbal statements made at the beginning of an in-person or virtual event. This may include BSO capacity building events such as formal education days as well as conferences that unite teams for the purpose of knowledge sharing and/or training. Land acknowledgements may also be incorporated into formal or casual meetings that unite partners from a particular region or across the province. In addition to the verbal statement given, organizers/hosts may also wish to provide the land acknowledgement in writing on a PowerPoint Slide and/or at the top of a meeting/conference agenda.

Note: If you are delivering a virtual event, or one that unites multiple sites across Ontario, you may wish to acknowledge the land that you or the host resides on and direct participants to a resource that will help them identify where they are as well.

Who Can Deliver Land Acknowledgements?

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.

It is not recommended to always ask Indigenous colleagues to provide land acknowledgements. This is a practice that is recommended to be done by non-Indigenous settlers⁸ as they have the responsibility to reflect on what it means to acknowledge the history and legacy of colonialism, how they develop relationships with people whose territory they are living on, and their role in shaping Canada's way forward.^{7,9}

It is important that the person who delivers the land acknowledgement is allotted time to do so. For in-person events, it is recommended to clear the room/space of distractions. This also gives those in the room a moment to come together to listen and reflect on the words. The person providing the acknowledgement may ask others to put their phones away on silent/vibrate, and to mind the door for any late comers. If the event is delivered virtually and has a waiting room option for those joining late, it is recommended to wait until the land acknowledgement has been delivered before admitting any additional participants who arrive during this time to avoid interruptions. This will help ensure those at the meeting or event are grounded, present and comfortable.⁵



The Importance of Personalizing a Land Acknowledgement

Providing a land acknowledgement should not feel like a “checkbox” item or feel somber. It is meant to be empowering for the Indigenous peoples and land being honoured.

“It shows that people are willing to hear you out as an Indigenous person, and they recognize that your culture and your past really means a lot.”⁵

Even though there are templates available to assist in creating speaking points for land acknowledgements, these should be used with care to avoid standardization, unless locally established processes have encouraged their use. The personalization of land acknowledgements is highly recommended. In fact, as Jennifer Matsunaga puts it, “I worry about the work that has been done for us, here. I take issue with the institutional standardization and expectation of these acknowledgments. It is important for people to do their own searching and learning.”¹⁰

An authentic and personalized land acknowledgement should consider the speaker’s own position while also being tailored to the audience. This may involve the identification of how the speaker’s organization or the event that they are hosting will strive to address inequities, or it may be as simple as sharing resources that the speaker or host organization has found to be particularly helpful.¹¹ For example, a person may include two items that are meaningful from the 150 Acts of Reconciliation (referenced in this document), they may also consider including information pertaining to an upcoming event, or local story, that continues to build upon reconciliation and reflect upon why it would be of importance in relation to the land acknowledgement.

To assist in delivering an authentic land acknowledgement, the person delivering it should have a foundational knowledge of Indigenous history and current realities. To build on this foundation, reviewing the following key reflective questions may help the speaker to prepare:

1. Why is this land acknowledgement taking place?
2. How does this land acknowledgement relate to the work I/we are doing?
3. What is the history of this region and how has colonialism impacted it?
4. What is my/our relationship to this region and what brings me/us here?
5. How can I/we help further disrupt colonialism beyond the territorial land acknowledgement?¹²

In the context of further personalizing a land acknowledgement to reflect the provision of BSO services, it is important to be knowledgeable about Indigenous perspectives and cultural understandings of dementia and other geriatric mental health conditions and their increased prevalence in Indigenous communities. Furthermore, it is essential to commit to further understanding inequities faced by Indigenous partners and commit to promoting equity in access to services.



Dementia

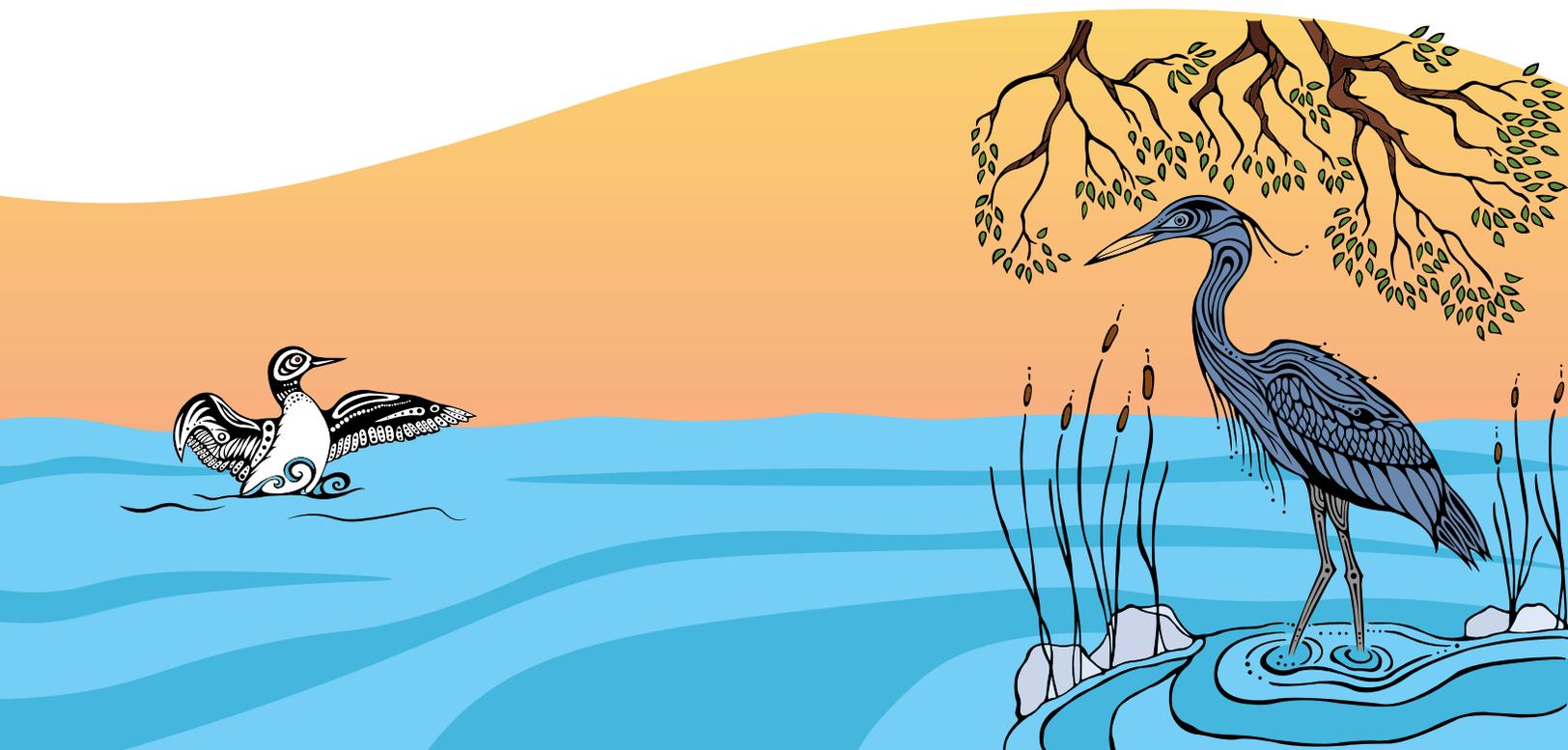
Evidence suggests that dementia is a significant health issue for Indigenous people. Symptoms of dementia are more likely to occur at a younger age and the incidence of dementia is likely to increase in years to come.¹³ In Indigenous communities, dementia may be described as a “second childhood” and a time when one is closer to the Creator.⁷ As such, early interactions with Indigenous people concerning dementia should include conversations to explore the person’s understandings of the symptoms and behaviours they are presenting with. The acceptability of clinical terms such as ‘Alzheimer’s Disease’ and ‘Dementia’ should be explored along with views on care planning.

Consider visiting the Indigenous Cognition & Aging Awareness Research Exchange website (<https://www.i-caare.ca/>) to learn more about Indigenous perspectives of dementia and download culturally safe tools that can be incorporated into BSO practices. This includes dementia assessment and education tools designed in partnership with Indigenous Communities such as the Canadian Indigenous Cognitive Assessment (CICA), and the PIECES of my RELATIONSHIPS (*personhood tool*).

Mental Health & Older Adults

In reflection of the BSO full scope of practice, including mental health and substance use, it is important to recognize that the historical trauma caused by the Indian residential school system has resulted in ongoing intergenerational effects on the psychological well-being of Indigenous communities.¹⁴ Many Indigenous communities report higher rates of depression, suicide attempts, adult trauma and substance use.^{15,16}

Mental health services to support older Indigenous people presenting with concerns may be viewed differently in comparison to mainstream perspectives. A focus on balance and harmony may be prioritized rather than deficits or weaknesses.¹⁷ When faced with mental health concerns, some may prefer to access culture-based services, such as traditional healing, while others may instead or also access those that are considered mainstream. No matter the option(s) selected, services must be provided in culturally safe ways, working respectfully within Indigenous frameworks of mental wellness.¹⁸



Other Considerations to Assist in Planning for the Delivery of a Land Acknowledgement

1. Learn the Correct Pronunciation of the Nation's Name:

If you are unsure, you may wish to respectfully ask someone from that nation or from a local organization such as a Friendship Centre and/or visit the First Nation's or community's webpage. They may offer a phonetic pronunciation on their "About" page, an audio-recording of their name, or videos that include people saying the First Nation's or community's name. You may also consider calling the nation after hours and listen to their answering machine recording.⁸ Practicing correct pronunciation prior to the event is encouraged so that you are confident when it is time to deliver the land acknowledgement.

2. Become Familiar With Other Terms Commonly Seen in Land Acknowledgements:

- **Traditional:** recognizes lands traditionally used and/or occupied First Nations/First Peoples.
- **Ancestral:** recognizes land that is handed down from generation to generation.
- **Unceded:** refers to land that was not turned over to the Crown by a treaty or other agreement.¹⁹

3. Find Out In Which Territory Your Event is Taking Place:

- Download the '**Whose Land**' App (Android/iOS)
- Visit native-land.ca which provides an interactive map of Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages.
- You can also send a text message to 907-312-5085, followed by the city and province in which you reside and you will receive a response indicating which land you are on.



Other Ways to Promote Reconciliation

The provision of land acknowledgements is only a first step in actioning truth and reconciliation. ***“The oral tradition is really important but if there is no action following it up, there is no integrity there, it’s not genuine, and it’s not reconciliation.”*** ([Shana Dion, Assistant Dean of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students at the University of Alberta, APTN article](#)). Linked below are a few additional resources that may assist in identifying actions that you or your organization can pursue to further action truth and reconciliation. These include items that can be done on an individual level and can be promoted both at work and at home:

1. [150 Acts of reconciliation](#)
2. [Indigenous book lists & podcasts](#)
3. [Mental health and the reconciliation process](#) (p. 365)
(Suggested actions for mental health professionals)

Reach out to your Indigenous Health Lead if you require additional support or guidance.



Additional Recommended Resources

Online Cultural Safety Training:

- [University of Alberta - Indigenous Canada](#)
- [Provincial Health Services Authority of BC - San'Yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training](#)
- [Cancer Care Ontario - Indigenous Relationship and Cultural Safety Courses](#)

Recommended Video

Ontario Tech Student Life - Kim Wheatley. (2020, July 17). *Why are land acknowledgments important?* [Video]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nG_iMUHFuOg&feature=youtu.be

Recommended Articles

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Whose Land | *Frequently Asked Questions*. (n.d.) Whose Land.

<https://www.whose.land/en/faq>



Indigenous Land Acknowledgements: Examples

The following examples were provided by Indigenous Land Acknowledgment Working Group Members from across Ontario:

Sault Ste Marie, ON | October 2020 | (Province-wide meeting hosted from Sault Ste Marie)

“Today I will begin by acknowledging that we are all attending on Indigenous Land. I am co-hosting from Sault Ste Marie which is located on Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg, specifically Garden River and Batchewana First Nations, as well as the Metis. Earlier this week was Orange Shirt Day, and you or your colleagues may have participated in this important event to commemorate residential school survivors and their families, and those students who never returned home. This is a day to hear stories of survivors, and to remember that Every Child Matters. Everyone is encouraged to visit orangeshirtday.org to learn more.”

Thunder Bay, ON | October 2018 | (Meeting with organization members and key partners)

“St. Joseph’s Care Group wishes to acknowledge this sacred land on which our many sites operate here in Thunder Bay. This land has been the territory of the Anishinaabek Nation, and is home to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850 territory. We acknowledge the people of Fort William First Nation, situated next to Mount McKay. Today, Thunder Bay is still home to many Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work together in this community and on this territory.”*

**If you are comfortable with the pronunciation, you can note that Mount McKay was originally called Animikii-wajiw (Thunder Mountain).*



*Birds eye view of The Sleeping Giant as seen from the top of Mt McKay (Thunder Mountain).
Photo retrieved by @rioryan from unsplash.com*



Hamilton, ON | January 2021 | (Regional BSO Meeting)

“Behavioural Supports Ontario Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (BSO HNHB) would like to acknowledge that the regions of Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand-Norfolk, Brant and Burlington are situated upon traditional territory of Haudenosaunee and Anishinabek. The Territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, and agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, The Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the land and resources around the Great Lakes. Today, these remain home to many Indigenous Peoples and we are grateful for the opportunity to work with communities across this territory including Mississaugas of Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River and Urban Indigenous population.”

Central West LHIN | February 2021

“Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. It is the traditional territory of the Ani-shin-a-bek, Huron-Wendat, Iroquois, and Ojibway-Chippewa peoples, and most recently home to the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and also the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement made between all of the Native nations - including Inuit - before Europeans arrived, making it the first treaty made in North America.

On this day our meeting place is still occupied by many Indigenous peoples, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land. In doing so, we give our respect to its first inhabitants.”

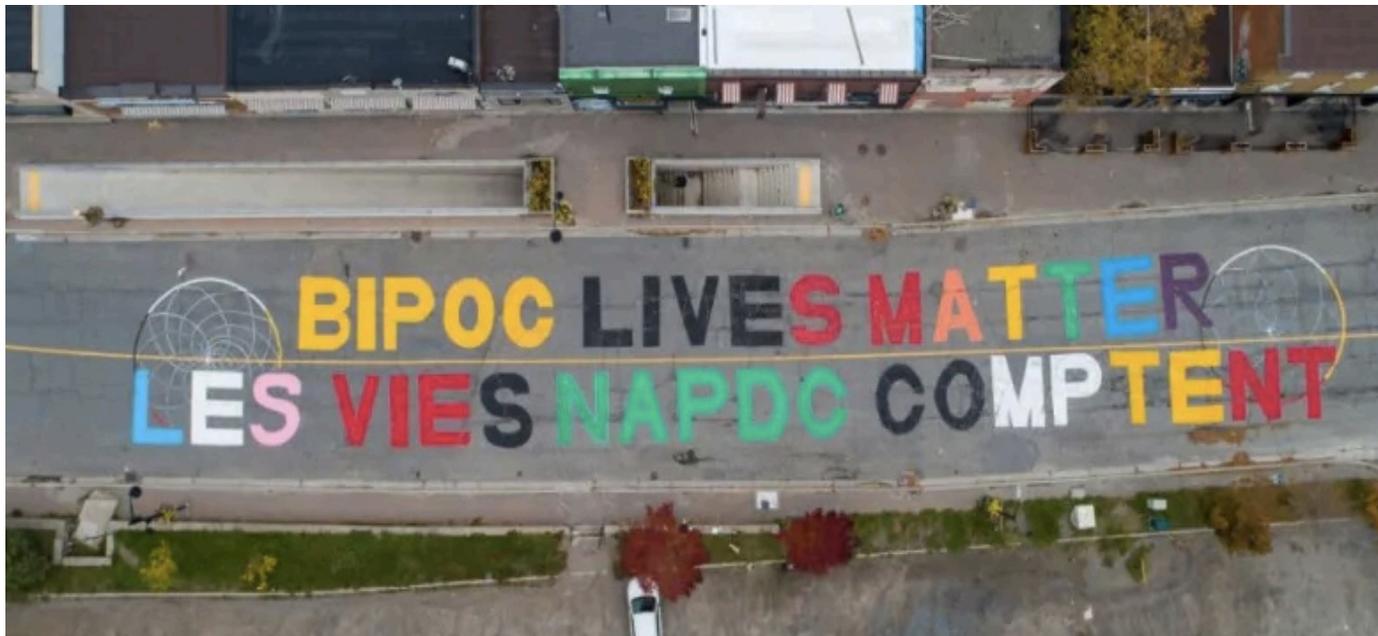
Mississauga Halton LHIN | February 2021

The Mississauga Halton LHIN in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples in our region co-developed this Indigenous Traditional Land Acknowledgement Statement and as a demonstration of commitment to incorporating Indigenous health and wellness practices in our everyday work we recited at the beginning of Mississauga Halton LHIN public meetings:

“As we meet here today, we are in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, and before, the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Huron and Wendat. We also acknowledge the many First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and other global Indigenous Peoples who now call this area their home. We are grateful for the opportunity to be working on this land”.



“I would like to begin today’s meeting by acknowledging that although we are all attending from different locations, that we are all meeting on Indigenous Land. As I am hosting from Sudbury, I wish to acknowledge the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 and that I am located on the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabeg. I also wish to highlight the following artwork today. It was painted on one of our downtown streets here in Sudbury to recognize that ‘Black, Indigenous and People of Colour’s Lives Matter’ followed by the French translation. It features the colours of the Indigenous Medicine Wheel, the Pride Flag, the Trans Flag, the Pan African Flag as well the Black Lives Matters Movement’s colours. The goal is the art is to give visibility to this important movement and I encourage all of you to explore and support similar efforts in your local areas.”



An aerial view of the Black Indigenous and People Of Colour (BIPOC) Lives Matter Art on Elgin Street in downtown Sudbury. Photo retrieved from CBC News where it was supplied by Black Lives Matter Sudbury.

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