

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

March 2026

FORWARD

HONOURING STRENGTH, LEADERSHIP, AND RESPONSIBILITY

We begin in relationship.

This toolkit exists because of the strength, wisdom, and leadership of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples across these lands now called Canada. Despite generations of colonial policies designed to disrupt governance, language, land, and kinship systems, Indigenous Nations continue to lead with resilience, knowledge, and care for future generations.

We honour that strength.

We honour the communities who continue to hold culture, ceremony, language, and law.

We honour the Elders and Knowledge Keepers who carry teachings forward.

We honour the youth who are stepping into leadership with clarity and courage.

Most importantly, we extend our deepest gratitude to the many Indigenous health leaders who contributed to this work.

Time and again, Indigenous health leaders are asked to share their experiences often while carrying significant responsibilities within their own Nations, families, and organizations. They navigate complex systems. They carry cultural, relational, and emotional labour. And still, they answer the call.

They contributed not for recognition, but so that future generations of Indigenous leaders may not have to lead in isolation, endure harm in silence, or choose between cultural integrity and professional opportunity.

Their insight, honesty, and generosity shaped every section of this toolkit.

This document is grounded in lived experience. It reflects real barriers and real brilliance. It carries the collective hope that healthcare systems can move from expecting Indigenous leaders to survive within them — toward creating spaces where they can lead, belong, and thrive.

We offer this work in humility, recognizing it is one step in a longer journey.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that this work was developed across the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territories of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples throughout what is now known as Canada.

From the Arctic tundra to the Pacific coast, across the prairies and woodlands, along rivers, lakes, and oceans, Indigenous Nations have stewarded these lands and waters since time immemorial.

We recognize the distinct histories, rights, and governance systems of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. We honour Treaties, inherent rights, and the enduring presence of Indigenous communities in both rural and urban spaces.

We acknowledge that healthcare systems operate on lands shaped by colonial policy and that reconciliation requires structural transformation, not symbolic language.

May this toolkit contribute in small but meaningful ways to strengthening relationships, accountability, and justice in healthcare systems across these lands.

Reflection (Pop-Out Box)

A Commitment grounded in Humility.

Creator,
Help us to walk gently on this land.
Help us to listen more than we speak.
Help us to act with humility and courage.
Guide our work so that it brings healing rather than harm,
Relationship rather than division,
And strength for the generations yet to come.

May our intentions be good.
May our actions be accountable.
May our leadership be rooted in care.

(This prayer / reflection is offered in the spirit of humility and right relationship. It is not drawn from any specific Nation's ceremonial teachings, and we acknowledge the diversity of spiritual traditions among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.)

CONTENTS

Forward.....	0
Honouring Strength, Leadership, and Responsibility.....	1
Land Acknowledgement	1
INTRODUCTION.....	5
Background and Purpose	5
Project Title.....	6
Evidence Base	6
Why This Toolkit Matters.....	7
How Leaders & HR Teams can use this toolkit	8
How to Use This Toolkit.....	8
Quick Start: Choosing a Starting Point.....	9
SECTION 1 - Foundation: Organizational Readiness and Relational Accountability	10
Tool: Healthcare Legal and Regulatory Guardrails (Canada-wide)	11
Tool 1: Reconciliation Readiness Checklist	11
Tool 1A: Readiness Scoring Rubric (0–2 scale)	14
Tool 1B: Evidence Guide (what “proof” looks like)	14
Tool 2: Distinctions-Based Language Guide	15
Tool 3: Relational Accountability Charter	15
Tool 4: Implementation Roadmap (12-Month Readiness Plan).....	16
SECTION 2 - Recruitment Pathways: Building Trust and Representation	17
Tool 1: Distinctions-Based Job Posting Framework.....	18
Tool 2: Culturally Safe Screening & Interview Process.....	18
Tool 3: Ensuring Meaningful Representation.....	20
Tool 4: Recruitment Relationship Map	20
Tool 5: Equitable Evaluation Matrix	21
SECTION 3 - Onboarding and Belonging: Creating Safety from Day One	22
Tool 1: Relational Onboarding Framework.....	23
Tool 2: Mentorship and Leadership Pathways Map	24
Tool 3: Authority, Autonomy & Recognition Guidelines	24
Tool 4: Cultural Leave & Wellness Policy Template.....	25

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

Tool 5: Continuous Reflection and Feedback Loop	25
SECTION 4 - Retention and Growth: Sustaining Indigenous Leadership	26
Tool 1: Indigenous Leadership Mentorship Guide	26
Tool 2: Cultural Leave & Wellness Implementation Notes (Retention).....	26
Tool 3: Cultural Load Equity Calculator	27
Tool 4A: Cultural Load Worksheet (Hours → Recognition Mapping)	28
Tool 4: Relational Performance Review Template	28
Tool 5: Leadership Development Map.....	29
SECTION 5 - Evaluation and Measurement Frameworks for Indigenous Health Leadership	29
Tool 1: Reconciliation Impact Dashboard.....	30
Tool 2: Relational Evaluation Model	31
Tool 3: Annual Reconciliation Accountability Report Template	31
Tool 4: Cultural Load Equity Audit	32
Tool 5: Continuous Improvement Loop	32
SECTION 6 - System and Policy Alignment: Making Reconciliation Structural	33
Tool 1: Reconciliation Action Planning Template	33
Tool 2: Governance and Accountability Framework	33
Tool 3: Elder and Advisor Compensation Framework.....	34
Tool 4: Cultural Safety Measurement Dashboard	34
Tool 5: Organizational Action Planner	34
Tool 6: Board Update Agenda (Biannual)	35
SECTION 7 - Sustaining the Work: Learning, Reflection, and Renewal	36
Tool 1: Annual Renewal and Reflection Cycle	36
Tool 2: Indigenous Leadership Succession Framework	36
Tool 3: Knowledge Transfer and Continuity Toolkit	37
Tool 4: Regional and National Learning Network	37
Tool 5: Communication and Change Strategy	37
Tool 5A: Communications Calendar	38
Tool 5B: Leadership Launch Script (Example).....	38

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

We begin by expressing our deep gratitude to the Indigenous health leaders who generously shared their experiences, insights, and recommendations to inform this work. Time and again, Indigenous leaders are called upon to contribute their knowledge, often while carrying significant cultural, relational, and professional responsibilities, and navigating dual accountability to both their families and communities and the organizations they serve. Their willingness to engage in this work reflects a commitment not only to present systems, but to creating safer, more supportive spaces for future generations of Indigenous health leaders. This toolkit is grounded in their lived experience and guidance, and we acknowledge the advisory committee of Indigenous health leaders whose leadership shaped its development.

Healthcare systems across Canada continue to address the impacts of colonial policies and Indigenous-specific racism that have shaped the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples within healthcare institutions. Indigenous health leaders interviewed for this project described experiences of exclusion, cultural burden, tokenism, and structural barriers within leadership environments. Strengthening Indigenous leadership in healthcare is one step toward addressing these systemic challenges and supporting leadership environments free of Indigenous specific racism.

Developed in 2025/2026 through the Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) EXTRA FORCES C19 program, this toolkit represents a pan-Canadian improvement initiative shaped through collaboration across organizations and informed by Indigenous health leaders' lived experience. The Canadian Health Leadership Network (www.chlnet.ca) and its 40+ network partners have been listening and learning directly from Indigenous health leaders about issues, concerns, and hopes for Indigenous health leadership development in Canada at a systems level, in the context of truth and reconciliation. BC's *In Plain Sight* Report (2020) noted that "Indigenous roles in health leadership and decision-making, both through Indigenous health governance structures and the health care system as a whole, need to be strengthened."

What the network heard was that it could be initially helpful to focus on how non-Indigenous health employers can create culturally safe environments to recruit and retain Indigenous health leaders at both the system and organizational levels. As a result, over 1.5 years, four partner organizations came together to make this a reality: CHLNet, Good Samaritan Society, Island Health, and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta (MNA). We also acknowledge Health Quality BC for their support with the interviews. The interviews were conducted by a team that included a First Nations leader, a Métis leader, and two non-Indigenous allies.

Guided by an advisory committee comprised of Indigenous health leaders, a distinctions-based approach was used for engagement with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, recognizing

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

that these Peoples have distinct histories, rights, cultures, and governance structures. A limitation of this initial collection of leadership practices is representation from Inuit and Francophone communities. Practices were gathered in English first, with a phased rollout to additional languages anticipated should further funding be secured.

PROJECT TITLE

“Listening and Learning from Indigenous Health Leaders: Creating Culturally Safe Spaces to Strengthen Retention and Recruitment”.

Four pan Canadian health system leaders came together through the EXTRA program with a shared goal: to strengthen the conditions that allow Indigenous health leaders to thrive within non-Indigenous healthcare organizations.

The work combined:

- Quality improvement methods.
- Operational healthcare leadership experience.
- Relationship-based learning and reflection.

The intent was to develop practical tools that reflect what is both needed and achievable within Canadian healthcare environments.

EVIDENCE BASE

This toolkit is grounded in two primary sources:

- Key informant interviews with Indigenous health leaders across Canada

Cultural Safety: Cultural safety refers to environments where Indigenous peoples feel respected, valued, and free from racism and discrimination within healthcare systems and organizations. Cultural safety moves beyond awareness or cultural competence and requires reflection on power, privilege, and systemic barriers. Importantly, cultural safety is determined by those receiving care or working within the environment. In practice, this means Indigenous peoples themselves determine whether an environment is culturally safe.

- Literature and national frameworks related to Indigenous health leadership, cultural safety, Indigenous-specific anti-racism, and reconciliation, include:
 - Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- First Nations Health Authority (FNHA).
- Health Standards Organization (HSO).
- EQUIP Health Care Framework (EQUIP).

Across interviews and literature, consistent themes emerged:

1. Community accountability and distinctions-based approaches.
2. Relational and culturally grounded recruitment.
3. Storytelling-centred and culturally safe interviews.
4. Relational onboarding and early belonging.
5. Mentorship and leadership pathways.
6. Cultural leave and wellness supports.
7. Authority and autonomy to prevent tokenism.
8. Recognition of cultural and relational workload.
9. Measurement and accountability to address Indigenous-specific racism and advance cultural safety
10. Integration of reconciliation into governance and operations.

These themes form the foundation for the sections and tools included in this document.

In addition, interview and literature findings were reviewed alongside common healthcare human resources and leadership practices. This comparison helped identify where existing processes may unintentionally create barriers and where practical enhancements could improve cultural safety, equity, and retention. The tools in this toolkit are designed to strengthen current system and organizational practices rather than replace them, ensuring they are realistic, legally appropriate, and operational within Canadian healthcare environments.

WHY THIS TOOLKIT MATTERS

This toolkit is informed by lived experience, practice, and evidence, and addresses organizational challenges such as:

- Recruitment processes that feel performative, rigid, or transactional.
- Onboarding that focuses on orientation rather than relationships.
- Being positioned as the single “Indigenous voice” without sufficient authority or support.
- Significant cultural and relational responsibilities that are not formally recognized or resourced.

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- Leadership turnover that disrupts progress, relationships, and trust.

This toolkit translates lived experience and evidence into practical, defensible actions that healthcare organizations can use to strengthen recruitment, onboarding, retention, and long-term leadership sustainability.

HOW LEADERS & HR TEAMS CAN USE THIS TOOLKIT

Recruitment and retention of Indigenous health leaders is a shared responsibility across healthcare organizations.

In most healthcare environments:

- Human Resources partners design and guide recruitment processes and implement hiring tools.
- Hiring leaders and executives define the role, participate in interviews, and shape the leadership environment Indigenous leaders enter.
- Indigenous health teams, advisors, and community partners provide guidance on indigenous specific racism , relationships, and distinctions-based engagement.

This toolkit is designed to support all three groups.

Human Resources teams may use the tools to strengthen recruitment, onboarding, and workforce practices.

Hiring leaders can use the toolkit to understand their role in creating environments free of indigenous specific racism s and relational hiring processes.

Executive leadership and boards can use the toolkit to embed reconciliation and Indigenous leadership development into governance and workforce planning.

Organizations do not need to implement the entire toolkit at once. Many organizations begin with:

1. Assessing organizational readiness
2. Strengthening recruitment practices
3. Improving relational onboarding and early belonging.

The tools in this toolkit are intended to strengthen existing healthcare human resources and leadership practices rather than replace them.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed for healthcare organizations at different stages of their reconciliation journey. Organizations are encouraged to select and adapt tools based on their local context, relationships, and capacity. You do not need to implement the entire toolkit at once.

Most organizations begin by:

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

1. Assessing readiness using Section 1.
2. Selecting one or two priority areas based on current needs.
3. Assigning clear ownership (e.g., HR, Indigenous Health, Executive Sponsor).
4. Implementing a small number of tools and reviewing progress quarterly.

Many organizations start with three foundational areas:

- Organizational readiness.
- Relational recruitment.
- Relational onboarding.

The tools are organized across seven interconnected areas:

1. Organizational readiness and relational accountability.
2. Culturally grounded recruitment.
3. Relational onboarding and early belonging.
4. Leadership retention and growth.
5. Measurement and accountability.
6. System and policy alignment.
7. Long-term learning, renewal, and continuity.

Where appropriate, tools include:

- Operational guidance.
- Evidence notes linking interviews and literature.
- Considerations for legal, regulatory, human rights, and collective agreement environments within Canadian healthcare.

This toolkit is intended to support phased implementation over time, aligned with existing workforce, quality, and strategic priorities.

QUICK START: CHOOSING A STARTING POINT

Use the guide below to identify a practical entry point based on your organization's current situation.

If your organization is unsure where to begin, start with Section 1 and review organizational readiness with Indigenous advisors, leaders, or community partners where possible.

If your organization is asking...	Start with
"We want to hire Indigenous leaders but aren't sure if we're ready."	Section 1: Organizational Readiness
"We are actively hiring and want the process to be culturally safe and equitable"	Section 2: Recruitment Pathways
"We've hired someone and want to support them well from day one."	Section 3: Onboarding and Belonging
"We're concerned about retention, burnout, or cultural load."	Section 4: Retention and Growth
"We need to demonstrate progress to leadership, Board, or partners."	Section 5: Measurement and Accountability
"This work depends on individual champions and isn't embedded yet."	Section 6: System and Policy Alignment
"We want to sustain momentum and build long-term capacity."	Section 7: Learning, Renewal, and Continuity

Implementation Tip:

- Start with 2–3 tools, assign ownership, and review progress quarterly through existing leadership or governance structures.

SECTION 1 - FOUNDATION: ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS AND RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Overview:

- Before recruitment begins, healthcare organizations must ensure they are structurally, culturally, and relationally ready to welcome and sustain Indigenous leaders. Across interviews, Indigenous leaders described readiness as trust, relationship, distinctions-based respect, and visible accountability, not statements or one-time training. The literature aligns closely: national frameworks (TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP, FNHA leadership pathways, HSO, CSH standards, EQUIP and cultural safety literature) consistently reinforce that recruitment and retention succeed only when reconciliation is embedded into governance, policy, measurement, and day-to-day leadership practice.
- In a pan-Canadian healthcare context, readiness also requires clarity about foundational obligations (such as patient safety, professional regulation, and CRC/VSC requirements where mandated), alongside deliberate flexibility in how systems are designed and applied, including how safety is created, authority is structured, and cultural load is recognized and resourced.

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

Crossover Themes:

- *Relational Accountability*: Trust and sustained community relationships are prerequisites for recruitment and retention.
- *Distinctions-Based Approach*: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis distinctions must be respected and named accurately.
- *Integrated Reconciliation Frameworks*: Reconciliation must live in governance, reporting, and leadership systems, not sit as a side initiative.
- *Healthcare Safety + Equitability*: Requirements remain but must be applied transparently and contextually where law allows.

TOOL: HEALTHCARE LEGAL AND REGULATORY GUARDRAILS (CANADA-WIDE)

- Evidence Base: Interviews; Human rights principles; Healthcare risk and Regulatory standards; HSO alignment.

Purpose:

- To ensure all toolkit practices remain legally defensible across provinces/territories while still addressing barriers raised in interviews.

Use:

- Include as a front-page insert and require leaders/HR to review before applying tools.

Guardrails (practical):

- *CRC/VSC*: Where required by legislation/policy/role risk, the requirement remains. The toolkit focuses on transparency and contextual review where permitted.
- *Licensing/Scope-of-Practice*: Required for regulated clinical roles.
- *Human Rights*: Indigenous preference language must be legally reviewed and grounded in employment equity and role relevance, in alignment with provincial human rights legislation.
- *Collective Agreements*: Classification/pay changes must align with union and pay equity requirements.

TOOL 1: RECONCILIATION READINESS CHECKLIST

This checklist is intended as a reflective tool to support learning, dialogue, and organizational readiness. It is not a compliance audit or scoring exercise, but a way to identify strengths, gaps, and areas for shared responsibility before recruiting Indigenous health leaders.

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention
Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- Evidence Base: Interviews; TRC #19; TRC #23; TRC #92; FNHA Leadership Pathways; HSO Reconciliation Framework; EQUIP.

Purpose:

- Assess whether policies, relationships, governance, and cultural safety conditions are strong enough to recruit Indigenous leaders responsibly.

Use:

- Jointly complete with Indigenous advisors, Elders / Knowledge Keepers, internal Indigenous leaders, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leaders and community members, as appropriate.

Category	Reflection Questions	Why It Matters (Evidence Link)	Readiness Scoring Rubric (0–2 scale)
<i>Governance & Policy</i>	Is reconciliation a standing priority in governance and leadership planning?	Literature emphasizes embedding reconciliation in governance (TRC, HSO standards).	
<i>Representation & Decision-Making</i>	Are Indigenous leaders represented in governance or advisory bodies with real influence?	Interviews identified representation as a precondition for trust and retention.	
<i>Community Relationships</i>	Are relationships with local First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations active and reciprocal, such as through regular engagement or shared decision making?	Both literature and interviews stress ongoing relationship maintenance (“relational accountability”).	

Category	Reflection Questions	Why It Matters (Evidence Link)	Readiness Scoring Rubric (0–2 scale)
<i>Language & Communication</i>	Does organizational language use distinctions-based terms (First Nations, Inuit, Métis)?	Interviews highlighted that generic “EDI” language lacks trust; literature supports distinctions-based approaches (FNHA).	
<i>Cultural Safety Practices</i>	Are leaders and staff supported to move beyond basic awareness toward cultural humility, anti-racism, and ongoing systemic reflection in their practice	Indigenous specific racism and cultural safety literature links practice change to retention.	
<i>Leadership Readiness</i>	Has the hiring leader or executive sponsor reflected on their role in creating leadership environments that are culturally safe and free from Indigenous-specific racism? Have they completed Indigenous-specific anti-racism, cultural safety, or anti-racism learning	Interviews emphasized that hiring outcomes are influenced not only by organizational policies but by the preparedness and humility of the hiring leader.	

Category	Reflection Questions	Why It Matters (Evidence Link)	Readiness Scoring Rubric (0–2 scale)
	relevant to their role?		
<i>Accountability & Reporting</i>	Are reconciliation goals and outcomes transparently reported to both boards and Indigenous partners?	Interviews underscored the importance of transparency and follow-through.	

TOOL 1A: READINESS SCORING RUBRIC (0–2 SCALE)

Purpose:

- Convert the checklist into a decision tool that triggers action.
 - 0 = Not in place (no evidence).
 - 1 = Emerging (inconsistent/partial evidence).
 - 2 = Established (formalized, consistent evidence).

Cutlines:

- 0–10: Not ready to recruit; implement readiness plan first.
- 11–16: Limited recruitment with safeguards; close gaps within one quarter.
- 17–20: Ready to recruit; maintain quarterly partner review.

TOOL 1B: EVIDENCE GUIDE (WHAT “PROOF” LOOKS LIKE)

- *Governance*: Board minutes showing reconciliation as standing agenda; approved policy.
- *Representation*: Advisory Circle Terms of Reference + Membership List.
- *Relationships*: MOUs/meeting notes with local FN/Métis/Inuit organizations.
- *Language*: sample postings using distinctions-based language.
- *Cultural Safety*: training roster + curriculum.
- *Accountability*: last progress update shared with Board and partners.

TOOL 2: DISTINCTIONS-BASED LANGUAGE GUIDE

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA Distinctions-Based HR Framework; Indigenous Services Canada 2023 Guidelines.

Purpose:

- To support clear, accurate, and relationally grounded communication in recruitment, policy, and engagement.

Instead of...	Use...	Evidence Link / Why It Matters
<i>Aboriginal Peoples</i>	First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples	Distinctions-based naming supports respect and accuracy.
<i>Preference will be given to qualified First Nations, Inuit, and Métis candidates in accordance with applicable employment equity policies and legislation</i>	We encourage applications from qualified First Nations, Inuit, and Métis candidates and commit to equitable assessment.	Interviewees described feeling safer when preference language was specific and transparent.
<i>Cultural awareness</i>	Cultural safety and humility	Literature: Cultural safety moves beyond awareness to system accountability (Ramsden, 2002; Browne et al., 2021).
<i>Working with Indigenous issues</i>	Working in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations	Reflects relational approach vs deficit-based framing (Interviews 1–5).

Template (For Job Postings):

- We recognize the distinct histories, rights, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and welcome applications from Indigenous candidates. Our organization is committed to reconciliation, relationship-building, and shared leadership in health care.*

TOOL 3: RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY CHARTER

- Evidence Base: FNHA “Relational Leadership” Framework; UNDRIP Articles 18 & 23.

Purpose:

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention
Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- To co-develop shared commitments between healthcare organizations and Indigenous communities or partners before recruitment or program development.

Use:

- Co-sign with partner community/organization; review annually.

Template:

Relational Accountability Charter:

- Between: *(Healthcare Organization)* and *(Partner Community / Indigenous Organization)*

Operational Commitment:

- “We will review workforce indicators and partnership commitments together at least annually and document decisions.”

Shared Intent:

- To build long-term, trust-based relationships that strengthen Indigenous leadership and cultural safety, and support meaningful transformation of healthcare systems to better respond to the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

Mutual Commitments:

1. *Respect*: We engage in good faith, following local cultural protocols.
2. *Reciprocity*: Both parties benefit through learning, employment, and improved outcomes.
3. *Confidentiality*: Teachings, stories, and data shared in trust will not be used without permission.
4. *Representation*: Indigenous voices will hold meaningful decision-making space.
5. *Reflection*: Annual joint review of progress and renewed commitments.

Signatures and Dates

- This charter is intended to be completed collaboratively with partner communities and signed once mutual commitments are agreed.

TOOL 4: IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP (12-MONTH READINESS PLAN)

- Evidence Base: Interviews, FNHA Leadership Pathways 2022; Health Standards Organization Reconciliation Action Framework.

Quarter	Priority Area	Supporting Evidence
<i>Q1 – Relationship & Policy Review</i>	Readiness assessment; relationship mapping; add Guardrails Tool 0	Interviews; TRC/HSO.
<i>Q2 – Language & Governance Alignment</i>	Update postings; establish advisory circle + reporting cadence	TRC #23; FNHA
<i>Q3 – Cultural Safety Development</i>	Leadership development + bias interrupters + interview training	EQUIP; HSO
<i>Q4 – Reporting & Renewal</i>	Report to Board + partners; renew charter; adjust targets	Interviews; TRC #92

SECTION 2 - RECRUITMENT PATHWAYS: BUILDING TRUST AND REPRESENTATION

Overview:

- Recruitment is a high-impact and high-risk point in the Indigenous leadership journey. Interviews consistently described that culturally grounded, relational hiring increases trust and application rates, while opaque screening, “checkbox” processes, and generic EDI language reinforce mistrust and exclusion. The literature aligns strongly: culturally safe recruitment requires transparency, storytelling space, relational outreach, and evaluation criteria that recognize community leadership and lived experience as legitimate expertise.

Crossover Themes:

- Community Accountability + Distinctions Language:* Trust grows when postings clearly reference accountability to Indigenous communities and name FN/Inuit/Métis.
- Relational Hiring Channels:* Word-of-mouth and trusted networks outperform passive job boards.
- Culturally Safe Interviews:* Storytelling, circle formats, smudge and other cultural practice invitations, and relational openings reduce power imbalance.
- Transparent Screening:* Questions in advance and clear criteria increase equity.
- Avoiding Tokenism:* Representation must come with authority, support, and workload recognition.

TOOL 1: DISTINCTIONS-BASED JOB POSTING FRAMEWORK

- Evidence Base: Interviews; TRC #23; FNHA HR Standards; Indigenous Services Canada Guidelines.

Purpose:

- To guide HR teams in designing transparent, distinctions-based, and trust-building postings that reflect Indigenous values and community accountability.

Checklist:

- Use distinctions-based language (First Nations, Inuit, Métis).
- Include accountability to Indigenous communities or reconciliation goals.
- Balance western education with lived experience (“education or equivalent experience”).
- Highlight organizational readiness and partnerships with Indigenous organizations and communities
- State whether Indigenous preference applies and how it aligns with policy/law.
- Include scope of authority (what decisions this role can make)
- Include candidate transparency on CRC/VSC and licensing expectations (where relevant)

Template:

- *We are committed to reconciliation and Indigenous leadership in health care. This position is open to all qualified applicants, with preference given to qualified First Nations, Inuit, and Métis candidates. We value lived experience and encourage applicants to share how their experience contributes to our shared purpose of improving health outcomes through culturally safe leadership.*

Evidence Link:

- Interviews emphasized the importance of explicit language and lived experience criteria. Literature (FNHA, 2022; TRC #23) reinforces this as a best practice in Indigenous recruitment.

TOOL 2: CULTURALLY SAFE SCREENING & INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA Leadership Pathways; Ramsden, 2002; Browne et al., 2021.

Purpose:

- To create equitable and relational screening processes that value both professional and cultural expertise.

Step	Practice	Rationale / Evidence
<i>Pre-Screening</i>	Share position summary, organizational reconciliation statement, and interview questions in advance.	Increases equity and reduces anxiety (Interviews; FNHA 2022).
<i>Two-Phase Screening</i>	Conduct informal “relationship call” before formal interview to build comfort and understanding.	Literature (FNHA) and interviews support this as reducing bias and power imbalance.
<i>Panel Composition</i>	Include Indigenous representation (Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or Indigenous HR/Health leader).	Creates safety and cultural grounding (Interview; HSO 2023).
<i>Interview Format</i>	Circle process or storytelling approach; open-ended questions to allow narrative responses.	Encourages authenticity and reduces traditional hierarchal interview formats (Ramsden 2002; Interviews).
<i>Smudging & Opening Protocols</i>	Invite candidates to identify cultural practices or protocols that would help them feel comfortable during the interview process. Participation should always be optional and guided by the candidate’s preferences	Reinforces relational accountability and safety (Interview 2; FNHA).
<i>Screening Guardrail</i>	Do not use automated screening to reject candidates without human review. Where automated tools are used to sort applications, ensure a reviewer who has been trained in ISAR and CSH completes a manual review before any “screen-out” decision for Indigenous applicants.	Interviewees expressed distrust of algorithmic screening and concern about systemic bias. Manual review is a practical bias-mitigation step and supports procedural fairness.
<i>Bias Evidence Rule</i>	Panels score independently first and document the evidence behind each score. If “fit” is referenced, the panel must specify “fit with what role requirements” and link it to defined job criteria.	Supports transparent scoring and reduces subjective “fit”-based bias. Structured documentation improves procedural fairness and decision defensibility, aligning with interview concerns about opaque hiring decisions.

Step	Practice	Rationale / Evidence
<i>Evaluation Criteria</i>	Weight relational and community leadership equally with technical or academic credentials.	Addresses bias in standard HR evaluation models (Interviews).

TOOL 3: ENSURING MEANINGFUL REPRESENTATION

- Evidence Base: Interviews; HSO 2023; Browne et al., 2021.

Purpose:

- To prevent symbolic inclusion by ensuring Indigenous leaders have real authority, support, and recognition.

Indigenous leaders may choose to engage in cultural mentorship, ceremony, or representational work. These responsibilities should never be assumed based solely on identity and should be discussed openly with the leader to ensure alignment with their role, interests, and capacity.

Checklist for Leaders and HR Teams:

- Representation is meaningful only if it comes with decision-making authority.
- Avoid assigning one leader as “the Indigenous voice.” Instead, create shared responsibility for reconciliation across leadership.
- Compensate for cultural load (the additional relational and representational work Indigenous staff carry).
- Use equity reviews to ensure Indigenous-specific roles are fairly classified and paid (addressing the systemic “under-classification” found in interviews).
- Establish mentorship pairings with other Indigenous leaders, Elders, and allies early in the recruitment cycle.
- Authority Check: If the role is accountable for Indigenous health outcomes, complete an Authority Matrix, including decision scope, budget influence, and reporting relationships, before the offer is finalized. This ensures responsibility is matched with appropriate decision making power. (*See Section 3, Tool 3 for role-file documentation requirements.*)

TOOL 4: RECRUITMENT RELATIONSHIP MAP

- Evidence Base: Interviews; Literature: Relational Accountability Framework, FNHA, 2021.

Purpose:

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- To intentionally expand recruitment outreach through existing Indigenous networks, not just mainstream job boards.

Instructions:

- Create a living document or visual map of trusted referral networks and Indigenous-specific platforms.

Recruitment Channel	Examples	Relationship Type
<i>Indigenous Professional Networks</i>	FNHMA, IPAC, NAHO, Métis Nation HR networks	National / Provincial
<i>Educational Partners</i>	Indigenous nursing programs, social work schools, Indigenous public health cohorts	Academic
<i>Community & Friendship Centres</i>	Urban Indigenous health and wellness centres	Local
<i>Word-of-Mouth & Elders</i>	Informal relationship networks and referrals	Relational

Why It Matters:

- Interviews underscored the importance of “people-first” channels, trust drives both application and retention.

TOOL 5: EQUITABLE EVALUATION MATRIX

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA; 2022 HSO Reconciliation Standards.

Competency Area	Indicators of Strength	Notes for Panel
<i>Relational Leadership</i>	Builds trust, connects across communities, models humility.	Weigh equally with technical leadership.
<i>Cultural Safety & Two-Eyed Seeing</i>	Integrates Indigenous and Western knowledge systems.	Demonstrated through storytelling, examples.
<i>System Change & Advocacy</i>	Experience leading reconciliation or equity initiatives.	Look for impact, not title.
<i>Lived Experience & Identity</i>	Values cultural and lived experience as assets.	Respect voluntary self-identification.

Operational Note:

- Where a role includes community partnership, cultural safety, Indigenous engagement, or reconciliation responsibilities, panels should weight relational and community leadership competencies at least equal to technical or operational expertise.

Evidence Note:

- Interview participants emphasized that western or colonial hiring processes often over-prioritize formal credentials and technical experience, undervaluing relational leadership and community trust, which are critical to success in Indigenous health roles.

SECTION 3 - ONBOARDING AND BELONGING: CREATING SAFETY FROM DAY ONE

Overview:

- Interviewees consistently described onboarding as the most fragile stage, particularly when Indigenous leaders are isolated, expected to educate others, or placed into rigid systems without cultural grounding. What improved retention was relational onboarding, mentorship, clear concern pathways, protected time for relationship building, and visible signals of cultural safety. Literature aligns relational onboarding and psychological safety reduce early exit, especially in high-pressure healthcare environments.

Crossover Themes:

- *Relational Onboarding, Not Checkbox Orientation:* Early introductions, Elder involvement, and peer shadowing build belonging.
- *Cultural Safety and Reflection in the First 90 Days:* Encouraging grounding practices, ceremony, and self-care creates psychological safety.
- *Mentorship and Leadership Pathways:* Ongoing guidance from Indigenous and allied leaders supports confidence and retention.
- *Authority, Autonomy, and Recognition:* Leaders stay when they have voice, trust, and respect for distinctions-based authority.
- *Cultural Leave and Wellness:* Flexible leave, kinship recognition, and boundaries protect wellbeing.

TOOL 1: RELATIONAL ONBOARDING FRAMEWORK

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2022; TRC #23; EQUIP Health Care Framework.

Purpose:

- Replace task-oriented onboarding with a relational model that fosters belonging, safety, and connection.

Phase	Practice	Rationale / Evidence
<i>Before Day 1</i>	Welcome email or video from leadership acknowledging the Nation(s) the site sits on.	Signals readiness and respect (Interviews).
<i>First Week</i>	Orientation circle including Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff; introduce organizational reconciliation goals.	Builds shared accountability (FNHA, TRC #23).
<i>First Month</i>	Assign a cultural mentor and operational peer. Include time for shadowing.	Relational learning reduces isolation (Interviews).
<i>First 90 Days</i>	Schedule regular reflection sessions and protect dedicated time for relationship-building, mentorship, community connection, and cultural grounding. This time should be planned and recognized as core work, not optional or additional.	Interview participants identified early workload pressure as a barrier to integration. Protected reflection and relational time support cultural safety, belonging, and retention (Browne et al., 2021; FNHA 2022; EQUIP).

Practical Resource:

- Relational Onboarding Checklist*
 - Introductions to Elders or Knowledge Keepers
 - Cultural protocols explained (not assumed)
 - The organization provides access to appropriate space for Indigenous cultural practices where requested by the employee and consistent with local protocols.
 - Reflection meeting scheduled within 30 days

TOOL 2: MENTORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS MAP

- Evidence Base: Interviews; NEIHR Leadership Development Model; FNHA 2022.

Purpose:

- Create structured yet relational mentorship pipelines for Indigenous leaders and allies.

Mentorship Type	Example Practices	Evidence Link
<i>Elder / Knowledge Mentorship</i>	Pair new leaders with an Elder or Knowledge Keeper for cultural guidance.	Interviews; FNHA cultural mentorship framework.
<i>Peer Mentorship</i>	Monthly learning circles for Indigenous staff across departments.	Interviews emphasized cross-portfolio support.
<i>Ally Mentorship</i>	Pair Indigenous leaders with non-Indigenous executive allies to co-develop reconciliation projects.	Literature shows reciprocal learning builds systemic change (HSO 2023).
<i>Leadership Pipeline</i>	Define career ladders with clear progression to director and executive roles.	Interviews; TRC #23 on advancing Indigenous leadership.

TOOL 3: AUTHORITY, AUTONOMY & RECOGNITION GUIDELINES

- Evidence Base: Interviews; HSO 2023; Browne et al. 2021.

Purpose:

- Ensure Indigenous leaders have genuine decision-making authority and visibility.

Checklist:

- Authority Matrix completed and retained in the role file (job description, governance chart, reporting structure, decision scope, and budget influence) before or at the start of employment.
- Clearly define scope of authority in job description and governance chart.
- Avoid pan-Indigenous token roles, match responsibility to voice and expertise.
- Celebrate accomplishments publicly in ways that honour Nation-specific identity.
- Compensate for cultural load, acknowledge extra relational and representational work.
- Include Indigenous leaders in system-level strategic discussions and board reports.

Evidence Note:

- Interview participants consistently linked early turnover to roles that carried system-change expectations without formal decision authority or resource influence.

TOOL 4: CULTURAL LEAVE & WELLNESS POLICY TEMPLATE

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2021; EQUIP Framework; TRC #22 & TRC #23.

Purpose:

- Normalize cultural practices and wellness supports as core HR policies.

Template Elements:

1. Two cultural days per year for ceremony or kinship obligations.
2. Flexibility to swap statutory holidays for Indigenous cultural days.
3. Access to Elders or cultural advisors for healing support.
4. Wellness time (5–10% of time per month) for debrief and reflection.
5. Coverage for travel to community events or funerals (kinship recognition).
6. Access to cultural leave and wellness supports will not negatively impact performance assessment or career progression.

Operational Note:

- Cultural leave policies should be reviewed for alignment with applicable provincial employment standards, collective agreements, and existing organizational leave structures to ensure consistent and compliant implementation across jurisdictions.

Evidence Note:

- Interviews linked retention directly to policies acknowledging kinship responsibilities and cultural time.

TOOL 5: CONTINUOUS REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK LOOP

- Evidence Base: Interviews; EQUIP Framework; FNHA 2022.

Purpose:

- To sustain trust through transparent listening and adaptation.

How to Implement:

- Conduct quarterly “leadership listening circles.”
- Use anonymous pulse surveys co-designed with Indigenous leaders.
- Report themes back to participants with commitments for action.

- Refresh mentorship and wellness supports annually based on feedback.

SECTION 4 - RETENTION AND GROWTH: SUSTAINING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Purpose:

- Strengthen relationships, career pathways, authority, and wellbeing so Indigenous leaders can thrive long term.

Crossover Themes:

- Mentorship and leadership pathways, wellness and cultural safety, cultural leave, values alignment, authority and autonomy, cultural load equity.

TOOL 1: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP MENTORSHIP GUIDE

- To establish structured, relational mentorship that supports leadership development, cultural grounding, and system navigation.

Use:

- Identify appropriate mentor types based on the leader's role and needs:
 - Elder or Knowledge Keeper (cultural guidance).
 - Indigenous peer leader (shared experience and support).
 - Executive ally (organizational influence and sponsorship).
- Allocate paid time for mentorship participation where possible.
- Establish quarterly check-ins with shared learning goals.
- Review mentorship effectiveness annually.

Evidence Note:

- Interview participants identified mentorship and Elder support as key factors in confidence, belonging, and long-term retention.

TOOL 2: CULTURAL LEAVE & WELLNESS IMPLEMENTATION NOTES (RETENTION)

- See Section 3, Tool 4 for full policy template.

Purpose

- To ensure cultural leave and wellness supports are actively used as retention tools, not simply documented as policy.

When to Use

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- During onboarding discussions.
- In regular one-on-one or check-in conversations.
- During workload or cultural load reviews.
- When early signs of burnout or overload are present.

Manager and HR Actions:

- Proactively discuss available cultural leave and wellness options with Indigenous staff rather than waiting for requests.
- Confirm that reflection time, ceremony participation, or community obligations are planned within workload expectations.
- Monitor cultural and relational workload and adjust priorities, timelines, or coverage where needed.
- Ensure access to Elders, cultural advisors, or support resources where available.
- Reinforce that use of cultural leave or wellness time is supported and will not negatively affect performance assessment or advancement.

Operational Note:

- Implementation should align with provincial employment standards, collective agreements, and organizational leave structures. Refer to Section 3, Tool 4 for policy requirements.

Evidence Note:

- Interviews linked retention to organizational environments where cultural time, kinship responsibilities, and recovery from relational and emotional workload were openly supported and operationalized, not treated as informal or exceptional.

TOOL 3: CULTURAL LOAD EQUITY CALCULATOR

Cultural load refers to the additional cultural, relational, and emotional labour often carried by Indigenous leaders because of their identity, including expectations related to representation, education, community relationships, and responding to trauma. This work is frequently unrecognized in formal role descriptions and workload models, yet it has real impacts on capacity, wellbeing, and retention.

Not all Indigenous leaders experience or identify with cultural or representational responsibilities in the same way. Cultural load should therefore be discussed with each leader individually rather than assumed based solely on identity.

- To identify additional cultural, relational, and emotional work carried by Indigenous leaders and trigger appropriate organizational responses.

Use:

- Assess cultural load across common categories:

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- Organizational representation.
- Staff education and cultural guidance.
- Community partnership and relationship work.
- Ceremony or protocol coordination.
- Exposure to trauma-related support requests.
- Where cultural load exceeds expected role scope, consider:
 - Protected release time.
 - Workload redistribution.
 - Additional administrative or cultural support.
 - Classification or compensation review.

Evidence Note:

- Unrecognized cultural load was consistently identified in interviews as a major contributor to burnout and turnover.

TOOL 4A: CULTURAL LOAD WORKSHEET (HOURS → RECOGNITION MAPPING)

- To document estimated cultural load and translate it into concrete workload or compensation decisions.

Use:

- Estimate monthly hours spent on cultural and relational responsibilities.
- Assess impact on role capacity and workload balance.
- Develop an action plan (release time, role adjustment, support, or reclassification).
- Review every 6–12 months as part of workload planning.

Evidence Note:

- Both interviews and literature describe this work as “invisible labour,” often unrecognized in formal job descriptions or compensation structures, requiring deliberate organizational recognition to support retention.

TOOL 4: RELATIONAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW TEMPLATE

- To align performance conversations with the relational and community-focused nature of Indigenous leadership roles.

Use:

- Include relational outcomes such as:
 - Trust and partnership quality.

- Community engagement and relationship development.
- Progress in eradicating indigenous specific racism , improving cultural safety and reconciliation initiatives.
- Discuss cultural load and workload balance during performance reviews.
- Adjust goals and expectations to reflect relational and system-change work.

Evidence Note:

- Traditional performance models often undervalue relational leadership, which interviews identified as central to Indigenous leadership success.

TOOL 5: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MAP

- To create visible career pathways and long-term leadership sustainability.

Use:

- Identify potential Indigenous leaders early and include them in succession planning.
- Provide cohort-based leadership development with protected learning time.
- Offer stretch assignments and mentorship to build readiness.
- Develop “train-up-from-within” pathways for near-qualified candidates.

Evidence Note:

- Interview participants emphasized that visible career pathways and leadership investment are critical for long-term retention and organizational trust.

SECTION 5 - EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORKS FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH LEADERSHIP

Overview:

- “If you can’t see it, you can’t sustain it.” Interviews and literature agree that without measurement and shared accountability, reconciliation work slips into symbolism. A strong evaluation framework balances quantitative indicators with relational evaluation (story circles, Elder reflection, journey mapping) and reports transparently to governance and partners.

Crossover Themes:

- *Measurement and Accountability for Cultural Safety:* Data collection must be meaningful and community-informed, not extractive.
- *Relational Evaluation:* Storytelling, feedback circles, and qualitative data should complement quantitative metrics.

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- *Shared Reporting*: Accountability should be two-way: to Indigenous staff *and* to partner communities.
- *Cultural Load Recognition*: Evaluate systems for fairness in compensation and workload, not individual resilience.
- *Long-Term Indicators*: Focus on impact over time (trust, representation, retention), not short-term outputs.

TOOL 1: RECONCILIATION IMPACT DASHBOARD

- Evidence Base: Interviews; HSO 2023; FNHA 2022; TRC #92.

Purpose:

- Provide leaders with a living dashboard that tracks progress on Indigenous leadership and workforce reconciliation.

Indicator Category	Example Metrics	Evidence Link
<i>Representation</i>	% of Indigenous employees in leadership roles (by Nation where self-identified).	TRC #23; Interviews emphasized visibility.
<i>Recruitment</i>	# of postings with Indigenous preference language; # of Indigenous candidates interviewed per cycle.	FNHA HR Standards.
<i>Onboarding Experience</i>	% of Indigenous new hires reporting feeling culturally safe and supported after 90 days.	Interviews; EQUIP Framework.
<i>Mentorship Participation</i>	# of Indigenous leaders with active mentorship or Elder support agreements.	NEIHR Leadership Model.
<i>Retention</i>	Average tenure of Indigenous staff vs. non-Indigenous peers.	Interviews noted this as key measure.
<i>Cultural Leave & Wellness</i>	Utilization rate of cultural leave; perceived accessibility of wellness supports.	Interviews; FNHA 2022.
<i>Community Engagement</i>	# of active relationships/MOUs with Indigenous organizations.	HSO CSHn Standards.

Note: Dashboard metrics should be co-developed with Indigenous advisors and reviewed semi-annually in leadership and board meetings.

TOOL 2: RELATIONAL EVALUATION MODEL

- Evidence Base: Interviews; Browne et al., 2021; FNHA 2022.

Purpose:

- To evaluate success through both quantitative data and qualitative storytelling grounded in relationship.

Evaluation Method	Description	Evidence / Interview Link
<i>Story Circles</i>	Gather small groups of Indigenous staff and leaders to share stories of success, challenge, and learning.	Interviews; Relational evaluation promotes trust.
<i>Elder-Led Reflection</i>	Invite Elders to review progress and offer guidance on direction and tone of reconciliation work.	FNHA, HSO 2023.
<i>Journey Mapping</i>	Document changes in policy, practice, and culture using visual “pathways” created with Indigenous leaders.	Interviews; connects data with lived experience.
<i>Balanced Scorecards</i>	Blend cultural, operational, and financial metrics (e.g., representation + community trust + retention).	Literature: EQUIP, HSO.

Implementation Tip:

- Quantitative measures show progress; qualitative insights explain *why* it matters.

TOOL 3: ANNUAL RECONCILIATION ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT TEMPLATE

- Evidence Base: TRC #19; TRC #92; FNHA 2022; Interviews.

Purpose:

- To ensure transparent reporting to Indigenous communities, staff, and governance bodies.

Report Sections:

- Year in Review*: Key achievements in Indigenous leadership recruitment, retention, and partnership.
- Community Voices*: Stories or reflections shared by Indigenous leaders and partners.
- Data Summary*: Representation, hiring, retention, and wellness indicators.

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

4. *Lessons Learned*: Areas for growth and improvement.
5. *Next Steps*: Concrete actions, timelines, and accountability owners.

Optional Add-On:

- Include a “Community Review” page where partner organizations or Elders can provide a written reflection on the organization’s progress.

TOOL 4: CULTURAL LOAD EQUITY AUDIT

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2021; HSO 2023.

Purpose:

- To assess and correct inequities related to the extra relational, cultural, and emotional labour Indigenous staff perform.

Audit Checklist:

- Review job descriptions for invisible cultural duties (e.g., representation, education).
- Assess whether workload and compensation reflect cultural responsibilities.
- Ensure Indigenous roles are not systematically under-classified.
- Provide release time for cultural and community obligations.
- Involve Indigenous leaders in audit design and interpretation.

Evidence Note:

- Interviewees repeatedly linked burnout and turnover to unacknowledged cultural labour. Literature calls this a structural equity issue (HSO 2023).

TOOL 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT LOOP

- Evidence Base: Interviews; EQUIP Framework; FNHA 2022.

Purpose:

- To embed reconciliation progress as an ongoing cycle, not a one-time initiative.

Cycle Step	Action	Timeline
<i>Review</i>	Gather metrics and stories from dashboard and circles.	Quarterly
<i>Reflect</i>	Leadership and Indigenous advisors meet to interpret results.	Semi-annual
<i>Revise</i>	Adjust policies, training, or recruitment processes based on findings.	Annual
<i>Report</i>	Share progress internally and with partner communities.	Annual

Cycle Step	Action	Timeline
<i>Renew</i>	Recommit and restart the cycle.	Continuous

SECTION 6 - SYSTEM AND POLICY ALIGNMENT: MAKING RECONCILIATION STRUCTURAL

Overview:

- Sustaining reconciliation requires structure: governance, policy, accountability, budgets, and role clarity. Interviews and literature agree that systems that embed reconciliation into operations withstand leadership churn and reduce reliance on individual champions.
- Sustaining reconciliation also requires ongoing reflection on how systemic barriers, including Indigenous-specific racism, may appear within organizational policies, leadership structures, and decision-making processes.

From Interviews and Literature:

- Policy is leverage, it translates values into practice.
- Shared governance builds accountability and trust.
- Transparency keeps momentum during leadership turnover.
- Measurement and reporting anchor continuous learning.

TOOL 1: RECONCILIATION ACTION PLANNING TEMPLATE

- Evidence Base: FNHA 2022; HSO 2023.
- Step-by-step guide for embedding reconciliation goals within HR, operations, and strategic plans.

Example Use:

- Each department identifies two annual reconciliation deliverables linked to budget and performance plans.

TOOL 2: GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2022; TRC #92; UNDRIP Articles 18 & 23.
- Clarifies who holds responsibility for implementation and oversight.

Governance Layer	Role in Implementation	Example Practice
<i>Board / Executive</i>	Approve reconciliation policy and receive biannual reports.	Include Indigenous representation on board or advisory bodies.

Governance Layer	Role in Implementation	Example Practice
<i>Indigenous Advisory Circle</i>	Guide priorities, review policies, advise on evaluation.	Include Elders and Indigenous staff leaders.
<i>Operational Leaders</i>	Implement and monitor daily practice.	Tie manager performance to reconciliation indicators.
<i>Community Partners</i>	Provide reflection and feedback.	Co-develop annual goals.

Evidence Note:

- Governance inclusion is the strongest predictor of sustained impact (Interviews; FNHA 2022).

TOOL 3: ELDER AND ADVISOR COMPENSATION FRAMEWORK

- Evidence Base: HSO 2023; TRC #92.
- Model for recognizing Elders and Knowledge Keepers as paid advisors. Outlines honoraria, travel coverage, and protocol for ceremonial engagement.

TOOL 4: CULTURAL SAFETY MEASUREMENT DASHBOARD

- Evidence Base: EQUIP Framework; FNHA 2022.
- Indicators for representation, retention, training completion, and reported psychological safety. Updated quarterly and reviewed by the Advisory Circle.
- Data note: Data collection should be voluntary and self-identified where appropriate.

TOOL 5: ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION PLANNER

- Evidence Base: Interviews; EQUIP Framework.
- Quarterly table to plan, track, and report milestones.

Objective	Action	Owner	Start	End	Progress
<i>Build Readiness</i>	Complete self-assessment	HR & Indigenous Partnership Lead			
<i>Recruit Relationally</i>	Update postings with distinctions-based language	HR			

Objective	Action	Owner	Start	End	Progress
<i>Embed Onboarding</i>	Launch mentorship & reflection model	HR & Leadership			
<i>Measure Outcomes</i>	Develop and share dashboard	Data/Analytics			

Tip: Review quarterly with senior leadership and Indigenous partners.

Why It Matters:

- When reconciliation is anchored in governance and policy, it becomes institutional memory, able to withstand staff changes and political cycles.

TOOL 6: BOARD UPDATE AGENDA (BIANNUAL)

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2022; HSO 2023; TRC #92.

Purpose:

- To support consistent governance oversight and ensure reconciliation progress, risks, and resource needs are reviewed at the Board or Board committee level.

Use:

- Provide a brief, structured update twice per year to maintain leadership accountability and sustain momentum during leadership transitions.

Suggested Agenda (1–2 pages):

1. Dashboard Highlights vs Targets: Key indicators for Indigenous leadership representation, recruitment, retention, cultural safety, and engagement.
2. Community and Elder Reflections (Themes): Summary of feedback from Indigenous Advisory Circle, partners, or reflection sessions.
3. Policy or Structural Changes: Updates to governance, HR practices, onboarding, cultural leave, or other system changes since the last report.
4. Cultural Load Actions: Summary of workload adjustments, support measures, or classification reviews completed.
5. Key Risks and Mitigation Strategies: Workforce risks, relationship risks, or implementation barriers and planned responses.
6. Next Six-Month Priorities and Resource Needs: Planned actions, timelines, and any budget or staffing requests.

Evidence Note:

- Interviews emphasized that sustained Board visibility and accountability were critical to maintaining progress and preventing reconciliation efforts from losing momentum during leadership changes.

SECTION 7 - SUSTAINING THE WORK: LEARNING, REFLECTION, AND RENEWAL

Overview:

- Reconciliation is not a project with an end date; it is a relationship-based transformation that requires ongoing reflection, succession, and shared learning (TRC; FNHA 2022; HSO 2023; UNDRIP). Interviews with Indigenous leaders stressed the need for continuity and time to learn together.

From Interviews and Literature

- Continuity matters: steady, not reactive, change builds trust.
- Relational renewal comes through reflection and ceremony.
- Succession is part of reconciliation, not an afterthought.
- Knowledge sharing strengthens national capacity.
- Communication and storytelling sustain engagement.

TOOL 1: ANNUAL RENEWAL AND REFLECTION CYCLE

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2022; EQUIP 2021; TRC #19.
- Establishes an annual practice of Reflect → Recommit → Realign → Recognize.

Cycle Step	Action	Frequency
<i>Reflect</i>	Hold a Reconciliation Reflection Day with Elders and staff.	Annual
<i>Recommit</i>	Update the Relational Accountability Charter and publish progress.	Annual
<i>Realign</i>	Refresh priorities and indicators with community input.	Every 2 years
<i>Recognize</i>	Publicly celebrate Indigenous leadership contributions.	Annual

TOOL 2: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION FRAMEWORK

- Evidence Base: Interviews; FNHA 2022; TRC #23; NEIHR 2020.
- Ensures continuity by developing and supporting future leaders.

Core Components:

- Early identification of emerging Indigenous leaders
- Mentorship and Elder support

Advancing Indigenous Health Leadership Recruitment, Onboarding, and Retention

Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) 2026

- Structured leadership development and coaching
- Clear career pathways and progression
- Succession indicators included in organizational scorecards

TOOL 3: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND CONTINUITY TOOLKIT

- Evidence Base: FNHA 2022; Interviews.
- Provides templates and checklists for:
 - Relationship handover during leadership transitions
 - Community contact and partnership maps
 - Joint transition meetings with partners
 - Optional Elder-supported departure or transition protocols

TOOL 4: REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEARNING NETWORK

- Evidence Base: HSO 2023; FNHA 2022.
- Supports shared learning across organizations.

Examples:

- Quarterly cross-organization learning circles
- Short-term exchanges or secondments
- Shared repository for policies, tools, and case examples
- Annual learning exchange or community of practice

TOOL 5: COMMUNICATION AND CHANGE STRATEGY

- Evidence Base: FNHA 2021; HSO 2023.
- Maintains visibility, transparency, and engagement so reconciliation work remains active and credible.

Core Elements:

- Leadership messages grounded in humility and accountability
- Regular progress updates and storytelling
- Open feedback channels for staff and partners
- Public recognition of progress and learning

TOOL 5A: COMMUNICATIONS CALENDAR

Quarter	Focus	Example Content
Q1	Organizational Commitment	“Why reconciliation matters here”; Role of Indigenous Advisory Circle
Q2	Workforce Supports	Mentorship stories; how to access cultural leave and wellness supports
Q3	Progress and Accountability	Dashboard highlights; key actions taken; areas for improvement
Q4	Renewal and Reflection	Reflection Day outcomes; community feedback; public recommitment

Evidence Link:

- Interviews emphasized that visible follow-through builds trust. Literature highlights ongoing communication as a core change management practice (FNHA; HSO).

TOOL 5B: LEADERSHIP LAUNCH SCRIPT (EXAMPLE)

- “Today we recommit to reconciliation on the lands of [Nation(s)]. This work is guided by our Indigenous partners and Elders, and we will measure our progress transparently. This year, our focus includes strengthening mentorship, ensuring culturally safe onboarding, and recognizing cultural load in our workforce planning. We will share what we learn, listen when we fall short, and continue moving forward together.”

Evidence Link:

- Interviews stressed that leadership tone and visibility influence whether reconciliation is seen as symbolic or real.