

Respectful Language Guide

Provincial Health Services Authority



This Guide was developed at *our main office that is located within the unceded, occupied, traditional and ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and səliilíwətaʔt (Tseil-Waututh Nation)*. As a provincial network, we operate on the traditional and ancestral lands of First Nations throughout B.C. and provides services to diverse Indigenous Peoples including First Nations, Métis and Inuit living in various settings and communities across British Columbia.

1.0 About this guide

This document offers guidance for respectful communication and engagement with Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit), organizations, communities, Nations and colleagues through appropriate language. It includes guidelines for respectfully acknowledging First Nations lands in what is now known as British Columbia. Developing respectful and equitable relationships with Indigenous Peoples requires that we examine the ways in which we engage with people and communities as well as what we say and do to acknowledge these important relationships.

[*In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care*](#) and the [B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan \(Declaration Act Action Plan\)](#) provide recommendations and actions to improve the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. Acknowledging and upholding First Nations rights, title and self-determination is one significant way to show that we value respectful relationships with First Nations on whose land we live, work and play.

1.1 Purpose of this guide

This document is **not a script** and should be used as a guide. It is an evolving, working document and will be changing as we learn and grow.

This guide is designed to enhance how we at PHSA engage with Indigenous people as an organization and as individuals.

The guide outlines ways to show respect in interactions with Indigenous patients and co-workers by using respectful language. It also provides acknowledgement and recognition protocols for PHSA events and written materials.

1.2 Who this guide is for

This guide is for all PHSA staff, including medical staff, contractors, volunteers and students who have an obligation to ensure they are contributing to an anti-racist and culturally safe environment for Indigenous patients, families and staff. Using respectful language is everyone's responsibility.

1.3 Why respectful language matters

Language and cultural safety

Language and words are often used in ways that perpetuate stereotypes and that are damaging and disrespectful to Indigenous Peoples. At PHSA, our goal is to ensure our language and words convey respect and inclusivity at all times.

We encourage you to broaden your understanding of language and its implications by referring to sources of information beyond this guide. We also recommend that you participate in the PHSA [San'yas Anti-racism Indigenous Cultural Safety \(ICS\)](#) Training program. The Anti-Indigenous Racism Response Training (ARRT) is available on the Learning Hub. ARRT will provide you with education and scenarios for identifying, acting on and reporting Indigenous-specific racism in PHSA.

Evolving communications

Language is constantly changing. Words and meaning evolve, depending on the context and who is using them. Take the time to ensure that your language is current. Keep in mind that fear of using the 'wrong' word should never stifle important dialogue and discussions. You can make it clear that you intend to be respectful. For example, "I am not sure I am saying this correctly, however I am going to try..." or "I am unsure of the correct term to use...please correct me if I am wrong" signal that you want to use respectful language and you are willing to learn. Humbly acknowledging that you are open to learning and to getting it right will build trust and demonstrate you are coming from a respectful place.



Terminology

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2.0 Terminology

Before the arrival of Europeans, First Nations and Inuit were thriving in independent, vibrant, healthy and highly complex societies. First Nations, Métis and Inuit are distinct rights-bearing communities who have tremendous diversity in cultures, histories, rights, languages, laws and government. It is important to respect and acknowledge these differences, even when using broad terminology.

Keep in mind that this document is a guide. If you are unsure about appropriate terms, ask the person or group involved or knowledgeable in this area.

2.1 Terms to use

Term to Use	Explanation	Considerations
INDIGENOUS	In Canada, Indigenous is an overarching term that includes First Nations, Métis peoples and Inuit, either collectively or separately. It is the term many Indigenous people in Canada prefer, and is used in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples .	In some contexts, the term Indigenous is ambiguous. For example, a reference to Indigenous people in Canada could include Maori or American Indian (United States) people living here, as well as Indigenous people with an ancestral connection to this land. A more descriptive use of Indigenous may be warranted where legal specificity to people originating in Canada is important (e.g., Indigenous Peoples of what is now known as Canada).
ABORIGINAL	Similar to the term Indigenous, Aboriginal refers to First Nations, Métis peoples and Inuit. Aboriginal is a government term used in the Canadian Constitution and in the legal system and is not commonly used outside of Canada.	For some Indigenous people the term carries derogatory and racist connotations; for others it can be a preferred term as it is connected to the legal framework for Indigenous rights in Canada. It is helpful to pay attention to the language a person uses and how they self-identify.
FIRST NATIONS	First Nations are distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples who lived in the land now called Canada, generally south of the Arctic region. There are 27 distinct cultural groups within B.C. and over 30 languages within seven major language families. Although there are some commonalities, each Nation has its own cultural, political, and religious institutions and practices. First Nations are the only group of Indigenous Peoples who have specific rights and title to land in what is now known as B.C.	Early settlers called First Nation people Indians. The term is still used in legislation, such as the Indian Act and in many historical documents. Otherwise, the term Indian is not used today and is considered disrespectful. There are approximately 173,000 people in B.C. that identify as First Nations.

MÉTIS	Métis are a distinct Indigenous Nation that developed post-colonization as European fur traders and Indigenous peoples engaged in trade. Métis ancestors include Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Dene, French, Scottish, and English peoples. As defined by the governing bodies of the Métis Nation General Assembly, someone who self-identifies as Métis, has an ancestral connection to the historic Métis community, and is accepted by the modern community with continuity to the historic Métis community is Métis. While a distinct people, there is a great deal of diversity among the Métis population with regards to culture, language, values, and beliefs, which varies between communities and geographic regions.	It is important to know that not all Métis people are registered with the Métis Nation but may still belong to one of the 38 Métis Chartered Communities in B.C. There are approximately 90,000 people in B.C. that identify as Métis. They comprise 33 per cent of the population of Indigenous people in British Columbia.
INUIT	Inuit are distinct Indigenous Peoples who are original to, and primarily live in the Arctic. There are eight main Inuit groups: the Labradormiut (Labrador), Nunavimmiut (Ungava), Baffin Island, Iglulingmiut (Iglulik), Kivallirmiut (Caribou), Netsilingmiut (Netsilik), Inuinait (Copper) and Inuvialuit or Western Arctic Inuit. There are five main Inuit language dialects, which include Inuvialuktun, Inuinnaqtun and three different dialects of Inuktitut.	Inuit people are culturally diverse and are legally and culturally distinct from First Nations and Métis people. The singular of Inuit is Inuk. The translation of Inuit is 'the people' so it is redundant to add 'people'. There are approximately 1,600 people in B.C. that identify as Inuit. They comprise 1.6 per cent of the population of Indigenous people in British Columbia.

2.2 Terms to avoid

Term to Avoid	Explanation	Considerations
ESKIMO	Historically, Eskimo was a term used to refer to the Inuit. It is considered a derogatory term; do not use Eskimo when referring to Inuit.	
NATIVE	Native or Native American is a term used infrequently in Canada and is generally not recommended for use by non-Indigenous people.	Only use this term when there is a reason to do so (e.g. It is part of the name of organizations such as Vancouver Native Health Society or the Urban Native Youth Association.). The term Native American is still used in the United States and used by some Indigenous people self-referentially.
INDIAN	Indian is a colonial term that was used to refer to a First Nations person. It is a term with negative and racist connotations and should be avoided, even if you hear an Indigenous person using it. 'Indian' is	The imposition of the Indian Act is a piece of history not widely understood by Canadians as it — along with things such as the Indian Residential School — was not taught in the public education

	sometimes used in a historical reference, or in government policies or classifications (e.g. the Indian Act or Status Indian). Before using the term, consult with a person with knowledge in this area.	system until recently as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action .
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2.3 Common terms explained

Term to Avoid	Explanation
COLONIALISM	<p>Colonialism is the policy or practice of gaining political control over another country or area, claiming ownership through Settler occupation, and then exploiting the area for colonial gain.</p> <p>The colonial relationship between the Settler and the original people of a land is inherently unequal, benefitting the colonizer at the expense of the colonized. The long-term outcome is institutionalized inequality. This is the legacy of Canada.</p>
INDIAN ACT	<p>The Indian Act, passed in 1876, is one of the oldest pieces of legislation in Canada. It is one of very few race-based pieces of legislation left in the world. The Act defines the federal government's legal and political relationship with First Nations people and goes so far as to define who is and is not a First Nations person.</p> <p>It is important to note that this piece of legislation was imposed upon First Nations — it disrupted many things including First Nations inherent rights to self-determination over their lands, resources and people.</p> <p>Despite amendments and revisions, the Indian Act remains in place supporting colonial policies that perpetuate colonial harms. Currently, there is pushback to this legislation with First Nations advocating for a shift toward recognition of First Nations self-governance and self-determination in political, legal, economic, social and cultural matters. The Indian Act does not address Inuit and Métis people.</p>
STATUS AND NON-STATUS	<p>There are Status Indians and non-Status Indians in Canada. Under the Indian Act, the term Status or Registered Indian refers to a person whose name appears on the Indian Register maintained by the Federal Government. Non-status refers to a First Nations person who is not registered with the federal government or is not registered with a band that has signed a Treaty with the government. The designation as Status or non-Status is not a reflection on how First Nations people identify with their Nation. As aforementioned, the Indian Act was imposed legislation that is still in place today.</p>
RESERVE	<p>A reserve is the legal title for a tract of land held by the Crown, set aside by treaty or under the Indian Act. A reserve is a legally defined geographical area to which a First Nation community was historically confined. To leave the reserve for any reason, First Nations people required a pass, issued by an Indian Agent who often made infrequent</p>

	<p>visits to the land.</p> <p>Reserves are located in rural and remote communities and urban settings. Many people live on-and off-reserve at different times. In general, it is better to refer to a local name for a village or community than to a reserve, unless the geographic or legal notation of reserve is required. The term reservation is used in the United States, but not in Canada.</p>
TRADITIONAL LAND	<p>Traditional land is the land inhabited by Indigenous people before colonization by European Settlers. Through the process of colonization, the Crown took possession of traditional land and set aside a small fraction for Indigenous Peoples called reserves. Recognizing traditional Indigenous land is one way of acknowledging our colonial and Settler history, as well as the rights of Indigenous Peoples and their connection to their land.</p> <p>Many PHSA buildings and services are located on unceded traditional land. For example, B.C. Children’s Hospital is built on unceded traditional Musqueam land. The City of Vancouver is set on the unceded traditional land of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tseil- Waututh Nations.</p>
UNCEDDED	<p>Unceded land refers to land settled by non-Indigenous Canadians without a negotiated treaty. However, this term can also refer to lands across Canada where treaties are not respected. In B.C., always include unceded when acknowledging land, unless you are referring to a First Nations community which has completed the treaty process and has a treaty in place. If you’re unsure, check with the local Nation or someone who is knowledgeable about whether to use unceded in the acknowledgements.</p>
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	<p>A land acknowledgement is a First Nation oral traditional practice. It is of Indigenous worldviews (languages, ways of knowing, and being). It is a respectful practice. It is important to note that this document and this definition is an English translation of the protocol, and, as such, approximates protocol meaning, purpose, and value. Deference of understanding is always to the First Nation with whom engagements take place.</p>
WELCOME	<p>A welcome to the Traditional Territories is a First Nations protocol. The local First Nation on whose lands the event is occurring always provides the Welcome. The Chief, an Elder or a Knowledge Keeper traditionally performs it.</p>
OPENING	<p>An opening to an event is a First Nations protocol. The local First Nation on whose lands the event is occurring often provide the Opening. An opening can include prayers, songs, drumming and/or stories. In contrast to a welcome, an Indigenous person in attendance can provide an opening.</p>
DISTINCTIONS-BASED	<p>A distinctions-based approach requires dealings with First Nations, Métis and Inuit be conducted in a manner that acknowledges the specific rights, interests, priorities, and concerns of each, while respecting and acknowledging these distinct Peoples with unique cultures, histories, rights, laws and governments. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes and affirms the rights of Aboriginal Peoples in what is now</p>

APPROACH	known as Canada, while all Indigenous Peoples have human rights that are expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, not all rights are uniform or the same among or between all Indigenous Peoples. In many cases, a distinctions-based approach may require different relationships and engagement with First Nations, Métis and Inuit and different approaches or actions that result in different outcomes.
LEGAL PLURALITY	The affirmation, consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, that upholding the human rights of Indigenous Peoples includes recognizing that within Canada there are multiple legal orders, including Indigenous laws and legal orders with distinct roles, responsibilities and authorities.

2.4 Additional language considerations

Peoples vs. People

Indigenous people can refer to Indigenous individuals or to Indigenous groups, communities or populations. When referring to multiple Indigenous Nations, sometimes it is preferable to use Indigenous Peoples as this recognizes the many distinct Indigenous Nations and Peoples.

Using possessives

Indigenous people do not belong to Canada. Do not use terms such as Canada's First Nations people or our Indigenous people. It is insulting and invokes a history of control by the Settler state of Canada.

The term Indigenous has become more common. Aboriginal is still the preferred term by some Nations but can be a racist or derogatory term to others. Please see definition of Aboriginal" page 6.

- Use *"Indigenous/Aboriginal people,"* instead of *'Aboriginals'*.
- Use *'the Indigenous Peoples of what is now known as Canada'* instead of *'Indigenous Peoples of Canada'*.
- Use *'he is an Indigenous/Aboriginal student (person, athlete, leader, etc.)'* instead of *'the student is an Aboriginal'*.

Capitalization

Capitalize Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit. It is consistent with descriptions of other groups such as Europeans or Canadians.

When part of a formal title, capitalize Chief, Hereditary Chief, Grand Chief, President, Regional Director, Elder, Knowledge Keeper/Holder and Traditional Knowledge Keeper/Holder.

Indigenous identity and self-identification

Each Indigenous person has the right to decide how they identify and whether they want to share that information. Some may not identify as Indigenous because it does not feel safe. As organizations and institutions become more culturally safe and less racist, Indigenous people may feel more comfortable in disclosing their ancestry. If someone chooses to share their ancestry with you, make sure you have their permission before sharing that information with others. Also, keep in mind that one should never make assumptions about who is Indigenous and who is not. It is not appropriate and is disrespectful to comment on whether an individual looks Indigenous or not.



Welcome and land acknowledgement

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3.0 Welcome, openings & land acknowledgements

When to include a welcome, opening and land acknowledgement

PHSA strongly recommends that there be a land acknowledgment at events and meetings. This includes:

- Large, public events
- Internal events with leaders
- Printed agendas
- Virtual events

If the event is significant or related to Indigenous Peoples, a welcome may also be appropriate. The welcome should precede the land acknowledgement and will be given by a Chief, Elder, Knowledge Keeper or other designated representative of the community. Only a representative of the First Nation(s) on whose land you are meeting can do this—they are welcoming attendees to their land.

Who should give the land acknowledgement?

Usually, the person hosting the meeting or event will give the land acknowledgement and that person may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Many meetings include both a welcome and a land acknowledgement.

A person with the responsibility of doing the land acknowledgement should:

- Research the appropriate lands to include, understanding that lands can be shared or disputed. The websites of many local First Nations and [Native Land](#) have resources that provide information on lands, territories and Nations. Lands should be verified with the specific Nation's website.
- Ensure that the recognition of First Nations lands is meaningful; think about your purpose and how you can convey, even in a brief statement, the significance and intention of your acknowledgement and how this links to your work. Please take the opportunity to critically reflect, situate yourself in relation to the land, e.g. uninvited guest, Occupier, Settler.
- Know that protocols for First Nations communities differ and learn about those differences and what is appropriate for the land you are on.
- Learn how to pronounce the name of the First Nation(s) you are acknowledging. [First Voices](#) provides pronunciations.
- Ask questions when you need clarification.

What is a welcome and who should provide it?

A welcome to the Traditional Territories is a First Nations protocol. The local First Nation on whose lands the event is occurring always provides the welcome. The Chief, an Elder or Knowledge Keeper traditionally performs it.

What is an opening and who should provide it?

An opening to an event is a First Nations protocol. The local First Nation on whose lands the event is occurring often provide the opening. An opening can include prayers, songs, drumming and/or stories. In contrast to a welcome, an Indigenous person in attendance can provide an opening that acknowledges the local First Nations whose land the event is on.

When should you include acknowledgments of Indigenous partners?

Acknowledging the presence of First Nations (from outside B.C.), Métis and Inuit leaders is a respectful practice that should follow the land acknowledgment at events and meetings. Acknowledging Métis and Inuit leaders and Indigenous partner organizations at events is foundational to good relations and recognizes the distinct culture and history of the Métis and Inuit. If you are working directly with the Métis Nation British Columbia, here is a list of [local Chartered Communities](#).

3.1 Protocol for large, public events

When PHSA hosts large or public events, include the following protocols:

- **Invite First Nations of the land to provide a welcome;** extend the invitation as early as possible and not less than one week before the event; invitations sent just before an event are disrespectful.
- It is appropriate to **pay Elders or Knowledge Keepers/ Holders offering the welcome compensations for their time**, including preparation time, travel and for sharing their valuable knowledge. Please invite them to stay for the entirety of the meeting. For more information on working with Elders, please refer to PHSA's Elders Guide.
- **Send invitations with time, location, and duration to the Chief(s) of land(s) and Métis representatives** as early as possible and not less than one week before the event; the community or organization will decide who should attend.
- **Assign a PHSA representative** to acknowledge First Nations traditional land and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders in attendance after the welcome.
- If an **event is taking place in a First Nations community**, it is respectful to ask the community leaders about whom to invite and the level of participation by PHSA members, e.g. help to offer gifts, witnessing.

3.2 Protocol for internal event with leaders

The land acknowledgement is the first order of business at an event. If the event is large and focuses on Indigenous people, follow the protocols above for large public events, including asking a representative of the First Nation on whose land the event is happening if they wish to provide a welcome before the meeting begins.

It is the responsibility of the host to provide a land acknowledgement. Please avoid tokenism and offer the invitation of providing a welcome to people in attendance at less formal events, if there is a First Nation person from the land in attendance, it is appropriate to ask before the meeting begins, if they wish to do the welcome.

3.3 Protocol for virtual event

When an event is hosted virtually with attendees joining from many locations, it is appropriate that each attendee be encouraged to make their own land acknowledgement at the beginning of the meeting with their self-introductions as a way of locating themselves within the First Nations lands that attendees are joining from.

Example: I wish to acknowledge with gratitude that we are gathered today through this virtual circle on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of First Nations in what is now known as British Columbia, who have cared and nurtured this land for all time. We give thanks to be able to live, work and care together on these lands.

3.4 Protocol printed agendas

A welcome is the first item on the agenda and should appear as 'Welcome to the land'.

When the event does not include a welcome, a land acknowledgement is first on the agenda and appears as 'Acknowledgement of the land'

We encourage you to put some time and reflection into the land acknowledgment to make it more meaningful and personal.

For example, here are some guiding questions for people creating a land acknowledgment:

- What is your intention or commitment to create a land acknowledgment?
- How can you create an acknowledgment that holds up the original people of these lands?

- How does the land connect to your work/organization and how does it speak to the importance of ensuring Indigenous-specific Anti-racism and Indigenous Cultural Safety and Humility is at the heart of the messaging you convey?
- Do you have a personal or professional commitment that builds off the acknowledgement?
- How can your acknowledgement share your commitment to truth telling: i.e. reconciliation, addressing racism and long standing inequities?
- How have you benefited personally and professionally from living and working on the land you are on?

Here are some resources to review in regards to land acknowledgment:

- [Haden King's Regrets](#)
- [Baroness von Sketch Show](#)
- [Chelsea Vowel 2016 Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements](#)
- [NAHLA 2019 Template for personalizing Land Acknowledgement](#)

3.5 Sample verbal land acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude that we are gathered today on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations who have cared and nurtured this land for all time. We give thanks to be able to live, work and care together here on these lands.

Add personalized actions and commitments, including how this awareness informs how you, as an occupier with settler privileges and benefits, conduct yourself on these lands and informs your commitment to ending Indigenous-specific racism from the health care system and within other spheres where you have influence.

Note: While you may hear people refer to ‘Coast Salish’ lands, we recommend naming the specific communities (i.e., Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil- Waututh).

Tailor the land acknowledgement to the location in which the event is happening in the province. Ensure that you know whose land to acknowledge and whether it is [unceded](#). Also check if it is taking place on a “shared land” between neighboring Nations.

3.6 Sample written land acknowledgement

Adding a land acknowledgment to your professional email signature or documents and reports is a way of showing recognition and respect. To tailor your email signature based on where you work in B.C. we recommend:

I acknowledge my place of work is within the unceded (when appropriate) land of the (name of Nation or Nations).

As PHSA provides services across the province of B.C., it may be more appropriate and fitting for you and your program to consider an acknowledgement that reflects this context. We recommend:

As a provincial network, we operate on the unceded traditional and ancestral lands of First Nations. Our main office is located on the traditional and ancestral lands of the [First Nation's name] Nation(s).

3.7 Artist acknowledgement for imagery use

Artwork created by Indigenous people may be used as public art in facilities, images in reports, virtually, or on office walls. Follow these guidelines when using or displaying a specific image or artwork.

- Attribute all images including video, photographic or graphics to the artist
- Include a title when available
- Secure permission to use the artwork and be explicit about uses for the artwork (unless in the public domain); be prepared to compensate for additional use
- Ensure the images appropriately reflect the distinct Indigenous groups (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) when selecting imagery
- Ensure you understand the ethics and operations of businesses if you are buying artwork; preferable to buy directly from the artist

Sometimes, it is advisable to ask the artist or custodian for direction to ensure you are using the image in a manner consistent with its intended purpose.

Inappropriate artwork

Be aware that some artwork by non-Indigenous artists is created to look like Indigenous art or inspired by Indigenous art styles and is not appropriate for use at PHSA. Buy from Indigenous owned and operated businesses. Use caution when sourcing imagery from stock sites or online.



Resources

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4.0 Technology resources

Fonts for Indigenous languages

[BC Sans](#) supports both accessibility and inclusion. BC Sans is a font with visual identity typeface, multiple languages and importantly, Indigenous languages. The province worked with an Indigenous language typographic expert, and First Voices, to add characters and syllabic glyphs to support the inclusion of Indigenous languages in B.C.

If you are in need of a font that supports all the Indigenous languages of the Americas, we suggest using [Huronian](#).

Another option is to install the [First Nations Unicode Font](#), which allows you to render certain characters used in First Nations languages in your preferred font.