

# **Aboriginal Seniors – A Growing Population**

- The most often-cited demographic statistics about Aboriginal communities in Canada are that their populations are on average much younger than the Canadian population overall, with a significant proportion under the age of 25.
- Statistics Canada data reveal that Aboriginal people in Canada are aging faster than the overall Canadian population [1-3], and are unhealthier [4-5].
- The Health Council of Canada recently referred to Aboriginal seniors as among Canada's most vulnerable citizens [6].
- Very little is known about the aging experiences, aspirations, and support needs of Indigenous seniors.

#### Health of Aboriginal Seniors is Poorer Than **Their non-Aboriginal Counterparts**

A recent examination of health status and determinants of health comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal seniors revealed some important disparities [5]:

- Among those aged 55-64, 7% of the Aboriginal population reported three or more chronic conditions, compared with 2% of the non-Aboriginal population.
- The gap is wider among those aged 75 and up, with 51% of Aboriginal people compared with 23% of the non-Aboriginal reporting three or more chronic conditions.
- Those reporting Métis identity are associated with increased odds of fair/poor health status than those reporting First Nations identity [6]
- Aboriginal people living in a rural area are more likely to report fair/poor health than those living in an urban area [6].

### **Colonization is an Important Determinant** of Indigenous<sup>\*</sup> Population Health

- The residential/ boarding school system, attempted to assimilate Indigenous children– starkly stated as "taking Indian out of the child"by severing the relationship between children and their parents and grandparents, and limiting opportunities for children to be exposed to their Indigenous language and culture.
- Corporal punishment and other forms of abuse were widespread, as was chronic malnutrition[7].
- The intergenerational health outcomes include high levels of both chronic (T2DM, CVD) and infectious (HIV, Hep C, TB) disease, as well as addictions, mental illness, and suicide from youth to old age.

## **Truth & Reconciliation – Intergenerational** Healing and Health

There is a critical need for research on experiences and aspirations of Indigenous aging that will inform programs and policies to support seniors to age well in their homes – many of which are youthful Indigenous rural communities - because:

Our research program on healthy aging in a rural Saskatchewan Métis community is framed through two connected projects that consider aging well across the lifecourse:

- seniors

\*We use the term Indigenous to refer to the first inhabitants of what is now Canada in a global context that links peoples in similar circumstances of colonization. Where it appears in the text the term Aboriginal refers to a formal recognition of Indigenous people in Canada in the Constitution Act of 1982, as members of three groups: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Terms used in a discussion of cited work reflect those used in source material.





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• From 2009-2015 the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** (TRC) of Canada documented the stories of survivors, communities, and others affected by residential schools.

• The **94 Calls to Action** [8] that resulted, and which bid all Canadians to participate, are clear about the importance of creating and maintaining opportunities for re-establishing the connection of Indigenous children and youth to their languages, cultures, and histories. Elders are those connections.

• National data indicate that Aboriginal seniors are more likely than non-Aboriginal seniors to be the primary caregivers for their grandchildren [5] and are influential role models to younger generations [9]. • The close relationship between grandparents and grandchildren underscores that the well-being of both groups is closely connected.

1. Indigenous seniors are a growing population with inequitable outcomes compared to the Canadian senior population overall, and;

2. Indigenous Elders are vital to community healing from the impacts of colonization.

• Wuskiwiy-tan! (Let's Move) is focused on • Tan-Nigahniwhak! (They Will Be Leaders) is

focused on youth.

The **project logo** designed by community youth, poignantly captures symbolically and textually the significance of their Elders to them, encapsulating their answer to the title question in this poster.







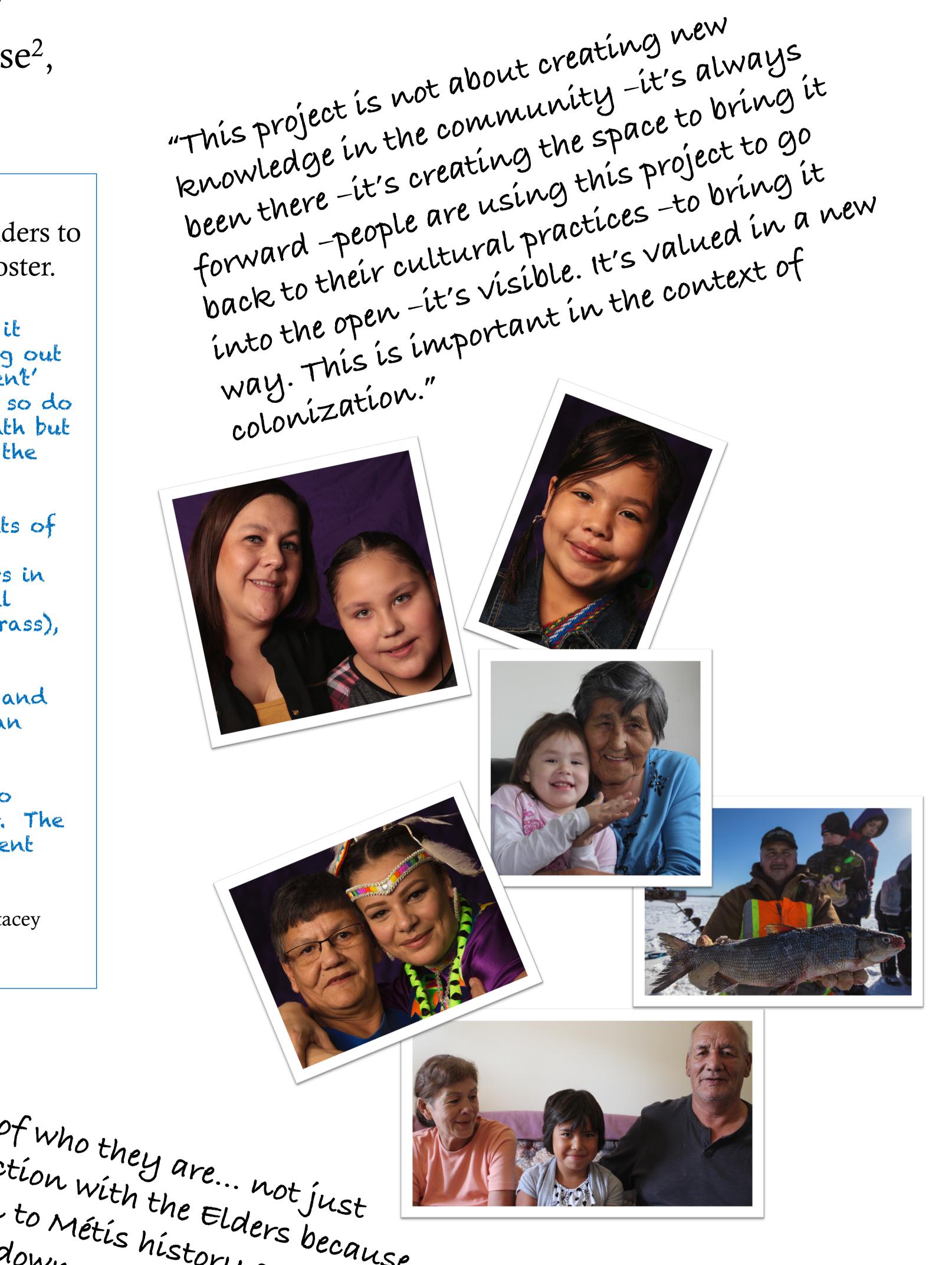
# Our Culture and Traditions are Important to Aging Well. Reflections from one northern Saskatchewan Métis Community. Saskatchewan, CANADA

Beginning with the branch wreath, it represents the cycle of life. Starting out at birth (that is why the leaves haven't' grown yet) and as maturity builds so do The leaves. At then end comes death but leaves continue as we continue in the afterlife.

In the middle are pictures of plants of the "Indian" medicine. Each one representing one of the four colors in the medicine wheel. White-Physical (sage), Yellow-Emotional (sweet Grass), Red-Mental (Tobacco) and Black-Spiritual (Cedar). Most of these medicines are used in "smudging" and "sweats" while tobacco is given as an offering to our Elders.

The feathers and string are used to make it look like a dream catcher. The infinity sign and Métis sash represent who we are as Métis.

Logo and Description By Cyril Laliberte and Stacey Caisse



"For the youth to be proud of who they are... not just Physical health, but connection with the Elders because of the continued connection to Métis history and the knowledge that gets passed down..." In addition to the poster co-authors, the research team includes: Dr. Bonnie Jeffery, SPHERU & University of Regina, SASKATCHEWAN Dr. Shanthi Johnson, SPHERU & University of Regina, SASKATCHEWAN Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine, SPHERU & University of Saskatchewan, SASKATCHEWAN Dr. Nuelle Novik, SPHERU & University of Regina, SASKATCHEWAN Dr. Hassanali Vatanparast, University of Saskatchewan, SASKATCHEWAN Dr. Tara-Leigh McHugh, University of Alberta, ALBERTA Want to know more about this research? Scan this QR code for team contact information. Mr. Boabang Owusu, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Saskatchewan, SASKATCHEWAN Ms. Liris Smith, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Saskatchewan, SASKATCHEWAN Projects described in this poster are funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research FRN136971 (Wuskiwiy-tan!) and the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation #3463 (Tah-Nigahniwak!) 1. Statistics Canada. 2001 Census: Analysis Series. Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: a demographic profile. 2003, Statistics Canada 2. Statistics Canada. Aboriginal identity population by age groups, median age and sex, 2006 counts, for Canada, provinces and territories-20% sample data. 2008 [cited 2010 March 20]; Available from: http://www12. statcan.ca/english/censu s06/data/ highlights / Aboriginal/ pages / Page . cfm ? Lang = E & Geo = PR & Code = 01 & Table = 1 & Data = Count & Sex= 1 & Age = 10 & StartRec = 1 & Sort = 2 & Display = Page. 3. Statistics Canada. National Household Survey, 2011. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit. 2013(Catalague no. 99-011-X2011001). 4. Wilson, K., M.W. Rosenberg, S. Abonyi, R. Lovelace. Aging and health: an examination of differences between older Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Can J Aging, 2010. 29(3): p.369-82. 5. Wilson, K., M.W. Rosenberg, and S. Abonyi. Aboriginal peoples, health and healing approaches: the effects of age and place on health. *Soc Sci Med*, 2011. 72(3): p. 355-64. 6. Health Council of Canada. Canada's most vulnerable: Improving health care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis seniors, H.C.o. Canada, Editor. 2013: Toronto, ON. 7. Milloy J. A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; 1999. 424 p. 8. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. TRC: Calls to Action. Winnipeg: TRC of Canada; 2015. 20 p. Accessed November 16, 2106 from <a href="http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls\_to\_Action\_English2.pdf">http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls\_to\_Action\_English2.pdf</a>



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