



UAKN  
Urban Aboriginal  
Knowledge Network

RCU  
Réseau de connaissances des  
Autochtones en milieu urbain

## RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

### Western Research Centre

#### **Name of Project:**

*Melq'ilwiye*: Intersections of Identity, Culture, and Health Among Urban Aboriginal Youth

#### **Collaborating Friendship Centre and/or other urban Aboriginal organization:**

Interior Indian Friendship Society

#### **Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:**

*Melq'ilwiye* is a Secwepemc word that means, “coming together.” This research will take place in the interior region of British Columbia through a community-university partnership between the Interior Indian Friendship Society and Thompson Rivers University, both of which are located on the traditional territories of the Secwepemc peoples in the city of Kamloops. The Interior Indian Friendship Society is part of a network of 119 Friendship Centres in Canada and is a member of the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC, n.d.). Friendship Centres are the primary providers of culturally enhanced programs and services to urban Aboriginal people. The urban Aboriginal youth population is the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian Aboriginal population (54% in 2006) (NAFC, n.d.), yet in Kamloops as in many cities there remains a temporal component to one’s location and identification as “urban Aboriginal,” varying according to the person’s life history and story.

This research proposal has been developed in ongoing dialogue between community and academic researchers. It has been informed by previous and ongoing research conducted by the applicants. The goals of this research study are two-fold: 1) to advance the understanding of how urban Aboriginal youth who identify as homeless or at risk of homelessness identify their health needs within an Indigenous intersectional model of health and wellness, and 2) to contribute to new understandings and knowledge of Indigenous urban youth and research capacity among urban Aboriginal youth and urban Aboriginal health-care providers. A key focus will be the development of strategies for addressing the *aspirations* of urban Aboriginal youth, laying the foundations upon which their health and wellness potential can be nurtured, supported, and realized. The project will address the goal identified by NAFC, for more effective ways to promote health among urban Aboriginal youth. It will also address the recommendation of the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2003) with respect to promoting “urban First Nations health research initiatives that could provide valuable information on the needs, experiences and priorities of First Nations youth living in urban centers under a First Nations controlled design”

## **Engagement Objectives:**

A central objective of the research is to improve the services and supports for urban Indigenous youth who experience homelessness, or are at risk for homelessness, in small- and medium-sized communities. Key to this research creation and dissemination process is the inclusion of community-based participants who act as expert consultants, bringing to the project their experiential knowledge of homelessness and the way in which homelessness shapes individual lives.

The research question aims to identify what are the health needs, priorities and services of urban Aboriginal youth who are experiencing homelessness or at risk for homelessness, in Kamloops and the components of cultural continuity necessary for health promotion and wellness. Sub-themes to be explored and further developed through the input of the community advisory include:

- How do urban aboriginal youth who are or have been homeless, or at risk for homelessness in Kamloops identify their health needs within an Indigenous holistic model of health and wellness?
- What components of cultural continuity are identified as key by urban aboriginal youth in meeting their health and wellness needs?
- What wise practices such as Indigenous trauma-informed practices are recommended?

The study contributes to a new narrative of the health of urban Aboriginal youth, at risk for or currently homeless, within an Indigenous intersectional and culturally safe framework that acknowledges the diversity of urban Indigenous youth, including those with strong connection to their Indigenous lands, languages, and traditions, and those who do not have these connections, while also recognizing the diversity of spaces between which they move.

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