

Indigenous Land-Based Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Report Summary

This research project funded by Making The Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab explores how First Nations youth at risk of or with lived experience of homelessness are affected by and negotiating the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, it focuses on how schools, organizations, and communities can continue to provide land-based learning and cultural programming to First Nations youth during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Soon after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, the Canadian government advised Indigenous community members that they should self-isolate, socially distance, and avoid “non-essential community and cultural gatherings”. As Indigenous peoples have emphasized, land-based and cultural practices are central to well-being. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a critical question for Indigenous schools, organizations and communities has become, How can we continue to provide land-based learning and cultural programming to youth? We’re interested in this question because a connection to land can help Indigenous youth develop a sense of self that is grounded in their reciprocal and sustaining relationships with the land and with the people and other living beings. Land-based learning and cultural programming can support the prevention of and sustained exits from homelessness for Indigenous youth.

This report describes ways Indigenous land-based educators and the schools, organizations and communities they are associated with have answered that question. The report presents the findings from a survey of Indigenous land-based educators from many parts of Canada.

Survey respondents were asked to describe ways that their practice has been impacted by COVID-19; what they’ve found most challenging about the pandemic; how they’ve adapted their practices to reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19; and, within those changes, what’s worked well and what hasn’t.

To conform with public health guidelines during the pandemic, land-based educators who participated in the survey, some of whom teach at schools that have remained open and others who teach remotely, have made significant changes to their practice. They noted that many of their students have felt stressed and anxious during the pandemic, and some pointed to youth and children who are in the care of child and family services, or who are 2SLGBTQI+ (two groups that, as adults, are overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness) as particularly vulnerable. Their commitment to the well-being of the children, youth, and communities they work with has led them to develop creative workarounds to ensure that they can continue to nurture their students’ relationships with the land during the pandemic. The report includes a discussion of workarounds and practice adaptations shared in the survey by land-based educators, along with a curated list of webinars, videos, podcasts, toolkits, teaching materials and other resources related to Indigenous land-based education, including resources specifically related to the impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous land-based education.

For more information or a for a full copy of the report, please contact Dr. Alex Wilson at alex.wilson@usask.ca



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