



BC Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (BC NEIHR)

Governing Council

Terms of Reference

General

The British Columbia Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (BC NEIHR) is supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The BC NEIHR is an Indigenous-led network that heightens the research engagement of Indigenous (*First Nations, Métis and Inuit*) communities, collectives and organizations (ICCOs), Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, and interdisciplinary, multi-sectoral groups and organizations in BC. The Governing Council (GC) includes a gender balanced representation of First Nations, Métis and, if possible, Inuit, including community, organizational, academic and geographic representation. The GC will consist of approximately 9-11 members, including representation from each of the three leading partners (First Nations Health Authority, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, and Métis Nation BC), as well as Elders, community members and Indigenous graduate students. Through a consensus based decision-making process, the GC is tasked with advising the BC NEIHR and its team on key research priorities and strategic policies related primarily to a) network membership, b) funding programs, c) capacity bridging/strengthening programs, d) partnerships and e) future funding.

BC NEIHR Mission Statement

The BC NEIHR facilitates and supports capacity for and engagement in Indigenous-led health research that is woven from the values, knowledge systems, protocols, priorities and leadership of Indigenous CCOs, academic researchers and students in BC. Our collective goal is to ground BC NEIHR structures, relationships and processes in the values and principles of self-determination, Indigenous knowledge, wholistic population health and wellness as well as intersectionality, equity, and transparency. We also aspire to promote and support Indigenous and/or decolonizing (ID) methodologies, ethics and OCAP® in Indigenous research. In BC NEIHR activities, we acknowledge and will uphold the cultural safety and cultural humility that is modeled by the work of the FNHA and the work yet to come from other ICCOs.

Purpose and Role of the Governing Council

Members of the BC NEIHR Governing Council are recognized as Knowledge Holders in First Nations and Métis communities in British Columbia and Canada, and include community, organizational, academic and geographic representation. Each Council member will make a pledge, before witnesses (*which is a tradition among Coast Salish and other Indigenous Peoples in BC*), to be accountable to the Indigenous peoples of BC. Witnesses can include other GC members and/or invited community members. The pledge from initial GC members will occur during the first GC full-day meeting. After that, each new GC member will make the pledge at the next occurring GC full-day meeting. This pledge will state that each member will honour the guidelines and protocols outlined by the GC, as well as make the promise to be accountable to both the good of the people and to each other as GC members.

In privileging Indigenous voices and lived experience, as well as centering cultural knowledge, Council Elders will be actively involved in decision-making regarding all BC NEIHR policies, programs and

activities. Further, the purpose and role of the GC is to:

- take into account knowledge and expertise from across domains/directions of health and wellness (*physical, emotional, mental and spiritual*) and be consistent with Indigenous values of egalitarian decision-making;
- enhance the effectiveness of the BC NEIHR endeavours by contributing to outcomes and by ensuring leadership to meet changing circumstances; and
- provide guidance and advise on key research and policy decisions that are related to network membership, funding programs, capacity bridging/strengthening programs, partners and future funding.

BC NEIHR Governing Council (GC) Sub-Committees: The GC may establish, from time to time, permanent or temporary committees to assist the BC NEIHR team in its responsibilities. The GC will determine the mandate of these committees and appoint a Chairperson for each committee.

Governing Council Membership

The GC membership will strive to be actively inclusive. The GC membership will include a gender balanced representation of First Nations, Métis and, if possible, Inuit, including community, organizational, academic and geographic representation. The following examples of knowledge and experience will be considered during membership selection:

- Local and/or traditional knowledge of First Nations and Métis peoples of BC;
- Knowledge of and experience with provincial and/or national Indigenous health research; research ethics/law/human rights issues; and knowledge and/or front-line experiences with First Nations, Métis and Inuit related to health;
- Understanding of and adherence to the ethical protocols of local and territorial Peoples and/or the policies for research laid out in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2)*, with a particular focus on Chapter 9: *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis People of Canada*. Other self-determination protocols apply as relevant, including:
 - OCAP® (www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP) - a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC);
 - The Six Principles of Métis Health Research: https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/30591/1/PrinciplesofEthicalMetisResearch-descriptive_003.pdf and
 - Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ): <https://www.ccsa-nccah.ca/docs/health/FS-InuitQaujimagatuqangitWellnessNunavut-Tagalik-EN.pdf>
- Professional/technical expertise related specifically to Indigenous health research, Indigenous, decolonizing and community-based research fields;
- Knowledge and respect for the diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations and the historical context of policy in Canada;
- Knowledge and/or lived experience related to diverse abilities;
- Experience in proposal writing;
- Experience in knowledge translation tools and methods;
- Commitment to collaboration and cooperation;
- Ability to actively participate in discussions and effectively communicate ideas;
- Belief that respect is a cornerstone of all relationships.

Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct (see page six of this document) will guide the GC to ensure that outside interests or activities do not jeopardize a member's judgment, independence, integrity or competence in decision-making. The GC members will act in a conscientious and diligent manner and fulfill their obligations and responsibilities to the best of their ability and with integrity. All GC discussions and meetings will follow a circle format (whether in-person or online) where each person is given the space to share or not share. This method holds each member accountable.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict sometimes arises when diverse individuals come together to address a common goal. In recognition of that, the GC shall develop culturally respectful dispute resolution mechanisms, including the guidance of Elders, Talking Circles, and other First Nations, Métis and Inuit traditional practices. The GC is open to engaging with diverse and alternative means of dispute resolution and mediation, which will include finding a balance between Western and traditional Indigenous conflict resolution practices. We recognize that the First Nations Health Authority is one of the largest Indigenous health organizations in Canada and, therefore, hope to model and learn from some of their wise practices. Some key wise practices include:

- involvement of Elders;
- integrating and modelling 'consensus' and 'humility' as core concepts/values; when conflict arises, it may be necessary to review the meaning of these principles as a group in an open dialogue or circle format;
- in the case where group discussion is compromised due to open conflict during a meeting, it is the responsibility of other members to suspend the meeting and create a space of safety where members can share in a respectful way (i.e. circle format) and/or suspend the meeting to allow for members to seek guidance from Elders or support person before reconvening in a future date.

Governing Council Resources

The GC is supported with appropriate administrative and technical supports and resources primarily through the BC NEIHR Network Coordinator and Administrative Assistant.

Term of Appointment and Duration

The term of appointment is five (5) years, during which the GC will have representation from our key partners (*FNHA, MNBC, BCAAFC*) as well as representation from an Indigenous graduate student and other ICCOs, such as NCCIH and ISC. Each member is asked to formally name a proxy who is willing to attend meetings as needed and/or replace them in the event they transition out of their role. A proxy may also attend a meeting and have voting power when the member is acting co-chair (chair and acting co-chair are ex-officio during consensus processes). As well, any member who is leaving the GC may suggest to the group a different replacement. When it is in the best interests of the BC NEIHR, additional committee member(s) may be reappointed by the BC NEIHR Operations Team (OT)¹, with guidance and consent of the GC members.

Should a committee member wish to terminate their membership on the GC, as much notice as possible (at least three months) would be appreciated. A new appointment will be made by the BC NEIHR

¹) The Operations Team (OT) is responsible for implementation of BC NEIHR policies, programs and activities. The OT includes Dr. Charlotte Loppie (NPI), the Network Coordinator (Ms. Tara Erb), and PIs (Dr. Evan Adams, Dr. Jeff Reading, Dr. Nadine Caron, Dr. Margo Greenwood; Dr. Amanda Ward, Katie Hughes). With support from the Administrative Assistant, Indigenous Research Trainee/Facilitators (IRTFs) and partners, the OT will collaborate to fulfill the following responsibilities: policy implementation, program development and implementation, partnerships and funding development.

Operations Team based upon membership considerations as outlined above.

In circumstances where there is a breach of the Code of Conduct and/or Mission of the BC NEIHR, the situation will be reviewed by the OT and then respectfully presented to the GC as a whole. The GC will collectively decide upon the committee member's ongoing role. Should a new appointment be necessary, this will be made by the OT based upon membership considerations as outlined above.

Co-Chairs

The GC will be co-chaired by the NPI (Charlotte Loppie) and one Knowledge User (e.g. student, practitioner, policy-maker, educator, decision-maker, health care administrator, community leader, etc.) on an annual rotating basis. The GC Indigenous student representative will take on the role of co-chair for the first year.

The following represents the responsibilities of the Co-Chairs, within the context of the BC NEIHR:

- Ensure that agendas are set and that records of meetings are kept, including the attendance of GC members;
- Respectfully facilitate GC meetings;
- Provide regular reports to the GC;
- Provide supplementary updates as requested or required;
- Work closely with the BC NEIHR Network Coordinator and Administrative Assistant to support the GC;
- Ensure that all commitments made by and for the GC are carried out in a timely and respectful manner.

Administration

The Operations Team will provide the Chair and Co-chair with background information and updates on BC NEIHR activities quarterly or as requested by the GC.

Meetings

The GC's work will be conducted through email, video-conference and in-person meetings. The GC will meet 2-3 times a year by video-conference, with one annual in-person to be held in the lower mainland, ideally in a First Nations community or organization (e.g. Musqueam Community Centre). It is the responsibility of the Co-chair and Network Coordinator to schedule all meetings in advance. While we strive to book meetings several months in advance, we understand that, due to special circumstances and/or time sensitive matters, on occasion, impromptu meetings may be necessary.

Attendance

If a committee member is absent for two (2) consecutive meetings without notice or proxy representation, the Chair will reach out to the member to discuss their circumstances. If a member is absent for a full year, the remaining GC members will discuss as a group the possibility of replacement at its discretion following the procedure described above.

Standing Agenda

The agenda for all meetings of the GC will be developed by the Chairperson(s) and distributed to members prior to each meeting. GC Member input on the agenda will be requested and accepted prior to a meeting.

The meetings will proceed using a circle format, with priority given to Elder GC members. The order may be altered or suspended at any meeting by consensus of the GC members present.

The general order will be as follows:

- Opening/Prayer by all Elders present
- Welcome by the Chair/s
- Introductions (new members or guests)
- Notice of Regrets
- Opening remarks of the Chairperson(s), articulating the agenda for the meeting
- Review and approval of previous Meeting Record (i.e. minutes)
- Matters arising from the minutes
- Report of Chairperson(s)/Members
- Report back from GC sub-committees
- New Matters (list)
- Summary of Action Agreements
- Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting
- Closing by Elders
- Adjournment

Decision Making

- Council Elders will be actively involved in decision making regarding all BC NEIHR policies, programs and activities.
- All decisions of the GC will be through consensus.
- When a decision is required by a specified deadline, consensus will be reached with the sitting members of the GC at a meeting. Sitting members are those in attendance during a given discussion. When there is flexibility with deadlines, email will be used prior to finalization, giving all members of the GC an opportunity for comment.
- Should it be impossible for the GC to agree upon a final decision as a result of timeline or other circumstances demanding a decision: 1) a vote will be used with the decision carried by 75% in meeting or 2) members (including those who sent their regrets) will have one week to send in their decision after receipt of full minutes. No response after one (1) week will be considered de facto in agreement. Method used for decision-making will depend on the time sensitivity of the matter.
- Operations Team members and Co-Chairs are ex-officio during consensus processes.
- All final decisions will be communicated via e-mail and clearly identified as a record of decision.

Minutes/Record of Proceedings

A record of all GC meetings will be prepared and shared with the GC by the Operations Team in a timely fashion (within 2 weeks). Verbatim minutes are not required.

Action items will be imported into a sharable Actions Table excel sheet and dated. At a subsequent meeting, the Council will review and approve such meeting records.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the GC will be considered a living document and may be amended only through agreement of the GC as needs/priorities change and/or as gaps are indentified.

Authority

The GC has no authority or role beyond that expressed in these terms of reference and is not a legal or financial entity.

Governing Council Code of Conduct

The BC NEIHR pursues ethical and respectful conduct in all of its activities. The Governing Council (GC) provides guidance on the policies and strategic direction for the BC NEIHR. Members shall exercise the degree of care, diligence and skill that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in comparable circumstances.

We respectfully ask that BC NEIHR Governing Council members maintain:

- commitment to carry out their duties in the interests of the BC NEIHR. This commitment supersedes any conflicting loyalty such as that to advocacy or interest groups and membership on other Boards or staffs. It also supersedes the personal interest of any member acting as an individual or organizational stakeholder.
- respect for the confidentiality of BC NEIHR discussions and BC NEIHR materials.
- interactions and communication with staff that encourages open dialogue while avoiding authority over staff.
- accountability to exercise their powers and discharge their duties as part of the BC NEIHR team honestly and in good faith.
- commitment to effective decision-making and, once a decision has been made, to speak with one voice.
- an atmosphere conducive to the expression of different viewpoints and perspectives as a broad range of ideas increases the potential for more informed and effective decisions.
- respect each other's contribution to the discussion and encourage each other to present their views.
- an obligation to ensure that their opinions and views are expressed and to always support the final decisions of the BC NEIHR even if they do not agree with them.
- respectful behavior that does not undermine BC NEIHR decision-making.
- preparedness for meetings and be familiar with the BC NEIHR meeting materials that are pre-circulated.