## Abstract

**Traditional Indigenous Approaches to Healing and the modern welfare of Traditional Knowledge, Spirituality and Lands: A critical reflection on practices and policies taken from the Canadian Indigenous Example**

In order for traditional knowledge to be maintained and to develop, it has to be practiced. Traditional healing provides a vehicle for this to occur. In Canada, the spiritual revitalization of Indigenous communities and individuals often involves the use numerous components of traditional healing. These elements are reflected most clearly at the grassroots level, however, current Indigenous programs delivered by Indigenous and governmental agencies have made some accommodating efforts as well. Perhaps most importantly, traditional knowledge and Indigenous spirituality hinges on the maintenance and renewal of relationships to the land. Indigenous lands and bases and the environment as a whole remain vitally important to the practice of traditional healing.

A focus on Indigenous healing, when discussing Indigenous knowledge systems and spirituality, is paramount today due to the large scale suppression of Indigenous cultural expressions during the process of colonization. With respect to policy, there appears to be a historical progression of perception or attitude towards Indigenous traditional healing in Canada from one of disfavour to one favour. There are nevertheless continuing challenges for traditional healing. Mainstream perceptions and subsequent policy implementations sometimes still reflect attitudes that were formulated during the decline of traditional healing practice during colonization processes.

As a consequence the ability for particular communities to maintain and use their specific understandings of Indigenous knowledge continues encounter obstacles. Indigenous Knowledge systems are living entities and not relics of the past. Today, these knowledge systems are still greatly being applied to help Indigenous communities and Indigenous people recover from intergenerational pain and suffering endured during the colonization process. Future policy development and implementation should aim to support Indigenous peoples and communities when they decide to learn about, maintain and build upon the knowledge amassed by their ancestors.

## Acknowledgments

Julian Robbins recently returned to his studies and is currently a PhD Candidate in Indigenous Studies at Trent University. During a hiatus from his studies he was employed as a Research Officer with the First Nations Centre (FNC) of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) (August 2005-August 2009). Since August, 2005, Mr. Robbins focused on work at the FNC to support and communicate the role that traditional knowledge plays in First Nations health (through the inclusion of the perspectives of First Nations Elders and healers in the FNC’s research agendas). Julian Robbins is mixed race with Mi'kmaq ancestry. Jonathan Dewar is Director of Research at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and is a former director of the Métis Centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization. He has several years of First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-specific policy and research experience in a variety of areas in both government and non-government organizations and was the founding executive director of the Qaggiq Theatre Company in Iqaluit. Jonathan is completing a doctorate in Canadian Studies, specializing in the role of art and artists in healing and reconciliation. He is descended from Huron-Wendat, French, and Scottish Canadian grandparents. This article is dedicated to the Elders and traditional healers who continue to be of service to Indigenous communities and to the memory and teachings of Mi'kmaq healer David Gehue.

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Improving science through traditional knowledge Many of the impacts of climate change on Arctic ecosystems are reflected in traditional knowledge recounted by the indigenous and local communities who inhabit and manage the Arctic. In fact, many aspects of Arctic biodiversity are being monitored informally on a daily basis as an inherent part of traditional livelihoods and activities such as hunting, herding, farming and fishing. Box 1 provides an example of observations made by indigenous peoples regarding changes in the climate and their impact on local biodiversity and livelihood activities. It is necessary, therefore, to develop research models that value and integrate traditional knowledge, practices and innovations, with the approval of the knowledge holders. This could include The terms traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge and local knowledge generally refer to knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of regional, indigenous, or local communities. Traditional knowledge includes types of knowledge about traditional technologies of subsistence (e.g., tools and techniques for hunting or agriculture), midwifery, ethnobotany and ecological knowledge, traditional medicine, celestial navigation, ethnoastronomy, climate, and others. These kinds of knowledge Once traditional knowledge is removed from an indigenous community, the community loses control over the way in which that knowledge is used. In most cases, this system of knowledge evolved over many centuries and is unique to the indigenous peoples' customs, traditions, land and resources. Indigenous peoples have the right to protect their intellectual property, including the right to protect that property against its inappropriate use or exploitation. Similarly, indigenous peoples are seeking to protect their traditional knowledge and practices from commercial exploitation. As science and