



# Advancing Indigenous Health and Wellness in Canada

Drs. Jamaica Cass, Sarah  
Funnell and Roger Pilon



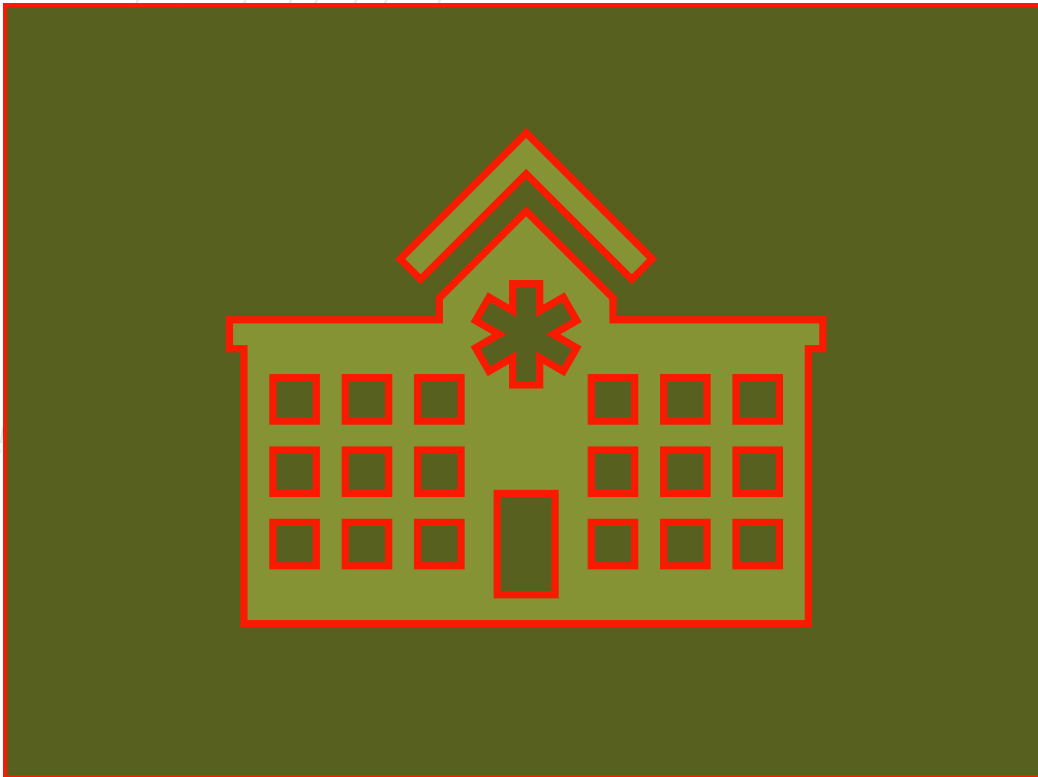
# Today's Talk

- **Team Introductions**
- **Context**
- **Framework**
- **Urgent & Systemic Issues in Indigenous Health**
- **Determinants of Health and Wellness**
- **Promising Frameworks and Solutions**
- **Cross-Cutting Determinants and Emerging Issues**
- **Recommendations**

## The Team

- **Dr. Jamaica Cass OOnt MD PhD CCFP DABOM**
- **Dr. Sarah Funnell MSc MD CCFP FRCPC**
- **Dr. Roger Pilon NP PhD CCNE**

# Context



- Health inequities are structural, not inevitable
- Colonial legislation created fragmented systems
- Reconciliation frameworks demand structural change
- Health is legally grounded in treaties and the Constitution
- Indigenous-led systems demonstrably improve outcomes
- Policy gap is implementation, not evidence

# The Framework

## **Guiding Principles & Ethical Foundations**

- Two-Eyed Seeing: blending Indigenous and Western knowledge
- OCAP® and Indigenous data sovereignty
- Self-determination
- Rejecting white saviourism and deficit framing

## **Analytical Frameworks**

- Social determinants of health focus
- FNHA (2014) framework
- NCCIH models
- Medicine Wheel and holistic wellness

## **Key Commitments**

- Centering Indigenous expertise
- Relational accountability
- Strengths-based systems analysis
- Honoring Indigenous uniqueness

## **Methodological Approach**

- Targeted literature review
- Policy and system scans
- Engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems

# Urgent & Systemic Issues in Indigenous Health

## **Financial & Geographic Barriers**

- High travel costs and limited insurance coverage
- Remote locations requiring long-distance travel

## **Systemic & Structural Challenges**

- Chronic underfunding of Indigenous health services
- Jurisdictional gaps between federal and provincial authorities
- Colonial legacies disrupting service access

## **Health Disparities**

- Higher rates of chronic illness, mental health conditions, and disabilities

## **Racism & Cultural Safety Issues**

- Discrimination and culturally unsafe care
- Racism leading to delayed or avoided treatment

## **Data Limitations**

- Insufficient reliable Indigenous health data
- Lack of longitudinal and community-specific data

# Determinants of Health and Wellness

## Distal

- Most profound determinants, political/social/economic contexts that influence intermediate and proximal
- Colonialism, Racism, Discrimination, Self-determination

## Intermediate

- Origins of proximal determinants
- Health care system, Educational system, Community infrastructure, Cultural continuity

## Proximal

- Direct impact on health
- Health behaviours, Employment, Income, Housing, Food security

# Promising Frameworks and Solutions

## **Indigenous Rights Based Framework: Self-determination & Indigenous Jurisdiction Over Health**

- Transition from colonial control
- Shift to self-governance and authority (eg. BC FNHA)

## **Alignment with UNDRIP and Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action**

- (UNDRIP), particularly Articles 3, 18, 21, 23, and 24
- TRC's Calls to Action (18-24)

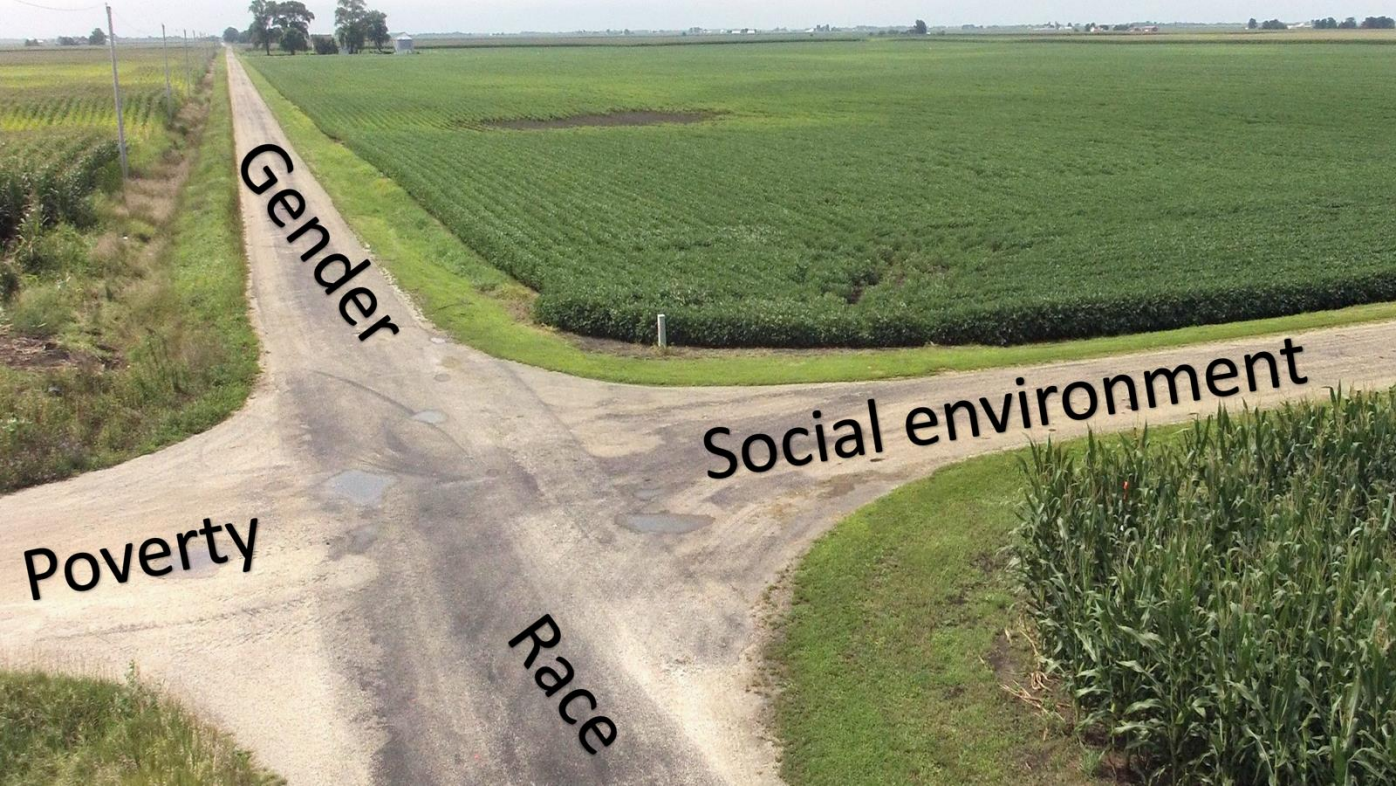
## **Culturally Safe and Anti Racist Care**

- Mandatory Anti Racism and Cultural Safety Training
- Respect for Traditional Healing and Knowledge Systems

## **Data Sovereignty & Shared Accountability**

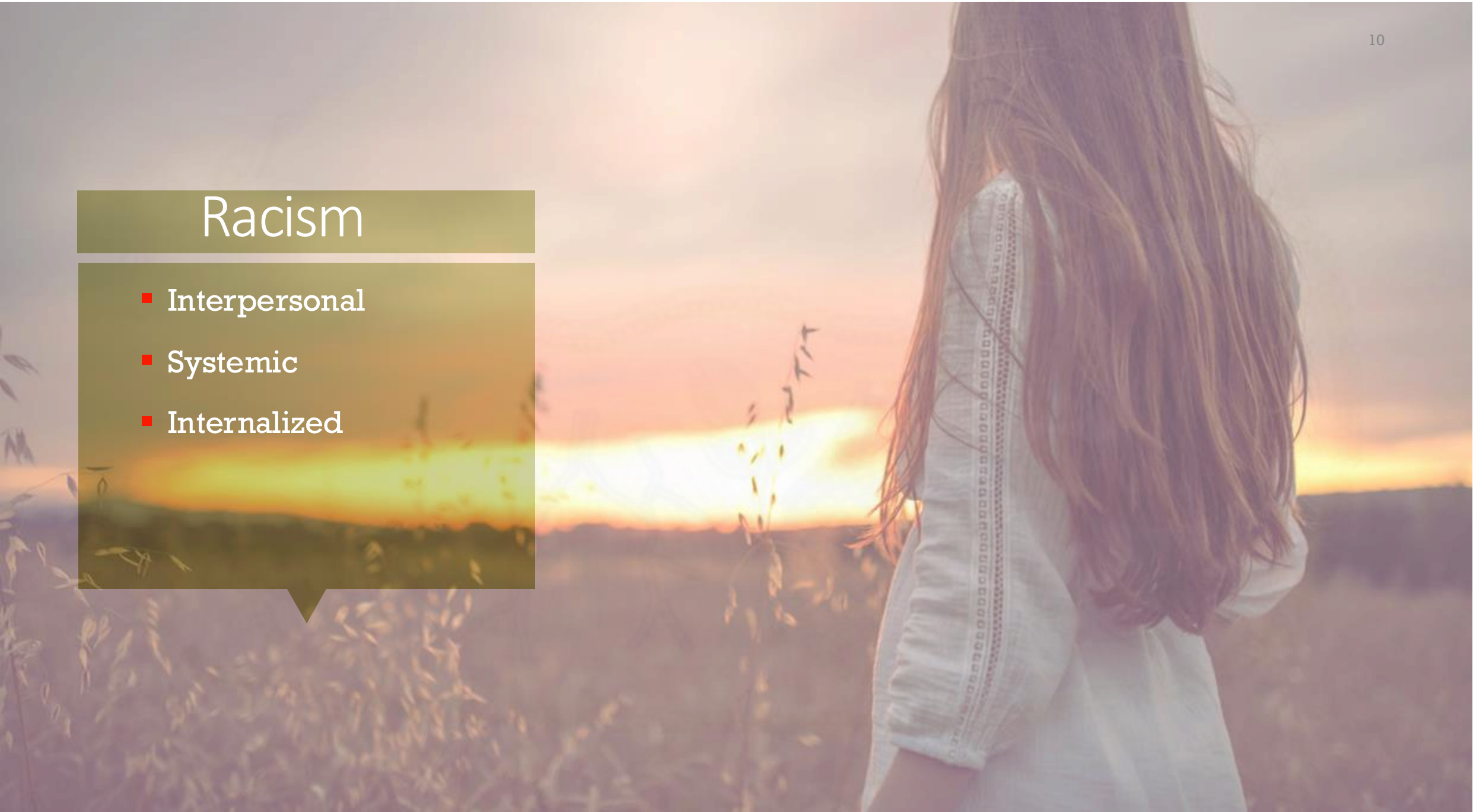
- Indigenous data sovereignty
- Shared accountability

Cross-Cutting  
Determinants and  
Emerging Issues



# Racism

- Interpersonal
- Systemic
- Internalized



Indigenous race

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graph TD; A[Indigenous race] --> B["Colonial practices (residential schools, 60s scoop, dog slaughter, etc)  
Systemic racism in healthcare, legal system and education  
Destruction of the natural environment"]; B --> C["Social and cultural disruption  
Intergenerational trauma  
Poverty  
Poor living conditions"]; C --> D[Health disparities];
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Poor living conditions

Health disparities



## Recommendations

- Implement previous recommendations
- Move from “program-based” to “rights-implemented” health policy
- Co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation
- Scale up Indigenous governance transfer and health authorities



# Recommendations

- Embed cultural safety and anti-racism as core patient-safety standards
- Make “no denial of services” operational across the lifespan
- Modernize NIHB
- Advance Indigenous data sovereignty and Indigenous-defined measures of wellness
- Shift investment toward prevention, land-based and cultural continuity interventions, and community capacity

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# Questions?