Executive Summary

Background

The San'yas Anti-Racism Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Program is an Indigenous-led, policy-driven, and systems-level educational intervention that fosters health equity and mitigates the effects of systemic racism experienced by Indigenous Peoples in the health system and other sectors.

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) collaborated with San'yas to assess Indigenous cultural safety (ICS) across the organization from September to December 2023 using the San'yas ICS Self-Assessment and ICS Organizational Assessment tools.

The Self-Assessment survey provides an opportunity for employees to reflect on their knowledge, awareness, and skills regarding foundational ICS concepts, principles, and practices. Informed by organizational theory, the Organizational Assessment is intended to assist healthcare organizations to evaluate the degree to which their programs and services are adhering to the core principles of cultural safety as defined by Indigenous Peoples with experience working in healthcare organizations, and Indigenous scholars.

Considerations for Interpretation

The findings of the San'yas ICS assessments are intended to provide a catalyst for dialogue and planning by identifying individual and organizational strengths, barriers, potential gaps in knowledge and understanding, and a measure of the commitment by OPH to become a culturally safer and humble organization. They are not intended to be an appraisal of the work related to OPH's Reconcili-ACTION Plan and/or strategic commitment to Reconciliation. While this context is helpful for the interpretation and analysis of responses to the assessments, San'yas can only provide an analysis of the findings from the assessments themselves.

Assessment Responses

Seven hundred and sixteen (716) OPH employees were invited to take the San'yas Self-Assessment survey online in September 2023. Three hundred and sixty-seven (367) employees completed the survey, achieving a 51% response rate. The Organizational Assessment was completed by eight (8) senior leaders representing service areas across the organization, resulting in a 100% response rate from the Senior Leadership Team.

Nearly half (49%) of those who completed the survey identified their primary role at OPH as front-line service delivery, 29% identified as working in administrative or support roles, 15% as managers or leaders, and 8% as other. Ninety-eight percent (98%) were full-time employees, and 57% have worked at OPH for five or more years. Four percent (4%) of respondents identified as Indigenous, 67% as White, 21% as non-Indigenous racialized, and 7% preferred not to answer.

Findings

The findings in the report are structured around the 11 action areas defined in the Organizational Assessment. Responses from the Self-Assessment are included under each of the action areas with the intention of making the interpretation of the results more accessible and to generate actionable areas for further consideration by OPH. A complete report will be available for discussion and interpretation by a group representing all OPH Service Areas, followed by tailored presentations and activities to share the results and generate ideas for priority actions across the organization.

Areas for Celebration

While there was considerable heterogeneity in the size and response rates from the different Service Areas, some organizational strengths were identified in the report. Here are a few examples, framed according to OPH's identified principles of reconciliation:

- **Respect**: The San'yas report acknowledges mechanisms already in place at OPH to promote ICS (e.g., Indigenous Health, Rights and Reconciliation team; existing Reconcili-ACTION Plan and culturally responsive evaluation framework; annual check-in meetings with Indigenous partners; annual updates to the Board of Health). Similarly, ICST is a mandatory requirement for all new members of the BOH and OPH Leadership Team. In general, the results indicate that most respondents believe they have a good understanding of ICS, appreciate leadership support to participate in ICS learning opportunities, and are committed to independent lifelong learning. Several employees mentioned their own actions and practices that support ICS and anti-racism initiatives. A few respondents shared instances where there was leading by example, with modeling of culturally safe practices and behaviours. Several comments highlighted OPH's improved data collection, analysis and knowledge exchange practices that adhere to OCAP® principles.

- **Relationship/Reciprocity**: Overall, there appears to be a clear understanding of the importance of partnering and collaborating with Indigenous communities when planning services. Building relationships with Indigenous partners is seen as critical to ensure culturally safer services. Some OPH programs have initiated engagement with Indigenous organizations. Several respondents mentioned the collaborations and partnerships in administering COVID vaccinations as true partnerships that demonstrated how OPH can modify public health services for greater impact. Others mentioned designated liaison roles that facilitated dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous partners.

- **Reflection**: A few employees described time set aside to reflect on ICS at quarterly team meetings. Other employees talked about becoming more self-aware of potentially harmful and inappropriate language used in communications and an awareness of recommended ICS resources to mitigate this risk.

Opportunities and Recommended Next Steps

Based on an analysis of the assessment responses and suggestions made by OPH employees, the San'yas consultants recommended that OPH consider several '*Areas for Future Curiosity*'. The Indigenous Health, Rights and Reconciliation team will work with OPH programs/teams to determine a plan for a phased implementation of recommended 'next steps' that are operationally feasible. The following table includes a snapshot of some of these recommendations:

AREA	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Shared Understanding	- **Enhance ICS learning opportunities** for OPH employees, including content related to OPH's definition of ICS; Canada's colonial history; the unique position of Indigenous Peoples in Canada as the original peoples of this land (as distinct from racialized settlers who may also experience racism and discrimination); and trauma-informed practice. - **Land acknowledgements** - Provide guidance on the purpose of land acknowledgements, including clearly articulated organizational expectations and how they contribute to ICS and reconciliation. Have each branch/team create a personalized land acknowledgement that includes a commitment to action.

AREA	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Culturally Safe Practices and Protocols	• **Protocols** – Provide OPH employees with resources and opportunities to learn about the importance of local cultural protocols (e.g., [City of Ottawa-Anishinabe Algonquin Nation Civic and Cultural Protocol](#)); implement the appropriate protocols when engaging with Indigenous Elders, communities, and organizations (e.g., offering of tobacco ties, honoraria, gifting); provide resources that support employee efforts to learn about the [Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) Principles](#).
Service Planning	• **Operational planning** – Systematic integration of ICS as a consideration in operational planning templates - i.e., all teams/programs are expected to consider an Indigenous lens (ICS) when planning services/initiatives, including the development of culturally-appropriate/adapted resources for Indigenous community members and organizations (e.g., preferred format, graphics, language, traditional foods); make referrals to local Indigenous organizations as appropriate; and when recruiting.
Racism and Discrimination Policies	• **Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination** – Clearly articulate that it is everyone's role to address racism; enhance understanding/awareness about OPH and City anti-racism policies; continue to facilitate access to ICS learning opportunities that include a practical focus on addressing Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in the workplace. • **Health system transformation** - Work with health system partners to improve ICS and to meaningfully address Indigenous-specific racism across all local health organizations (e.g., [Share Your Story](#) Community of Practice).
Communication	• **Resource adaptation** – Arrange training for teams and/or facilitate the development of resources that provide practical guidance to support the integration of an Indigenous lens in all public-facing OPH documents and resources. When possible, review resources with Indigenous partners to ensure they are accurate before promoting them in the community.
Community Relations	• **Indigenous community engagement** – Consider creating an Indigenous advisory committee that includes Elders and youth; facilitate knowledge sharing opportunities for OPH employees and Indigenous community members; enhance employee awareness about local Indigenous organizations and the services they offer.
Evaluation & Research	• **OPH evaluations** – Systematically integrate and monitor ICS considerations in all OPH program evaluation (e.g., include in evaluation templates and as part of ethical considerations). • **OPH Strategy** – Monitor/report on Reconciliation as a commitment within the OPH Strategy (e.g., performance measures).
Training & Orientation	• **ICS Training (ICST)** – Encourage all OPH employees to participate in ICS learning opportunities; organize experiential ICS learning opportunities and knowledge exchange activities for employees.
Indigenous Recruitment & Retention	• **Indigenous-specific recruitment/hiring practices** – Consult Indigenous employees and partners re: successful Indigenous-specific recruitment/hiring/retention strategies and implement for OPH employment competitions; connect/collaborate with post-secondary schools that recruit Indigenous students; include Indigenous employees on interview panels.
Leadership	• **Accountability** - Re-enforce accountabilities for ICS across all Service Areas. • **Leadership development** - Encourage, support, and facilitate leadership development for Indigenous employees.
Funding, Resources Allocation & Sustainability	• **Funding** – Ensure that sustainable funding and organizational support are available for ICST initiatives; continue to advocate for and support requests for Indigenous-specific funding to address community-identified priorities.