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## Intersections of health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3: A Métis-guided, participatory study

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID	bmjopen-2024-089503
Article Type:	Original research
Date Submitted by the Author:	14-Jun-2024
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Keywords:	MENTAL HEALTH, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, Health Equity

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## Intersections of health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)

### Region 3: A Métis-guided, participatory study

#### Abstract

**Objectives:** The purpose of our research was to understand intersections between health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3.

**Design:** This Métis-guided, participatory research study builds on our previous patient-oriented community-based study where we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with leaders, Elders, and community members to explore health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the MNA Region 3.

**Setting:** Métis people are affected by historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, including the residential school experience, impacting how Métis people relate to themselves, to others, and to their culture. Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada, and our research is based in the most densely populated region.

**Participants:** 101 surveys were completed between September and November 2021, via Qualtrics; 25 participants who completed surveys participated in sharing circle data analysis groups in January 2022, via Zoom.

**Results:** Six overarching themes emerged from our participatory data analysis: (1) searching (searching for connection, educating ourselves and others); (2) interconnectedness (interconnectedness and holistic health, family and community relationships); (3) colonization and systems (navigating systems and Métis identity, colonization and ongoing impacts on health); (4) traditional practices and teachings (reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit, engaging in traditional practices and teachings); (5) spiritual and religious practices (living for something more, self-determination with spirituality and religion, centering spirituality in

health); and (6) relationship with Métis identity (identity conflict and tensions, identity and self-concept).

**Conclusions:** Our research findings have implications for MNA Region 3 program and policy decisions, and future research with Métis communities across Alberta. We recommend more research regarding ongoing impacts of colonization, connections and understanding about Métis identity, health, spirituality, religion, and wellbeing, ongoing impacts of colonization on health, and the effects of intergenerational trauma in the broader MNA, and across Canada.

### Strengths and limitations of this study

- To date, ours is the only existing Métis-guided, participatory research exploring Métis health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the localized context in Alberta, or anywhere else in Canada.
- Patient-oriented, community-based research is a necessarily ethical way to engage with Indigenous people.
- We were limited from engaging in our planned face-to-face data collection and analysis by the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore completed these steps of the method using Qualtrics and Zoom.
- Our sample may have been larger, and our findings more diverse if we had been able to visit each Métis Nation of Alberta Region in person at community-held events.

### Introduction

Globally, effects of colonization are devastating and profound, shredding the fabric of traditional societies,<sup>1</sup> in Canada, colonization efforts have aimed to assimilate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people into dominant European settler systems and ways of life. Métis people account for over a third of Indigenous people in Canada;<sup>2</sup> Métis refers to a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Indigenous people, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation.<sup>3</sup> Emerging as a people through 17th century fur trade networks and the subsequent relationships that formed between Indigenous people and European fur traders, Métis people developed their collective identity with distinct cultural and social features over time, which continue to thrive and evolve today.<sup>4</sup> Since the existence of Métis

communities, the Canadian government has brought about assimilative and racist colonial policies to allow for white settlement and development on Indigenous land.<sup>5-7</sup> These policies and processes have had destructive impacts on Métis people's identity and ways of life, including their relationship and connection to land, governance, and kinship systems.<sup>8</sup> Christianity was promoted and often forced on Indigenous people and played a marked role in carrying out assimilative efforts, with similar and unique impacts across Indigenous groups in Canada.<sup>5,9</sup> The missionary impulse, the residential school system, and the child welfare system influenced Métis people's relationship with culture, identity, and spirituality, along with how they relate to religion and spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

Although Métis people are of European and First Nations origins, Métis communities are diverse in cultural orientations. Early descriptions of Métis people included the Nehiyawak (Cree), and apihtawikosisan, meaning "half sons" or "half people,"<sup>10</sup> "the independent ones,"<sup>10</sup> aka e-akimiht, meaning "not counted in the treaties,"<sup>5</sup> and "the people who own themselves."<sup>11</sup> Fiola<sup>5</sup> notes Métis people adhering to Indigenous Spiritualism, Catholicism, Anglicanism, Methodism, or Presbyterianism, with Michif-speaking Catholics viewing Indigenous Spiritualism most favorably due to parallels between folk Catholicism of voyageur fathers and mothers' Ojibwa and Cree traditions. Prefontaine, et al.<sup>12</sup> noted few Métis people may participate in Indigenous spirituality currently, however throughout history, many Métis people were connected to and embraced it.

At the basis of this system is Kitchi Manitou or the "Great Spirit" or "Creator" who created the universe, the spirit world, the land, plants, animals, and humans. In this spiritual system, it is vital to share, give and receive in order to keep the body, spirit, mind and emotions balanced. The traditional Métis worldview promoted living with the

land, not exploiting it. The use of the land and its resources was that of a collective stewardship between a responsible community of resource users. In Indigenous languages, there is no such thing as inanimate objects – all things have spirits. Indeed, flora, fauna, and humans were provided with spirits, emotions, minds, and bodies, which made them equals and therefore worthy of respect... Christianity has long been an integral component in the spiritual lives of the Métis.<sup>12</sup>

Payment<sup>13</sup> noted the syncretic nature of Métis spirituality incorporating elements from parent cultures, believing in the Great Spirit and God, as well as spirit helpers.

Historically, Métis and other Indigenous peoples’ conversion to Catholicism was complicated; many hesitated to accept the Christian message because of fundamental differences and fear of the substitution of values, traditions, and morality according to western Europeans.<sup>14</sup> According to Huel<sup>14</sup> motives for Indigenous peoples’ conversions were complex, frequently rooted in ethnic survival in the face of social, cultural, economic, and health challenges. Huel<sup>14</sup> described current impacts of Christianity on Indigenous people, by continued participation in Catholicism, and the syncretism evident in the annual Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta, Canada pilgrimages. However, the lack of Indigenous clergy in the Catholic church, the exclusion of rich cultural traditions of Indigenous people in the missionary effort and attempts at assimilation were significant.<sup>14</sup> According to Stonechild and Starblanket<sup>15</sup> there was conflict on contact regarding spiritual issues between Europeans and Indigenous people, assimilationist policies forced some Indigenous people to move away from traditional spiritual beliefs. By the early 1800’s, Métis people were a strong political and economic force in the Red River area, and had integrated ceremonies and other elements of Indigenous spirituality.<sup>15</sup>

As part of colonial efforts, historical impacts of Christianization have shaped Métis people's lives, directly and indirectly impacting health, spirituality, and wellbeing. Métis people are affected by historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, including the residential school experience, impacting how Métis people relate to themselves, to others, and to their culture.<sup>16</sup> Between 1883 and 1996, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were placed in residential schools, which were set up to displace parental and community involvement in children's lives, with ongoing adverse effects for surviving families and communities, affecting individual and collective health.<sup>17</sup> Métis children comprised 9% of children in residential schools, and adverse effects were compounded by the Sixties Scoop, where thousands of Indigenous children were taken into foster care, and adopted by mostly non-Indigenous families.<sup>18-21</sup> Ongoing intergenerational trauma is evident in the current foster care system; although only 7% of children in Canada are Indigenous, they comprise 52% of children under age 14 in foster care.<sup>22</sup> Indigenous children in foster care are among the most vulnerable children in Canada.<sup>23</sup>

While many people who worked in the schools were inspired by an impulse to "save" and to "civilize" Canada's Aboriginal people, government had other motives. To gain control of Aboriginal land, the Canadian government signed treaties it did not respect, took over land without making treaties, and unilaterally passed laws that controlled nearly every aspect of Aboriginal life. No other Canadians were subject to this level of regulation. No word better describes these policies than "colonialism." The schools were central to the colonization of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.<sup>24</sup>

Past collective trauma can affect current individual, family, and community health. Impacts of residential school on former attendees and subsequent generations include poorer physical health, increased chronic and infectious disease, mental distress, depression, addiction, substance





health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the localized context in Alberta, or anywhere else in Canada. All authors but the first and last are members of the MNA Region 3.

## Methods

Our Métis-guided, participatory research builds on our previous patient-oriented community-based study,<sup>1</sup> where we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with leaders, Elders, and community members to explore health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the MNA Region 3. Identified were priorities of passing on Métis traditions/culture to the younger generation, blending different cultural and spiritual practices, and cultural immersion/traditional knowledge/learning in community. Connection to Métis ancestry, to community, to land, and spirituality presented opportunities for individual, family, and community healing.<sup>2</sup> We used the qualitative structured survey developed in our previous study for the current research.

Two philosophical perspectives guided our current research: (1) Indigenous ways of knowing,<sup>30 31</sup> and (2) participatory action research (PAR), a philosophy as well as a method, influenced by Lewin<sup>32</sup> (emigrating in 1933 due to the Nazi's treatment of Jews and academics), who questioned the permanence of social change without community involvement, identifying the harmful effects of colonization. Founded by Freire<sup>33</sup> and Borda,<sup>34</sup> PAR emphasizes social transformation through placing those to whom the research matters most at the centre of it. Kovach<sup>35</sup> describes a continuum of ways to access information, and that Indigenous research is less researcher-dependent and more relational. In our initial inquiry about the possibility of a research study with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder, they identified exploring some aspect of health, spirituality, and wellbeing would be meaningful and helpful to the community.

Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada, where > 114,375 self-identified and 42,000 registered Métis people live within six regions, along with > 5,000 people living on eight

Métis Settlements (Canada's only designated Métis land bases, comprising over 1.25 million acres of land).<sup>36</sup> Métis settlements are governed by the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) and there is a distinct divide between the MNA and the MSGC. Our research focused on registered Métis people within the MNA Region 3, with 14,000 registered members. The six regions in the MNA include Métis Locals, each Local having an elected President and Vice-President. The locals facilitate networking among smaller communities within the region and serve to support local interests. Our previous community-based study took place in the largest of 12 communities (Calgary) in the MNA Region 3, where 6,300 members reside.

Originally planning to distribute the survey face-to-face across the MNA Region 3, we were inhibited by the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore a Qualtrics<sup>37</sup> survey link was emailed by the MNA Region 3 Head Office and posted on their Facebook page for members to access. The Qualtrics survey was open September 2021 – November 2021, 101 surveys were completed, and 25 of the participants also volunteered to take part in data analysis via Zoom, through one of four research sharing circle groups held weekly in January 2022.

Following the closure of the survey and de-identification of the data from Qualtrics surveys into word documents, we engaged in discussion of the survey data and theme development using a participatory method.<sup>38</sup> ■ Sharing circle participants were provided with the de-identified word documents and given opportunity to identify the data holding the most meaning to them, discuss why, and work together to develop themes. These circle sharing groups were attended and facilitated by our research team and an MNA Region 3 Elder, who provided guidance and perspective to each sharing circle, aligning with Kovach,<sup>35</sup> providing space, time, and an environment for sharing ideas. Conversations focused on participant's understandings of the survey data that had been shared with them, and research team members took notes during

each sharing circle, adding ideas and themes to a whiteboard within Zoom as participants shared ideas. Conversations were not focused on personal stories, but on survey data, however, there were natural opportunities for participants to share their personal connection to the data and their stories as well.

Following completion of the sharing circle groups, three of the research team members reviewed and discussed the notes from each of sharing circle to determine themes that emerged. Informed by PAR methods, the researchers thematically coded the working group notes, determining theme names that reflected working group themes. After all survey data was reviewed and thematically coded under these themes, the coded data was reviewed. Three members of the research team organized 13 sub-themes under six overarching themes, including the identification of components of sub-themes. Many research studies occur with agendas set outside the community rather than with Indigenous people.<sup>40</sup> Our research originated with community leaders identifying a topic of importance, co-developing a qualitative structured survey with community leaders, an Elder, and community members, and working closely to centre their priorities and perspectives throughout the research process.

According to the Tri-Council policy statement on ethical conduct for research involving humans research with Indigenous people must arise from within the community, and include building trusting, reciprocal relationships with respect for persons, collaboration, and engagement between researchers, community members, and community leaders.<sup>41</sup> We built trusting, reciprocal relationships within the MNA Region 3, collaborating at each step in our research, developing a research proposal in conjunction with local MNA Region 3 leadership and received ethics approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (REB: 18-0433). The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, et al.<sup>41</sup> also details ethical

guidelines, which we adhered to: (1) respect for persons (mindful of the need for free, informed, and ongoing consent, and intergenerational interconnections with nature); (2) concern for welfare (mindful of physical, social, economic, and cultural environments including communities); and (3) justice (engagement with participants prior to recruiting and then maintaining over course of the research can enhance ethical practice and quality of research, promote trust, and identify mutually beneficial research goals). We were also guided by the National Aboriginal Health Organization<sup>42</sup> principles of ethical Métis research: (1) Building reciprocal relationships through community engagement, acceptance, and involvement; (2) Respecting individual and collective practices and protocols; (3) Recognizing individual and community diversity; (4) Researching with outcomes of relevance meaningful to the community in mind; and (5) Understanding relevant Métis history including straddled worldviews.

Results

Six overarching themes emerged from our participatory data analysis: (1) searching (searching for connection, educating ourselves and others); (2) interconnectedness (interconnectedness and holistic health, family and community relationships); (3) colonization and systems (navigating systems and Métis identity, colonization and ongoing impacts on health); (4) traditional practices and teachings (reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit, engaging in traditional practices and teachings); (5) spiritual and religious practices (living for something more, self-determination with spirituality and religion, centering spirituality in health); and (6) relationship with Métis identity (identity conflict and tensions, identity and self-concept). See Table 1.

Table 1. Overarching themes and subthemes.

Searching  
 Searching for Connection  
 Educating Ourselves and Others

Interconnectedness  
 Interconnectedness and Holistic Health  
 Family and Community Relationships

Colonization and Systems  
 Navigating Systems and Métis Identity  
 Colonization and Ongoing Impacts on Health

Traditional Practices and Teachings  
 Reconnecting with and Practicing Métis Ways that Fit  
 Engaging in Traditional Practices and Teachings

Spiritual and Religious Practices  
 Living for Something More  
 Self-Determination with Spirituality and Religion  
 Centering Spirituality in Health

Relationship with Métis Identity  
 Identity Conflict and Tensions  
 Identity and Self-Concept

We co-designed and shared an illustration of the findings at an MNA – Region 3 mixer, where MNA Region 3 leaders, members, and Elders enthusiastically verified. See Figure 1. Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3.

Insert Figure 1 here

## Searching

### *Searching for connection*

Ongoing searching for connection included wanting to connect, or connect more deeply to Métis identity and culture, and to a higher power, sometimes referred to by participants as Creator, God, nature, or Mother Earth. Interconnections between physical health, mental health, colonialism, intergenerational trauma, and spirituality were evident throughout the findings.

I'm having to learn about what it means to be Métis from people outside my family. I didn't grow up knowing what this meant or really anything about it. Because of this lack of knowledge and experience, right now my Métis identity is a source of conflict — I feel pride and curiosity, but also pain. I feel as an outsider and a fraud, which is hurtful. I see how this identity could bring connection to culture and nature, but I am just starting out. I feel I have a cultural wound that I'm shying away from, which leads to pain, anxiety, and almost a rejection of spirituality. (Participant 19)

Historically, Métis people have been hidden or erased, not fully fitting into European or Indigenous classifications.<sup>18</sup>

Some were searching for connection to spirituality, to address disconnection from spirituality, for belonging, to address disconnection from community, and to connect to Métis family and community. Desired outcomes of searching included connecting to Indigenous ways of being, connecting to learning opportunities, connecting to teachings on Indigenous spirituality, connecting to their Indigenous ancestry, connecting to culture, connecting with oneself, connection to Indigenous cultures and beliefs, connecting to Métis ways of life in the bush, and connecting to and claiming Métis identity.

*Educating ourselves and others*

Part of a search for connection included educating, after experiencing childhoods where for some, Métis teachings were minimal.

I'm learning and trying to reclaim our ways of knowing. Slowly my grandmother is starting to share more but it takes time. I feel like I don't know enough and it negatively impacts the way I view myself in the community. Knowledge that has been passed down makes me feel proud and connected in my spirituality, but the process is



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long and hard and can challenge sense of identity and can have negative impacts on wellbeing. (Participant 71)

Educating ourselves and others included Métis-specific teachings, spirituality, Indigenous spirituality, Métis culture, smudging, praying, ceremony, their roots, knowing who they are and where they come from as Métis people, Indigenous culture, Métis ways, plant medicines and the impacts of intergenerational trauma. Educating referred to informal and relational learning by receiving teachings from Elders or family members, but also referred to accessing classes and courses. It also sometimes included higher education or institutionalized learning beyond Métis-specific education. Many had Elders in their lives to approach and learn from regularly.

Connection to kin gives me a larger pool of support that family alone does not. I am able to go to nature and the land to find a safe calming space to communicate with the creator. My Elders help guide me and provide insight and teachings on how to live. (Participant 93)

## Interconnectedness

### *Interconnectedness and holistic health*

Interconnectedness and a holistic model of health, incorporating the entire person, was directly and indirectly referenced as a key framework for understanding health, wellbeing and spirituality. Participant 65 wrote, “I see health, wellbeing, and spirituality as being interconnected with all areas affecting one another in strengthening and weakening depending on how each area is affected. It is a balancing act.” Throughout the findings, spirituality and a connection to something more was self-defined, however, “following the circle of life and the four directions, it is clear that all is connected” (Participant 5).



Métis identity was also indicated to be a strong factor in holistic health and wellbeing. Some participants had a strong sense of how their Métis identity influenced their health and wellbeing, where others hoped to better understand the connection between Métis identity and health. Interconnectedness with nature (land, the outdoors, and Mother Earth) and individual interconnectedness (between mind, body, emotions and spirit), frequently included the spiritual. Everyday practice and incorporation of spirituality was a vital part of holistic health and wellbeing for Métis participants. Spiritual practices were described as individual as well as communal.

I embrace all sides of my culture and practice spiritual healing in my home by smudging, burning sweet grass. I also take part in sweats when I can, as well as taking part in healing circles and talking to Elders. (Participant 38)

***Family and community relationships***

Relationships with family and community members, as well as building relationships with Elders, was an evident part of interconnectedness and social connection, supporting health, wellbeing, and positive health outcomes. For many, maintaining regular social connection was particularly difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. Métis participants valued family as a source of support, particularly for mental health. Learning about their Métis history and prioritizing family was a source of strength. Participant 70 wrote, "I look forward to new opportunities to connect to the Métis community in my city, the land, and to continue practicing our cultural traditions like beading, gathering, and ceremony."

A priority for many people in consideration of the role of interconnectedness in their health, wellbeing and spirituality was connection with Elders. In the words of Participant 97, "the

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more traditional ceremonies I take part in and Elders I speak to, the more I grow both physically and spiritually.”

When a new medical professional finds out my Métis identity they automatically assume that I have a lot of medical conditions or addictions! But I also think my Métis identity allows me to connect and speak with Elders and spirituality will improve my wellbeing.

(Participant 50)

Participant 97 wrote, "I grew up Catholic. My family still practices some of that. But I attend speaking circles, rely on Elders and knowledge to support me in my life.”

## Colonization and systems

### *Navigating systems and Métis identity*

Many participants openly shared their experiences of discrimination or fear of being discriminated against, with a particular focus on interactions with health care professionals and the health care system. Participant 85 described their Métis identity making a difference, “depending on the situation, I experience discrimination in health centres for my appearance and don’t like going to health centres for that reason.” Discrimination and racism was identified by many participants as interfering with health.

Myself and my Métis relatives have struggles with heart issues, diabetes, and mental illnesses (schizophrenia, PTSD, anxiety, etc.). I myself am white passing so I have yet to experience discrimination in the health system but my non-white passing relatives have (expected to be alcoholics, harassed for prescribed medicine at pharmacies, etc). This affects their desire to access services and distrust the system. (Participant 47)

Navigating health care services is impacted by being white or non-white passing; traditional healing and western medicine are difficult to merge. These effects also spill over into the workplace for many.

Most people spend their days at work. Workplaces, I feel, have a major impact on health and wellbeing. How does my Métis identity play out there? Can I say I'm Métis without prejudice? I made a workplace change 2 years ago for my mental health and I found that the change to a more liberal work environment helped my mental health because in an environment that supported me in many ways. The pay isn't great but my health seems much better. (Participant 43)

Culturally safe policies and practices promoted and centered with incorporation of the TRC Calls to Action are critical for Métis health and wellbeing within systems. As suggested by Participant 84, as the TRC is implemented and policies and practices are developed, there should be a recognition of the impact on Métis people who participate in terms of their health, spirituality, and wellbeing, with a specific emphasis on the "emotional labour and responsibilities."

One participant referred to challenges navigating academia, the justice system, and supports and services, including even Métis-specific services.

Completing graduate studies impacted my health negatively due to the presence of a racist academic in my sphere. Fighting the racist and misogynist justice system related to domestic abuse and the rights to safety for my baby also impacted my health negatively. (Participant 91).

Participant 65 wrote, "internalized racism from systemic issues in society has affected my wellbeing especially when hearing and being witness to racism and negative perceptions [in] society... however it has also given me strength when learning what it means to be Métis."

External and internal challenges exist with experiences of racism and discrimination, along with opportunities for developing resiliency and strength through claiming and walking in Métis identity.

### ***Colonization and ongoing impacts on health***

Ongoing effects of colonization have significantly impacted the health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people. Participant 104 described, “my loss of identity not knowing my culture or Métis spirituality affected my sense of connection to my people, Spirit and value of my physical health.” Participant 79 wrote, “So much was lost and forgotten because being Métis used to not be socially acceptable.”

I have a lot of relatives and ancestors who struggle/struggled with addictions and mental illnesses. As I learned more of this and my own mental illnesses began to show, I worked hard to avoid alcohol, drugs, as well as to seek therapy. I also began to acknowledge and understand the systems and history that created addiction in my family and use this knowledge to protect myself from these systems and work to return to traditional ways. This had helped me to understand that my mental health issues are not entirely my fault, and that by taking care of my mind, body, and spirit I can help alleviate my issues and help to heal further generations. (Participant 47)

Another aspect of colonization is the role of religion and mistreatment by religious institutions and staff.

It affects my mental well-being more than anything, as trying to understand why the Indigenous people were treated so poorly from the beginning. And how people are okay with using their religion as a scapegoat for their choices of mistreatment and or

murder. And it really gives you an understanding of how humans treat humans for selfish reasons. (Participant 74)

Varying relationships to the church and organized religion were expressed.

I used to be Catholic which I totally reject now especially since learning more about the atrocities my family and others has experienced because of the church. I am a very new learner about our Michif “ways” of ceremonies. Of course it is connected at a deep level in the choices I make every day. (Participant 54).

Emphasized throughout was the importance of recognizing, understanding, and addressing personal and intergenerational trauma. Participant 7 wrote, “Removed myself from toxic people and situations; began my road to sobriety so I could heal myself from the trauma of my life and past generations.”

Understanding who I am and where my family comes from is very important. Trauma from past generations is imprinting in my DNA and passed down through many generations. Knowing that helps me deal with the things that come up in life. (Participant 81)

Recognizing the effects of intergenerational trauma and taking steps to mitigate them, Participant 83 described engaging in “physical activity, healthy food choices by mainly eating wild game protein, choosing to be a non-smoker, stress reduction techniques, recognizing intergenerational traumas and most importantly living a strong spiritual way of life.”

For many, colonization resulted in disconnection from Indigenous spirituality. I was raised very Catholic with no discussion of traditional spiritual practices. As I got older I questioned those beliefs and began exploring spiritual connection to land and how those worked together. I smudge in the morning and say my prayers. My prayers

still come through the way I'd almost pray in church, but now I use a different method I suppose. Smudge grounds and centers me. (Participant 71)

Participant 96 wrote, “in our household we are accepting of all religion and spiritually and are always trying to learn more without belonging to anything. This affects our wellbeing because I feel we have lost information, culture and understanding.” Reclaiming religion and spirituality as a way of addressing disconnection from Métis culture and traditional spirituality included “re-learning what was lost during colonization and still practicing the religion I choose today takes some juggling but it helps me be more comfortable with myself.”

### **Traditional practices and teachings**

#### ***Reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit***

Finding and practicing Métis ways fit differently for each individual, however, smudging was frequently identified as the way to reconnect with and practice traditional ways. Connection with Métis ways, or reconnection, knowing inside all along about being Métis, were described throughout.

I think it's so important to gain teachings from Elders or family members. If young, urban Indigenous youth don't have access to traditional knowledge, then I think they should be provided this support in schools or Aboriginal friendship centres. Without spirituality, it feels like a part of your self is missing. (Participant 16)

### **Engaging in traditional practices and teachings**

Engaging in traditional practices and teachings occurs on an individual and collective level. Participant 36 observed, “I find that the Métis people tend to forget where the Indigenous part of them comes from, and we forget to celebrate that side. We focus on the non-Indigenous side and celebrate that more often.” Embracing and living out traditions and practices were

informed by each Métis person’s unique relationship with local Indigenous people, personal history, family history and relationship to Métis ways. Distinguishing between Indigenous, First Nation, or Métis practices and traditions (such as smudging, Indigenous spirituality, prayer, being on the land, and ceremony), was not frequent.

Participant 91 wrote, “My wellbeing is intimately connected to practicing my culture and Indigenous spirituality, being involved in my community and being on the land.” Participant 16 noted, “I smudge regularly and I try to eat a traditional diet filled with meat and whole foods. I was raised Catholic however in my teens I rejected the faith and solely followed my father's Indigenous spiritual teachings.” Participant 50 related, "I have nothing to do with Christianity. I follow First Nations spiritual practices.” Another noted, “I wish I could harvest more medicines and have more knowledge in that area” (Participant 88).

Smudging and prayer were consistent practices. Smudging was “to help with stress” (Participant 9). Participant 16 emphasized, “maintain a healthy diet, follow traditional Indigenous teachings and spirituality as taught by my [Métis] father, and keep an active lifestyle through outdoor activities.”

Connecting to land was referred to as part of religion or spirituality, as a part of mental health, as a part of physical activity, and as a place of refuge, belonging, and holiness, supporting health, wellbeing, connection, healing, and wholeness.

My Métis identity affects my health and well-being as I feel drawn to the outdoors, I feel that nature is a holy place for me. While I believe in god I feel closest to her when [in] nature and I can smell the earth. (Participant 33)



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Participant 46 identified, "mindfulness, time to connect to nature and the creator, realizing the simplicity of walking/hiking to provide physical benefits as well as opportunity to connect to nature."

## **Spiritual and religious practices**

### ***Living for something more***

Living for something more included participants' sense of purpose, meaning and personal values. Participant 46 identified, "we can't be physically healthy without mental well-being and a connection to something larger than ourselves." Participant 112 wrote, "worked hard, believed in a power greater than me." Participant 35 summarized, "I go to Catholic church but also respect Métis cultural beliefs."

### ***Self-determination with spirituality and religion***

Self-determination with spirituality and religion included self-definition and self-leadership, shaped by colonization, including religious missions in historical Métis communities. Participants strongly conveyed spiritual and religious practices as personal; Participant 56 wrote, "the way a person prays should always be personal and meaningful to a greater power." "There is not one way or dogma" (Participant 80). Captured in the words of Participant 80 "... there is not one way or dogma." Rather, participants described embracing, rejecting or blending Christianity with traditional Indigenous spirituality.

My spirituality is kinda a mix of being raised Catholic, resenting that, becoming more in tune with Indigenous ways of knowing in regards to spirituality, and a whole mix of what I chose to believe and put into practice. These certain practices and having spirituality in general help me be mindful, which affects my wellbeing. (Participant 46)

### ***Centering spirituality in health***



The blending of Christianity with Métis beliefs was frequently mentioned, "re-learning what was lost during colonization and still practicing the religion I choose today takes some juggling but it helps me be more comfortable with myself" (Participant 81). Participant 4 wrote, "I definitely blend Indigenous spirituality with a Christian theology. I try to see Soteriology with Indigenous eyes."

**Relationship with Métis identity**

***Identity conflict and tensions***

A common thread indicated Métis people are connected, however, there is no one way to be Métis, "are unique and can't be defined by one set way" (Participant 12). Participant 67 wrote about, "deconstructing what [they have] adopted and deciding what is important to [their] wellbeing as a Métis woman." Participants described inner conflict and tension with identity as a Métis person, along with tensions between Métis identity and self-concept. Self-concept was expressed as central to health and wellbeing in childhood and adulthood, "so much was lost and forgotten because being Métis used to not be socially acceptable" (Participant 79).

***Identity and self-concept***

Historically, Métis people hid their identity where possible due to racism, discrimination, marginalization, and fear of being unable to maintain housing and jobs. This hiding led to disconnection from Métis identity and culture. Participant 89 wrote, "I [grew] up not knowing my culture and I am learning everyday now." "Understanding who I am and where my family comes from is very important. Trauma from past generations is imprinting in my DNA and passed down through many generations. Knowing that helps me deal with the things that come up in life" (Participant 81).

Still trying to figure it all out. I am VERY proud to be a Michif woman and to have my children and grandkids now recognized. As an older woman I feel like a baby in this regard though and it is difficult for my cousins/relatives who've not taken this step to understand why belonging & participating in Métis community matters.

(Participant 54)

The impact of accepting oneself as a Métis person and feeling proud is evident in the words of Participant 61, who shared "I am proud to be Métis. I think its a sense of community. Everyone has welcomed me and helped me learn about my family and heritage."

## Discussion

Our research identified ongoing adverse effects of colonization across the MNA Region 3 community, particularly in relation to how cultural identity informs health, spirituality, and wellbeing. Colonial policies and processes (both historical and contemporary aspects of colonization that discriminate against Indigenous people in Canada) have resulted in adverse impacts on health determinants and outcomes in comparison to non-Indigenous populations across Canada.<sup>43-47</sup> Participants in our research identified searching for connection to Métis identity and culture, trying to fill a void, educating themselves and others about who they are and where they come from. Throughout the literature, participation in traditional activities, environmental and cultural connections, Indigenous language learning, and spirituality are cornerstones of an Indigenous health.<sup>47-50</sup>

In our research, interconnectedness and holistic health included the land and spirituality, along with family and community relationships, and relationships with Elders. Some literature exists exploring the relationship between spirituality and health for Indigenous people, emphasizing consideration of spirituality in health policies and programming.<sup>51-53</sup> Our research

identified colonization’s effect on a societal level – and ongoing impacts on health. Recent events affecting processes of reconciliation for Métis people include unearthing of Indigenous children’s bodies across former residential schools across Canada.<sup>54-56</sup> Survivors of the residential school system have clearly spoken about ongoing intergenerational effects.<sup>57-60</sup>

Pope Francis travelled to Maskwacis and Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, on July 25, 2022, and offered an apology for the evil committed in residential schools against Indigenous people.<sup>61</sup> Words are not the only significant part of apology, it also includes the spirit behind them; the emphasis of colonization as a common enemy implied responsibility outside the church, and the church should not determine acceptance of an apology but should demonstrate deep sorrow and amendment for wrongs.<sup>62</sup> On July 26, 2022, Pope Francis engaged in a penitential pilgrimage to the Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage National Historic Site of Canada – a site sacred to many Indigenous people, with yearly pilgrimages (since 1889) to the healing waters in honour of Saint Anne, mother of Mary, grandmother of Jesus.<sup>63</sup> On Pope Francis’ return to Rome he described affirming local Canadian Catholic communities to engage with Indigenous culture, languages, and worldviews, and the pain he felt when the elderly in Iqaluit described losing their children, however, each survivor will need to make their own decision about accepting the apology – concrete action is still required.<sup>64</sup> In order to follow-up on Pope Francis’ desire for restoration, more than \$30 million dollars will be needed by the Catholic church for taking concrete action in cultural healing, which will include diminishing the percentage of Indigenous people in Canadian prisons, decrease in the number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, decline of children in the foster care system, increases of youth graduating from secondary and post-secondary schools, special initiatives fostering cultural and spiritual flourishing.<sup>65</sup>

In our research, reconnection with traditional practices and teachings along with spiritual and religious practices were identified as essential to individual and community wellbeing. Traditional Indigenous spirituality was targeted by assimilative efforts, with learning and development impeded, and resultant deterioration of the earth and human interrelationships.<sup>15</sup> Relationality and spiritual development is essential across diverse Indigenous communities, including Métis communities; Indigenous knowledge systems and ethical guidelines promote and generate all life, not just human life, in an intergenerational manner, centering the land.<sup>66</sup> In contrast to colonial views of land as capital, are Indigenous views of land as sacred and sustaining through connection to ancestors, medicines, and teachings.<sup>67</sup> Prefontaine, et al.<sup>12</sup> described maintaining and respecting the spiritual connections between people and other living things through renewing mind, body, emotion, and spirit.

Study limitations include a virtual sample from the MNA Region 3 only, not all the regions across Alberta. Our sample may have been larger, and our findings more diverse if the Covid-19 pandemic had not prevented us from visiting each MNA Region 3 community in person. However, our research findings have implications for MNA Region 3 program and policy decisions, and future research with Métis communities across Alberta. More research is recommended regarding ongoing impacts of colonization, connections, and understanding about Métis identity, health, spirituality, religion, and wellbeing, and the intergenerational effects of trauma in the broader MNA, and across Canada.

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Figure 1. Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3

132x134mm (300 x 300 DPI)

# BMJ Open

## How do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3? A Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID	bmjopen-2024-089503.R1
Article Type:	Original research
Date Submitted by the Author:	27-Nov-2024
Complete List of Authors:	Ginn, Carla; University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing Ginn, Craig; University of Calgary, Department of Classics and Religion Barnabe, Cheryl; University of Calgary Cumming School of Medicine, Departments of Medicine and Community Health Sciences Dumont/Vaness Bergum, Doreen; Elder - Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3 Gentes, Judy; Regional President - Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3 Tatrallyay, Priscilla; University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing - Graduate Student
<b>Primary Subject Heading</b>:	Qualitative research
Secondary Subject Heading:	Patient-centred medicine, Qualitative research, Research methods, Global health, Mental health
Keywords:	MENTAL HEALTH, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, Health Equity, Community-Based Participatory Research, Health Services Accessibility, Patient Participation

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## How do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3? A Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study

### Abstract

**Objectives:** The purpose of our research was to understand intersections between health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3.

**Design:** This Métis-guided, community-based, participatory research builds on our previous patient-oriented community-based study where we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with leaders, Elders, and community members to explore health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the MNA Region 3.

**Setting:** Métis people are affected by historical and contemporary impacts of colonization. This includes the residential school experience, impacting how Métis people relate to themselves, to others, and to their culture. Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada, and our research is based in the most densely populated region.

**Participants:** 101 surveys were completed between September and November 2021, via Qualtrics. Twenty-five participants who completed surveys participated in community-based participatory research sharing circle data analysis groups in January 2022, via Zoom.

**Results:** Six overarching themes were developed in our participatory data analysis: (1) searching, (2) interconnectedness, (3) colonization and systems, (4) traditional practices and teachings, (5) spiritual and religious practices, and (6) relationship with Métis identity.

**Conclusions:** We discovered multiple intersections between health, spirituality, and wellbeing within the MNA Region 3. Our results indicate that the impacts of colonization for Métis people are poorly understood. More research is needed to understand the ongoing impacts of



communities, the Canadian government has brought about assimilative and racist colonial policies to allow for white settlement and development on Indigenous land.<sup>5-7</sup> These policies and processes have had destructive impacts on Métis people's identity and ways of life, including their relationship and connection to land, governance, and kinship systems.<sup>8</sup> Christianity was promoted and often forced on Indigenous people and played a marked role in carrying out assimilative efforts, with similar and unique impacts across Indigenous groups in Canada.<sup>5,9</sup> The missionary impulse, the residential school system, and the child welfare system influenced Métis people's relationship with culture, identity, and spirituality, along with how they relate to religion and spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Cultural and spiritual orientations***

Although Métis people are of European and First Nations origins, Métis communities are diverse in cultural orientations. Early descriptions of Métis people included the Nehiyawak (Cree), and apihtawikosisan, meaning half sons or half people,<sup>10</sup> the independent ones,<sup>10</sup> aka e-akimiht, meaning not counted in the treaties,<sup>5</sup> and the people who own themselves.<sup>11</sup> Fiola<sup>5</sup> notes Métis people adhering to Indigenous Spiritualism, Catholicism, Anglicanism, Methodism, or Presbyterianism. In addition, Michif-speaking Catholics viewed Indigenous Spiritualism most favorably due to parallels between folk Catholicism of voyageur fathers and mothers' Ojibwa and Cree traditions.<sup>5</sup> Prefontaine, et al.<sup>12</sup> noted today few Métis people may participate in Indigenous spirituality, however throughout history, many Métis people were connected to and embraced it.

At the basis of this system is Kitchi Manitou or the "Great Spirit" or "Creator" who created the universe, the spirit world, the land, plants, animals, and humans. In this spiritual system, it is vital to share, give and receive in order to keep the body, spirit,



mind and emotions balanced. The traditional Métis worldview promoted living with the land, not exploiting it. The use of the land and its resources was that of a collective stewardship between a responsible community of resource users. In Indigenous languages, there is no such thing as inanimate objects – all things have spirits. Indeed, flora, fauna, and humans were provided with spirits, emotions, minds, and bodies, which made them equals and therefore worthy of respect... Christianity has long been an integral component in the spiritual lives of the Métis. <sup>12</sup> (pp. 2,3)

Payment <sup>13</sup> noted the syncretic nature of Métis spirituality incorporating elements from parent cultures, believing in the Great Spirit and God, as well as spirit helpers.

*Assimilationist policies*

Historically, Métis and other Indigenous peoples’ conversion to Catholicism was complicated. Many hesitated to accept the Christian message because of fundamental differences and fear of the substitution of values, traditions, and morality according to western Europeans. <sup>14</sup> According to Huel <sup>14</sup> motives for Indigenous peoples’ conversions were complex, frequently rooted in ethnic survival in the face of social, cultural, economic, and health challenges. Huel <sup>14</sup> described current impacts of Christianity on Indigenous people, by continued participation in Catholicism, and the syncretism evident in the annual Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta pilgrimages. However, the lack of Indigenous clergy in the Catholic church, the exclusion of rich cultural traditions of Indigenous people in the missionary effort, and attempts at assimilation were significant. <sup>14</sup> According to Stonechild and Starblanket <sup>15</sup> there was conflict on contact regarding spiritual issues between Europeans and Indigenous people, and assimilationist policies forced some Indigenous people to move away from traditional spiritual beliefs. By the early 1800’s, Métis people had integrated ceremonies and other elements of Indigenous spirituality. <sup>15</sup>

### ***Residential schools***

As part of colonialism, historical effects of Christianization have shaped Métis people's lives, directly and indirectly impacting health, spirituality, and wellbeing. Métis people are affected by historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, including the residential school experience, impacting how Métis people relate to themselves, to others, and to their culture.<sup>16</sup> Between 1883 and 1996, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were placed in residential schools, which were set up to displace parental and community involvement in children's lives. There are ongoing adverse effects of residential schools for surviving families and communities, affecting individual and collective health.<sup>17</sup> While many people who worked in the schools were inspired by an impulse to "save" and to "civilize" Canada's Aboriginal people, government had other motives. To gain control of Aboriginal land, the Canadian government signed treaties it did not respect, took over land without making treaties, and unilaterally passed laws that controlled nearly every aspect of Aboriginal life. No other Canadians were subject to this level of regulation; these schools were central to the colonization of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Ongoing intergenerational trauma***

Métis children comprised 9% of children in residential schools, and adverse effects were compounded by the Sixties Scoop, where thousands of Indigenous children were taken into foster care, adopted by mostly non-Indigenous families.<sup>19-22</sup> Ongoing intergenerational trauma is evident in today's foster care system; although only 7% of children in Canada are Indigenous, they comprise 52% of children under age 14 in foster care.<sup>23</sup> Indigenous children in foster care are among the most vulnerable children in Canada.<sup>24</sup>

Past collective trauma can affect current individual, family, and community health. Impacts of residential school on former attendees and subsequent generations include poorer



physical health, increased chronic and infectious disease, mental distress, depression, addiction, substance misuse, increased stress, and suicidal behaviour.<sup>25 26</sup> These historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, including the residential school experience, have also affected how Métis people relate to themselves, relate to others, and relate to their culture. Colonialism resulted in Indigenous people disassociating from their culture and assimilating into the dominant culture. Of note, understanding how people conceive of themselves and how they relate to the world around them, is fundamental to health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Part of addressing the health and wellbeing of Métis people is to understand more about historical collective identity and peoplehood, shaping how Métis people see themselves today. Métis spirituality and religion is not easily categorizable, and there is a gap in the literature exploring Métis relationships with traditional Indigenous spirituality.<sup>12</sup> This history and the understanding of Métis people as colonized, with complex religious and spiritual experiences over time provides important context for our research.

**Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action**

In 2015, the Canadian federal government made a commitment to implementing the Calls to Action that were provided in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).<sup>17</sup> Along with the implementation of the TRC’s call to close health outcome gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, McNally and Martin<sup>27</sup> highlighted the role of research in contributing to the development of policies and programs that aim to increase health equity for Indigenous people in Canada. Particularly for Métis people, there is a lack of Métis-guided research advancing the development of local understandings of health and wellbeing that addresses cultural, social, and historical aspects of health in local contexts.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of our research was to understand intersections between health, spirituality, and

wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3. To date, ours is the only existing research exploring Métis health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the localized context in Alberta, or anywhere else in Canada. Our research team members (co-authors) are members of the MNA Region 3 except two. The first non-Indigenous author is the spouse (42+ years) of the second author, who is Métis – and their children and grandchildren members of the Métis Nation of Alberta. The last author is connected to the Indigenous community through her Indigenous children. Our research question was, how do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3?

## Methods

Our Métis-guided, community-based, participatory research builds on our previous patient-oriented community-based study.<sup>29</sup> In our previous study, we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with leaders, Elders, and community members to explore health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the MNA Region 3.<sup>29</sup> Identified were priorities of passing on Métis traditions/culture to the younger generation, blending different cultural and spiritual practices, and cultural immersion/traditional knowledge/learning in community. Connection to Métis ancestry, to community, to land, and spirituality presented opportunities for individual, family, and community healing.<sup>29</sup> In our current study, we used the qualitative structured survey we co-developed in our previous research.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Aboriginal People's Health describes the essential place of engaging in community-based, participatory research with Indigenous communities.<sup>30</sup> Our research team engaged in community-based, participatory research within the MNA Region 3 using these CIHR guidelines: Engaging in community-based, participatory research with Indigenous communities includes the following responsibilities: (1)

understanding and respecting Indigenous world views; (2) respecting the jurisdiction of the community over the conduct of the research; (3) providing the option of a participatory-research approach; (4) obtaining community leader consent, and also individual community member consent; (5) respecting anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality concerns; (6) addressing the use of the community's cultural and sacred knowledge; (7) maintaining the individual and community rights to cultural knowledge, sacred knowledge, and cultural practices and traditions; (8) understanding and communicating individual and community intellectual property rights; (9) benefitting the community as well as the researcher; (10) fostering capacity of community members including participation in research processes; (11) learning about and applying Indigenous cultural protocols relevant to each community-and engaging in ongoing, accessible, and understandable communication with the community; (12) recognizing and respecting the rights of individuals and the community in data ownership; (13) viewing biological samples as on loan to the researcher; (14) including the individual and community in interpretation of data and the review of conclusions to ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation; (15) providing opportunity for the individual and community to decide how contributions to the research project should be acknowledged.<sup>31</sup>

Two philosophical perspectives guided our current research, Indigenous ways of knowing, and participatory action research (PAR), a philosophy as well as a method. Indigenous ways of knowing encompasses a wholistic worldview, a belief in the connectedness of everything, with transmission from generation to generation.<sup>32 33 34</sup> Kovach<sup>34</sup> describes a continuum of ways to access information, and that Indigenous research is less researcher-dependent and more relational. PAR was influenced by Lewin<sup>35</sup> (emigrating in 1933 due to the Nazi's treatment of Jews and academics), who questioned the permanence of social change

without community involvement, identifying the harmful effects of colonization. Founded by Freire<sup>36</sup> and Borda<sup>37</sup>, PAR emphasizes social transformation through placing those to whom the research matters most at the centre of it.

### ***Ethical Approval***

According to the Tri-Council policy statement on ethical conduct for research involving humans research with Indigenous people must arise from within the community, and include building trusting, reciprocal relationships with respect for persons, collaboration, and engagement between researchers, community members, and community leaders.<sup>30</sup> We built trusting, reciprocal relationships within the MNA Region 3, collaborating at each step in our research, developing a research proposal in conjunction with local MNA Region 3 leadership and received ethics approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (REB: 18-0433). The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, et al.<sup>30</sup> also details ethical guidelines, which we adhered to: (1) respect for persons (mindful of the need for free, informed, and ongoing consent, and intergenerational interconnections with nature); (2) concern for welfare (mindful of physical, social, economic, and cultural environments including communities); and (3) justice (engagement with participants prior to recruiting and then maintaining over course of the research can enhance ethical practice and quality of research, promote trust, and identify mutually beneficial research goals). We were also guided by the National Aboriginal Health Organization<sup>38</sup> principles of ethical Métis research: (1) Building reciprocal relationships through community engagement, acceptance, and involvement; (2) Respecting individual and collective practices and protocols; (3) Recognizing individual and community diversity; (4) Researching with outcomes of relevance meaningful to the community in mind; and (5) Understanding relevant Métis history including straddled worldviews.

**Participants**

Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada, where > 114,375 self-identified and 42,000 registered Métis people live within six regions, along with > 5,000 people living on eight Métis Settlements (Canada’s only designated Métis land bases, comprising over 1.25 million acres of land).<sup>39</sup> Métis settlements are governed by the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) and there is a distinct divide between the MNA and the MSGC. Our research focused on registered Métis people within the MNA Region 3, with 14,000 registered members. The six regions in the MNA include Métis Locals, each Local having an elected President and Vice-President. The locals facilitate networking among smaller communities within the region and serve to support local interests. Our previous community-based study took place in the largest of 12 communities (Calgary) in the MNA Region 3, where 6,300 members reside. Inquiring about the possibility of a research study with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder, they identified exploring some aspect of health, spirituality, and wellbeing would be meaningful and helpful to the community.

**Funding**

This research was supported by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant – PA: Patient-Oriented Research [175397, 2020].

**Patient and Public involvement**

Our research team has years of ongoing trusting, reciprocal relationships within the MNA Region 3. When inquiring about a research study with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder, they identified exploring health, spirituality, and wellbeing as a meaningful topic that would be helpful to the community. Collaborating at each step in our earlier research, we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder. With continued

collaboration in this current research, we distributed this co-developed qualitative structured survey electronically. We engaged in research sharing circle groups for data analysis and theme development.

### ***Qualitative structured survey***

We used the qualitative structured survey developed in our previous study for the current research (see survey attached as a supplementary file). The survey contains checkboxes with areas of interest and space for narrative writing. Originally planning to distribute the survey face-to-face across the MNA Region 3, we were inhibited by the Covid-19 pandemic. A Qualtrics<sup>40</sup> survey link was emailed by the MNA Region 3 Head Office and posted on their Facebook page for MNA Region 3 members to access. The Qualtrics survey was open September 2021 – November 2021, 116 participants initiated surveys, of which 15 were incomplete (87% completion rate). 101 participants aged 19-77 years (mean 40.76 yr, standard deviation 11.87 yr) completed surveys. Following de-identification of the narrative data from Qualtrics surveys into word documents, we engaged in research sharing circle data analysis groups for participatory coding and theme development. Each participant completing the survey was given a \$50.00 gift card (and an additional \$50.00 gift card if participating in data analysis).

### ***Research sharing circle data analysis***

Twenty-five participants who completed surveys volunteered to take part in data analysis through attending one of four research circle sharing groups. Research sharing circle data analysis groups were held via Zoom weekly in January 2022, and were approximately 90 minutes long. Research sharing circles provide space, time, and an environment for sharing ideas, and are fitting for research with Indigenous people.<sup>34</sup> Our research sharing circle data analysis groups were attended and facilitated by our research team and an MNA Region 3 Elder,

who provided guidance and perspective to each research sharing circle. Our participatory coding and theme development was modeled after previous studies.<sup>29 41-43</sup> Research sharing circle data analysis group participants were provided with de-identified word documents of narrative survey data approximately two weeks ahead of each sharing circle. During each research sharing circle data analysis groups, participants were given opportunity to identify the data holding the most meaning to them, discuss why, and work together to develop themes. Conversations focused on participants' understandings of the survey data that had been shared with them, and research team members took notes during each research sharing circle data analysis group, adding ideas for themes to a whiteboard within Zoom as participants shared them. More detail about the data analysis and theme development process can be found in the notes and whiteboard themes attached as supplementary files. Conversations were not focused on personal stories, but on survey data, however, there were natural opportunities for participants to share their personal connection to the data and their stories as well. The research sharing circle data analysis groups did not generate new narrative data, however, they contributed to the participatory data analyses process, building trust, reciprocity, collaboration, and engagement among the research team, community members, and leaders.

Following completion of the research sharing circle data analysis groups, the research team members reviewed and discussed the notes from each of the sharing circles to confirm themes that were developed about the data. Informed by PAR methods, the research team members condensed some of the themes identified in the research sharing circle data analysis groups, placing them under six overarching themes. These themes were member-checked with the MNA Region 3 community members at community mixers. We co-designed and shared an



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illustration of the findings at an MNA Region 3 mixer, where MNA Region 3 leaders, members, and Elders enthusiastically verified it.

## Results

Six overarching themes were developed in a participatory manner in our research sharing circle data analysis groups: (1) searching (searching for connection, educating ourselves and others); (2) interconnectedness (interconnectedness and holistic health, family and community relationships); (3) colonization and systems (navigating systems and Métis identity, colonization and ongoing impacts on health); (4) traditional practices and teachings (reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit, engaging in traditional practices and teachings); (5) spiritual and religious practices (living for something more, self-determination with spirituality and religion, centering spirituality in health); and (6) relationship with Métis identity (identity conflict and tensions, identity and self-concept). See Figure 1. Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3.

Insert Figure 1 here

## Searching

### *Searching for connection*

Ongoing searching for connection included wanting to connect, or connect more deeply to Métis identity and culture, and to a higher power, sometimes referred to by participants as Creator, God, nature, or Mother Earth. For Participant 74, it was broader:

Your health and well-being are definitely connected, if you are not a healthy person there's a good chance that things in your life are harder to do or to live with. As for the spirit, I don't believe in spirits or spirituality. I believe we are all of the universe, you are made of space dust you go back to space dust. And I suppose I find comfort in that.

Interconnections between physical health, mental health, colonialism, intergenerational trauma, and spirituality were evident throughout the findings.

I'm having to learn about what it means to be Métis from people outside my family. I didn't grow up knowing what this meant or really anything about it. Because of this lack of knowledge and experience, right now my Métis identity is a source of conflict — I feel pride and curiosity, but also pain. I feel as an outsider and a fraud, which is hurtful. I see how this identity could bring connection to culture and nature, but I am just starting out. I feel I have a cultural wound that I'm shying away from, which leads to pain, anxiety, and almost a rejection of spirituality. (Participant 19)

Historically, Métis people have been hidden or erased, not fully fitting into European or Indigenous classifications.<sup>19</sup> Some were searching for connection to spirituality, to address disconnection from spirituality, for belonging, to address disconnection from community, and to connect to Métis family and community. Desired outcomes of searching included connecting to: (1) Indigenous ways of being, (2) learning opportunities, (3) teachings on Indigenous spirituality, (4) Indigenous ancestry, (5) culture, (6) oneself, (7) Indigenous cultures and beliefs, (8) Métis ways of life in the bush, and (9) Métis identity.

*Educating ourselves and others*

Part of a search for connection included educating themselves about being Métis, after experiencing childhoods where Métis teachings were minimal.

I'm learning and trying to reclaim our ways of knowing. Slowly my grandmother is starting to share more but it takes time. I feel like I don't know enough and it negatively impacts the way I view myself in the community. Knowledge that has been passed down makes me feel proud and connected in my spirituality, but the process is long and hard

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and can challenge sense of identity and can have negative impacts on wellbeing.

(Participant 71)

For some, educating others about being Métis included educating medical professionals.

I smudge and pray twice a day on a daily basis. I've participated in ceremonies including sweats, and I monthly do my own River ceremony for guidance and peace from the Creator and my Ancestors. I'm teaching my children as much as I can learn about our culture and we have come to love traditional practices...I've shared openly with my specialists my desire to incorporate a blend of traditional healing and western medicine. My specialists are very supportive and open. My new family doctor who replaced my previous doctor of 19 years is not, and recently refused to work with me and my specialists on prescribing pain medication for a diagnosed condition having me end up in emergency and admitted from a pain crisis that had my body go in shock with my blood pressure 70/30 and oxygen 86%. I'm so frustrated and scared that I won't find a family doctor that will work with me and my girls again in a healthy collaboration in my health. My youngest daughter has also had emergency surgery these past few months and is still experiencing daily symptoms of vomiting and can't get help...even though the family doctor has seen her but hasn't looked at her wholistic health. Our people need help in accessing services and advocacy. (Participant 48)

Educating referred to informal and relational learning by receiving teachings from Elders or family members, but also referred to accessing classes and courses. Many had Elders in their lives to approach and learn from regularly.

Connection to kin gives me a larger pool of support that family alone does not. I am able to go to nature and the land to find a safe calming space to communicate with the creator. My Elders help guide me and provide insight and teachings on how to live.

(Participant 93)

Educating also sometimes included higher education or institutionalized learning beyond Métis-specific education. Educating ourselves and others included more understanding about: (1) Métis-specific teachings, (2) spirituality, (3) Indigenous spirituality, (4) Métis culture and ways, (5) smudging, (6) praying, (7) ceremony, (8) their roots (knowing who they are and where they come from as Métis people), (9) Indigenous culture, (10) plant medicines, and (11) the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

**Interconnectedness**

***Interconnectedness and holistic health***

Interconnectedness and a holistic model of health, incorporating the entire person, was directly and indirectly referenced as a key framework for understanding health, wellbeing, and spirituality. Participant 65 wrote, “I see health, wellbeing, and spirituality as being interconnected with all areas affecting one another in strengthening and weakening depending on how each area is affected. It is a balancing act.” Throughout the findings, spirituality, and a connection to something more was self-defined.

Following the circle of life and the four directions, it is clear that all is connected.

Personally, I have found that lack of spirituality is of great concern because if a person is not grounded it can affect the mental health of the individual leading to a decline in health which then affects the overall wellbeing of the person. Spirituality is not just a belief in a higher power or creator but also a belief in yourself because you know that you

will be safe and protected. (Participant 5).

Métis identity was also indicated to be a strong factor in holistic health and wellbeing. Some participants had a strong sense of how their Métis identity influenced their health and wellbeing, where others hoped to better understand the connection between Métis identity and health. Interconnectedness with nature (land, the outdoors, and Mother Earth) and individual interconnectedness (between mind, body, emotions, and spirit), frequently included the spiritual. Everyday practice and incorporation of spirituality was a vital part of holistic health and wellbeing for Métis participants. Spiritual practices were described as individual as well as communal.

I embrace all sides of my culture and practice spiritual healing in my home by smudging, burning sweet grass. I also take part in sweats when I can, as well as taking part in healing circles and talking to Elders. (Participant 38)

For Métis people, engaging in ceremonies such as smudging, pipe, sweat lodge, sun dance, and sacred lodges can create connection with creation; however there is resistance in communities to these practices due to the influence of residential schools, Christianity, and government policy.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Family and community relationships***

Relationships with family and community members, as well as building relationships with Elders, was an evident part of interconnectedness and social connection, supporting health, wellbeing, and positive health outcomes. Family and community relationships included understanding how they were situated in it, particularly in urban settings.

I think that access to teachings and community is important for our nation[s] wellbeing. Many of us in urban settings and away from homelands are disconnected and lacking that guidance and connection. Especially if we don't "look" Métis it can negatively affect our

view of ourselves. Where do we belong within the community? Lack of connection to community, teachings, language etc. all impacts health and well being of our nation.

(Participant 71)

For many, maintaining regular social connection was particularly difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. Métis participants valued family as a source of support, particularly for mental health. Learning about their Métis history and prioritizing family was a source of strength. Participant 70 wrote, "I look forward to new opportunities to connect to the Métis community in my city, the land, and to continue practicing our cultural traditions like beading, gathering, and ceremony."

A priority for many people when considering the role of interconnectedness in health, wellbeing, and spirituality was connection with Elders. In the words of Participant 97, "the more traditional ceremonies I take part in and Elders I speak to, the more I grow both physically and spiritually." For some participants, this connection with Elders increased wellbeing:

When a new medical professional finds out my Métis identity they automatically assume that I have a lot of medical conditions or addictions! But I also think my Métis identity allows me to connect and speak with Elders and spirituality will improve my wellbeing.

(Participant 50)

Participant 97 wrote, "I grew up Catholic. My family still practices some of that. But I attend speaking circles, rely on Elders and knowledge to support me in my life." For some, finding a mix between Catholicism and more traditional beliefs was facilitated by family and community relationships.

**Colonization and systems**

*Navigating systems and Métis identity*

Many participants openly shared their experiences of discrimination or fear of being discriminated against, with a particular focus on interactions with health care professionals and the health care system. Participant 85 described their Métis identity making a difference, “depending on the situation, I experience discrimination in health centres for my appearance and don’t like going to health centres for that reason.” Discrimination and racism was identified by many participants as interfering with health.

Myself and my Métis relatives have struggles with heart issues, diabetes, and mental illnesses (schizophrenia, PTSD, anxiety, etc.). I myself am white passing so I have yet to experience discrimination in the health system but my non-white passing relatives have (expected to be alcoholics, harassed for prescribed medicine at pharmacies, etc.). This affects their desire to access services and distrust the system. (Participant 47)

Navigating health care services is impacted by being white or non-white passing; traditional healing and western medicine are difficult to merge. Some of the participants also had difficulties navigating the preceding in their places of work.

Most people spend their days at work. Workplaces, I feel, have a major impact on health and wellbeing. How does my Métis identity play out there? Can I say I’m Métis without prejudice? I made a workplace change 2 years ago for my mental health and I found that the change to a more liberal work environment helped my mental health because in an environment that supported me in many ways. The pay isn’t great but my health seems much better. (Participant 43)

Culturally safe policies and practices promoted and centered with incorporation of the TRC Calls to Action are critical for Métis health and wellbeing within systems. As the TRC is implemented and policies and practices are developed, there should be a recognition of the



impact on Métis people regarding health, spirituality, and wellbeing, with a specific emphasis on workplace environments.

Workplace environments must do more to Indigenize and acknowledge the positive affects it has on all people. Equity, inclusion and diversity are intrinsic components. Governments must implement culturally safe policies and practices within the health care system. Active participation in the Truth and Reconciliation process brings new challenges for health, spirituality and wellbeing. The emotional labour and responsibilities that is expected of a Métis person continues to be present as it did historically. There are more truths to be told. (Participant 84)

One participant referred to challenges navigating academia, the justice system, and supports and services, including even Métis-specific services.

Completing graduate studies impacted my health negatively due to the presence of a racist academic in my sphere. Fighting the racist and misogynist justice system related to domestic abuse and the rights to safety for my baby also impacted my health negatively. (Participant 91).

Participant 65 wrote, “internalized racism from systemic issues in society has affected my wellbeing especially when hearing and being witness to racism and negative perceptions [in] society... however it has also given me strength when learning what it means to be Métis.” External and internal challenges exist with experiences of racism and discrimination, along with opportunities for developing resiliency and strength through claiming and walking in Métis identity.

*Colonization and ongoing impacts on health*

Ongoing effects of colonization have significantly impacted the health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people. Participant 14 described, “my loss of identity not knowing my culture or Métis spirituality affected my sense of connection to my people, Spirit and value of my physical health.” Participant 79 wrote, “So much was lost and forgotten because being Métis used to not be socially acceptable.”

I have a lot of relatives and ancestors who struggle/struggled with addictions and mental illnesses. As I learned more of this and my own mental illnesses began to show, I worked hard to avoid alcohol, drugs, as well as to seek therapy. I also began to acknowledge and understand the systems and history that created addiction in my family and use this knowledge to protect myself from these systems and work to return to traditional ways. This had helped me to understand that my mental health issues are not entirely my fault, and that by taking care of my mind, body, and spirit I can help alleviate my issues and help to heal further generations. (Participant 47)

Another aspect of colonization is the role of religion and mistreatment by religious institutions and staff.

It affects my mental well-being more than anything, as trying to understand why the Indigenous people were treated so poorly from the beginning. And how people are okay with using their religion as a scapegoat for their choices of mistreatment and or murder. And it really gives you an understanding of how humans treat humans for selfish reasons. (Participant 74)

Varying relationships to the church and organized religion were expressed.

I used to be Catholic which I totally reject now especially since learning more about the

atrocities my family and others has experienced because of the church. I am a very new learner about our Michif “ways” of ceremonies. Of course it is connected at a deep level in the choices I make every day. (Participant 54).

Emphasized throughout was the importance of recognizing, understanding, and addressing personal and intergenerational trauma. Participant 7 wrote, “Removed myself from toxic people and situations; began my road to sobriety so I could heal myself from the trauma of my life and past generations.”

Understanding who I am and where my family comes from is very important. Trauma from past generations is imprinting in my DNA and passed down through many generations. Knowing that helps me deal with the things that come up in life. (Participant 81)

Recognizing the effects of intergenerational trauma and taking steps to mitigate them, Participant 83 described engaging in “physical activity, healthy food choices by mainly eating wild game protein, choosing to be a non-smoker, stress reduction techniques, recognizing intergenerational traumas and most importantly living a strong spiritual way of life.”

For many, colonization resulted in disconnection from Indigenous spirituality.

I was raised very Catholic with no discussion of traditional spiritual practices. As I got older I questioned those beliefs and began exploring spiritual connection to land and how those worked together. I smudge in the morning and say my prayers. My prayers still come through the way I'd almost pray in church, but now I use a different method I suppose. Smudge grounds and centers me. (Participant 71)

Participant 96 wrote, “in our household we are accepting of all religion and spiritually and are always trying to learn more without belonging to anything. This affects our wellbeing because I

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feel we have lost information, culture and understanding.” Reclaiming religion and spirituality as a way of addressing disconnection from Métis culture and traditional spirituality was identified throughout the study.

## Traditional practices and teachings

### *Reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit*

Finding and practicing Métis ways fit differently for each individual, however, smudging was frequently identified as the way to reconnect with and practice traditional ways. Connection with Métis ways, or reconnection, knowing inside all along about being Métis, were described throughout.

I think it's so important to gain teachings from Elders or family members. If young, urban Indigenous youth don't have access to traditional knowledge, then I think they should be provided this support in schools or Aboriginal friendship centres. Without spirituality, it feels like a part of your self is missing. (Participant 16)

Being outdoors was a fitting way to connect with spirituality for some participants in our study.

I don't consider myself to be a spiritual person. My only connection to spirituality is being in nature. I am outside a lot and hike throughout the year. Hiking to me is first and foremost physical, but it also reminds me that nature is powerful and enormous. Hiking is a mindfulness practice and also allows for a break from the tech-connected and busy city lifestyle. (Participant 19)

## Engaging in traditional practices and teachings

Engaging in traditional practices and teachings occurs on an individual and collective level. Participant 36 observed, “I find that the Métis people tend to forget where the Indigenous part of them comes from, and we forget to celebrate that side. We focus on the non-Indigenous

side and celebrate that more often.” Embracing and living out traditions and practices were informed by each Métis person’s unique relationship with local Indigenous people, personal history, family history and relationship to Métis ways. “I stay away from church, I am in a better place believing in the Creator” (Participant 52). Distinguishing between Indigenous, First Nation, or Métis practices and traditions (such as smudging, Indigenous spirituality, prayer, being on the land, and ceremony), was not frequent. Participant 91 wrote, “My wellbeing is intimately connected to practicing my culture and Indigenous spirituality, being involved in my community and being on the land.” Participant 16 noted, “I smudge regularly and I try to eat a traditional diet filled with meat and whole foods. I was raised Catholic however in my teens I rejected the faith and solely followed my father’s Indigenous spiritual teachings.” Participant 50 related, “I have nothing to do with Christianity. I follow First Nations spiritual practices.” Another noted, “I wish I could harvest more medicines and have more knowledge in that area” (Participant 88).

Smudging and prayer were consistent practices. Smudging was “to help with stress” (Participant 9). Participant 16 emphasized, “maintain a healthy diet, follow traditional Indigenous teachings and spirituality as taught by my Métis father, and keep an active lifestyle through outdoor activities.” Connecting to land was referred to as part of religion or spirituality, as a part of mental health, as a part of physical activity, and as a place of refuge, belonging, and holiness, supporting health, wellbeing, connection, healing, and wholeness.

My Métis identity affects my health and well-being as I feel drawn to the outdoors, I feel that nature is a holy place for me. While I believe in god I feel closest to her when [in] nature and I can smell the earth. (Participant 33)

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Participant 46 identified, "mindfulness, time to connect to nature and the creator, realizing the simplicity of walking/hiking to provide physical benefits as well as opportunity to connect to nature."

## **Spiritual and religious practices**

### ***Living for something more***

Living for something more included participants' sense of purpose, meaning and personal values. Participant 46 identified, "we can't be physically healthy without mental well-being and a connection to something larger than ourselves." Participant 12 wrote, "worked hard, believed in a power greater than me." Participant 35 summarized, "I go to Catholic church but also respect Métis cultural beliefs." Living for something more was described more specifically by another participant:

I feel that honouring nature, Spirit and Christian values are synonymous and blend easily.

I enjoy spending lots of my time outside in creation/nature honouring Spirit and enjoying its bounty. My soul is healed in the forest & mountains. The rivers and creeks listen & the animals teach me lessons. (Participant 14)

### ***Self-determination with spirituality and religion***

Self-determination with spirituality and religion included self-definition and self-leadership, shaped by colonization, including religious missions in historical Métis communities. Participants strongly conveyed spiritual and religious practices as personal; Participant 56 wrote, "the way a person prays should always be personal and meaningful to a greater power." In the words of Participant 80, "there is not one way or dogma," rather, participants described embracing, rejecting or blending Christianity with traditional Indigenous spirituality.

My spirituality is kinda a mix of being raised Catholic, resenting that, becoming more in tune with Indigenous ways of knowing in regards to spirituality, and a whole mix of what I chose to believe and put into practice. These certain practices and having spirituality in general help me be mindful, which affects my wellbeing. (Participant 46)

***Centering spirituality in health***

The blending of Christianity with Métis beliefs was frequently mentioned, "re-learning what was lost during colonization and still practicing the religion I choose today takes some juggling but it helps me be more comfortable with myself" (Participant 81). Participant 4 wrote, "I definitely blend Indigenous spirituality with a Christian theology. I try to see Soteriology with Indigenous eyes." Another participant described how health and wellbeing are connected with spirituality:

I am Christian but also believe in the creation stories and ways of being and doing that are more of my Metis up bringing. I use Christian prayer as well as smudging to stay healthy and seek guidance. I use the land as a place that gives me an understanding of our connectedness to everything. By recognizing that we are all connected, I live with respect for everything and it brings me peace. (Participant 93)

***Relationship with Métis identity***

***Identity conflict and tensions***

A common thread indicated Métis people are connected, however, there is no one way to be Métis, "are unique and can't be defined by one set way" (Participant 12). Participant 67 wrote about, "deconstructing what I've adopted and deciding what is important to wellbeing as a Métis woman." Participants described inner conflict and tension with identity as a Métis person,



along with tensions between Métis identity and self-concept. Self-concept was expressed as central to health and wellbeing in childhood and adulthood, "so much was lost and forgotten because being Métis used to not be socially acceptable" (Participant 79). Another participant wrote:

My fathers negative views of the Catholic Church have been passed on to me. It's a bias maybe? But then isn't that what Métis are? Conflicted/Mixed ethnically and culturally. Métis are Catholic but look at what the Church did to the Métis. (Participant 43)

Identity conflict and tensions existed throughout the findings, but were noted to be essential to spirituality, health, and wellbeing.

### ***Identity and self-concept***

Historically, Métis people hid their identity where possible due to racism, discrimination, marginalization, and fear of being unable to maintain housing and jobs. This hiding led to disconnection from Métis identity and culture. Participant 89 wrote, "I [grew] up not knowing my culture and I am learning everyday now." "Understanding who I am and where my family comes from is very important. Trauma from past generations is imprinting in my DNA and passed down through many generations. Knowing that helps me deal with the things that come up in life" (Participant 81). Pride in Métis identity was identified, as well as a reluctance for some:

Still trying to figure it all out. I am VERY proud to be a Michif woman and to have my children and grandkids now recognized. As an older woman I feel like a baby in this regard though and it is difficult for my cousins/relatives who've not taken this step to understand why belonging & participating in Métis community matters. (Participant 54)

The impact of accepting oneself as a Métis person and feeling proud is evident in the words of Participant 61, who shared "I am proud to be Métis. I think its a sense of community. Everyone has welcomed me and helped me learn about my family and heritage." Another participant described their experiences working through Métis identity and self-concept:

While I am baptized and confirmed Catholic, I have extreme difficulty & anger with the fact that the church has yet to apologize for the atrocities of the residential schools and other colonized ways that they have oppressed Indigenous people. I recently found a new church that is affirming, focused on social justice, and working to decolonize their community. As I am in relationship and connection with the MNA community, I continue to learn and grow. I have been participating in Grandmother Tea ceremonies and this has been such a gift. (Participant 70)

**Discussion**

The goal of our study was to understand how health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect for members of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3. Our research identified ongoing adverse effects of colonization across the MNA Region 3 community, particularly in relation to how cultural identity informs health, spirituality, and wellbeing. Colonial policies and processes (both historical and contemporary aspects of colonization that discriminate against Indigenous people in Canada) have resulted in adverse impacts on health determinants and outcomes in comparison to non-Indigenous populations across Canada.<sup>44-48</sup> Participants in our research identified searching for connection to Métis identity and culture, trying to fill a void, and educating themselves and others about who they are and where they come from. Throughout the literature, participation in traditional activities, environmental and cultural connections, Indigenous language learning, and spirituality are cornerstones of an Indigenous health.<sup>48-51</sup>

In our research, interconnectedness and holistic health included the land and spirituality, along with family and community relationships, and relationships with Elders. These connections can also be found in emerging research from Manitoba, Canada.<sup>52</sup> Some literature exists exploring the relationship between spirituality and health for Indigenous people, emphasizing consideration of spirituality in health policies and programming.<sup>53-55</sup> Our research identified colonizations' effect on a societal level – and ongoing impacts on health. Recent events affecting processes of reconciliation for Métis people include unearthing of Indigenous children's bodies across former residential schools across Canada.<sup>56-58</sup> Survivors of the residential school system have clearly spoken about ongoing intergenerational effects (including participants in our research).<sup>59-62</sup>

In our previous research, we discovered that engaging in pilgrimages to Lac Ste. Anne contributed to individual, family, and community health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people.<sup>29</sup> Lac Ste. Anne is a site sacred to many Indigenous people, with yearly pilgrimages (since 1889) to the healing waters in honour of Saint Anne, mother of Mary, grandmother of Jesus.<sup>63</sup> On July 26, 2022, Pope Francis engaged in a penitential pilgrimage to Lac Ste Anne. Additionally, Pope Francis travelled to Maskwacis and Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, on July 25, 2022, offering an apology for the evil committed in residential schools against Indigenous people.<sup>64</sup> Words are not the only significant part of apology, it also includes the spirit behind them.<sup>65</sup> Pope Francis' emphasis of colonization as a common enemy implied responsibility outside the church; the church should not determine acceptance of an apology but should demonstrate deep sorrow and amendment for wrongs.<sup>65</sup> On Pope Francis' return to Rome he described affirming local Canadian Catholic communities to engage with Indigenous culture, languages, and worldviews.<sup>66</sup> Each survivor will need to make their own decision about

accepting the apology, and concrete action is still required on behalf of the Catholic church.<sup>66</sup> In order to follow-up on Pope Francis’ desire for restoration, it will require more than \$30 million dollars for concrete actions toward cultural healing including: (1) decreasing the percentage of Indigenous people in Canadian prisons, (2) decreasing in the number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, (3) decreasing the number of children in the foster care system, (4) increasing the number of youth graduating from secondary and post-secondary schools, and (5) engaging in special initiatives fostering cultural and spiritual flourishing.<sup>67</sup>

In our research, reconnection with traditional practices and teachings along with spiritual and religious practices were identified as essential to individual and community wellbeing. Traditional Indigenous spirituality was targeted by assimilative efforts, with learning and development impeded, and resultant deterioration of the earth and human interrelationships.<sup>15</sup> Relationality and spiritual development is essential across diverse Indigenous communities, including Métis communities; Indigenous knowledge systems and ethical guidelines promote and generate all life, not just human life, in an intergenerational manner, centering the land.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to colonial views of land as capital, are Indigenous views of land as sacred and sustaining through connection to ancestors, medicines, and teachings.<sup>69</sup> Prefontaine, et al.<sup>12</sup> described maintaining and respecting the spiritual connections between people and other living things through renewing mind, body, emotion, and spirit.

Our research findings have implications for future research with Métis communities across Alberta, where change toward self-government is currently occurring. As we share our research findings across the broader MNA, we will contribute to new policy development across programs and services, including: (1) Alberta Métis Works, a network of Métis entrepreneurs building relationships within communities and across Alberta; (2) Children & Family Services,

helping build resilient Métis families by providing culturally appropriate resources; (3) Environment & Climate Change resources through preserving Métis traditional and cultural ways of life; (4) Harvesting Rights, activities on the land including hunting, fishing, and trapping essential to Métis people's way of life; (5) Métis Health Programs, culturally appropriate, self-directed health and wellness opportunities; (6) Truth and Reconciliation intergenerational support for Métis individuals, families, and communities affected by residential schools experiences; and (7) Youth Programs & Services for Métis youth to provide community belonging and cultural connection.

### Limitations

Study limitations include a virtual sample from the MNA Region 3 only, not all the regions across Alberta. Our sample may have been larger, and our findings more diverse if the Covid-19 pandemic had not prevented us from visiting each MNA Region 3 community in person. More research is recommended regarding ongoing impacts of colonization, connections, and understanding about Métis identity, health, spirituality, religion, and wellbeing, and the intergenerational effects of trauma in the broader MNA, and across Canada.

### Conclusion

In our Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study, we explored intersections among health, spirituality, and wellbeing with the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3. Many research studies occur with agendas set outside the community rather than with Indigenous people. Our research originated with community leaders identifying a topic of importance, co-developing a qualitative structured survey with community leaders, an Elder, and community members, and working closely to centre their priorities and perspectives throughout the research process. Our research sharing circle data analysis groups resulted in unique participatory coding

and theme development. We discovered innumerable intersections among health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people in our study. Searching for connection to Métis identity, educating themselves and others about who they are and where they come from, was ongoing. Interconnection and holistic health includes family and community relationships, particularly relationships with Elders. Ongoing effects of colonization affect every aspect of health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people intergenerationally. Reconnecting with traditional activities and teachings, including the environment, land, and culture, learning original languages, and practicing spirituality is foundational to health and wellbeing for Métis people.

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Figure 1. Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3

132x134mm (300 x 300 DPI)

**How do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta**  
**(MNA) Region 3? A Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study**

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**Keywords:** Indigenous health, Métis health, Métis, colonization, health, spirituality, religion, community-based research, participatory action research, Christianization

**Author contributions:**

**Carla Ginn:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – Original draft preparation. **Craig W. C. Ginn:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Validation, Writing – Review & editing. **Cheryl Barnabe:** Investigation, Resources, Validation, Writing – Review & editing. **Doreen Dumont/Vaness Bergum:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Supervision, Validation. **Judy Gentes:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Priscilla Tatrallyay:** Formal analysis, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

**Acknowledgements:**

Thank you to the Elders, leaders, and community members from the MNA who participated in survey development, data collection, and analysis.

Thank you to Dave McCann (<https://www.davemccann.com/>) who designed Figure 1.

This research was supported by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant – PA: Patient-Oriented Research [175397, 2020].

Title: A community-based pilot study exploring links between health, spirituality, and wellbeing within the Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3  
Principal and Co-Investigator: Ginn, C.S., and Ginn, C.W.C.  
Ethics ID: REB18-0433

Study ID \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Members, leaders, and Elders of the MNA – Region 3 have met together to develop these questions/questionnaire/survey.

Please check off areas of interest to you:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Prison ministries
<input type="checkbox"/>	Addiction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spirituality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blending different cultural practices
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blending different spiritual practices
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cultural immersion
<input type="checkbox"/>	Traditional knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning in community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spirituality as a tool for healing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cultural history as a tool for healing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elder’s role in healing (physical)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elder’s role in healing (spiritual)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reconciliation (government)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reconciliation (church)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forgiveness (government)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forgiveness (church)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Passing on both(?) Métis traditions and culture to younger generation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nutrition for mental wellness (for example Diabetes/Mental health)

Title: A community-based pilot study exploring links between health, spirituality, and wellbeing within the Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3  
Principal and Co-Investigator: Ginn, C.S., and Ginn, C.W.C.  
Ethics ID: REB18-0433

<input type="checkbox"/>	Nutrition for physical wellness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Land claims
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harvesting rights
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Preserving language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pilgrimages to sacred sites

Please use the next few pages to write about any of the topics you checked off above.

Additional Questions:

- (1) Are there ways that you see your health, spirituality, and wellbeing as connected?
- (2) What are the most important things you have done in your lifetime that have impacted your health?
- (3) Are there ways that your Métis identity affects your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?
- (4) How do you blend different religious or spiritual practices to maintain your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?
- (5) Are there any other areas you want to write about related to health, spirituality, and wellbeing?

Emerging Themes	<p><b>January 4, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #1</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Elder shared personal lived experience, group discussion of main points and themes from the survey data.</li><li>• <b>Elder sharing about her personal lived experience:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We are all born with a gift, none of us is the same.”</li><li>• She couldn’t jig in public until age 55.</li><li>• She went into deep grief about the Indigenous children’s bodies that were discovered at the residential school in Kamloops. She used tobacco and went to visit the priest.</li><li>• “You can set laws against us but you can’t take my faith.”</li><li>• She suggests that the word Indigenous has put us back into a pan-Indigenous ‘basket’ and that we should use the word First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.</li><li>• Métis people would dance all night and then head to mass the next morning. She suggests that dancing is important to release all the stress and enjoy life and to let your body release. She noted that this was important in terms of being who you are. People were able to relax and be themselves.</li><li>• It took her so long to come out of the closet and be known as Métis. She now teaches the youth about their Métis heritage, so they can be proud of it long before I did. She holds a dance group where they learn to jig, and there have been 4 sessions prior to the onset and social restrictions due to COVID-19. She has also taught beading and capote making.</li><li>• FN, Métis, and Inuit Elders – there, I’m not Indian enough, but as I went along, I’ve found I’m fitting in now because I took the side of my grandmothers, the more I did ceremony, I have this warmth around me, but this spirit around me, “I was supposed to be there.” And the more I participated, for example, my eagle feather and my tobacco, the more I got involved, it got me wanting more, and to learn more. I was invited to a HII FNMI women’s event – taught them how to make a wool blanket coat and how to jig – how to connect your hands, heart, and head with a project – as we stitched, different stories would come out – and we did a pipe ceremony every morning. I went to my room to gather my things to go – and the spirit showed itself – it was my mother, guiding me – I knew that I was supposed to be there – we can fit any cultures – we can take what’s good for us from all the</li></ul></li></ul>
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60	<p>Searching for Métis Identity</p> <p>How you identify impacts how you connect with culture and spirituality</p> <p>Connection to culture facilitated by spiritual beliefs</p> <p>Mental health and Identity</p> <p>Searching for authentic connection</p> <p>Searching for spirituality</p> <p>Conflict with spirituality</p>	<p>cultures – take what’s good for you – it took me all these years to be who I was and proud of who I am – I’m comfortable being in the middle because I can take from both sides. The options depend on us – how we want to go out in the world – I have a very strong Métis mother – she taught us to how to present ourselves so we wouldn’t incite discrimination or name calling. I still do it to this day – I prepare My Creator has put me back here where we used to be discriminated against – enjoyed dancing and having fun, being ourselves – 3 of my siblings were a beautiful brown color and they had a different life than the rest of us could hide our identity.</p> <p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people’s experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant suggested that it seemed as though a lot of the people who completed the survey were new exploring and embracing their Métis identity.</li> <li>• One participant suggested that some of the main themes were that of “lost culture and connection,” which has coloured the ability to connect with Métis identity. One participant had just recently found out that they are Métis. The loss of identity, impacts many people’s ability connect. When the identity piece is missing, there is a hole in life. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This participant had just recently found out that they are Métis. Many Métis people are just reconnecting. The loss of identity has impacted the ability to connect with Métis spirituality. When that piece is missing it’s hard to have that.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The next participant agreed and suggested that being brought up Catholic, the “Indigenous part” of being Métis is where she found peacefulness. They suggested that “it’s hard to reconnect with culture if I don’t have a belief system.” This participant believes in Mother Earth and smudges with children and grandchildren. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another participant suggested that they are on a similar journey as well. They were raised Roman Catholic, but never went to church, so it felt weird. They suggested that “if I tried to force myself into that box would be more detrimental to my values.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Challenges with mental health, with what is going on in the world (referring to COVID-19 and the impacts of COVID-19), along with residential school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health is tied to connecting with identity and community</li> <li>• Use of opioids within our communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of us in the world are facing different issues, such as opioids.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Longing for connection to FN ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Belief and connection with “something more than ourselves”<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant noted the importance of a belief in Creator, a belief in something “more than ourselves.”</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnection to land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another participant suggested that survey participants were at a loss when it comes to spirituality, as it seemed from the data that they were not sure whether to believe in the church or traditional ways. This participant grew up Catholic and grew up traditional, but remains conflicted. He suggested that as Métis people, we don’t celebrate enough of the First Nations ways of being, the ways of our matriarchs. Once colonization happened, the ways of our matriarchs became more hidden. He remains conflicted that we don’t celebrate enough of First Nation’s culture and Métis people remain impoverished by not looking at what our First Nations matriarchs brought to the table.</li></ul>
Many influences on Métis spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conflicted when it comes to the Métis culture.</li></ul>
Searching for (identity) that has been lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This participant suggested that it’s important that we connect with plants and animals, as our matriarchs did. Connections between Métis culture, medicines, plants and animals</li></ul>
Searching for peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another participant suggested that the “spirituality piece,” is difficult as she does not know Métis spirituality. Her Mom’s side is Ojibway out of Manitoba, and so for her, her connection to being Métis and her Métis identity was blurred. In Calgary there is also the influence of Blackfoot ways, Dene ways, Stoney ways. The question remains: what is Métis spirituality?</li></ul>
Conflict with identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not sure of the spirituality piece and needs clarity in terms of the difference between Métis spirituality and the spiritualities of other Indigenous groups and people.</li></ul>
Discrimination from the Catholic church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deep loss, recovery, lack and searching. Another participant suggested that many Métis people - herself included - feel a sense of deep loss, lack of community. Many people are searching for answers and searching for peace.</li></ul>
Searching for spiritual reconnection, “something more”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This can include grappling with “dual identity” of being Métis/Catholic or Métis/self-improvement.</li><li>• This participant shared that her mom went to Lac Ste Anne several times. She said there is power in the land, and for her it’s stronger than anything the Catholic church could offer at this point. She noted that we have experienced shaming and rejection from the Catholic church as well, and that much harm has been done.</li></ul>
Internal conflict with identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Circles back to recovery piece, as her Mom went to Lac Ste Anne many times before she knew much about her Métis ancestors.</li></ul>

Conflict with culture and religion (affects health)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection with “something more” It’s important to connect to the Creator, or “something more” than ourselves.</li> </ul>
Conflict with self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing internal conflict and struggle</li> <li>• One participant suggested that we are all conflicted within our own selves because we’ve been swept under the rug. This has impacted multiple generations, and is intergenerational.</li> </ul>
Conflict with traditional and colonial mentality, creating mistrust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Métis people are in "conflict with culture and religion"</li> <li>• This participant suggested that how we’re dealing with it is reflected in our health, and how we manage health. Spirituality and the conflict between how we “walk in two worlds” is actively affecting our health.</li> <li>• Métis people are in conflict with a colonial mentality and a traditional mentality</li> </ul>
Identity harmed by the Catholic church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The data showed that Métis people are actively in conflict with a colonial mentality and a traditional mentality. Many people deal with an internal conflict in terms of trusting traditional medicine or Western, which is “actively affecting health.”</li> </ul>
Stigma of being Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerationally and genetically, this conflict with colonial and traditional mentalities, as well as the harms of colonialism, is passed on.</li> </ul>
Discrimination and lateral violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerationally and genetically, there is direct connection between identity, health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Harm from Catholic Church, shaming and rejection from the church.</li> <li>• In the data, one participated said she saw “the effects of that harm.”</li> </ul>
Conflict with western ways/colonial ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lateral violence</li> <li>• Métis people experience lateral violence from FN people as well as non-Indigenous people – there’s more than just one reason, however, the stigma of being Métis still goes on today.</li> </ul>
Residential schools, opioid crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges with trusting Western medicine</li> <li>• Genetic risk, such as heart disease</li> <li>• We have our own struggles, for example with answering the question “do we want health care from AHS?”</li> </ul>
Mistrust with the HCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative impacts to health, related to not identifying as Métis</li> <li>- Not identifying as Métis right away can affect health with doctors. One participant suggested that this negatively impacted the healthcare that her father received.</li> </ul>

Métis identity affects health and health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Another participant noted (not confirmed) that if babies are Indigenous, they get extra vaccine</li></ul>
Conflict in hiding and embracing Métis identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative impacts to health, related to identifying as Métis<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a preconceived notion that Métis people are going to be judged a certain way and that disclosing may draw focus away from what the issue really is.</li><li>• This can lead to being excluded from appropriate healthcare.</li></ul></li></ul>
Relating with Métis identity, finding the right fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Much of the survey data suggested being stigmatized when identifying as Métis within the healthcare system. There were several stories within her data set of being excluded from appropriate healthcare because of being Métis.</li><li>• This participant suggested that self-disclosing can be “a barrier or a path to greater understanding.”</li><li>• Stigma was identified, as one participant said about self disclosure in the healthcare system: “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” They follow up by saying “Where do you fit in is the biggest thing.”</li></ul>
Métis identity facilitates connection to spirituality, health and wellbeing	
Reconnecting with Métis identity is challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Métis identity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no right or wrong way to be Métis, or to connect with your Métis identity.</li><li>• Many Métis people are scared to identify with what we feel.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The important question is: What do you have and who do you feel are in your heart and your soul?</li></ul></li><li>• How you relate to your Métis identity may depend on demographics and where you are in your life and your journey.</li><li>• It’s hard to know how to connect to whatever your spirituality looks like if you don’t have a sense of identity.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If there is not cohesion to your own personal sense of identity, it will impact Métis mental and physical health.</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>• One participant identified that discovering and reconnecting with her Métis identity when she was a bit older was challenging. They suggested that for most Métis people, its more challenging when finding it out later than earlier.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It was noted that much of the educational opportunities to learn about Métis culture that are offered by the Métis Nation of Alberta are focused on youth. This age cutoff may prevent those who are older and reconnecting with Métis identity from accessing MNA provided programming that would support them in their learning.</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnection to the land and traditional ways	
Reconnection and discovering how to identify as Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling of that you’re not Métis enough, or that you don’t look Métis enough.</li><li>• Fighting within your own self – where do you fit in?</li></ul>

<p>Racism/ discrimination</p> <p>Reconnection to ceremony</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconnection to land             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Went back to land, including learning traditional medicines.</li> <li>• The challenge is where to find these medicines, which remains a big question</li> <li>• This participant suggested that plant medicines are supposed to be traded, however sometimes you need to trade/purchase with money. Before, this was never the case.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Another participant suggested the themes of reconnection and discovery. They also suggested that it's challenging to identify themes from the data, as many of the answers were yes/no or very short. They thought that "this shortness is a theme itself. I find many of our peoples are unsure of our identity and what it means, and how it plays a part in our lives." They went on to say that "it's sad, but I think colonial systems really damaged our community."</li> <li>• One participant has found learning about cultural practices very helpful. She has done this through Natalie Pepin's business Meeting my Ancestors. She has also learned hide tanning, went to Métis crossing, and did some programming.</li> <li>• Prior to learning she was Métis, she know something was being hidden – everyone, whether hidden from being Métis or knowing you were Métis had faced racism and discrimination. She has given up on church.</li> <li>• Access to cultural learning seems to be out of city, or out of age group.</li> <li>• Another participant suggested that "as a relative newbie, everyone talks about ceremony. But I have no connections to be able to access/participate in ceremony...I am searching for that. Plus COVID-19 has put a wrench in that lately."</li> </ul> <p><b>January 11, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #2</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Discussion of main points and themes from the survey data</li> </ul> <p><b>Elder sharing about her personal lived experience:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kamloops children and the Catholic priests and nuns treated them – can restrict us in any way – for example blankets over windows when practicing culture – jigging or cutting up hunted meat. Our kinship – I'm the only practicing Catholic in my family – I lost my faith – finally in September I</li> </ul>
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	<p>talked about it with leaders/Elders – I put tobacco under a tree – didn’t know how to find my faith again – teddy bears and shoes – saved items from being thrown out – disrespecting the congregation who left them there – and the children that were found. The priest will start a reconciliation wall – cleaned up and put in a bookshelf and displayed in the foyer – as time goes on, during COVID, how many children need teddy bears and shoes – keep rotating – year-round. Reconciliation is never going to be over.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When my parents lost their land to scrip, they were discriminated against in the church.</li><li>• One day after mass, my dad was followed out and asked to put more money in the offering.</li><li>• We went every summer to Lac Ste Anne. All relatives and friends could meet and practice their spirituality. They could speak their language and share their food – they couldn’t dance, but the joy that was there was incredible.</li><li>• Seeing the children – brings joy to my heart – Eucharist – children crossing themselves – need to go home for first communion.</li><li>• Just enjoying my role more when Covid hit – I told my story, and most people are very interested in learning about us now.</li><li>• Even though the Catholic church shuts us out as Métis, we still have our faith.</li><li>• She is part of the City of Calgary Elder’s Committee</li><li>• Come to the barn for beading sessions – for talking/laughing/ being yourself</li></ul> <p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people’s experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections to healthy vices like crafts and smudging</li><li>• Connections to the land</li><li>• Indigenous or Métis specific teachings strengthen overall wellbeing</li><li>• Community connections</li><li>• Some health issues that exist include diabetes and suicide</li><li>• Stigma, discrimination and judgement of Métis people impacts health and wellbeing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the workplace, one may want to not identify as Métis due to fear of discrimination.</li></ul></li></ul>
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Connection to traditional ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another consideration is discrimination against Métis people in healthcare – one participant had concluded that her mother had died in hospital because of it.</li> </ul>
Connection to land and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination in health care – One participant has seen discrimination in healthcare working in a correctional institute. The situation they shared was between a physician and an inmate. The inmate “hit a brick wall” when he came into the doctors’ office, as the doctor had already prejudged what he was going to say. The doctor had made preconceived notions and judgements even before he arrived at a conclusion about the inmate’s health condition.</li> </ul>
Métis and health predispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of yourself is an important aspect of health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Lateral violence for those who practice spirituality, if they didn’t practice the Catholic faith</li> </ul>
“Stigma, discrimination and judgement of Métis people impacts health and wellbeing”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone would like to know more – may not know much, but would like to know more</li> <li>• Connecting spirituality with wellbeing through environment</li> </ul>
Métis identity affects health and health care you receive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It’s important to have a connection to something and a feeling of belonging somewhere or to something. Whatever you practice physically, you are connected to that. For example, this is the case with yoga. You can have a connection to your culture, whether you grew up that way or not. A connection to other people who are like you.</li> <li>• Connection to whoever you say your god is, or connection to people to nature</li> <li>• It shows in our Métis functions, because you can go there, you’re welcome, it’s like coming home. You can be who you are, enjoy the company of people who are just like you. There is music and dancing.</li> </ul>
Lateral violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This participant suggested that “MNA – Region 3 – that’s where I found myself. I could come out and dance and laugh. We are missing it with COVID-19.”</li> </ul>
Searching for more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearly checkup – eye doctor – had just travelled – and started talking about brown people – water systems having to be serviced – comparing it to First Nations people here – discriminated against.</li> </ul>
Searching for connection and belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant shared that their mom went to a residential day school, but never talked about it.</li> <li>• Spirituality, mental, and physical health are all connected – in how you are treated wherever you go – it’s very important – they are all connected.</li> <li>• Connection needs to be made again somehow – they always went to Batoche, spoke Michif – but when they moved to Calgary, that stopped – lots of people come to</li> </ul>

	<p>cities but still maintain their cultures – is necessary to wellbeing to be connected to community, culture, and wellbeing. It’s a matter of how do you do that when it was cut off so extremely. My mom shunned that part of herself so I didn’t know about it. It’s necessary for health, not an option – how do you reconnect to community/culture/spirituality? Otherwise, your health will falter.</p>
Shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant suggested the book Stories of Métis women. It is written in English and is excellent, they said.</li></ul>
Spirituality and health are all connected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant said that in terms of moving forward with trauma and addiction, making a spiritual connection helped them heal.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling grounded to earth relieved stress, helped one participant feel more connected.</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eating traditional foods</li></ul>
How do you learn to identify as Métis (to be)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant noted, but said that they don’t even know if they have experienced eating them. They said that it could make a big difference the health, but that they are far away from eating them. They think it could support our health, but that it’s not something that a lot of us eat.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Traditional medicines and access to them – were also discussing berries and plants as well</li><li>• Métis cookbook shares details on medicines and canning. There are pictures and stories on healthy eating. This is published by the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO).<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Métis Cookbook and Guide to Healthy Living <a href="http://www.naho.ca/Métiscentre">www.naho.ca/Métiscentre</a>.</li></ul></li><li>• Maintaining a holistic approach is important.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ One participant does this through drinking mint tea and eating bannock, wearing sash and colors. They take good pride and strength in these practices.</li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnecting to spirituality as a path to healing from trauma and addiction	
Reconnection to land and traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another person wrote that she was learning about being Métis, but felt like a bit of an outsider or a ‘fraud’ as she didn’t grow connected to her Métis identity.</li></ul>
Reconnection to food	



<p>Journey to connecting with identity is challenging</p> <p>Interconnectedness</p> <p>Lost identity</p> <p>Searching for identity, what works</p>	<p><b>January 18, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #3</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Elder shared personal lived experience, group discussion of main points and themes from the survey data</li> </ul> <p><b>Elder sharing about her personal lived experience:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elder shared the challenges with the discovery of children, losing her faith, shared a prayer of having a hard time understanding. Had opportunity to meet with the Bishop that was going to Rome, gave this prayer to friend going to Rome.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family of 10 only one still going to Catholic Church – Kamloops residential school found children – can set laws against us but can't take my faith. But it was gone in May, finding out what the churches had done.</li> <li>• Thought God had forgotten about us.</li> <li>• My Face My Race – prayer</li> <li>• Where do we come into the picture with all of this happening with our children</li> <li>• Meeting once a month for Elders at U of C – I told them I felt I'd lost my faith – I was given advice to go and put some tobacco under a tree and I'll do a ceremony for you – then went to visit the priest. Felt a lot more at peace when the ceremony had been done – wanted the priest to pray with me – this lady from CWL said what are we going to do with the teddy bears and shoes – should maybe throw them out. No – want to take the wall for a bookcase – clean up all the items – this will be your reconciliation wall. It was done – and they put "every child matters" there – these items were then given to children who were in need – keep asking/renewing those items and give them away to the children in need. This will be permanent, you can't throw it away. Reconciliation and the process we have to go through to get our faith back</li> <li>• Don't like the word Indigenous because it puts us back into the basket with everyone – we need to keep the word Métis – because everyone generalizes – we need to keep the words First Nations, Inuit, and Métis</li> <li>• Parents were married behind the church as they were not allowed in even though the French and the Métis had built it together.</li> <li>• 5 of 10 siblings were baptized into the Catholic church – Olds was the worst place for discrimination – my mother was very spiritual.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Internal conflict with Métis identity (not Métis enough)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After mass – the person who passed around the collection said my dad didn’t put enough in</li><li>• Lac Ste Anne was our holiday</li><li>• Double-blessed through my grandmother’s FN spirituality and traditions and my catholic spirituality</li><li>• Pipe ceremony, smudging, from both my grandmother’s sides</li><li>• At a women’s conference for women with HIV, taught them how to make coat out of a wool blanket, did a pipe ceremony every day – last day packing my bag, there was my mother’s spirit, and she made her presence known</li></ul>
Embracing being Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I tell the youth we’re all born with a gift – my mother was a champion jigger – had to have our windows covered at home when dancing – I had to hide being Métis, however, our mother taught us about being proud of ourselves because you never knew</li></ul>
Reconnecting to Métis identity is a journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 out of the 10 born with beautiful brown skin but the rest of us could pass age 55 I got my gift, I learned it – a comfortable feeling – when in a group of Métis people</li><li>• We need to have a Métis function again – especially because of Covid now we have missed them</li><li>• Beading sessions and dance – food, and can’t wait for Covid to be over</li></ul>
External confirmations (am I Métis enough)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 sacred teachings – aunts and uncles could reprimand – responsibility of the adults to help raise everyone’s children</li><li>• Important part as well is coming from any family, especially Métis, family connection is so important, take on different responsibilities within that family – of each other, and as you grow older, you realize where you were in that family and what it meant. Older ones often still speak for the younger ones and think they’re more important. Nicknames (in Indian language) gives you your ideas of who you are</li></ul>
Searching for what is lost, what it means to be Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No matter how many kids you’ve got there’s always one you have to worry about – kinship, we need each other</li><li>• Responsibility towards family – for example, being a mother at age 13 when mom cooked in a logging camp – am trying to pass that bundle onto my sister for the younger generation.</li></ul>
Connection to family and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Elder closed with The Dance Prayer - “we dance for a reason”</li></ul>

<p>Searching for what's been lost (longing for tradition)</p> <p>Longing for connection, what fits</p> <p>Searching for authentic connection to Métis identity</p> <p>Métis identity is connected to wellbeing, health, and spirituality</p> <p>Challenging journey</p>	<p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people's experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant suggested that one of the main themes that came through in the data is interconnectedness of mind, body, soul spirit and person, earth, other             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no singularities, there are multiples and an interplay in everything related to Métis health, wellbeing and spirituality.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Another participant said that she struggles not knowing what family believed in but is focused on finding something that might work for her.</li> <li>• One participant reflected that interacting with the survey data helped them reflect.</li> <li>• Another participant said that she struggles with imposter syndrome and that this came up when reading the data, as those who filled out the survey seemed more connected with their 'Métisness.'             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another participant said: "The people that feel they have this imposter syndrome – I wonder why?" She didn't grow up Métis, but once she discovered it, her experience was different.</li> <li>• She knows that imposter syndrome doesn't make sense, as she is on a journey of not knowing what it means to be Métis, coming back to 'Métisness' and Métis culture.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How people view us on the outside – some look more white, some look more brown – when we all get together, all different shades of brown, white, there is a resemblance – if you take a picture of Métis people, you know you belong to that group – it confirms that's where you belong.</li> <li>• What does it mean to be Métis?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She asks herself the questions: Do I identify with certain things that are presented as Métis? Learning has highlighted that there is a gap and hole in my life. Part of the challenge is just not knowing what it means to be Métis. It is difficult because it's not about the history, but the culture – what is it really, do I identify with those things?</li> <li>• Another participant said she feels a similar way, and that there is a gap in her cultural learning. She doesn't feel she knows enough about the culture. Growing up, there were many Indigenous cultural events in her school setting, but she was always being told that she wasn't allowed to join. Finding out there is a specific culture where she "fits" - being Métis - has been helpful for her now that she is an adult.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identity/navigating being Métis</li> </ul>
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Searching for connection, searching for what has been lost/hidden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another theme is kinship and being together. Family and relatives are very important to us.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After the rebellion, we were always having to look out for each other. Elder suggested that always room for one more to stay and/or eat, always room for one more at our table.</li></ul></li><li>• The Métis have protected each other.</li><li>• People were searching for something and once they discovered some traditional healing practices, they were coming home – had a knowing – searching for grounding.</li><li>• Another theme is a feeling of disconnection and searching for something.</li><li>• A major theme is searching, longing and grasping for answers.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The words seeking, grasping and ‘adrift’ were used to describe this.</li><li>• This participant supported this theme with her own experience of not knowing what her family may have believed in, but trying to find something that works for her. She is hoping there might be a connection, as she is looking for and grasping at what might work to fill that void.</li></ul></li><li>• Another participant said that this is surprising was because it was in stark contrast with my journey – having lots of knowledge about what being Métis meant.</li></ul>
Embracing your identity, conflict	
Underrepresentation of Métis culture	
Métis culture is distinct	
Learning what it means to be Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections between identity/spirituality/wellbeing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interconnectedness and the importance of giving attention to all the parts to feel the healthiest</li><li>• Searching to improve/build on what you already know</li><li>• Interconnectedness involves continually building the bundles of our identity</li><li>• “You can’t just water one part of your garden, they all deserve watering. This includes the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual.”</li></ul></li><li>• Once people find a practice, they find comfort in the practice gives them a better sense of wellbeing.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Searching for those practices is less comfortable, but once start practicing them it contributes to how well they feel (peace).</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnecting with community	
Advocating for Métis culture	
Searching for connections as a path to healing	
Reconnections to traditions	
Challenges encountered when reconnecting	

<p>Impacts of colonialism has imposed challenges to reconnecting with Métis identity.</p> <p>Forgotten, lost culture</p> <p>Discrimination</p> <p>Shame</p>	<p><b>January 25, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #4</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Elder shared thoughts and personal perspectives, group discussion of main points and themes from the survey data</li> </ul> <p><b>Elder sharing her personal perspectives and experiences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique ethnogenesis historically have followed protestant/catholic/traditional Métis religion and would never hunt on the sabbath. The Métis practices are more focused on lived experiences of their faith. Adopted from the Cree practice of interconnectedness – respect, reciprocity, and relationality are important – collective responsibility and not taking too much.</li> <li>• Became an Elder at the university – knew nothing about ceremony – not enough representation of Métis people – pipe ceremony, face-painting ceremony, felt out of place – Métis didn't have any traditions, but you can pick up your grandmother's side and live in 2 worlds – now don't have to it. A spiritual experience of accepting the FN side and as well as the Métis side – and catholic – now more children</li> <li>• Had to hide our culture – in the past, now so good we can celebrate it</li> <li>• Need to make sure our voices are heard – the basket of Indigenous – Métis, First Nations, and Inuit</li> <li>• We are often going through the same things – remember, you are good enough and don't let anybody tell you any different – show confidence in being Métis self-respect. Honouring our ancestors and what they've had to go through we need educating – jiggers for example – children teaching their peers – be proud of being Métis till age 55 – keep moving forward and educating people</li> <li>• Elder knew nothing about ceremony and then started at the university, doing ceremony. She thought to herself, what am I doing here? Don't know ceremony. Finding within self to accept her "First Nations side".</li> <li>• In talking about doing beadwork, Elder suggested: "Once you connect your head, hands and heart, you're connecting all your senses. Takes you out of your head and into your heart."</li> </ul> <p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people's experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p>
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Internal conflict with Métis identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Underrepresentation of Métis people in the workplace and the importance of having culture visible in the workplace.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For example, in a full day training session on Indigenous awareness, one participant employed by GoA noted that there was little mention of any information specific to Métis or Inuit people. She suggested that the focus tends to be on First Nations communities and individuals, and that Métis people were discussed for “maybe 5 minutes.”</li><li>• Important of recognizing that we are different. One of the activities was making a tepee, however, to this participant, she did not connect with this. Statements were also made in the training such as “Indigenous people do fancy dancing, shawl dancing ...” which may not be applicable to most Métis people.</li><li>• Another participant who also works for the GoA agreed. She notes that she works in a group home setting. In celebrating different cultures in the workplace, there has never been any mention of Métis people. She is just now learning about what it means to be Métis as she was part of 60s Scoop.</li><li>• Additionally, she shared that the government wouldn’t let her mom put her dad’s name on her birth certificate. She identifies with being Métis, as she was raised by her mom. She thinks she needs to connect with Métis people in Calgary, she is also learning. She grew up asking her mom, how do we identify?</li></ul></li></ul>
Embracing a blend of spirituality or nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• She noted the importance of educating people and making sure Métis voices are heard. The issue is that we need people to listen.</li></ul>
Health tied to identity and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two things noted were negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol/drugs but also trying to reconnect with traditional Métis ways of life, including through eating healthy, exercising, being out in the wilderness and on the land.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principles of kinship</li><li>• Another coping mechanism mentioned as positive was combatting depression with beadwork. It was said that “beadwork is healing.”</li></ul></li></ul>
External confirmation, Do I look Métis enough?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Navigating modern-day realities while trying to reconnect<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another participant noted that there was a great deal of mention in the survey data of trying to connect with heritage, and how it’s challenging to tie in “modern life with the historical.” There are certain problems we have now, such as drinking and food problems, that may have not existed for our ancestors historically.</li><li>• The survey data points to trying and struggling to learn our old ways and culture again to try to find a way to deal with modern issues.</li><li>• The phrase “re-learn our culture” was used.</li><li>• There is diversity in how Métis people reconnect with traditions.</li></ul></li></ul>
Under-representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant suggested that there was running theme in the survey data of representation and connection to culture and spirit. She noted that “colonialism has such an impact on Indigenous communities, Métis people.”</li></ul>
Hidden and lost culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant, in talking to her dad, who suggested that Métis people have always felt that they “fell through cracks”. Along with this, many Métis people have felt shunned by white people and those who are First Nations.</li></ul>
Connection to Elders	
Health to spirituality	

<p>Longing to believe in something</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her father has “felt adrift for [his] entire life.” He is trying to work to accept the fact the he is Métis. Before, her father tried to deny being Native because of racism.</li> <li>• “Too white to be First Nations, too dark for the white” – most tried to deny being Métis because of discrimination.</li> </ul>
<p>Métis experience illness as a result of intergeneration trauma, discrimination, colonialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another participant, speaking directly to themes from the data, noted that the Métis people who filled out the survey have “mixed Western and traditional Indigenous approaches to spirituality or the have nothing,” as approaches to spirituality. Physical wellness was tied with knowledge in the practice of Métis culture. When they had more knowledge of Métis culture and identity and were able to practice it, “physical wellness followed.”</li> <li>• Increased knowledge about Métis culture led to physical wellness</li> <li>• A lot of Métis people had blended religions and traditions.</li> <li>• Another participant provided his insight on the survey data that many participants spoke about coping mechanisms, both positive and negative.</li> <li>• He also other suggested that that another theme was external confirmations - other</li> </ul>
<p>Discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a personal example, he notes that his child’s school called this year to confirm that they were in fact Métis, since this had been indicated on a form. His reflection on this was the question of whether there is an assumption that kids have to look a certain way to be Indigenous.</li> <li>• First Nations focus in the school system.</li> <li>• In his workplace, they have done a blanket ceremony, which he suggested was “very First Nations focused.” He said it would be nice to have people understand Métis background better, both the Métis historical background, but also the practices of things that have always supported our people, such as harvesting and hunting, but this is not easily done because of laws and restrictions.</li> </ul>
<p>Health challenges related to Métis identity (external conflicts with Métis identity)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant, speaking on her own experience, said that Bowden prison had a Métis employee. There are a lot of Métis people in prison, and a lot of Métis people working in prison. It’s important to have original languages, the Elders looked after those who were acting out of order</li> <li>• Another participant noted that in reading the data, they “triggered her back to being 17,” when her family doctor said “if you believe in something, you will be in a better place and you will not be as ill.” She went home, talked to mom and dad, and asked questions about church, spirituality, and questioned why she wasn’t baptized. She grew up surrounded by the Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Lutheran faiths, which were the 3 predominant religious groups around her. She is now 56, and suggests that those who “believe in something are always less sick than people who don’t believe in anything.”</li> </ul>
<p>Métis identity affects health and the health care you receive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was born Métis, heard Michif and Cree in house, dad worked with reserves, also worked with Catholic Church.</li> <li>• Interested in trauma leading to illness. As a social worker, she finds it amazing how many social workers end up with autoimmune disease.</li> <li>• Consideration of the impacts of continual exposure to trauma personally and professionally as an Indigenous person.</li> </ul>



Hidden culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ “I carry every child in my heart that has died in the system.”</li><li>▪ Collective and historical trauma</li><li>▪ There is a relationship between vicarious trauma and autoimmune disorders. This participant noted that being on long-term disability is stressful – what about the people that fall through the cracks?</li></ul>
Métis are a distinct culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Noted how common ADHD with those who are present. Trauma in birth canal, pregnancy, can lead to medical issues.</li><li>• Lateral violence, vicarious trauma, Supervisor with children’s services<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daughter works for public guardian, and in that setting, she sees a lot of people who came through Children and Family Services.</li><li>• As Métis people, we need to keep pushing forward. “We have a lot of many Métis people with lupus and similar autoimmune diseases.” Has 3 autoimmune diseases herself.</li><li>• Challenges of accessing medication - \$5000 not covered a month. Many Métis people can’t afford medication or trial drugs.</li><li>• <b>“Métis people were lost... are still invisible. We’re no longer living on road allowances, but we’re still lost.”</b></li><li>• Brother not registered as Métis, 60s Scoop survivor. Brother also experienced forced sterilization. She feels angry when looking at something [institutions involved in the 60s Scoop] that caused family so much pain.</li></ul></li></ul>
Conflicts in reconnection to spirituality	
Complex journey	
Searching for reconnection to land, to traditional ways (what’s been lost)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experiences of discrimination in the healthcare system and by healthcare providers<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An example of stereotyping was provided by one participant, who was asked to provide a status card for healthcare services. However, this is not relevant for non-status Métis people, or for non-status First Nations people.</li><li>• Another participant notes that there is a misconception - including amongst some healthcare providers - that if you’re Métis you have medications and medical coverage provided. She said that in trying to get her child’s medication for ADHD, the doctor asked for them to provide their status card. Her reflection on this is that in turn, you “need to advocate for yourself. It turns into need to educate healthcare professional to lecture. It shouldn’t need to be a teaching moment when you’re asking for medical assistance.”</li><li>• Her final reflection on this topic is that “receiving medical care a vulnerable position to be in.”</li></ul></li></ul>
Colonialism has and still imposes conflict and challenges to reconnecting with Identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Education is needed in institutions as well as for ourselves as we reconnect</li><li>• “Spirituality is complex, especially when adding in colonialism.” Some people are trying to connect and re-learn traditional Métis knowledge and ways, as well as to learn the language. Another challenge is that medicinal knowledge of plants and knowledge from the land hasn’t been passed down. Some are Catholic, some follow Métis traditions. Some trying to connect and relearn.” In her mother’s</li></ul>

<p>Searching for what is right for you</p>	<p>family, all of her mother's generation spoke the language, but medicinal knowledge from the land that wasn't passed down to her generation. Now she is taking courses and all possible routes to learn. She "used to be angry" with the thought "why didn't you teach me?" She said he "didn't understand the effects of colonialism."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Norquest, was part of Aboriginal mentorship program came, said general consensus from communities its that the medicine has its own spirit. Also, every pharmaceutical drug comes from earth, but "when you multiply it, you disconnect it from the spirit and it's not a whole medicine any more." That's why we have side effects, and need more med and more medication. Effects of colonialism on each of our generations. The speaker said that plant medicine has its own spirit.</li> <li>• Medicine is also colonialized and there have been effects of colonialism on each generation.</li> <li>• Another aspect of navigating the effects of colonization is navigating reconciliation with the church and its effects. She added that it's "interesting that people are able to speak up now."</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Comments from Participants Following Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meetings (emailed after meeting)</b></p> <p><b>1. January 4 Participant</b></p> <p>"I would just add that I notice that there is what I would call a "spectrum of the he on this topic. I found myself that I've gone from unaware to horrified to angry (Very Angry) to reflective...to searching for 'what makes the most sense' spiritually. I saw that 'trend' in the data set you sent along..."</p> <p>It is hard to describe. I'm attaching a story I told in November. Perhaps that will illustrate that spectrum of what I've gone through in my own wellness journey. Resilience I guess is part of it too. Focussing on gratitude helps."</p> <p><b>2. January 11 Participant</b></p> <p>"I just wanted to type out some of my observations in case I don't get to cover them in the session. I'm in a course until 6pm, but hopefully won't be too late."</p> <p>Q.3 Are there ways that you see your health, spirituality, and well-being are connected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traditional crafts and connections with nature eased mental wellness issues</li> <li>• disconnections from spirituality and community decreased mental wellness</li> </ul>
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<p>Connection with land, tradition and community essential for health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• spirituality made people feel more positive and created better physical outcomes</li></ul> <p>Q.4 What are the most important things you have done in your lifetime that impacted your health?</p>
<p>Not identifying with Métis identity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• avoidance of/quitting addictive substances including alcohol, drugs, smoking</li><li>• eating healthy</li><li>• use of traditional medicines</li><li>• outdoor activities and keeping active</li><li>• connections with community, family, friends</li></ul> <p>Q.5 Are there ways that your Métis identity affects your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• many respondents didn't take enough time to understand this question</li><li>• many respondents indicated that there are no ways that Métis identity affects their health, spirituality and wellbeing</li><li>• some answered that these are affected by Métis identity, but didn't elaborate</li><li>• some individuals mentioned the high prevalence of diabetes and other diseases, in addition to high suicide rates</li><li>• connections to (Métis) community are important but have been severed for many</li><li>• one respondent mentioned a marginalized health care response (institutionalized racism)</li><li>• some respondents felt conflicted by religion or the incorporation of Indigenous spiritual practices into Métis culture</li></ul> <p>Q.6 How do you blend different religions or spiritual practices to maintain your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?</p>
<p>Harms done to Métis people (colonialism, discrimination, shame, severed connections, hiding, underrepresentation ) have caused illness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a number of people indicated that they're of the Catholic faith</li><li>• some individuals indicated that they mix religious and spiritual practices (smudging). Some were opposed to this.</li><li>• smudging seems important but very few people have mentioned a deeper understanding of other spiritual practices (ie. sweats, sun dance, pow wow, other ceremonies such as Grandmother Moon, etc). Likely a product of being separated from many Indigenous teachings.</li><li>• a number of people add yoga to their routines</li></ul> <p>Q.7 Are there any areas you want to write about related to health, spirituality and wellbeing?</p>
<p><b>Spirituality burdened by conflict between traditional</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• many had nothing further to say</li><li>• some individuals felt impacted by their work environments which impacted their wellbeing (one had fears of racism and seem to indicate hiding their Métis identity in the workplace environment)</li><li>• some thought better access to events and Indigenous teachings would have a positive impact on wellness.</li></ul>

<p>practices, Catholic Church, western mentalities, or just not knowing</p> <p>Fear of racism for identifying as Métis</p> <p>Searching for connections with community-challenging</p> <p>Searching for connection with land</p> <p>Embracing of Traditional and western practices</p> <p>Unrecognized, underrepresented,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Métis people practicing Indigenous spirituality may be discriminated against by other Métis people (lateral violence)</li> <li>• Some people have moved away from the Catholic faith</li> <li>• some respondents found solace in connections with the land</li> <li>• some respondents feel the need to keep explaining what Métis are and aren't (lateral violence mentioned above)</li> </ul> <p>Overall impressions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• connections to healthy vices (crafts), practices (smudging/traditional medicines, yoga), the land (outdoor activities), and teachings increase the overall mental and physical wellbeing of participants.</li> <li>• some participants have experienced a disconnection from Indigenous spirituality, but would benefit from increased access and teachings</li> <li>• community connections are very important</li> <li>• certain health issues need to be addressed including diabetes, suicide”</li> </ul> <p><b>3. January 18 Participant</b></p> <p>“A final thought I had about the data was that, for many people, there seemed to be a seamless integration of Western and traditional medicine, and there didn't seem to be any sort of inner turmoil about it. People just seemed to naturally combine different ways of healing.”</p> <p><b>4. January 25 Participant</b></p> <p>“Definitely reaffirmed my feelings on my heritage and society. Hopefully one day it'll get even better. As much as we fall thru the cracks now... at least its better than my parents and grandparents had. (I have two uncles that the church up in Fort Vermilion that were taken away from my paternal grandfather. I'm now started searching for them or their possible children). My grandpa is gone but I feel his spirit with me as I research our family tree. Makes me wish we had more opportunities to meet others like that more often.”</p>
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falling through the cracks, lost	
Longing for connection	

For peer review only



January 4 2022 White board  
lost cultures and connection

Actively in conflict with colonial  
mentality- this is coming out in our  
health. Conflicted stage of trusting  
western medicine.

hard to reconnect with your culture if you don't have  
a connection. Mental health, community- all of  
society is lacking this not just us.

seemed that data reflected people newly  
becoming connected to Metis culture.

Spirituality piece, blurred between Metis and  
Indigenous piece.

People at a loss with spirituality, church or  
traditional ways. Conflicted with Metis culture-  
celebrations seem to be from European side. First  
Nations ways of being are matriarchal, became  
hidden with Colonization, dishonours our great  
Grandmothers.

Grappling with dual  
identity, Metis and  
Catholic. Power in the  
land.

Fiddles, guitars, food, dance- release and  
joy.

Conflicted with self- generational stigma. People  
are easy to judge without knowing the whole  
story.

# Metis Identity connecting with health and well being

Without Metis identity- will impact your mental health, core values. When trying to fit into a way that is not who you are, this could be detrimental to health.

Metis heritage can relate to physical health. Impacts of not identifying as Metis can effect physical health.

Whats our Heritage?

Damned if you do damned if you don't. Where do you fit in? Hard to fit yourself, have to identify with what you beleive, no right or wrong. We are scared to identify with what we feel. Culture that we are re-learning

Fear in identifying as Metis- may draw away from what the medical issue is. Don't feel enough as a Metis to be included in western diagnosis- genetics qualities for predispositions.

Stigma- being excluded from appropriate health care. Self disclosing can be a barrier or path to more understanding. Need to have to do continual teaching to those who are well meaning. Us having to help them care for us.

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Not feeling you're (you look)  
Metis enough.

Don't think I'm Indian enough. Fitting in  
now because I took the side of my  
grandmothers. Spirit was around me-  
supposed to be there. The more I got  
involved, the feelings and the emotion  
grew and wanted more. Spirit guiding me, I  
knew I was supposed to be there. Taking  
whats good for you. I'm comfortable being  
in the middle, take from both sides.

## Overarching themes

Reconnecting with Metis identity being  
older has been challenging. Focus  
(programs) has been on youth  
reconnecting with identity. Still Searching.

Searching for programs  
independently, online as programs  
focus on youth. Shame a barrier. All  
this and all the ways (hidden or not)  
has effected health/mental health.  
So Far Reaching.

Reconnection to land. Traditional medicines, how/where  
can we find knowledge keeper to share this information.  
Elders say never to buy medicines- purchasing/trading  
monetarily- barriers to urbanization.

January 11 2022 White board

Connections to healthy vices: crafts, smudging, to the land, yoga, -increase the mental well being. Community connections very important. Health conditions like diabetes and suicide need to be addressed.

Stigma is a big part of this. Judgment discrimination- how we are judged by others is deep rooted. Mother taught us how to present ourselves, put together, clean. A way to defend yourself, self care, you don't know when you're going to run into things.

Theme: everyone would like to learn more. They may not know much, but would like to know more. Connecting spirituality with their well being through their environment.

### Overall Impressions

Lateral violence to Metis who practice spirituality, to those who didn't practice the Catholic faith.

Discrimination in health care. My own mother died in hospital because that discrimination. Huge issue. My mom more visibly Indigenous than I am. Can see that Metis are having similar experience with health care. This affects a person's health and well being.

Discrimination in health care. Witnessed an inmate who was well spoken, hit a brick wall in the doctors office. The doctor had an idea The inmate was determined to get accross was he was going to stay, but stuck to it. Doctor had some preconceived notions, but the inmate had to push through those. I

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Saw my doctors who came back from South Africa. Doctor spoke about he black people, comparing them to brown people, Indigenous people. Thinking about complaining about this doctors, been fighting my way through here.

You can set laws against us, as kids we had to put blankets on our windows to hide our dancing. I am the only practicing Catholic left in my family. I lost my faith (after the discovery of the children in Kamloops).

Shoes left to honour children left at church, they wanted to throw them out. "you're going to display all those shoes, this is where you're reconciliation is going to start"

Reconciliation is never going to be over

Was doing the prayers of the faithful at church, prayer included only Indigenous. I changed it to include First Nations, Metis and Inuit.

My parents always teased each other about gettin married behind the church. The Metis and the French built the church, but only the french could go in, the Metis had to go behind. We had to sit in the back of the church always.

Experiences of discrimination (not being as to take up the offering at church) stay with children forever.

There's joy in seeing my parents speak their language

Covid hit, now missing part of my spirituality

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the Catholic church has shut you out (Metis), but I still have my spirituality.

Can see how spirituality, mental health and physical health are interconnected. They all go together.

In Covid, missing our laughter and our connection, which grounds us.

Big theme is "a connection to something"  
Whatever you practice physically to stay healthy. A connection to your culture (whether you grew up that way or not). When you learn it, you want more. CONNECTION to people who are like you, when you feel like you belong somewhere. CONNECTION

Shows in our Metis functions (dances and music)- you're welcome there, you can be who you are, enjoy the kinship of other people who are like you.

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## Main themes

The connection needs to be made again. My grandparents, I don't know what they did spiritually, but did a lot of Metis things. When they moved to Calgary that stopped. Don't know why? Maybe to assimilate? Necessary to well being to be connected to culture and spirituality. How do you do that, it was cut off so extremely. There are so many people who didn't know they were Metis. It's necessary for health, but how do you reconnect with all of those ways: culture, spirituality and connection. Health will falter without. (Grandparents spoke Michif, they went to Batoche every year. Grandfather was a jigger and played the spoons)

Beading session, people open up, connecting and talking, laughing, being themselves. Very rewarding teaching this.

Eating traditional foods. I don't know if I've experienced eating my traditional foods. Don't know if this would make a difference in health. If we ate them more, maybe this would increase our health. In general I don't know if we eat a lot of our traditional food.

Access to traditional medicines (Sage, sweet grass, also berries and other traditional methods)- as a contribution to health.

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Accross the board, no was said there wasn't a connection between mind, body and spirituality, not mentioned how. SOme mentioned trauma they experienced. Making that spiritual connection helped them heal and overcome. Grounded to the earth, and doing things outdoors helped them feel less stressed.

Learning about being Metis, had felt like an outsider or a fraud.

Honouring the land, makin banok brought her comfort. Wearing Metis sash brough her source of strength. Being part of a larger Metis community has helped her.

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White board Jan 18, 22

Interconnectedness, connections,  
multiples, no singular theme.

Kinship, being together.

Protecting each other, always  
room for one more.

Searching for something.  
Searching for grounding.  
Longing.

Feelings of disconnection.  
Searching for something that  
worked for me. Searching for  
filling the void.



When your history is behing  
you, it's in you.

Some had seemed to find meaning  
and understanding in their journey

exlusion

No mater what you look like,  
when you're Metis, you belong.

Imposter  
syndrome.

Perception of others when sharing Metis  
heritage



MAIN THEMES

INTERCONNECTEDNESS. Giving attention to all the parts for health	Searching.
Family connection	Everything is connected
Responsibility towards family, caring for family and caring for community	Building on knowledge
Individual spirituality	comfort in a practice gives tone a sense of well being. This starts with searching.
Kinship	

White board January 25, 2022  
Recognizing negative and positive coping methods.

Importance of having Metis culture visible in the workplace.

Connecting modern life with historical life, mainly learning traditional ways to deal with problems of modern life.

Representaion and connection to culture.

Metis representation missing in work and education.

Diverse way of reconnecting with Metis traditions

We live in 2 worlds, and that's o.k.

Not enough inclusion for Metis people

Others need to be educated about the Metis culture.

Metis have fallen through the cracks.

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# Main themes about health wellbeing and spirituality

blended approach (western and Metis) to wellness and spirituality

Physical wellness improved when connecting to traditional practice

Harvesting, hunting, going to the forest- these practices can be hard, but are connected to wellness

Spirituality is complex, affected by colonialism

Spirituality, any connection to it, supports wellbeing

trauma leading to illness

Metis peoples are still lost.

Misconceptions about Metis leads to advocating

# BMJ Open

## How do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3? A Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID	bmjopen-2024-089503.R2
Article Type:	Original research
Date Submitted by the Author:	14-Dec-2024
Complete List of Authors:	Ginn, Carla; University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing Ginn, Craig; University of Calgary, Department of Classics and Religion Barnabe, Cheryl; University of Calgary Cumming School of Medicine, Departments of Medicine and Community Health Sciences Dumont/Vaness Bergum, Doreen; Elder - Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3 Gentes, Judy; Regional President - Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3 Tatrallyay, Priscilla; University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing - Graduate Student
<b>Primary Subject Heading</b>:	Qualitative research
Secondary Subject Heading:	Patient-centred medicine, Qualitative research, Research methods, Global health, Mental health
Keywords:	MENTAL HEALTH, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, Health Equity, Community-Based Participatory Research, Health Services Accessibility, Patient Participation

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# How do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)

## Region 3? A Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study

### Abstract

**Objectives:** The purpose of our research was to understand intersections between health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3.

**Design:** This Métis-guided, community-based, participatory research builds on our previous patient-oriented community-based study where we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with leaders, Elders, and community members to explore health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the MNA Region 3.

**Setting:** Métis people are affected by historical and contemporary impacts of colonization. This includes the residential school experience, impacting how Métis people relate to themselves, to others, and to their culture. Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada, and our research is based in the most densely populated region.

**Participants:** 101 surveys were completed between September and November 2021, via Qualtrics. Twenty-five participants who completed surveys participated in community-based participatory research sharing circle data analysis groups in January 2022, via Zoom.

**Results:** Six overarching themes were developed in our participatory data analysis: (1) searching, (2) interconnectedness, (3) colonization and systems, (4) traditional practices and teachings, (5) spiritual and religious practices, and (6) relationship with Métis identity.

**Conclusions:** We discovered multiple intersections between health, spirituality, and wellbeing within the MNA Region 3. Our results indicate that the impacts of colonization for Métis people are poorly understood. More research is needed to understand the ongoing impacts of





communities, the Canadian government has brought about assimilative and racist colonial policies to allow for white settlement and development on Indigenous land.<sup>5-7</sup> These policies and processes have had destructive impacts on Métis people's identity and ways of life, including their relationship and connection to land, governance, and kinship systems.<sup>8</sup> Christianity was promoted and often forced on Indigenous people and played a marked role in carrying out assimilative efforts, with similar and unique impacts across Indigenous groups in Canada.<sup>5,9</sup> The missionary impulse, the residential school system, and the child welfare system influenced Métis people's relationship with culture, identity, and spirituality, along with how they relate to religion and spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Cultural and spiritual orientations***

Although Métis people are of European and First Nations origins, Métis communities are diverse in cultural orientations. Early descriptions of Métis people included the Nehiyawak (Cree), and apihtawikosisan, meaning half sons or half people,<sup>10</sup> the independent ones,<sup>10</sup> aka e-akimiht, meaning not counted in the treaties,<sup>5</sup> and the people who own themselves.<sup>11</sup> Fiola<sup>5</sup> notes Métis people adhering to Indigenous Spiritualism, Catholicism, Anglicanism, Methodism, or Presbyterianism. In addition, Michif-speaking Catholics viewed Indigenous Spiritualism most favorably due to parallels between folk Catholicism of voyageur fathers and mothers' Ojibwa and Cree traditions.<sup>5</sup> Prefontaine, et al.<sup>12</sup> noted today few Métis people may participate in Indigenous spirituality, however throughout history, many Métis people were connected to and embraced it.

At the basis of this system is Kitchi Manitou or the "Great Spirit" or "Creator" who created the universe, the spirit world, the land, plants, animals, and humans. In this spiritual system, it is vital to share, give and receive in order to keep the body, spirit,

mind and emotions balanced. The traditional Métis worldview promoted living with the land, not exploiting it. The use of the land and its resources was that of a collective stewardship between a responsible community of resource users. In Indigenous languages, there is no such thing as inanimate objects – all things have spirits. Indeed, flora, fauna, and humans were provided with spirits, emotions, minds, and bodies, which made them equals and therefore worthy of respect... Christianity has long been an integral component in the spiritual lives of the Métis. <sup>12</sup> (pp. 2,3)

Payment <sup>13</sup> noted the syncretic nature of Métis spirituality incorporating elements from parent cultures, believing in the Great Spirit and God, as well as spirit helpers.

*Assimilationist policies*

Historically, Métis and other Indigenous peoples’ conversion to Catholicism was complicated. Many hesitated to accept the Christian message because of fundamental differences and fear of the substitution of values, traditions, and morality according to western Europeans. <sup>14</sup> According to Huel <sup>14</sup> motives for Indigenous peoples’ conversions were complex, frequently rooted in ethnic survival in the face of social, cultural, economic, and health challenges. Huel <sup>14</sup> described current impacts of Christianity on Indigenous people, by continued participation in Catholicism, and the syncretism evident in the annual Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta pilgrimages. However, the lack of Indigenous clergy in the Catholic church, the exclusion of rich cultural traditions of Indigenous people in the missionary effort, and attempts at assimilation were significant. <sup>14</sup> According to Stonechild and Starblanket <sup>15</sup> there was conflict on contact regarding spiritual issues between Europeans and Indigenous people, and assimilationist policies forced some Indigenous people to move away from traditional spiritual beliefs. By the early 1800’s, Métis people had integrated ceremonies and other elements of Indigenous spirituality. <sup>15</sup>

### ***Residential schools***

As part of colonialism, historical effects of Christianization have shaped Métis people's lives, directly and indirectly impacting health, spirituality, and wellbeing. Métis people are affected by historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, including the residential school experience, impacting how Métis people relate to themselves, to others, and to their culture.<sup>16</sup> Between 1883 and 1996, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were placed in residential schools, which were set up to displace parental and community involvement in children's lives. There are ongoing adverse effects of residential schools for surviving families and communities, affecting individual and collective health.<sup>17</sup> While many people who worked in the schools were inspired by an impulse to "save" and to "civilize" Canada's Aboriginal people, government had other motives. To gain control of Aboriginal land, the Canadian government signed treaties it did not respect, took over land without making treaties, and unilaterally passed laws that controlled nearly every aspect of Aboriginal life. No other Canadians were subject to this level of regulation; these schools were central to the colonization of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Ongoing intergenerational trauma***

Métis children comprised 9% of children in residential schools, and adverse effects were compounded by the Sixties Scoop, where thousands of Indigenous children were taken into foster care, adopted by mostly non-Indigenous families.<sup>19-22</sup> Ongoing intergenerational trauma is evident in today's foster care system; although only 7% of children in Canada are Indigenous, they comprise 52% of children under age 14 in foster care.<sup>23</sup> Indigenous children in foster care are among the most vulnerable children in Canada.<sup>24</sup>

Past collective trauma can affect current individual, family, and community health. Impacts of residential school on former attendees and subsequent generations include poorer

physical health, increased chronic and infectious disease, mental distress, depression, addiction, substance misuse, increased stress, and suicidal behaviour.<sup>25 26</sup> These historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, including the residential school experience, have also affected how Métis people relate to themselves, relate to others, and relate to their culture. Colonialism resulted in Indigenous people disassociating from their culture and assimilating into the dominant culture. Of note, understanding how people conceive of themselves and how they relate to the world around them, is fundamental to health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Part of addressing the health and wellbeing of Métis people is to understand more about historical collective identity and peoplehood, shaping how Métis people see themselves today. Métis spirituality and religion is not easily categorizable, and there is a gap in the literature exploring Métis relationships with traditional Indigenous spirituality.<sup>12</sup> This history and the understanding of Métis people as colonized, with complex religious and spiritual experiences over time provides important context for our research.

**Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action**

In 2015, the Canadian federal government made a commitment to implementing the Calls to Action that were provided in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).<sup>17</sup> Along with the implementation of the TRC’s call to close health outcome gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, McNally and Martin<sup>27</sup> highlighted the role of research in contributing to the development of policies and programs that aim to increase health equity for Indigenous people in Canada. Particularly for Métis people, there is a lack of Métis-guided research advancing the development of local understandings of health and wellbeing that addresses cultural, social, and historical aspects of health in local contexts.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of our research was to understand intersections between health, spirituality, and

wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3. To date, ours is the only existing research exploring Métis health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the localized context in Alberta, or anywhere else in Canada. Our research team members (co-authors) are members of the MNA Region 3 except two. The first non-Indigenous author is the spouse (42+ years) of the second author, who is Métis – and their children and grandchildren members of the Métis Nation of Alberta. The last author is connected to the Indigenous community through her Indigenous children. Our research question was, how do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3?

## Methods

Our Métis-guided, community-based, participatory research builds on our previous patient-oriented community-based study.<sup>29</sup> In our previous study, we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with leaders, Elders, and community members to explore health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the MNA Region 3.<sup>29</sup> Identified were priorities of passing on Métis traditions/culture to the younger generation, blending different cultural and spiritual practices, and cultural immersion/traditional knowledge/learning in community. Connection to Métis ancestry, to community, to land, and spirituality presented opportunities for individual, family, and community healing.<sup>29</sup> In our current study, we used the qualitative structured survey we co-developed in our previous research.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Aboriginal People's Health describes the essential place of engaging in community-based, participatory research with Indigenous communities.<sup>30</sup> Our research team engaged in community-based, participatory research within the MNA Region 3 using these CIHR guidelines: Engaging in community-based, participatory research with Indigenous communities includes the following responsibilities: (1)

understanding and respecting Indigenous world views; (2) respecting the jurisdiction of the community over the conduct of the research; (3) providing the option of a participatory-research approach; (4) obtaining community leader consent, and also individual community member consent; (5) respecting anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality concerns; (6) addressing the use of the community's cultural and sacred knowledge; (7) maintaining the individual and community rights to cultural knowledge, sacred knowledge, and cultural practices and traditions; (8) understanding and communicating individual and community intellectual property rights; (9) benefitting the community as well as the researcher; (10) fostering capacity of community members including participation in research processes; (11) learning about and applying Indigenous cultural protocols relevant to each community-and engaging in ongoing, accessible, and understandable communication with the community; (12) recognizing and respecting the rights of individuals and the community in data ownership; (13) viewing biological samples as on loan to the researcher; (14) including the individual and community in interpretation of data and the review of conclusions to ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation; (15) providing opportunity for the individual and community to decide how contributions to the research project should be acknowledged.<sup>31</sup>

Two philosophical perspectives guided our current research, Indigenous ways of knowing, and participatory action research (PAR), a philosophy as well as a method. Indigenous ways of knowing encompasses a wholistic worldview, a belief in the connectedness of everything, with transmission from generation to generation.<sup>32 33 34</sup> Kovach<sup>34</sup> describes a continuum of ways to access information, and that Indigenous research is less researcher-dependent and more relational. PAR was influenced by Lewin<sup>35</sup> (emigrating in 1933 due to the Nazi's treatment of Jews and academics), who questioned the permanence of social change



without community involvement, identifying the harmful effects of colonization. Founded by Freire<sup>36</sup> and Borda<sup>37</sup>, PAR emphasizes social transformation through placing those to whom the research matters most at the centre of it.

### ***Ethical Approval***

According to the Tri-Council policy statement on ethical conduct for research involving humans research with Indigenous people must arise from within the community, and include building trusting, reciprocal relationships with respect for persons, collaboration, and engagement between researchers, community members, and community leaders.<sup>30</sup> We built trusting, reciprocal relationships within the MNA Region 3, collaborating at each step in our research, developing a research proposal in conjunction with local MNA Region 3 leadership and received ethics approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (REB: 18-0433). The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, et al.<sup>30</sup> also details ethical guidelines, which we adhered to: (1) respect for persons (mindful of the need for free, informed, and ongoing consent, and intergenerational interconnections with nature); (2) concern for welfare (mindful of physical, social, economic, and cultural environments including communities); and (3) justice (engagement with participants prior to recruiting and then maintaining over course of the research can enhance ethical practice and quality of research, promote trust, and identify mutually beneficial research goals). We were also guided by the National Aboriginal Health Organization<sup>38</sup> principles of ethical Métis research: (1) Building reciprocal relationships through community engagement, acceptance, and involvement; (2) Respecting individual and collective practices and protocols; (3) Recognizing individual and community diversity; (4) Researching with outcomes of relevance meaningful to the community in mind; and (5) Understanding relevant Métis history including straddled worldviews.

*Métis Nation of Alberta*

Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada, where > 114,375 self-identified and 42,000 registered Métis people live within six regions, along with > 5,000 people living on eight Métis Settlements (Canada’s only designated Métis land bases, comprising over 1.25 million acres of land).<sup>39</sup> Métis settlements are governed by the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) and there is a distinct divide between the MNA and the MSGC. Our research focused on registered Métis people within the MNA Region 3, with 14,000 registered members. The six regions in the MNA include Métis Locals, each Local having an elected President and Vice-President. The locals facilitate networking among smaller communities within the region and serve to support local interests. Our previous community-based study took place in the largest of 12 communities (Calgary) in the MNA Region 3, where 6,300 members reside. Inquiring about the possibility of a research study with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder, they identified exploring some aspect of health, spirituality, and wellbeing would be meaningful and helpful to the community.

*Patient and Public involvement*

Our research team has years of ongoing trusting, reciprocal relationships within the MNA Region 3. When inquiring about a research study with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder, they identified exploring health, spirituality, and wellbeing as a meaningful topic that would be helpful to the community. Collaborating at each step in our earlier research, we co-developed a qualitative structured survey with MNA Region 3 leaders and an Elder. With continued collaboration in this current research, we distributed this co-developed qualitative structured survey electronically. We engaged in research sharing circle groups for data analysis and theme development.

## Participants

We used the qualitative structured survey developed in our previous study for the current research (see survey attached as a supplementary file). The survey contains checkboxes with areas of interest and space for narrative writing. Originally planning to distribute the survey face-to-face across the MNA Region 3, we were inhibited by the Covid-19 pandemic. A Qualtrics<sup>40</sup> survey link was emailed by the MNA Region 3 Head Office and posted on their Facebook page for MNA Region 3 members to access. The Qualtrics survey was open September 2021 – November 2021, 116 participants initiated surveys, of which 15 were incomplete (87% completion rate). One hundred and one participants aged 19-77 years ( $M=40.76$ ,  $SD=11.87$ ) completed surveys. Following de-identification of the narrative data from Qualtrics surveys into word documents, we engaged in research sharing circle data analysis groups for participatory coding and theme development. Each participant completing the survey was given a \$50.00 gift card (and an additional \$50.00 gift card if participating in data analysis).

## Research sharing circle data analysis

Twenty-five participants who completed surveys volunteered to take part in data analysis through attending one of four research circle sharing groups. Research sharing circle data analysis groups were held via Zoom weekly in January 2022, and were approximately 90 minutes long. Research sharing circles provide space, time, and an environment for sharing ideas, and are fitting for research with Indigenous people.<sup>34</sup> Our research sharing circle data analysis groups were attended and facilitated by our research team and an MNA Region 3 Elder, who provided guidance and perspective to each research sharing circle. Our participatory coding and theme development was modeled after previous studies.<sup>29 41-43</sup> Research sharing circle data analysis group participants were provided with de-identified word documents of narrative survey

data approximately two weeks ahead of each sharing circle. During each research sharing circle data analysis groups, participants were given opportunity to identify the data holding the most meaning to them, discuss why, and work together to develop themes. Conversations focused on participants' understandings of the survey data that had been shared with them, and research team members took notes during each research sharing circle data analysis group, adding ideas for themes to a whiteboard within Zoom as participants shared them. More detail about the data analysis and theme development process can be found in the notes and whiteboard themes attached as supplementary files. Conversations were not focused on personal stories, but on survey data, however, there were natural opportunities for participants to share their personal connection to the data and their stories as well. The research sharing circle data analysis groups did not generate new narrative data, however, they contributed to the participatory data analyses process, building trust, reciprocity, collaboration, and engagement among the research team, community members, and leaders.

Following completion of the research sharing circle data analysis groups, the research team members reviewed and discussed the notes from each of the sharing circles to confirm themes that were developed about the data. Informed by PAR methods, the research team members condensed some of the themes identified in the research sharing circle data analysis groups, placing them under six overarching themes. These themes were member-checked with the MNA Region 3 community members at community mixers. We co-designed and shared an illustration of the findings at an MNA Region 3 mixer, where MNA Region 3 leaders, members, and Elders enthusiastically verified it.

## Results

Six overarching themes were developed in a participatory manner in our research sharing circle data analysis groups: (1) searching (searching for connection, educating ourselves and others); (2) interconnectedness (interconnectedness and holistic health, family and community relationships); (3) colonization and systems (navigating systems and Métis identity, colonization and ongoing impacts on health); (4) traditional practices and teachings (reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit, engaging in traditional practices and teachings); (5) spiritual and religious practices (living for something more, self-determination with spirituality and religion, centering spirituality in health); and (6) relationship with Métis identity (identity conflict and tensions, identity and self-concept). See Figure 1. Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3.

Insert Figure 1 here

## Searching

### *Searching for connection*

Ongoing searching for connection included wanting to connect, or connect more deeply to Métis identity and culture, and to a higher power, sometimes referred to by participants as Creator, God, nature, or Mother Earth. For Participant 74, it was broader:

Your health and well-being are definitely connected, if you are not a healthy person there's a good chance that things in your life are harder to do or to live with. As for the spirit, I don't believe in spirits or spirituality. I believe we are all of the universe, you are made of space dust you go back to space dust. And I suppose I find comfort in that.

Interconnections between physical health, mental health, colonialism, intergenerational trauma, and spirituality were evident throughout the findings.

I'm having to learn about what it means to be Métis from people outside my family. I didn't grow up knowing what this meant or really anything about it. Because of this lack of knowledge and experience, right now my Métis identity is a source of conflict — I feel pride and curiosity, but also pain. I feel as an outsider and a fraud, which is hurtful. I see how this identity could bring connection to culture and nature, but I am just starting out. I feel I have a cultural wound that I'm shying away from, which leads to pain, anxiety, and almost a rejection of spirituality. (Participant 19)

Historically, Métis people have been hidden or erased, not fully fitting into European or Indigenous classifications.<sup>19</sup> Some were searching for connection to spirituality, to address disconnection from spirituality, for belonging, to address disconnection from community, and to connect to Métis family and community. Desired outcomes of searching included connecting to: (1) Indigenous ways of being, (2) learning opportunities, (3) teachings on Indigenous spirituality, (4) Indigenous ancestry, (5) culture, (6) oneself, (7) Indigenous cultures and beliefs, (8) Métis ways of life in the bush, and (9) Métis identity.

*Educating ourselves and others*

Part of a search for connection included educating themselves about being Métis, after experiencing childhoods where Métis teachings were minimal.

I'm learning and trying to reclaim our ways of knowing. Slowly my grandmother is starting to share more but it takes time. I feel like I don't know enough and it negatively impacts the way I view myself in the community. Knowledge that has been passed down makes me feel proud and connected in my spirituality, but the process is long and hard and can challenge sense of identity and can have negative impacts on wellbeing. (Participant 71)



For some, educating others about being Métis included educating medical professionals.

I smudge and pray twice a day on a daily basis. I've participated in ceremonies including sweats, and I monthly do my own River ceremony for guidance and peace from the Creator and my Ancestors. I'm teaching my children as much as I can learn about our culture and we have come to love traditional practices...I've shared openly with my specialists my desire to incorporate a blend of traditional healing and western medicine. My specialists are very supportive and open. My new family doctor who replaced my previous doctor of 19 years is not, and recently refused to work with me and my specialists on prescribing pain medication for a diagnosed condition having me end up in emergency and admitted from a pain crisis that had my body go in shock with my blood pressure 70/30 and oxygen 86%. I'm so frustrated and scared that I won't find a family doctor that will work with me and my girls again in a healthy collaboration in my health. My youngest daughter has also had emergency surgery these past few months and is still experiencing daily symptoms of vomiting and can't get help...even though the family doctor has seen her but hasn't looked at her wholistic health. Our people need help in accessing services and advocacy. (Participant 48)

Educating referred to informal and relational learning by receiving teachings from Elders or family members, but also referred to accessing classes and courses. Many had Elders in their lives to approach and learn from regularly.

Connection to kin gives me a larger pool of support that family alone does not. I am able to go to nature and the land to find a safe calming space to communicate with the creator. My Elders help guide me and provide insight and teachings on how to live. (Participant 93)

Educating also sometimes included higher education or institutionalized learning beyond Métis-specific education. Educating ourselves and others included more understanding about: (1) Métis-specific teachings, (2) spirituality, (3) Indigenous spirituality, (4) Métis culture and ways, (5) smudging, (6) praying, (7) ceremony, (8) their roots (knowing who they are and where they come from as Métis people), (9) Indigenous culture, (10) plant medicines, and (11) the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

**Interconnectedness**

***Interconnectedness and holistic health***

Interconnectedness and a holistic model of health, incorporating the entire person, was directly and indirectly referenced as a key framework for understanding health, wellbeing, and spirituality. Participant 65 wrote, “I see health, wellbeing, and spirituality as being interconnected with all areas affecting one another in strengthening and weakening depending on how each area is affected. It is a balancing act.” Throughout the findings, spirituality, and a connection to something more was self-defined.

Following the circle of life and the four directions, it is clear that all is connected.

Personally, I have found that lack of spirituality is of great concern because if a person is not grounded it can affect the mental health of the individual leading to a decline in health which then affects the overall wellbeing of the person. Spirituality is not just a belief in a higher power or creator but also a belief in yourself because you know that you will be safe and protected. (Participant 5).

Métis identity was also indicated to be a strong factor in holistic health and wellbeing. Some participants had a strong sense of how their Métis identity influenced their health and wellbeing, where others hoped to better understand the connection between Métis identity and

health. Interconnectedness with nature (land, the outdoors, and Mother Earth) and individual interconnectedness (between mind, body, emotions, and spirit), frequently included the spiritual. Everyday practice and incorporation of spirituality was a vital part of holistic health and well-being for Métis participants. Spiritual practices were described as individual as well as communal.

I embrace all sides of my culture and practice spiritual healing in my home by smudging, burning sweet grass. I also take part in sweats when I can, as well as taking part in healing circles and talking to Elders. (Participant 38)

For Métis people, engaging in ceremonies such as smudging, pipe, sweat lodge, sun dance, and sacred lodges can create connection with creation; however there is resistance in communities to these practices due to the influence of residential schools, Christianity, and government policy.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Family and community relationships***

Relationships with family and community members, as well as building relationships with Elders, was an evident part of interconnectedness and social connection, supporting health, wellbeing, and positive health outcomes. Family and community relationships included understanding how they were situated in it, particularly in urban settings.

I think that access to teachings and community is important for our nation[s] wellbeing. Many of us in urban settings and away from homelands are disconnected and lacking that guidance and connection. Especially if we don't "look" Métis it can negatively affect our view of ourselves. Where do we belong within the community? Lack of connection to community, teachings, language etc. all impacts health and well being of our nation. (Participant 71)

For many, maintaining regular social connection was particularly difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. Métis participants valued family as a source of support, particularly for mental health. Learning about their Métis history and prioritizing family was a source of strength. Participant 70 wrote, "I look forward to new opportunities to connect to the Métis community in my city, the land, and to continue practicing our cultural traditions like beading, gathering, and ceremony."

A priority for many people when considering the role of interconnectedness in health, wellbeing, and spirituality was connection with Elders. In the words of Participant 97, "the more traditional ceremonies I take part in and Elders I speak to, the more I grow both physically and spiritually." For some participants, this connection with Elders increased wellbeing:

When a new medical professional finds out my Métis identity they automatically assume that I have a lot of medical conditions or addictions! But I also think my Métis identity allows me to connect and speak with Elders and spirituality will improve my wellbeing.  
(Participant 50)

Participant 97 wrote, "I grew up Catholic. My family still practices some of that. But I attend speaking circles, rely on Elders and knowledge to support me in my life." For some, finding a mix between Catholicism and more traditional beliefs was facilitated by family and community relationships.

**Colonization and systems**

*Navigating systems and Métis identity*

Many participants openly shared their experiences of discrimination or fear of being discriminated against, with a particular focus on interactions with health care professionals and the health care system. Participant 85 described their Métis identity making a difference,

“depending on the situation, I experience discrimination in health centres for my appearance and don’t like going to health centres for that reason.” Discrimination and racism was identified by many participants as interfering with health.

Myself and my Métis relatives have struggles with heart issues, diabetes, and mental illnesses (schizophrenia, PTSD, anxiety, etc.). I myself am white passing so I have yet to experience discrimination in the health system but my non-white passing relatives have (expected to be alcoholics, harassed for prescribed medicine at pharmacies, etc.). This affects their desire to access services and distrust the system. (Participant 47)

Navigating health care services is impacted by being white or non-white passing; traditional healing and western medicine are difficult to merge. Some of the participants also had difficulties navigating the preceding in their places of work.

Most people spend their days at work. Workplaces, I feel, have a major impact on health and wellbeing. How does my Métis identity play out there? Can I say I’m Métis without prejudice? I made a workplace change 2 years ago for my mental health and I found that the change to a more liberal work environment helped my mental health because in an environment that supported me in many ways. The pay isn’t great but my health seems much better. (Participant 43)

Culturally safe policies and practices promoted and centered with incorporation of the TRC Calls to Action are critical for Métis health and wellbeing within systems. As the TRC is implemented and policies and practices are developed, there should be a recognition of the impact on Métis people regarding health, spirituality, and wellbeing, with a specific emphasis on workplace environments.

Workplace environments must do more to Indigenize and acknowledge the positive affects it has on all people. Equity, inclusion and diversity are intrinsic components. Governments must implement culturally safe policies and practices within the health care system. Active participation in the Truth and Reconciliation process brings new challenges for health, spirituality and wellbeing. The emotional labour and responsibilities that is expected of a Métis person continues to be present as it did historically. There are more truths to be told. (Participant 84)

One participant referred to challenges navigating academia, the justice system, and supports and services, including even Métis-specific services.

Completing graduate studies impacted my health negatively due to the presence of a racist academic in my sphere. Fighting the racist and misogynist justice system related to domestic abuse and the rights to safety for my baby also impacted my health negatively. (Participant 91).

Participant 65 wrote, “internalized racism from systemic issues in society has affected my wellbeing especially when hearing and being witness to racism and negative perceptions [in] society... however it has also given me strength when learning what it means to be Métis.” External and internal challenges exist with experiences of racism and discrimination, along with opportunities for developing resiliency and strength through claiming and walking in Métis identity.

***Colonization and ongoing impacts on health***

Ongoing effects of colonization have significantly impacted the health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people. Participant 14 described, “my loss of identity not knowing my culture or Métis spirituality affected my sense of connection to my people, Spirit and value of



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my physical health.” Participant 79 wrote, “So much was lost and forgotten because being Métis used to not be socially acceptable.”

I have a lot of relatives and ancestors who struggle/struggled with addictions and mental illnesses. As I learned more of this and my own mental illnesses began to show, I worked hard to avoid alcohol, drugs, as well as to seek therapy. I also began to acknowledge and understand the systems and history that created addiction in my family and use this knowledge to protect myself from these systems and work to return to traditional ways. This had helped me to understand that my mental health issues are not entirely my fault, and that by taking care of my mind, body, and spirit I can help alleviate my issues and help to heal further generations. (Participant 47)

Another aspect of colonization is the role of religion and mistreatment by religious institutions and staff.

It affects my mental well-being more than anything, as trying to understand why the Indigenous people were treated so poorly from the beginning. And how people are okay with using their religion as a scapegoat for their choices of mistreatment and or murder. And it really gives you an understanding of how humans treat humans for selfish reasons. (Participant 74)

Varying relationships to the church and organized religion were expressed.

I used to be Catholic which I totally reject now especially since learning more about the atrocities my family and others has experienced because of the church. I am a very new learner about our Michif “ways” of ceremonies. Of course it is connected at a deep level in the choices I make every day. (Participant 54).

Emphasized throughout was the importance of recognizing, understanding, and addressing personal and intergenerational trauma. Participant 7 wrote, “Removed myself from toxic people and situations; began my road to sobriety so I could heal myself from the trauma of my life and past generations.”

Understanding who I am and where my family comes from is very important. Trauma from past generations is imprinting in my DNA and passed down through many generations. Knowing that helps me deal with the things that come up in life.  
(Participant 81)

Recognizing the effects of intergenerational trauma and taking steps to mitigate them, Participant 83 described engaging in “physical activity, healthy food choices by mainly eating wild game protein, choosing to be a non-smoker, stress reduction techniques, recognizing intergenerational traumas and most importantly living a strong spiritual way of life.”  
For many, colonization resulted in disconnection from Indigenous spirituality.

I was raised very Catholic with no discussion of traditional spiritual practices. As I got older I questioned those beliefs and began exploring spiritual connection to land and how those worked together. I smudge in the morning and say my prayers. My prayers still come through the way I'd almost pray in church, but now I use a different method I suppose. Smudge grounds and centers me. (Participant 71)

Participant 96 wrote, “in our household we are accepting of all religion and spiritually and are always trying to learn more without belonging to anything. This affects our wellbeing because I feel we have lost information, culture and understanding.” Reclaiming religion and spirituality as a way of addressing disconnection from Métis culture and traditional spirituality was identified throughout the study.

## Traditional practices and teachings

### *Reconnecting with and practicing Métis ways that fit*

Finding and practicing Métis ways fit differently for each individual, however, smudging was frequently identified as the way to reconnect with and practice traditional ways. Connection with Métis ways, or reconnection, knowing inside all along about being Métis, were described throughout.

I think it's so important to gain teachings from Elders or family members. If young, urban Indigenous youth don't have access to traditional knowledge, then I think they should be provided this support in schools or Aboriginal friendship centres. Without spirituality, it feels like a part of your self is missing. (Participant 16)

Being outdoors was a fitting way to connect with spirituality for some participants in our study.

I don't consider myself to be a spiritual person. My only connection to spirituality is being in nature. I am outside a lot and hike throughout the year. Hiking to me is first and foremost physical, but it also reminds me that nature is powerful and enormous. Hiking is a mindfulness practice and also allows for a break from the tech-connected and busy city lifestyle. (Participant 19)

### Engaging in traditional practices and teachings

Engaging in traditional practices and teachings occurs on an individual and collective level. Participant 36 observed, "I find that the Métis people tend to forget where the Indigenous part of them comes from, and we forget to celebrate that side. We focus on the non-Indigenous side and celebrate that more often." Embracing and living out traditions and practices were informed by each Métis person's unique relationship with local Indigenous people, personal history, family history and relationship to Métis ways. "I stay away from church, I am in a

better place believing in the Creator” (Participant 52). Distinguishing between Indigenous, First Nation, or Métis practices and traditions (such as smudging, Indigenous spirituality, prayer, being on the land, and ceremony), was not frequent. Participant 91 wrote, “My wellbeing is intimately connected to practicing my culture and Indigenous spirituality, being involved in my community and being on the land.” Participant 16 noted, “I smudge regularly and I try to eat a traditional diet filled with meat and whole foods. I was raised Catholic however in my teens I rejected the faith and solely followed my father’s Indigenous spiritual teachings.” Participant 50 related, “I have nothing to do with Christianity. I follow First Nations spiritual practices.” Another noted, “I wish I could harvest more medicines and have more knowledge in that area” (Participant 88).

Smudging and prayer were consistent practices. Smudging was “to help with stress” (Participant 9). Participant 16 emphasized, “maintain a healthy diet, follow traditional Indigenous teachings and spirituality as taught by my Métis father, and keep an active lifestyle through outdoor activities.” Connecting to land was referred to as part of religion or spirituality, as a part of mental health, as a part of physical activity, and as a place of refuge, belonging, and holiness, supporting health, wellbeing, connection, healing, and wholeness.

My Métis identity affects my health and well-being as I feel drawn to the outdoors, I feel that nature is a holy place for me. While I believe in god I feel closest to her when [in] nature and I can smell the earth. (Participant 33)

Participant 46 identified, “mindfulness, time to connect to nature and the creator, realizing the simplicity of walking/hiking to provide physical benefits as well as opportunity to connect to nature.”

**Spiritual and religious practices**

### *Living for something more*

Living for something more included participants' sense of purpose, meaning and personal values. Participant 46 identified, "we can't be physically healthy without mental well-being and a connection to something larger than ourselves." Participant 12 wrote, "worked hard, believed in a power greater than me." Participant 35 summarized, "I go to Catholic church but also respect Métis cultural beliefs." Living for something more was described more specifically by another participant:

I feel that honouring nature, Spirit and Christian values are synonymous and blend easily.

I enjoy spending lots of my time outside in creation/nature honouring Spirit and enjoying its bounty. My soul is healed in the forest & mountains. The rivers and creeks listen & the animals teach me lessons. (Participant 14)

### *Self-determination with spirituality and religion*

Self-determination with spirituality and religion included self-definition and self-leadership, shaped by colonization, including religious missions in historical Métis communities. Participants strongly conveyed spiritual and religious practices as personal; Participant 56 wrote, "the way a person prays should always be personal and meaningful to a greater power." In the words of Participant 80, "there is not one way or dogma," rather, participants described embracing, rejecting or blending Christianity with traditional Indigenous spirituality.

My spirituality is kinda a mix of being raised Catholic, resenting that, becoming more in tune with Indigenous ways of knowing in regards to spirituality, and a whole mix of what I chose to believe and put into practice. These certain practices and having spirituality in general help me be mindful, which affects my wellbeing. (Participant 46)

### *Centering spirituality in health*

The blending of Christianity with Métis beliefs was frequently mentioned, "re-learning what was lost during colonization and still practicing the religion I choose today takes some juggling but it helps me be more comfortable with myself" (Participant 81). Participant 4 wrote, "I definitely blend Indigenous spirituality with a Christian theology. I try to see Soteriology with Indigenous eyes." Another participant described how health and wellbeing are connected with spirituality:

I am Christian but also believe in the creation stories and ways of being and doing that are more of my Metis up bringing. I use Christian prayer as well as smudging to stay healthy and seek guidance. I use the land as a place that gives me an understanding of our connectedness to everything. By recognizing that we are all connected, I live with respect for everything and it brings me peace. (Participant 93)

**Relationship with Métis identity**

***Identity conflict and tensions***

A common thread indicated Métis people are connected, however, there is no one way to be Métis, "are unique and can't be defined by one set way" (Participant 12). Participant 67 wrote about, "deconstructing what I've adopted and deciding what is important to wellbeing as a Métis woman." Participants described inner conflict and tension with identity as a Métis person, along with tensions between Métis identity and self-concept. Self-concept was expressed as central to health and wellbeing in childhood and adulthood, "so much was lost and forgotten because being Métis used to not be socially acceptable" (Participant 79). Another participant wrote:



My fathers negative views of the Catholic Church have been passed on to me. It's a bias maybe? But then isn't that what Métis are? Conflicted/Mixed ethnically and culturally. Métis are Catholic but look at what the Church did to the Métis. (Participant 43)

Identity conflict and tensions existed throughout the findings, but were noted to be essential to spirituality, health, and wellbeing.

### *Identity and self-concept*

Historically, Métis people hid their identity where possible due to racism, discrimination, marginalization, and fear of being unable to maintain housing and jobs. This hiding led to disconnection from Métis identity and culture. Participant 89 wrote, "I [grew] up not knowing my culture and I am learning everyday now." "Understanding who I am and where my family comes from is very important. Trauma from past generations is imprinting in my DNA and passed down through many generations. Knowing that helps me deal with the things that come up in life" (Participant 81). Pride in Métis identity was identified, as well as a reluctance for some:

Still trying to figure it all out. I am VERY proud to be a Michif woman and to have my children and grandkids now recognized. As an older woman I feel like a baby in this regard though and it is difficult for my cousins/relatives who've not taken this step to understand why belonging & participating in Métis community matters. (Participant 54)

The impact of accepting oneself as a Métis person and feeling proud is evident in the words of Participant 61, who shared "I am proud to be Métis. I think its a sense of community. Everyone has welcomed me and helped me learn about my family and heritage." Another participant described their experiences working through Métis identity and self-concept:

While I am baptized and confirmed Catholic, I have extreme difficulty & anger with the fact that the church has yet to apologize for the atrocities of the residential schools and other colonized ways that they have oppressed Indigenous people. I recently found a new church that is affirming, focused on social justice, and working to decolonize their community. As I am in relationship and connection with the MNA community, I continue to learn and grow. I have been participating in Grandmother Tea ceremonies and this has been such a gift. (Participant 70)

**Discussion**

The goal of our study was to understand how health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect for members of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3. Our research identified ongoing adverse effects of colonization across the MNA Region 3 community, particularly in relation to how cultural identity informs health, spirituality, and wellbeing. Colonial policies and processes (both historical and contemporary aspects of colonization that discriminate against Indigenous people in Canada) have resulted in adverse impacts on health determinants and outcomes in comparison to non-Indigenous populations across Canada.<sup>44-48</sup> Participants in our research identified searching for connection to Métis identity and culture, trying to fill a void, and educating themselves and others about who they are and where they come from. Throughout the literature, participation in traditional activities, environmental and cultural connections, Indigenous language learning, and spirituality are cornerstones of an Indigenous health.<sup>48-51</sup>

In our research, interconnectedness and holistic health included the land and spirituality, along with family and community relationships, and relationships with Elders. These connections can also be found in emerging research from Manitoba, Canada.<sup>52</sup> Some literature exists exploring the relationship between spirituality and health for Indigenous people,

emphasizing consideration of spirituality in health policies and programming.<sup>53-55</sup> Our research identified colonizations' effect on a societal level – and ongoing impacts on health. Recent events affecting processes of reconciliation for Métis people include unearthing of Indigenous children's bodies across former residential schools across Canada.<sup>56-58</sup> Survivors of the residential school system have clearly spoken about ongoing intergenerational effects (including participants in our research).<sup>59-62</sup>

In our previous research, we discovered that engaging in pilgrimages to Lac Ste. Anne contributed to individual, family, and community health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people.<sup>29</sup> Lac Ste. Anne is a site sacred to many Indigenous people, with yearly pilgrimages (since 1889) to the healing waters in honour of Saint Anne, mother of Mary, grandmother of Jesus.<sup>63</sup> On July 26, 2022, Pope Francis engaged in a penitential pilgrimage to Lac Ste Anne. Additionally, Pope Francis travelled to Maskwacis and Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, on July 25, 2022, offering an apology for the evil committed in residential schools against Indigenous people.<sup>64</sup> Words are not the only significant part of apology, it also includes the spirit behind them.<sup>65</sup> Pope Francis' emphasis of colonization as a common enemy implied responsibility outside the church; the church should not determine acceptance of an apology but should demonstrate deep sorrow and amendment for wrongs.<sup>65</sup> On Pope Francis' return to Rome he described affirming local Canadian Catholic communities to engage with Indigenous culture, languages, and worldviews.<sup>66</sup> Each survivor will need to make their own decision about accepting the apology, and concrete action is still required on behalf of the Catholic church.<sup>66</sup> In order to follow-up on Pope Francis' desire for restoration, it will require more than \$30 million dollars for concrete actions toward cultural healing including: (1) decreasing the percentage of Indigenous people in Canadian prisons, (2) decreasing in the number of missing and murdered

Indigenous women and girls, (3) decreasing the number of children in the foster care system, (4) increasing the number of youth graduating from secondary and post-secondary schools, and (5) engaging in special initiatives fostering cultural and spiritual flourishing.<sup>67</sup>

In our research, reconnection with traditional practices and teachings along with spiritual and religious practices were identified as essential to individual and community wellbeing. Traditional Indigenous spirituality was targeted by assimilative efforts, with learning and development impeded, and resultant deterioration of the earth and human interrelationships.<sup>15</sup> Relationality and spiritual development is essential across diverse Indigenous communities, including Métis communities; Indigenous knowledge systems and ethical guidelines promote and generate all life, not just human life, in an intergenerational manner, centering the land.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to colonial views of land as capital, are Indigenous views of land as sacred and sustaining through connection to ancestors, medicines, and teachings.<sup>69</sup> Prefontaine, et al.<sup>12</sup> described maintaining and respecting the spiritual connections between people and other living things through renewing mind, body, emotion, and spirit.

Our research findings have implications for future research with Métis communities across Alberta, where change toward self-government is currently occurring. As we share our research findings across the broader MNA, we will contribute to new policy development across programs and services, including: (1) Alberta Métis Works, a network of Métis entrepreneurs building relationships within communities and across Alberta; (2) Children & Family Services, helping build resilient Métis families by providing culturally appropriate resources; (3) Environment & Climate Change resources through preserving Métis traditional and cultural ways of life; (4) Harvesting Rights, activities on the land including hunting, fishing, and trapping essential to Métis people's way of life; (5) Métis Health Programs, culturally appropriate, self-

directed health and wellness opportunities; (6) Truth and Reconciliation intergenerational support for Métis individuals, families, and communities affected by residential schools experiences; and (7) Youth Programs & Services for Métis youth to provide community belonging and cultural connection.

## Limitations

Lincoln and Guba<sup>70</sup> proposed adding a naturalistic rather than rationalistic method of inquiry to research, and identified four criteria for determining trustworthiness in qualitative research: (1) credibility (a type of internal validity); (2) transferability (a type of external validity); (3) dependability (a type of reliability); and (4) confirmability (a type of objectivity). Credibility included member checking results with MNA Region 3 leaders, members, and Elders at community mixers. Transferability of our study results may be limited, due to our virtual sample from the MNA Region 3 only, not all the regions across Alberta. Dependability of our results may have been stronger with a larger sample, and our findings more diverse if the Covid-19 pandemic had not prevented us from visiting each MNA Region 3 community in person. Confirmability of our results is evidenced in in our prolonged engagement with the MNA Region 3 – from research proposal to survey development, to participatory data analysis, resulting in thick description. More research is recommended regarding ongoing impacts of colonization, connections, and understanding about Métis identity, health, spirituality, religion, and wellbeing, and the intergenerational effects of trauma in the broader MNA, and across Canada.

## Conclusion

In our Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study, we explored intersections among health, spirituality, and wellbeing with the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3. Many research studies occur with agendas set outside the community rather than with Indigenous people. Our research originated with community leaders identifying a topic of importance, co-developing a qualitative

structured survey with community leaders, an Elder, and community members, and working closely to centre their priorities and perspectives throughout the research process. Our research sharing circle data analysis groups resulted in unique participatory coding and theme development. We discovered innumerable intersections among health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people in our study. Searching for connection to Métis identity, educating themselves and others about who they are and where they come from, was ongoing. Interconnection and holistic health includes family and community relationships, particularly relationships with Elders. Ongoing effects of colonization affect every aspect of health, spirituality, and wellbeing for Métis people intergenerationally. Reconnecting with traditional activities and teachings, including the environment, land, and culture, learning original languages, and practicing spirituality is foundational to health and wellbeing for Métis people.

**FUNDER:** Government of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research [175397, 2020].

**Figure 1.** Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3



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Figure 1. Health, spirituality, and wellbeing in the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3

132x134mm (300 x 300 DPI)

**How do health, spirituality, and wellbeing intersect in the Métis Nation of Alberta**  
**(MNA) Region 3? A Métis-guided, community-based, participatory study**

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**Keywords:** Indigenous health, Métis health, Métis, colonization, health, spirituality, religion, community-based research, participatory action research, Christianization

**Author contributions:**

**Carla Ginn (guarantor):** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – Original draft preparation. **Craig W. C. Ginn:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Validation, Writing – Review & editing. **Cheryl Barnabe:** Investigation, Resources, Validation, Writing – Review & editing. **Doreen Dumont/Vaness Bergum:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Supervision, Validation. **Judy Gentes:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Priscilla Tatrallyay:** Formal analysis, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

**Acknowledgements:**

Thank you to the Elders, leaders, and community members from the MNA who participated in survey development, data collection, and analysis.

Thank you to Dave McCann (<https://www.davemccann.com/>) who designed Figure 1.

FUNDER: Government of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research [175397, 2020].

Title: A community-based pilot study exploring links between health, spirituality, and wellbeing within the Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3  
Principal and Co-Investigator: Ginn, C.S., and Ginn, C.W.C.  
Ethics ID: REB18-0433

Study ID \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Members, leaders, and Elders of the MNA – Region 3 have met together to develop these questions/questionnaire/survey.

Please check off areas of interest to you:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Prison ministries
<input type="checkbox"/>	Addiction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spirituality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blending different cultural practices
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blending different spiritual practices
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cultural immersion
<input type="checkbox"/>	Traditional knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning in community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spirituality as a tool for healing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cultural history as a tool for healing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elder’s role in healing (physical)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elder’s role in healing (spiritual)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reconciliation (government)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reconciliation (church)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forgiveness (government)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forgiveness (church)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Passing on both(?) Métis traditions and culture to younger generation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nutrition for mental wellness (for example Diabetes/Mental health)



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<input type="checkbox"/>	Nutrition for physical wellness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Land claims
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harvesting rights
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Preserving language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pilgrimages to sacred sites

Please use the next few pages to write about any of the topics you checked off above.

Additional Questions:

- (1) Are there ways that you see your health, spirituality, and wellbeing as connected?
- (2) What are the most important things you have done in your lifetime that have impacted your health?
- (3) Are there ways that your Métis identity affects your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?
- (4) How do you blend different religious or spiritual practices to maintain your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?
- (5) Are there any other areas you want to write about related to health, spirituality, and wellbeing?

Emerging Themes	<p><b>January 4, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #1</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Elder shared personal lived experience, group discussion of main points and themes from the survey data.</li><li>• <b>Elder sharing about her personal lived experience:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We are all born with a gift, none of us is the same.”</li><li>• She couldn’t jig in public until age 55.</li><li>• She went into deep grief about the Indigenous children’s bodies that were discovered at the residential school in Kamloops. She used tobacco and went to visit the priest.</li><li>• “You can set laws against us but you can’t take my faith.”</li><li>• She suggests that the word Indigenous has put us back into a pan-Indigenous ‘basket’ and that we should use the word First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.</li><li>• Métis people would dance all night and then head to mass the next morning. She suggests that dancing is important to release all the stress and enjoy life and to let your body release. She noted that this was important in terms of being who you are. People were able to relax and be themselves.</li><li>• It took her so long to come out of the closet and be known as Métis. She now teaches the youth about their Métis heritage, so they can be proud of it long before I did. She holds a dance group where they learn to jig, and there have been 4 sessions prior to the onset and social restrictions due to COVID-19. She has also taught beading and capote making.</li><li>• FN, Métis, and Inuit Elders – there, I’m not Indian enough, but as I went along, I’ve found I’m fitting in now because I took the side of my grandmothers, the more I did ceremony, I have this warmth around me, but this spirit around me, “I was supposed to be there.” And the more I participated, for example, my eagle feather and my tobacco, the more I got involved, it got me wanting more, and to learn more. I was invited to a HII FNMI women’s event – taught them how to make a wool blanket coat and how to jig – how to connect your hands, heart, and head with a project – as we stitched, different stories would come out – and we did a pipe ceremony every morning. I went to my room to gather my things to go – and the spirit showed itself – it was my mother, guiding me – I knew that I was supposed to be there – we can fit any cultures – we can take what’s good for us from all the</li></ul></li></ul>
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60	<p>Searching for Métis Identity</p> <p>How you identify impacts how you connect with culture and spirituality</p> <p>Connection to culture facilitated by spiritual beliefs</p> <p>Mental health and Identity</p> <p>Searching for authentic connection</p> <p>Searching for spirituality</p> <p>Conflict with spirituality</p>	<p>cultures – take what’s good for you – it took me all these years to be who I was and proud of who I am – I’m comfortable being in the middle because I can take from both sides. The options depend on us – how we want to go out in the world – I have a very strong Métis mother – she taught us to how to present ourselves so we wouldn’t incite discrimination or name calling. I still do it to this day – I prepare My Creator has put me back here where we used to be discriminated against – enjoyed dancing and having fun, being ourselves – 3 of my siblings were a beautiful brown color and they had a different life than the rest of us could hide our identity.</p> <p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people’s experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant suggested that it seemed as though a lot of the people who completed the survey were new exploring and embracing their Métis identity.</li> <li>• One participant suggested that some of the main themes were that of “lost culture and connection,” which has coloured the ability to connect with Métis identity. One participant had just recently found out that they are Métis. The loss of identity, impacts many people’s ability connect. When the identity piece is missing, there is a hole in life. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This participant had just recently found out that they are Métis. Many Métis people are just reconnecting. The loss of identity has impacted the ability to connect with Métis spirituality. When that piece is missing it’s hard to have that.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The next participant agreed and suggested that being brought up Catholic, the “Indigenous part” of being Métis is where she found peacefulness. They suggested that “it’s hard to reconnect with culture if I don’t have a belief system.” This participant believes in Mother Earth and smudges with children and grandchildren. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another participant suggested that they are on a similar journey as well. They were raised Roman Catholic, but never went to church, so it felt weird. They suggested that “if I tried to force myself into that box would be more detrimental to my values.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Challenges with mental health, with what is going on in the world (referring to COVID-19 and the impacts of COVID-19), along with residential school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health is tied to connecting with identity and community</li> <li>• Use of opioids within our communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of us in the world are facing different issues, such as opioids.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Longing for connection to FN ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Belief and connection with “something more than ourselves”<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant noted the importance of a belief in Creator, a belief in something “more than ourselves.”</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnection to land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another participant suggested that survey participants were at a loss when it comes to spirituality, as it seemed from the data that they were not sure whether to believe in the church or traditional ways. This participant grew up Catholic and grew up traditional, but remains conflicted. He suggested that as Métis people, we don’t celebrate enough of the First Nations ways of being, the ways of our matriarchs. Once colonization happened, the ways of our matriarchs became more hidden. He remains conflicted that we don’t celebrate enough of First Nation’s culture and Métis people remain impoverished by not looking at what our First Nations matriarchs brought to the table.</li></ul>
Many influences on Métis spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conflicted when it comes to the Métis culture.</li></ul>
Searching for (identity) that has been lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This participant suggested that it’s important that we connect with plants and animals, as our matriarchs did. Connections between Métis culture, medicines, plants and animals</li></ul>
Searching for peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another participant suggested that the “spirituality piece,” is difficult as she does not know Métis spirituality. Her Mom’s side is Ojibway out of Manitoba, and so for her, her connection to being Métis and her Métis identity was blurred. In Calgary there is also the influence of Blackfoot ways, Dene ways, Stoney ways. The question remains: what is Métis spirituality?</li></ul>
Conflict with identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not sure of the spirituality piece and needs clarity in terms of the difference between Métis spirituality and the spiritualities of other Indigenous groups and people.</li></ul>
Discrimination from the Catholic church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deep loss, recovery, lack and searching. Another participant suggested that many Métis people - herself included - feel a sense of deep loss, lack of community. Many people are searching for answers and searching for peace.</li></ul>
Searching for spiritual reconnection, “something more”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This can include grappling with “dual identity” of being Métis/Catholic or Métis/self-improvement.</li><li>• This participant shared that her mom went to Lac Ste Anne several times. She said there is power in the land, and for her it’s stronger than anything the Catholic church could offer at this point. She noted that we have experienced shaming and rejection from the Catholic church as well, and that much harm has been done.</li></ul>
Internal conflict with identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Circles back to recovery piece, as her Mom went to Lac Ste Anne many times before she knew much about her Métis ancestors.</li></ul>

Conflict with culture and religion (affects health)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection with “something more” It’s important to connect to the Creator, or “something more” than ourselves.</li> </ul>
Conflict with self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing internal conflict and struggle</li> <li>• One participant suggested that we are all conflicted within our own selves because we’ve been swept under the rug. This has impacted multiple generations, and is intergenerational.</li> </ul>
Conflict with traditional and colonial mentality, creating mistrust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Métis people are in "conflict with culture and religion"</li> <li>• This participant suggested that how we’re dealing with it is reflected in our health, and how we manage health. Spirituality and the conflict between how we “walk in two worlds” is actively affecting our health.</li> <li>• Métis people are in conflict with a colonial mentality and a traditional mentality</li> </ul>
Identity harmed by the Catholic church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The data showed that Métis people are actively in conflict with a colonial mentality and a traditional mentality. Many people deal with an internal conflict in terms of trusting traditional medicine or Western, which is “actively affecting health.”</li> </ul>
Stigma of being Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerationally and genetically, this conflict with colonial and traditional mentalities, as well as the harms of colonialism, is passed on.</li> </ul>
Discrimination and lateral violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerationally and genetically, there is direct connection between identity, health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Harm from Catholic Church, shaming and rejection from the church.</li> <li>• In the data, one participated said she saw “the effects of that harm.”</li> </ul>
Conflict with western ways/colonial ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lateral violence</li> <li>• Métis people experience lateral violence from FN people as well as non-Indigenous people – there’s more than just one reason, however, the stigma of being Métis still goes on today.</li> </ul>
Residential schools, opioid crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges with trusting Western medicine</li> <li>• Genetic risk, such as heart disease</li> <li>• We have our own struggles, for example with answering the question “do we want health care from AHS?”</li> </ul>
Mistrust with the HCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative impacts to health, related to not identifying as Métis</li> <li>- Not identifying as Métis right away can affect health with doctors. One participant suggested that this negatively impacted the healthcare that her father received.</li> </ul>



Métis identity affects health and health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Another participant noted (not confirmed) that if babies are Indigenous, they get extra vaccine</li></ul>
Conflict in hiding and embracing Métis identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative impacts to health, related to identifying as Métis<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a preconceived notion that Métis people are going to be judged a certain way and that disclosing may draw focus away from what the issue really is.</li><li>• This can lead to being excluded from appropriate healthcare.</li></ul></li></ul>
Relating with Métis identity, finding the right fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Much of the survey data suggested being stigmatized when identifying as Métis within the healthcare system. There were several stories within her data set of being excluded from appropriate healthcare because of being Métis.</li><li>• This participant suggested that self-disclosing can be “a barrier or a path to greater understanding.”</li><li>• Stigma was identified, as one participant said about self disclosure in the healthcare system: “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” They follow up by saying “Where do you fit in is the biggest thing.”</li></ul>
Métis identity facilitates connection to spirituality, health and wellbeing	
Reconnecting with Métis identity is challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Métis identity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no right or wrong way to be Métis, or to connect with your Métis identity.</li><li>• Many Métis people are scared to identify with what we feel.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The important question is: What do you have and who do you feel are in your heart and your soul?</li></ul></li><li>• How you relate to your Métis identity may depend on demographics and where you are in your life and your journey.</li><li>• It’s hard to know how to connect to whatever your spirituality looks like if you don’t have a sense of identity.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If there is not cohesion to your own personal sense of identity, it will impact Métis mental and physical health.</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>• One participant identified that discovering and reconnecting with her Métis identity when she was a bit older was challenging. They suggested that for most Métis people, its more challenging when finding it out later than earlier.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It was noted that much of the educational opportunities to learn about Métis culture that are offered by the Métis Nation of Alberta are focused on youth. This age cutoff may prevent those who are older and reconnecting with Métis identity from accessing MNA provided programming that would support them in their learning.</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnection to the land and traditional ways	
Reconnection and discovering how to identify as Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling of that you’re not Métis enough, or that you don’t look Métis enough.</li><li>• Fighting within your own self – where do you fit in?</li></ul>



<p>Racism/ discrimination</p> <p>Reconnection to ceremony</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconnection to land             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Went back to land, including learning traditional medicines.</li> <li>• The challenge is where to find these medicines, which remains a big question</li> <li>• This participant suggested that plant medicines are supposed to be traded, however sometimes you need to trade/purchase with money. Before, this was never the case.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Another participant suggested the themes of reconnection and discovery. They also suggested that it's challenging to identify themes from the data, as many of the answers were yes/no or very short. They thought that "this shortness is a theme itself. I find many of our peoples are unsure of our identity and what it means, and how it plays a part in our lives." They went on to say that "it's sad, but I think colonial systems really damaged our community."</li> <li>• One participant has found learning about cultural practices very helpful. She has done this through Natalie Pepin's business Meeting my Ancestors. She has also learned hide tanning, went to Métis crossing, and did some programming.</li> <li>• Prior to learning she was Métis, she know something was being hidden – everyone, whether hidden from being Métis or knowing you were Métis had faced racism and discrimination. She has given up on church.</li> <li>• Access to cultural learning seems to be out of city, or out of age group.</li> <li>• Another participant suggested that "as a relative newbie, everyone talks about ceremony. But I have no connections to be able to access/participate in ceremony...I am searching for that. Plus COVID-19 has put a wrench in that lately."</li> </ul> <p><b>January 11, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #2</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Discussion of main points and themes from the survey data</li> </ul> <p><b>Elder sharing about her personal lived experience:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kamloops children and the Catholic priests and nuns treated them – can restrict us in any way – for example blankets over windows when practicing culture – jigging or cutting up hunted meat. Our kinship – I'm the only practicing Catholic in my family – I lost my faith – finally in September I</li> </ul>
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	<p>talked about it with leaders/Elders – I put tobacco under a tree – didn’t know how to find my faith again – teddy bears and shoes – saved items from being thrown out – disrespecting the congregation who left them there – and the children that were found. The priest will start a reconciliation wall – cleaned up and put in a bookshelf and displayed in the foyer – as time goes on, during COVID, how many children need teddy bears and shoes – keep rotating – year-round. Reconciliation is never going to be over.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When my parents lost their land to scrip, they were discriminated against in the church.</li><li>• One day after mass, my dad was followed out and asked to put more money in the offering.</li><li>• We went every summer to Lac Ste Anne. All relatives and friends could meet and practice their spirituality. They could speak their language and share their food – they couldn’t dance, but the joy that was there was incredible.</li><li>• Seeing the children – brings joy to my heart – Eucharist – children crossing themselves – need to go home for first communion.</li><li>• Just enjoying my role more when Covid hit – I told my story, and most people are very interested in learning about us now.</li><li>• Even though the Catholic church shuts us out as Métis, we still have our faith.</li><li>• She is part of the City of Calgary Elder’s Committee</li><li>• Come to the barn for beading sessions – for talking/laughing/ being yourself</li></ul> <p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people’s experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections to healthy vices like crafts and smudging</li><li>• Connections to the land</li><li>• Indigenous or Métis specific teachings strengthen overall wellbeing</li><li>• Community connections</li><li>• Some health issues that exist include diabetes and suicide</li><li>• Stigma, discrimination and judgement of Métis people impacts health and wellbeing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the workplace, one may want to not identify as Métis due to fear of discrimination.</li></ul></li></ul>
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Connection to traditional ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another consideration is discrimination against Métis people in healthcare – one participant had concluded that her mother had died in hospital because of it.</li> </ul>
Connection to land and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination in health care – One participant has seen discrimination in healthcare working in a correctional institute. The situation they shared was between a physician and an inmate. The inmate “hit a brick wall” when he came into the doctors’ office, as the doctor had already prejudged what he was going to say. The doctor had made preconceived notions and judgements even before he arrived at a conclusion about the inmate’s health condition.</li> </ul>
Métis and health predispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of yourself is an important aspect of health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Lateral violence for those who practice spirituality, if they didn’t practice the Catholic faith</li> </ul>
“Stigma, discrimination and judgement of Métis people impacts health and wellbeing”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone would like to know more – may not know much, but would like to know more</li> <li>• Connecting spirituality with wellbeing through environment</li> </ul>
Métis identity affects health and health care you receive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It’s important to have a connection to something and a feeling of belonging somewhere or to something. Whatever you practice physically, you are connected to that. For example, this is the case with yoga. You can have a connection to your culture, whether you grew up that way or not. A connection to other people who are like you.</li> <li>• Connection to whoever you say your god is, or connection to people to nature</li> <li>• It shows in our Métis functions, because you can go there, you’re welcome, it’s like coming home. You can be who you are, enjoy the company of people who are just like you. There is music and dancing.</li> </ul>
Lateral violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This participant suggested that “MNA – Region 3 – that’s where I found myself. I could come out and dance and laugh. We are missing it with COVID-19.”</li> </ul>
Searching for more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearly checkup – eye doctor – had just travelled – and started talking about brown people – water systems having to be serviced – comparing it to First Nations people here – discriminated against.</li> </ul>
Searching for connection and belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant shared that their mom went to a residential day school, but never talked about it.</li> <li>• Spirituality, mental, and physical health are all connected – in how you are treated wherever you go – it’s very important – they are all connected.</li> <li>• Connection needs to be made again somehow – they always went to Batoche, spoke Michif – but when they moved to Calgary, that stopped – lots of people come to</li> </ul>

	<p>cities but still maintain their cultures – is necessary to wellbeing to be connected to community, culture, and wellbeing. It’s a matter of how do you do that when it was cut off so extremely. My mom shunned that part of herself so I didn’t know about it. It’s necessary for health, not an option – how do you reconnect to community/culture/spirituality? Otherwise, your health will falter.</p>
Shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant suggested the book Stories of Métis women. It is written in English and is excellent, they said.</li></ul>
Spirituality and health are all connected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant said that in terms of moving forward with trauma and addiction, making a spiritual connection helped them heal.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling grounded to earth relieved stress, helped one participant feel more connected.</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eating traditional foods</li></ul>
How do you learn to identify as Métis (to be)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant noted, but said that they don’t even know if they have experienced eating them. They said that it could make a big difference their health, but that they are far away from eating them. They think it could support our health, but that it’s not something that a lot of us eat.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Traditional medicines and access to them – were also discussing berries and plants as well</li><li>• Métis cookbook shares details on medicines and canning. There are pictures and stories on healthy eating. This is published by the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO).<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Métis Cookbook and Guide to Healthy Living <a href="http://www.naho.ca/Métiscentre">www.naho.ca/Métiscentre</a>.</li></ul></li><li>• Maintaining a holistic approach is important.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ One participant does this through drinking mint tea and eating bannock, wearing sash and colors. They take good pride and strength in these practices.</li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnecting to spirituality as a path to healing from trauma and addiction	
Reconnection to land and traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another person wrote that she was learning about being Métis, but felt like a bit of an outsider or a ‘fraud’ as she didn’t grow connected to her Métis identity.</li></ul>
Reconnection to food	

<p>Journey to connecting with identity is challenging</p> <p>Interconnectedness</p> <p>Lost identity</p> <p>Searching for identity, what works</p>	<p><b>January 18, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #3</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Elder shared personal lived experience, group discussion of main points and themes from the survey data</li> </ul> <p><b>Elder sharing about her personal lived experience:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elder shared the challenges with the discovery of children, losing her faith, shared a prayer of having a hard time understanding. Had opportunity to meet with the Bishop that was going to Rome, gave this prayer to friend going to Rome.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family of 10 only one still going to Catholic Church – Kamloops residential school found children – can set laws against us but can't take my faith. But it was gone in May, finding out what the churches had done.</li> <li>• Thought God had forgotten about us.</li> <li>• My Face My Race – prayer</li> <li>• Where do we come into the picture with all of this happening with our children</li> <li>• Meeting once a month for Elders at U of C – I told them I felt I'd lost my faith – I was given advice to go and put some tobacco under a tree and I'll do a ceremony for you – then went to visit the priest. Felt a lot more at peace when the ceremony had been done – wanted the priest to pray with me – this lady from CWL said what are we going to do with the teddy bears and shoes – should maybe throw them out. No – want to take the wall for a bookcase – clean up all the items – this will be your reconciliation wall. It was done – and they put "every child matters" there – these items were then given to children who were in need – keep asking/renewing those items and give them away to the children in need. This will be permanent, you can't throw it away. Reconciliation and the process we have to go through to get our faith back</li> <li>• Don't like the word Indigenous because it puts us back into the basket with everyone – we need to keep the word Métis – because everyone generalizes – we need to keep the words First Nations, Inuit, and Métis</li> <li>• Parents were married behind the church as they were not allowed in even though the French and the Métis had built it together.</li> <li>• 5 of 10 siblings were baptized into the Catholic church – Olds was the worst place for discrimination – my mother was very spiritual.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Internal conflict with Métis identity (not Métis enough)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After mass – the person who passed around the collection said my dad didn’t put enough in</li><li>• Lac Ste Anne was our holiday</li><li>• Double-blessed through my grandmother’s FN spirituality and traditions and my catholic spirituality</li><li>• Pipe ceremony, smudging, from both my grandmother’s sides</li><li>• At a women’s conference for women with HIV, taught them how to make coat out of a wool blanket, did a pipe ceremony every day – last day packing my bag, there was my mother’s spirit, and she made her presence known</li></ul>
Embracing being Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I tell the youth we’re all born with a gift – my mother was a champion jigger – had to have our windows covered at home when dancing – I had to hide being Métis, however, our mother taught us about being proud of ourselves because you never knew</li></ul>
Reconnecting to Métis identity is a journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 out of the 10 born with beautiful brown skin but the rest of us could pass age 55 I got my gift, I learned it – a comfortable feeling – when in a group of Métis people</li><li>• We need to have a Métis function again – especially because of Covid now we have missed them</li><li>• Beading sessions and dance – food, and can’t wait for Covid to be over</li></ul>
External confirmations (am I Métis enough)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 sacred teachings – aunts and uncles could reprimand – responsibility of the adults to help raise everyone’s children</li><li>• Important part as well is coming from any family, especially Métis, family connection is so important, take on different responsibilities within that family – of each other, and as you grow older, you realize where you were in that family and what it meant. Older ones often still speak for the younger ones and think they’re more important. Nicknames (in Indian language) gives you your ideas of who you are</li></ul>
Searching for what is lost, what it means to be Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No matter how many kids you’ve got there’s always one you have to worry about – kinship, we need each other</li><li>• Responsibility towards family – for example, being a mother at age 13 when mom cooked in a logging camp – am trying to pass that bundle onto my sister for the younger generation.</li></ul>
Connection to family and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Elder closed with The Dance Prayer - “we dance for a reason”</li></ul>



<p>Searching for what's been lost (longing for tradition)</p> <p>Longing for connection, what fits</p> <p>Searching for authentic connection to Métis identity</p> <p>Métis identity is connected to wellbeing, health, and spirituality</p> <p>Challenging journey</p>	<p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people's experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant suggested that one of the main themes that came through in the data is interconnectedness of mind, body, soul spirit and person, earth, other             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no singularities, there are multiples and an interplay in everything related to Métis health, wellbeing and spirituality.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Another participant said that she struggles not knowing what family believed in but is focused on finding something that might work for her.</li> <li>• One participant reflected that interacting with the survey data helped them reflect.</li> <li>• Another participant said that she struggles with imposter syndrome and that this came up when reading the data, as those who filled out the survey seemed more connected with their 'Métisness.'             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another participant said: "The people that feel they have this imposter syndrome – I wonder why?" She didn't grow up Métis, but once she discovered it, her experience was different.</li> <li>• She knows that imposter syndrome doesn't make sense, as she is on a journey of not knowing what it means to be Métis, coming back to 'Métisness' and Métis culture.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How people view us on the outside – some look more white, some look more brown – when we all get together, all different shades of brown, white, there is a resemblance – if you take a picture of Métis people, you know you belong to that group – it confirms that's where you belong.</li> <li>• What does it mean to be Métis?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She asks herself the questions: Do I identify with certain things that are presented as Métis? Learning has highlighted that there is a gap and here in my life. Part of the challenge is just not knowing what it means to be Métis. It is difficult because it's not about the history, but the culture – what is it really, do I identify with those things?</li> <li>• Another participant said she feels a similar way, and that there is a gap in her cultural learning. She doesn't feel she knows enough about the culture. Growing up, there were many Indigenous cultural events in her school setting, but she was always being told that she wasn't allowed to join. Finding out there is a specific culture where she "fits" - being Métis - has been helpful for her now that she is an adult.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identity/navigating being Métis</li> </ul>
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Searching for connection, searching for what has been lost/hidden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another theme is kinship and being together. Family and relatives are very important to us.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After the rebellion, we were always having to look out for each other. Elder suggested that always room for one more to stay and/or eat, always room for one more at our table.</li></ul></li><li>• The Métis have protected each other.</li><li>• People were searching for something and once they discovered some traditional healing practices, they were coming home – had a knowing – searching for grounding.</li><li>• Another theme is a feeling of disconnection and searching for something.</li><li>• A major theme is searching, longing and grasping for answers.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The words seeking, grasping and ‘adrift’ were used to describe this.</li><li>• This participant supported this theme with her own experience of not knowing what her family may have believed in, but trying to find something that works for her. She is hoping there might be a connection, as she is looking for and grasping at what might work to fill that void.</li></ul></li><li>• Another participant said that this is surprising was because it was in stark contrast with my journey – having lots of knowledge about what being Métis meant.</li></ul>
Embracing your identity, conflict	
Underrepresentation of Métis culture	
Métis culture is distinct	
Learning what it means to be Métis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections between identity/spirituality/wellbeing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interconnectedness and the importance of giving attention to all the parts to feel the healthiest</li><li>• Searching to improve/build on what you already know</li><li>• Interconnectedness involves continually building the bundles of our identity</li><li>• “You can’t just water one part of your garden, they all deserve watering. This includes the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual.”</li></ul></li><li>• Once people find a practice, they find comfort in the practice gives them a better sense of wellbeing.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Searching for those practices is less comfortable, but once start practicing them it contributes to how well they feel (peace).</li></ul></li></ul>
Reconnecting with community	
Advocating for Métis culture	
Searching for connections as a path to healing	
Reconnections to traditions	
Challenges encountered when reconnecting	

<p>Impacts of colonialism has imposed challenges to reconnecting with Métis identity.</p> <p>Forgotten, lost culture</p> <p>Discrimination</p> <p>Shame</p>	<p><b>January 25, 2022 Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meeting #4</b></p> <p><b>1830-2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session Structure:</b> Elder opened and closed with a blessing/prayer, Elder shared thoughts and personal perspectives, group discussion of main points and themes from the survey data</li> </ul> <p><b>Elder sharing her personal perspectives and experiences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique ethnogenesis historically have followed protestant/catholic/traditional Métis religion and would never hunt on the sabbath. The Métis practices are more focused on lived experiences of their faith. Adopted from the Cree practice of interconnectedness – respect, reciprocity, and relationality are important – collective responsibility and not taking too much.</li> <li>• Became an Elder at the university – knew nothing about ceremony – not enough representation of Métis people – pipe ceremony, face-painting ceremony, felt out of place – Métis didn't have any traditions, but you can pick up your grandmother's side and live in 2 worlds – now don't have to it. A spiritual experience of accepting the FN side and as well as the Métis side – and catholic – now more children</li> <li>• Had to hide our culture – in the past, now so good we can celebrate it</li> <li>• Need to make sure our voices are heard – the basket of Indigenous – Métis, First Nations, and Inuit</li> <li>• We are often going through the same things – remember, you are good enough and don't let anybody tell you any different – show confidence in being Métis self-respect. Honouring our ancestors and what they've had to go through we need educating – jiggers for example – children teaching their peers – be proud of being Métis till age 55 – keep moving forward and educating people</li> <li>• Elder knew nothing about ceremony and then started at the university, doing ceremony. She thought to herself, what am I doing here? Don't know ceremony. Finding within self to accept her "First Nations side".</li> <li>• In talking about doing beadwork, Elder suggested: "Once you connect your head, hands and heart, you're connecting all your senses. Takes you out of your head and into your heart."</li> </ul> <p><b>Participants suggested that the survey data revealed the following about Métis people's experiences of health, wellbeing and spirituality:</b></p>
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Internal conflict with Métis identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Underrepresentation of Métis people in the workplace and the importance of having culture visible in the workplace.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For example, in a full day training session on Indigenous awareness, one participant employed by GoA noted that there was little mention of any information specific to Métis or Inuit people. She suggested that the focus tends to be on First Nations communities and individuals, and that Métis people were discussed for “maybe 5 minutes.”</li><li>• Important of recognizing that we are different. One of the activities was making a tepee, however, to this participant, she did not connect with this. Statements were also made in the training such as “Indigenous people do fancy dancing, shawl dancing ...” which may not be applicable to most Métis people.</li><li>• Another participant who also works for the GoA agreed. She notes that she works in a group home setting. In celebrating different cultures in the workplace, there has never been any mention of Métis people. She is just now learning about what it means to be Métis as she was part of 60s Scoop.</li><li>• Additionally, she shared that the government wouldn’t let her mom put her dad’s name on her birth certificate. She identifies with being Métis, as she was raised by her mom. She thinks she needs to connect with Métis people in Calgary, she is also learning. She grew up asking her mom, how do we identify?</li><li>• She noted the importance of educating people and making sure Métis voices are heard. The issue is that we need people to listen.</li></ul></li></ul>
Embracing a blend of spirituality or nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two things noted were negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol/drugs but also trying to reconnect with traditional Métis ways of life, including through eating healthy, exercising, being out in the wilderness and on the land.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principles of kinship</li><li>• Another coping mechanism mentioned as positive was combatting depression with beadwork. It was said that “beadwork is healing.”</li></ul></li></ul>
Health tied to identity and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Navigating modern-day realities while trying to reconnect<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another participant noted that there was a great deal of mention in the survey data of trying to connect with heritage, and how it’s challenging to tie in “modern life with the historical.” There are certain problems we have now, such as drinking and food problems, that may have not existed for our ancestors historically.</li><li>• The survey data points to trying and struggling to learn our old ways and culture again to try to find a way to deal with modern issues.</li><li>• The phrase “re-learn our culture” was used.</li><li>• There is diversity in how Métis people reconnect with traditions.</li></ul></li></ul>
External confirmation, Do I look Métis enough?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant suggested that there was running theme in the survey data of representation and connection to culture and spirit. She noted that “colonialism has such an impact on Indigenous communities, Métis people.”</li></ul>
Under-representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One participant, in talking to her dad, who suggested that Métis people have always felt that they “fell through cracks”. Along with this, many Métis people have felt shunned by white people and those who are First Nations.</li></ul>
Hidden and lost culture	
Connection to Elders	
Health to spirituality	

Longing to believe in something	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her father has “felt adrift for [his] entire life.” He is trying to work to accept the fact the he is Métis. Before, her father tried to deny being Native because of racism.</li> <li>• “Too white to be First Nations, too dark for the white” – most tried to deny being Métis because of discrimination.</li> </ul>
Métis experience illness as a result of intergeneration trauma, discrimination, colonialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another participant, speaking directly to themes from the data, noted that the Métis people who filled out the survey have “mixed Western and traditional Indigenous approaches to spirituality or the have nothing,” as approaches to spirituality. Physical wellness was tied with knowledge in the practice of Métis culture. When they had more knowledge of Métis culture and identity and were able to practice it, “physical wellness followed.”</li> <li>• Increased knowledge about Métis culture led to physical wellness</li> <li>• A lot of Métis people had blended religions and traditions.</li> <li>• Another participant provided his insight on the survey data that many participants spoke about coping mechanisms, both positive and negative.</li> <li>• He also other suggested that that another theme was external confirmations - other within the context of institutions - of Métis identity.</li> </ul>
Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a personal example, he notes that his child’s school called this year to confirm that they were in fact Métis, since this had been indicated on a form. His reflection on this was the question of whether there is an assumption that kids have to look a certain way to be Indigenous.</li> <li>• First Nations focus in the school system.</li> <li>• In his workplace, they have done a blanket ceremony, which he suggested was “very First Nations focused.” He said it would be nice to have people understand Métis background better, both the Métis historical background, but also the practices of things that have always supported our people, such as harvesting and hunting, but this is not easily done because of laws and restrictions.</li> </ul>
Health challenges related to Métis identity (external conflicts with Métis identity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One participant, speaking on her own experience, said that Bowden prison had a Métis employee. There are a lot of Métis people in prison, and a lot of Métis people working in prison. It’s important to have original languages, the Elders looked after those who were acting out of order</li> <li>• Another participant noted that in reading the data, they “triggered her back to being 17,” when her family doctor said “if you believe in something, you will be in a better place and you will not be as ill.” She went home, talked to mom and dad, and asked questions about church, spirituality, and questioned why she wasn’t baptized. She grew up surrounded by the Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Lutheran faiths, which were the 3 predominant religious groups around her. She is now 56, and suggests that those who “believe in something are always less sick than people who don’t believe in anything.”</li> </ul>
Métis identity affects health and the health care you receive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was born Métis, heard Michif and Cree in house, dad worked with reserves, also worked with Catholic Church.</li> <li>• Interested in trauma leading to illness. As a social worker, she finds it amazing how many social workers end up with autoimmune disease.</li> <li>• Consideration of the impacts of continual exposure to trauma personally and professionally as an Indigenous person.</li> </ul>



Hidden culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ “I carry every child in my heart that has died in the system.”</li><li>▪ Collective and historical trauma</li><li>▪ There is a relationship between vicarious trauma and autoimmune disorders. This participant noted that being on long-term disability is stressful – what about the people that fall through the cracks?</li></ul>
Métis are a distinct culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Noted how common ADHD with those who are present. Trauma in birth canal, pregnancy, can lead to medical issues.</li><li>• Lateral violence, vicarious trauma, Supervisor with children’s services<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daughter works for public guardian, and in that setting, she sees a lot of people who came through Children and Family Services.</li><li>• As Métis people, we need to keep pushing forward. “We have a lot of many Métis people with lupus and similar autoimmune diseases.”</li><li>• Has 3 autoimmune diseases herself.</li><li>• Challenges of accessing medication - \$5000 not covered a month. Many Métis people can’t afford medication or trial drugs.</li><li>• <b>“Métis people were lost... are still invisible. We’re no longer living on road allowances, but we’re still lost.”</b></li><li>• Brother not registered as Métis, 60s Scoop survivor. Brother also experienced forced sterilization. She feels angry when looking at something [institutions involved in the 60s Scoop] that caused family so much pain.</li></ul></li></ul>
Conflicts in reconnection to spirituality	
Complex journey	
Searching for reconnection to land, to traditional ways (what’s been lost)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experiences of discrimination in the healthcare system and by healthcare providers<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An example of stereotyping was provided by one participant, who was asked to provide a status card for healthcare services. However, this is not relevant for non-status Métis people, or for non-status First Nations people.</li><li>• Another participant notes that there is a misconception - including amongst some healthcare providers - that if you’re Métis you have medications and medical coverage provided. She said that in trying to get her child’s medication for ADHD, the doctor asked for them to provide their status card. Her reflection on this is that in turn, you “need to advocate for yourself. It turns into need to educate healthcare professional to lecture. It shouldn’t need to be a teaching moment when you’re asking for medical assistance.”</li><li>• Her final reflection on this topic is that “receiving medical care a vulnerable position to be in.”</li></ul></li></ul>
Colonialism has and still imposes conflict and challenges to reconnecting with Identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Education is needed in institutions as well as for ourselves as we reconnect</li><li>• “Spirituality is complex, especially when adding in colonialism.” Some people are trying to connect and re-learn traditional Métis knowledge and ways, as well as to learn the language. Another challenge is that medicinal knowledge of plants and knowledge from the land hasn’t been passed down. Some are Catholic, some follow Métis traditions. Some trying to connect and relearn.” In her mother’s</li></ul>



<p>Searching for what is right for you</p>	<p>family, all of her mother's generation spoke the language, but medicinal knowledge from the land that wasn't passed down to her generation. Now she is taking courses and all possible routes to learn. She "used to be angry" with the thought "why didn't you teach me?" She said he "didn't understand the effects of colonialism."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Norquest, was part of Aboriginal mentorship program came, said general consensus from communities its that the medicine has its own spirit. Also, every pharmaceutical drug comes from earth, but "when you multiply it, you disconnect it from the spirit and it's not a whole medicine any more." That's why we have side effects, and need more med and more medication. Effects of colonialism on each of our generations. The speaker said that plant medicine has its own spirit.</li> <li>• Medicine is also colonialized and there have been effects of colonialism on each generation.</li> <li>• Another aspect of navigating the effects of colonization is navigating reconciliation with the church and its effects. She added that it's "interesting that people are able to speak up now."</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Comments from Participants Following Research Sharing Circle Data Analysis Group Meetings (emailed after meeting)</b></p> <p><b>1. January 4 Participant</b></p> <p>"I would just add that I notice that there is what I would call a "spectrum of the he on this topic. I found myself that I've gone from unaware to horrified to angry (Very Angry) to reflective...to searching for 'what makes the most sense' spiritually. I saw that 'trend' in the data set you sent along..."</p> <p>It is hard to describe. I'm attaching a story I told in November. Perhaps that will illustrate that spectrum of what I've gone through in my own wellness journey. Resilience I guess is part of it too. Focussing on gratitude helps."</p> <p><b>2. January 11 Participant</b></p> <p>"I just wanted to type out some of my observations in case I don't get to cover them in the session. I'm in a course until 6pm, but hopefully won't be too late."</p> <p>Q.3 Are there ways that you see your health, spirituality, and well-being are connected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traditional crafts and connections with nature eased mental wellness issues</li> <li>• disconnections from spirituality and community decreased mental wellness</li> </ul>
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<p>Connection with land, tradition and community essential for health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• spirituality made people feel more positive and created better physical outcomes</li></ul> <p>Q.4 What are the most important things you have done in your lifetime that impacted your health?</p>
<p>Not identifying with Métis identity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• avoidance of/quitting addictive substances including alcohol, drugs, smoking</li><li>• eating healthy</li><li>• use of traditional medicines</li><li>• outdoor activities and keeping active</li><li>• connections with community, family, friends</li></ul> <p>Q.5 Are there ways that your Métis identity affects your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• many respondents didn't take enough time to understand this question</li><li>• many respondents indicated that there are no ways that Métis identity affects their health, spirituality and wellbeing</li><li>• some answered that these are affected by Métis identity, but didn't elaborate</li><li>• some individuals mentioned the high prevalence of diabetes and other diseases, in addition to high suicide rates</li><li>• connections to (Métis) community are important but have been severed for many</li><li>• one respondent mentioned a marginalized health care response (institutionalized racism)</li><li>• some respondents felt conflicted by religion or the incorporation of Indigenous spiritual practices into Métis culture</li></ul> <p>Q.6 How do you blend different religions or spiritual practices to maintain your health, spirituality, or wellbeing?</p>
<p>Harms done to Métis people (colonialism, discrimination, shame, severed connections, hiding, underrepresentation ) have caused illness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a number of people indicated that they're of the Catholic faith</li><li>• some individuals indicated that they mix religious and spiritual practices (smudging). Some were opposed to this.</li><li>• smudging seems important but very few people have mentioned a deeper understanding of other spiritual practices (ie. sweats, sun dance, pow wow, other ceremonies such as Grandmother Moon, etc). Likely a product of being separated from many Indigenous teachings.</li><li>• a number of people add yoga to their routines</li></ul> <p>Q.7 Are there any areas you want to write about related to health, spirituality and wellbeing?</p>
<p><b>Spirituality burdened by conflict between traditional</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• many had nothing further to say</li><li>• some individuals felt impacted by their work environments which impacted their wellbeing (one had fears of racism and seem to indicate hiding their Métis identity in the workplace environment)</li><li>• some thought better access to events and Indigenous teachings would have a positive impact on wellness.</li></ul>

<p>practices, Catholic Church, western mentalities, or just not knowing</p> <p>Fear of racism for identifying as Métis</p> <p>Searching for connections with community-challenging</p> <p>Searching for connection with land</p> <p>Embracing of Traditional and western practices</p> <p>Unrecognized, underrepresented,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Métis people practicing Indigenous spirituality may be discriminated against by other Métis people (lateral violence)</li> <li>• Some people have moved away from the Catholic faith</li> <li>• some respondents found solace in connections with the land</li> <li>• some respondents feel the need to keep explaining what Métis are and aren't (lateral violence mentioned above)</li> </ul> <p>Overall impressions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• connections to healthy vices (crafts), practices (smudging/traditional medicines, yoga), the land (outdoor activities), and teachings increase the overall mental and physical wellbeing of participants.</li> <li>• some participants have experienced a disconnection from Indigenous spirituality, but would benefit from increased access and teachings</li> <li>• community connections are very important</li> <li>• certain health issues need to be addressed including diabetes, suicide”</li> </ul> <p><b>3. January 18 Participant</b></p> <p>“A final thought I had about the data was that, for many people, there seemed to be a seamless integration of Western and traditional medicine, and there didn't seem to be any sort of inner turmoil about it. People just seemed to naturally combine different ways of healing.”</p> <p><b>4. January 25 Participant</b></p> <p>“Definitely reaffirmed my feelings on my heritage and society. Hopefully one day it'll get even better. As much as we fall thru the cracks now... at least its better than my parents and grandparents had. (I have two uncles that the church up in Fort Vermilion that were taken away from my paternal grandfather. I'm now started searching for them or their possible children). My grandpa is gone but I feel his spirit with me as I research our family tree. Makes me wish we had more opportunities to meet others like that more often.”</p>
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falling through the cracks, lost	
Longing for connection	

For peer review only

January 4 2022 White board  
lost cultures and connection

Actively in conflict with colonial  
mentality- this is coming out in our  
health. Conflicted stage of trusting  
western medicine.

hard to reconnect with your culture if you don't have  
a connection. Mental health, community- all of  
society is lacking this not just us.

seemed that data reflected people newly  
becoming connected to Metis culture.

Spirituality piece, blurred between Metis and  
Indigenous piece.

People at a loss with spirituality, church or  
traditional ways. Conflicted with Metis culture-  
celebrations seem to be from European side. First  
Nations ways of being are matriarchal, became  
hidden with Colonization, dishonours our great  
Grandmothers.

Grappling with dual  
identity, Metis and  
Catholic. Power in the  
land.

Fiddles, guitars, food, dance- release and  
joy.

Conflicted with self- generational stigma. People  
are easy to judge without knowing the whole  
story.



# Metis Identity connecting with health and well being

Without Metis identity- will impact your mental health, core values. When trying to fit into a way that is not who you are, this could be detrimental to health.

Metis heritage can relate to physical health. Impacts of not identifying as Metis can effect physical health.

Whats our Heritage?

Damned if you do damned if you don't. Where do you fit in? Hard to fit yourself, have to identify with what you beleive, no right or wrong. We are scared to identify with what we feel. Culture that we are re-learning

Fear in identifying as Metis- may draw away from what the medical issue is. Don't feel enough as a Metis to be included in western diagnosis- genetics qualities for predispositions.

Stigma- being excluded from appropriate health care. Self disclosing can be a barrier or path to more understanding. Need to have to do continual teaching to those who are well meaning. Us having to help them care for us.

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Not feeling you're (you look)  
Metis enough.

Don't think I'm Indian enough. Fitting in  
now because I took the side of my  
grandmothers. Spirit was around me-  
supposed to be there. The more I got  
involved, the feelings and the emotion  
grew and wanted more. Spirit guiding me, I  
knew I was supposed to be there. Taking  
whats good for you. I'm comfortable being  
in the middle, take from both sides.

## Overarching themes

Reconnecting with Metis identity being  
older has been challenging. Focus  
(programs) has been on youth  
reconnecting with identity. Still Searching.

Searching for programs  
independently, online as programs  
focus on youth. Shame a barrier. All  
this and all the ways (hidden or not)  
has effected health/mental health.  
So Far Reaching.

Reconnection to land. Traditional medicines, how/where  
can we find knowledge keeper to share this information.  
Elders say never to buy medicines- purchasing/trading  
monetarily- barriers to urbanization.

January 11 2022 White board

Connections to healthy vices: crafts, smudging, to the land, yoga, -increase the mental well being. Community connections very important. Health conditions like diabetes and suicide need to be addressed.

Stigma is a big part of this. Judgment discrimination- how we are judged by others is deep rooted. Mother taught us how to present ourselves, put together, clean. A way to defend yourself, self care, you don't know when you're going to run into things.

Theme: everyone would like to learn more. They may not know much, but would like to know more. Connecting spirituality with their well being through their environment.

Overall Impressions

Lateral violence to Metis who practice spirituality, to those who didn't practice the Catholic faith.

Discrimination in health care. My own mother died in hospital because that discrimination. Huge issue. My mom more visibly Indigenous than I am. Can see that Metis are having similar experience with health care. This affects a person's health and well being.

Discrimination in health care. Witnessed an inmate who was well spoken, hit a brick wall in the doctors office. The doctor had an idea The inmate was determined to get accross was he was going to stay, but stuck to it. Doctor had some preconceived notions, but the inmate had to push through those. I

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Saw my doctors who came back from South Africa. Doctor spoke about he black people, comparing them to brown people, Indigenous people. Thinking about complaining about this doctors, been fighting my way through here.

You can set laws against us, as kids we had to put blankets on our windows to hide our dancing. I am the only practicing Catholic left in my family. I lost my faith (after the discovery of the children in Kamloops). Shoes left to honour children left at church, they wanted to throw them out. "you're going to display all those shoes, this is where you're reconciliation is going to start"

Reconciliation is never going to be over

Was doing the prayers of the faithful at church, prayer included only Indigenous. I changed it to include First Nations, Metis and Inuit.

My parents always teased each other about gettin married behind the church. The Metis and the French built the church, but only the french could go in, the Metis had to go behind. We had to sit in the back of the church always.

Experiences of discrimination (not being as to take up the offering at church) stay with children forever.

There's joy in seeing my parents speak their language

Covid hit, now missing part of my spirituality

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the Catholic church has shut you out (Metis), but I still have my spirituality.

Can see how spirituality, mental health and physical health are interconnected. They all go together.

In Covid, missing our laughter and our connection, which grounds us.

Big theme is "a connection to something" Whatever you practive physically to stay healthy. A connection to your culture (whether you grew up that way or not). When you learn it, you want more. COnnection to people who are like you, when you feel like you belong somewhere. CONNECTION

Shows in our Metis functions (dances and music)- you're welcome there, you can be who you are, enjoy the kinship of other people who are like you.

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## Main themes

The connection needs to be made again. My grandparents, I don't know what they did spiritually, but did a lot of Metis things. When they moved to Calgary that stopped. Don't know why? Maybe to assimilate? Necessary to well being to be connected to culture and spirituality. How do you do that, it was cut off so extremely. There are so many people who didn't know they were Metis. It's necessary for health, but how do you reconnect with all of those ways: culture, spirituality and connection. Health will falter without. (Grandparents spoke Michif, they went to Batoche every year. Grandfather was a jigger and played the spoons)

Beading session, people open up, connecting and talking, laughing, being themselves. Very rewarding teaching this.

Eating traditional foods. I don't know if I've experienced eating my traditional foods. Don't know if this would make a difference in health. If we ate them more, maybe this would increase our health. In general I don't know if we eat a lot of our traditional food.

Access to traditional medicines (Sage, sweet grass, also berries and other traditional methods)- as a contribution to health.

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Accross the board, no was said there wasn't a connection between mind, body and spirituality, not mentioned how. SOme mentioned trauma they experienced. Making that spiritual connection helped them heal and overcome. Grounded to the earth, and doing things outdoors helped them feel less stressed.

Learning about being Metis, had felt like an outsider or a fraud.

Honouring the land, makin banok brought her comfort. Wearing Metis sash brough her source of strength. Being part of a larger Metis community has helped her.

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White board Jan 18, 22

Interconnectedness, connections,  
multiples, no singular theme.

Kinship, being together.

Protecting each other, always  
room for one more.

Searching for something.  
Searching for grounding.  
Longing.

Feelings of disconnection.  
Searching for something that  
worked for me. Searching for  
filling the void.



When your history is behing  
you, it's in you.

Some had seemed to find meaning  
and understanding in their journey

exlusion

No mater what you look like,  
when you're Metis, you belong.

Imposter  
syndrome.

Perception of others when sharing Metis  
heritage

MAIN THEMES

INTERCONNECTEDNESS. Giving attention to all the parts for health	Searching.
Family connection	Everything is connected
Responsibility towards family, caring for family and caring for community	Building on knowledge
Individual spirituality	comfort in a practice gives tone a sense of well being. This starts with searching.
Kinship	

White board January 25, 2022  
Recognizing negative and positive coping methods.

Importance of having Metis culture visible in the workplace.

Connecting modern life with historical life, mainly learning traditional ways to deal with problems of modern life.

Representaion and connection to culture.

Metis representation missing in work and education.

Diverse way of reconnecting with Metis traditions

We live in 2 worlds, and that's o.k.

Not enough inclusion for Metis people

Others need to be educated about the Metis culture.

Metis have fallen through the cracks.

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# Main themes about health wellbeing and spirituality

blended approach (western and Metis) to wellness and spirituality

Physical wellness improved when connecting to traditional practice

Harvesting, hunting, going to the forest- these practices can be hard, but are connected to wellness

Spirituality is complex, affected by colonialism

Spirituality, any connection to it, supports wellbeing

trauma leading to illness

Metis peoples are still lost.

Misconceptions about Metis leads to advocating