

# Workplace Wellness & Balance

in the Aboriginal non-profit sector

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction .....	7
The Research: Workplace Wellness and Balance .....	10
Purpose .....	10
Indigenous Lens.....	10
Methodology .....	11
Findings.....	14
Discussion.....	27
Recommendations .....	28
Training and Mentorship .....	28
Wellness Assessment Tools.....	29
Wellness Toolkit .....	29
Creative Employee Incentives.....	30
Tools and Policies for the ANP Sector.....	31
Culture and Spiritual Practice in the Workplace.....	32
Partnerships .....	33
Youth Opportunities .....	33
Elders .....	35
Conclusion.....	36
Appendix A – References.....	37

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# Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of research focused on Workplace Wellness and Balance in the Aboriginal non-profit (ANP) sector. The research was conducted within BC's ANP sector from 2012 to 2013. The findings within this report are both a reflection of current conditions within ANP organizations and a testament to the resiliency and ingenuity of the ANP workforce.

ANP organizations provide a wide range of services to BC's diverse Aboriginal population. They respond to current challenges faced by Aboriginal people by providing safe and culturally appropriate support systems and programming. We learned through our research that ANPs provide a surrogate family and sense of home for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. ANPs also play a very significant role in the healing and personal development of Aboriginal people. Therefore, it is critical that ANPs attract and retain healthy leadership and staff to effectively run their organizations and promote workplace wellness and balance.

The Mahigan Consulting team conducted research for this report. Our research journey included focus groups, key informant interviews, surveys, Sharing Circles and a review of literature. The data collected throughout our research provided us with comprehensive information, including promising practices, which support our recommendations outlined in this report.

## The Research Journey

The Mahigan team consists of three Aboriginal business women equipped with both academic and cultural educations. Each member of the team has worked for and/or served on boards of ANPs for a minimum of 10 years each, and collectively the team has over 30 years of experience within the ANP sector. The team undertook this initiative with the greatest *ee-soke* (respect) for the people we would be connecting with.

We began this journey with the guiding question: What is workplace wellness and work-life balance and how does it impact the ANP sector? Through our early team meetings and discussion with the other research teams we concluded we would not enter into this research with assumptions and definitions, rather we would be guided



by the research participant's knowledge and their definitions of workplace wellness and work-life balance. This proved to be a helpful approach as we learned each organization holds its own perspectives and definitions in this area. Our findings would not have been as rich if we did not have the trust of the research and Sharing Circle participants. We thank each and every one of them for their honesty and their continued service in the ANP sector.

In keeping with our traditional teachings we share our story of the workplace wellness and work-life balance research journey by explaining what we did, what we heard and what we learned.

## What We Did

Community engagement sessions took place in the form of Sharing Circles. Additional research was conducted through a review of the literature, surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups. The research data reflected in this report consists of the views and opinions expressed by the participants during the research process. Where appropriate we have included quotes from the research participants. This report provides a summary of the key themes that emerged from the data followed by recommendations.

## What We Heard

The multi-generational impact of the residential schools and attempts to assimilate are still reverberating across the country, including in BC's ANP sector. The impacts include, but are not limited to: disconnection from culture, loss of identity, learned dependency, and misplaced anger (also known as lateral violence). Lateral violence occurs when an oppressed group turns anger towards each other and starts oppressing their peers. These impacts and their side effects are among the challenges faced by ANPs.

More important than the legacy of assimilation is the emerging resilience witnessed during the Sharing Circles and key informant interviews. Though participants acknowledge the residential schools as a part of their history, they fight to not let this attempt to assimilate them or define them. We heard participants say, "This is our past but we can overcome the pain and focus on healing." Our research in relation to the impacts of residential schools supports findings in the *Advancing the Aboriginal Non-Profit Workforce* report. Both sources identify a legacy of pain, therefore healing and wellness must be a priority within the ANP sector. Healing must occur in order to promote workplace wellness and work-life balance.

ANPs emerged in the 1950s in response to the need to have culturally appropriate programming responsive to community needs. Early pioneers in the ANP movement included Friendship Centres. The Coqualeeza Fellowship Club, now known as the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, was the first organization to lead the movement. (Aboriginal Non Profit Website, 2011, p. 2) Over the past 60 years ANPs have developed through trials and tribulations all the while striving for excellence in service delivery. ANPs

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The legacy of residential school makes healing and wellness a priority for the ANP sector workforce.

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know their strengths and limitations and continually aim to deliver the highest standard of service to those they serve. They do the best they can with the resources they have while continually looking for additional supports to fully meet the needs of their organization. This is evidenced in the promising practices section of the report as well as in the key themes.

### Key Themes:

1. Adequate funding impacts the ability to attract and retain employees, and deliver effective programming responsive to client and community needs.
2. Each organization's perspective defines what workplace wellness means to them. While there are common threads in the definition of workplace wellness, its presence and interpretation within organizations will vary.
3. Personal trauma and the need for healing was a reoccurring theme throughout all phases of research.
4. The spiritual environment of the workplace has a significant impact on employee performance.
5. There are at least two types of workplace safety: emotional and spiritual.
6. Elders play an important role in workplace wellness. They provide guidance and support at a variety of levels including: individual, family, staff, board, client and organizational. They serve as an anchor to our past and help maintain traditional teachings in the workplace.
7. Youth play an important role in workplace wellness. They also provide guidance and support and serve as the voice of the new and emerging generation. They are catalyst for change, helping ANPs weave traditional teachings into a modern day context.
8. Relationships based on understanding and mutual respect contribute to the health of ANPs.

These findings are expanded upon and followed by recommendations in the discussion section of the report.

### What We Learned

Aboriginal people have the answers to the challenges the ANP sector is facing. This is evident in the data we collected. Throughout this report you will hear the voices and wisdom of the participants providing responses to current challenges. Bopp & Bopp, (2001), describe this as authentic development: "Authentic development is culturally based. Healing and development must be rooted in the wisdom, knowledge and living processes of the culture of the people" (p. 197). With support, ANPs can overcome the challenges that hinder workplace wellness and begin to build safer, healthier and more vibrant organizations.

The Nuu-chah-nulth people have a teaching of *bishuk ish tsawalk*, meaning everything is interconnected and everything is one. This teaching confirms when we create wellness in one area it will impact wellness in other areas. And so, while we share our findings by categorized themes, we believe in the spirit of *bishuk ish tsawalk* and have this teaching as a foundation for the interpretation of our findings.



# Introduction

Workplace wellness and work-life balance play a very important role in helping to sustain a healthy Aboriginal workforce. The following research report sought to uncover stories from the ANP sector about workplace initiatives that create a healthy workforce. As Indigenous researchers, we wanted to learn about what contributes to a healthy workforce and what conditions deplete it. We knew the voices of the ANP sector would provide us with the knowledge and insight on how to strengthen workplace wellness and work-life balance, and we leaned on our traditional teachings of exploring challenges through the lens of past, present and future.

An Aboriginal Perspective on wellness includes the concept that everything is interconnected and everything is one.

“One cannot consider mental wellness without considering the connectedness to all aspects of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. This consideration should not be just centered on the individual but on the family and to the community as a whole” (Tripartite First Nations Health Plan, 2012, p. 1).

Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual balance are the foundation of many Indigenous worldviews and ways of life. In most Indigenous cultures, teachings are expressed in songs, art and stories, which preserve these concepts. It is a collective movement towards balance in all four quadrants that defines the wellness journey.

Researchers have described Aboriginal wellness models as being based on a holistic approach of interconnectivity. Smye and Mussell, 2001, have described holism as:

“Consideration of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health with particular attention to congruence between the mind and body encompassed by the spirit. Individual wellbeing is strongly connected to family and community wellness” (p. 24).

Healthy workplaces have been linked in the research to three key elements: health and lifestyle practices; workplace culture and a supportive environment; and physical environment and occupational health and safety (Canada’s Healthy Workplace Month, 2013). When all three elements are present and interconnected, employees and organizations can thrive. This holistic perspective is a critical brick in



the foundational wall for workplace wellness. The following research report attempts to weave together the interconnections of wellness in the workplace by sharing the stories that were collected from 2012 to 2013 from ANP employees and volunteers throughout BC.

## Background

Workplace Wellness and Balance in the ANP Sector emerged out of a labour market partnership agreement (LMP) between the Province and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC). The LMP was formed to help address human resources challenges within ANP agencies. The LMP was established based on 2011 research that identified the following issues as impacting the ANP sector: the unique context of the Aboriginal workforce, poor wages and benefits in the sector, challenges to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees, high rates of worker turnover, limitations to developing long-term HR strategies due to funding cycles, and the need for more Aboriginal driven ANP workforce research (British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, 2011, p. 5).

The LMP sought to address the aforementioned issues through conducting research in the ANP sector in four areas that could lead to the development of tools and resources relevant to Aboriginal cultures and the ANP sector: workplace wellness and balance; employee pensions and benefits; professional development and mentorship; and connections with culture and tradition. This research report focuses on workplace wellness and balance in the ANP workforce.

## Historical Context

A historical context is required in order to better understand workplace wellness within the ANP sector. Understanding the past, “what once was”, aids in comprehending the significant shift to “what is” today. This reflection provides the framework for this research project.

Pre-contact, each member of the community had a role and responsibility for the greater good and health of the larger population. Everyone contributed, had a purpose, and was valued (Atleo, 2004). This contributed to individual and community wellness as everyone had a clearly defined role and a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, this balanced and sustainable way of life has shifted since contact with the introduction of the Indian Act.

The Indian Act attempted to dismantle the solid foundation of teachings, values and systems that sustained Aboriginal people for hundreds of years. Montpetit, 2011, describes how the Indian Act replaced traditional Aboriginal systems with government legislation, “The Indian Act, which was enacted in 1876 and has since been amended, allows the government to control most aspects of aboriginal life: Indian status, land, resources, wills, education, band administration and so on.”(Montpetit, 2011, p. 1)

In 1920, the popular policy view towards Aboriginal people was to conform their cultures into the Western ideals. This intent can be seen in a quote from Duncan Scott, which states,



“Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department” (Residential Schools, 2013 para. 1).

Despite every effort, the resiliency of the Aboriginal people prevailed. The Indian Act did not destroy the Aboriginal way of life; in fact Aboriginal people sought new ways to take care of each other and their community. This quote captures the spirit of ANPs and how they evolved in response to community needs.

Aboriginal people began to establish non-profit agencies to augment or replace informal networks of support, many of which were traditionally supplied by families and over the course of 60 years, approximately 480 Aboriginal services and organizations have been created throughout BC (BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, 2011, p. 6)

Today, Aboriginal people continue to recognize their challenges and strengths, and want to take responsibility for creating positive change. In 2005, the Assembly of First Nations reported:

“The underlying socio-economic framework that perpetuates historical and social injustices must be changed. This is the true meaning of *transformative change*. Research has established links between cultural continuity, self-determination, health and wellbeing outcomes. In order to support positive, sustainable socio-economic change, the processes driving this change must be founded on the principle of self-determination and must be culturally driven.” (BC Assembly of First Nations, 2005, p.2)

The past has taught the ANP sector that Aboriginal people are resilient. They find strength in unity and know the strength of one contributes to the strength of all. This teaching is helpful in a modern day context as we search for ways to create workplace wellness and work-life balance.

The historical context to the ANP sector lends some explanation to the current state of Aboriginal organizations today, and the struggles of maintaining and sustaining wellness. For the most part, Aboriginal organizations are dependent (to varying degrees) on government funding, and to lesser degrees still governed by policies that do not reflect Aboriginal values. This current reality is in stark contrast to the traditional practice of families, communities and nations being interdependent. There are a variety of lessons we can learn from our past. The most relevant lesson to this research is that Aboriginal people are innately programmed to take care of each other and contribute to the greater good of the community. In order to do that, each person must fulfill a role. A person must be whole and healthy to fulfill their role. When people are able to fulfill their role they have a sense of purpose and belonging, which contributes to individual wellness, and the health of the larger community.

Recent initiatives within the ANP sector in BC are an example of how culturally driven research is helping address historical and social injustices. One of the foundational objectives of this research is to identify a new path forward, one that reflects the unique challenges ANPs face and celebrates resiliency as Aboriginal people and organizations. The following section outlines the new path ANP organizations have started down. It provides context and an Aboriginal lens through which to view workplace wellness.

# The Research: Workplace Wellness and Balance

## Purpose

The goal in our research was to learn about the key elements that help strengthen and support a healthy workforce. We aimed to engage with ANPs, draw on their knowledge and expertise, and identify themes in creating workplace wellness and work-life balance.

## Indigenous Lens

All of our research was guided through an Indigenous approach. Specifically, we drew on the following perspectives:

1. “The belief that we are all one, that everything is connected. It is in the interconnectedness that all living things are respected, each equally important to maintain balance and harmony in all areas, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually” (Tripartite First Nations Health Plan, 2012, p. 7);
2. The stories and feedback of Aboriginal community members carry with them the solutions and insights required to improve workforce issues in the ANP sector. Furthermore, in order for Aboriginal community organizations communities and people to thrive, they must see themselves in the strategy and hear their voices in the research upon which the strategy is built.
3. Any strategy created for Aboriginal organizations needs to encompass a community driven approach to building, achieving and sustaining the strategy. The implementation of the strategy must be accessible and achievable for employees and organizations. Connection and engagement with employees, boards, community partners and clients are critical for both strategy creation and strategy implementation.
4. Any recommendation clearly acknowledges and represents the past so that community members feel part of a continuum of change as opposed to trying or implementing something foreign or unfamiliar.



## Methodology

Our research methodology combined a number of qualitative and quantitative tools, grounded in indigenous ideology. To effectively deliberate conclusions from the interaction of qualitative and quantitative analysis, the team created clear research parameters and consistent data input categories.

### Approach

A unique and collective approach was adopted throughout the duration of this project. Three teams were selected to complete research in four areas: Workplace Wellness and Balance; Culture in the Workplace; Mentorship and Training; and Pensions and Benefits. The project was closely managed and supported by the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) along with a Project Advisory Committee (PAC).

**Project Advisory Committee.** A strong influence that contributed to the success of the project was the PAC. Put in place by the BCAAFC, the PAC was an infusion of highly experienced leaders from the ANP sector. The group not only reinforced the use of Aboriginal ideologies in our work, but modeled it as well. In many ways, as Elders do, they had faith in our expertise and reinforced the Indigenous value that we were more than a sum of our parts. They set the tone for collaboration and teamwork while offering their expertise, wisdom and guidance.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration was prevalent among the three teams engaged in the research. This spirit of collaboration helped to create synergy and avoid engagement fatigue amongst research participants. It was recognized that to approach ANPs in a non-cohesive manner could potentially overwhelm respondents and thus compromise the quality of feedback received. The BCAAFC provided administrative support for the collaborative approach. They coordinated team meetings among the three research groups and aligned research efforts (including communication and sector engagement sessions). The collaborative efforts and coordination led by the BCAAFC resulted in: two surveys produced and sent out simultaneously, consultants collaborating to facilitate Regional Engagement Circles (REC) where all four topics were discussed in a World Café Style, and consulting teams producing two communications newsletters for the sector.

### Research Tools

1. **Literature Review.** A review of the literature was conducted to provide the initial foundation and comparison for the project. Our focus for the ANP sector review of the literature was to gain a snapshot of the sector's history, high level challenges, systemic challenges and best practices.
2. **Regional Sharing Circles.** Mahigan Consulting worked in collaboration with the other research teams and BCAAFC to plan and facilitate Sharing Circles. Six Regional Engagement Circles were held in BC: Victoria, Kelowna, Vancouver, Kamloops, Prince George and Terrace. Sessions were facilitated using a World Café format. All research teams participated

and gathered data for their respective research topics. In total 76 staff and volunteers from ANPs participated.

3. **Key Informant Interviews.** 39 key informant interviews were conducted with informants in a survey-style questionnaire, from the sectors of Health, Treatment, Child and Family Services, Employment Services and Housing. An online research tool (Survey Monkey) was used to gather the data. Key informants had the opportunity to go to the website and complete the survey on their own, have a face-to-face interview with a team member who entered the responses into the survey, complete the survey over the phone with a team member entering the responses into the survey, or participate in small group discussion with a team member entering the data into the survey and recording all other responses. The personal interaction of the key informant interview process provided researchers with additional qualitative data.

The Key Informant Interviews were conducted across BC with a mix of target subjects from youth to Elders, managers to front line workers. A snowball approach was used whereby the Mahigan team interviewed key informants who suggested other key informants. The data collected during this exercise was of great value to the research project. As each member of our team is Aboriginal and has experience working in our communities and in the ANP sector, subjects were quick to share their challenges, struggles and triumphs.

Interviews were conducted in person, small groups, and/or by phone.

Respondents were emailed the interview questions a day prior to the interview to give them time to think about their answers.

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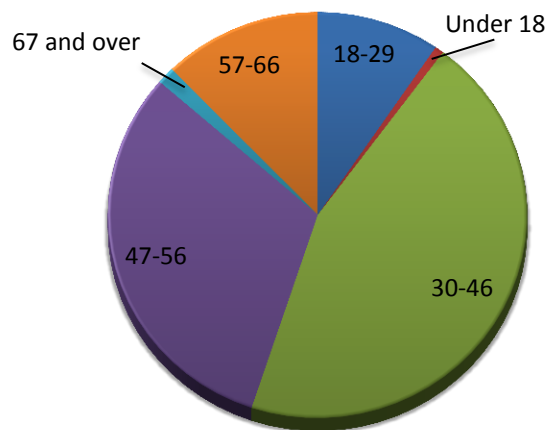
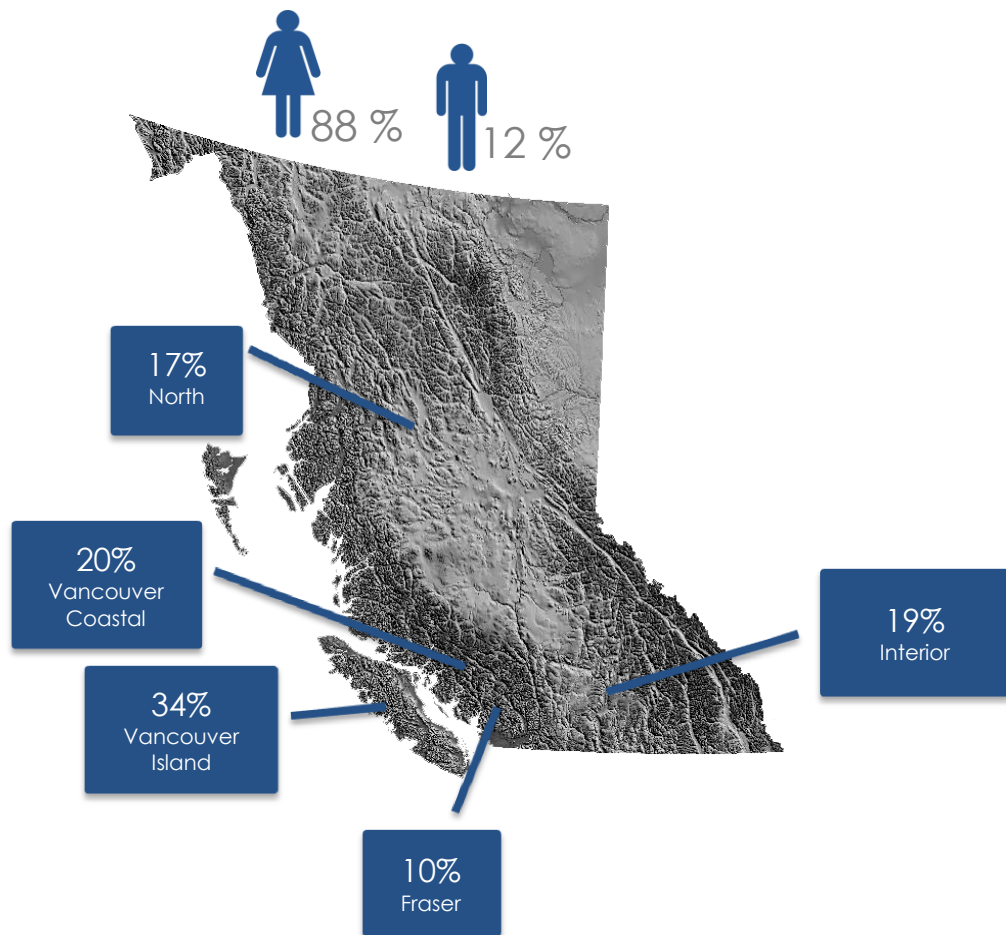
### Interviews held with 39 people in the ANP sector:

10 Managers  
7 Frontline workers  
7 Board members  
6 Youth  
5 Elders  
4 Volunteers

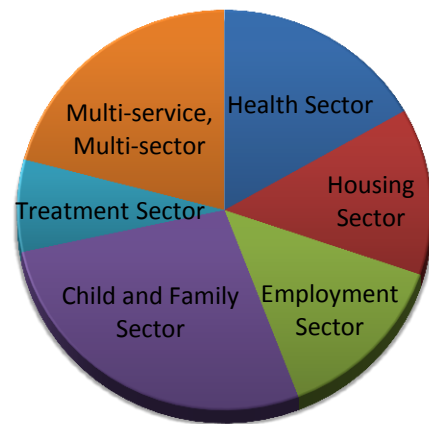
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4. **Survey Tool.** A survey on culture and workplace wellness was distributed to the ANP sector from December 2012 to July 2013. We had 148 employees from small to large size organizations from each of five identified regions in BC participate in the survey. Mahigan Consulting collaborated with the *Connections with Culture and Traditional Values* Team to produce and distribute the survey. The following graphics depict the demographics of the survey respondents:

## Survey Respondents



Age of Survey Respondents



Survey Respondents by sub-sector

## Findings

Our research sought to understand what contributes to wellness and balance in the workplace. The following findings reflect what was learned from the combination of research tools as listed above. ANP employees and volunteers identified a range of factors that can contribute to or hinder workplace wellness including:

- Organizational planning and strategic development
- Adequate funding
- Safe workplace environments (including emotional, cultural and spiritual, and intellectual safety)
- Healthy relationships
- Youth and Elders in the workplace.

### Organizational Planning and Strategic Development

An overarching aspect of organizational wellness evidenced in feedback was the ability of the organization to develop and communicate a clear strategic direction and offer up clear roles for employees in helping to fulfill the vision. One research participant summed this up by stating: “Planning offers collaboration and hope.”(Key Informant, June, 2013).

Survey respondents also indicated the important role that organizational and strategic planning plays in workplace wellness: 49% of respondents felt challenged by a lack of organizational direction and 58% felt they lacked support from their managers. This lack of direction coupled with lack of support from managers serves as a barrier to workplace wellness.

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“We work with heavy topics and it's easy to burn-out. Understanding the strategic plan helps us to lean on each other more” (Key informant, May 2013).

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Key informant interviews showed strong themes towards the ways ANP leaders feel as though they have to walk in two worlds: on the one hand they must work in a Western worldview to report according to funder’s rhetoric, often fragmented and compartmentalized, and on the other hand they need to work from their Aboriginal worldview to create a holistic environment for their staff that incorporates culture and responds to employee and organizational demands. The lack of alignment between funders’ requirements and the goals of the ANP sector serve as a barrier to workplace wellness. ANP leadership is faced with trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. The stress trickles throughout the organization leaving staff frustrated as they struggle to meet the needs of the people they serve within a dysfunctional funding system.

From an organizational wellness perspective, many respondents felt that wellness was not currently part of their organization’s culture, however they did see value in including it. Respondents agreed that workplace wellness plans are required as a mandatory part of all ANP strategic plans. They



expressed that this would aid the organization in clarifying the unique spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual ‘culture’ of the organization. Recognizing and addressing the emotional trauma that employees bring to the workplace is an important part of strengthening workplace wellness and work-life balance.

## Funding

Lack of adequate funding serves as a significant barrier to achieving workplace wellness and work-life balance. Adequate funding was raised in all forms of data collection. There are two separate lenses to look through in relation to funding: wages and operational. Funding for wages relates to the ability to provide staff fair and equitable salaries and benefits. Operational funding relates to the ability of the organization to sustainably deliver programs and services to meet the needs of the people it serves. Throughout the research journey we heard that ANPs struggle to attain adequate funding for both.

The ANP sector has previously identified lack of adequate wages and benefits as a challenge for the workforce. In the 2010 report, *Advancing the Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce – Report for the 1st HR Gathering*, the authors note that organizations are:

“...Losing staff to other organizations that offer better wages and benefits. It was widely noted that there is a lack of wage equity in the overall social service sector, as government agencies can offer better wages and benefits to employees doing the same or similar work in the ANP sector.” (p.8).

Many of our research participants shared they have not had a salary increase since 2009. Simply put, employees need to be able to earn enough to cover their basic needs. One participant stated, “I need enough money to support my family.” On the same note, another participant illustrated the link between wages and wellness: “Our staff don’t make a lot of money and this can make eating well hard for some.”

One participant made the link between the organization’s annual funding cycle and the impact on employees: “We need to feel secure in our jobs, not think we will be laid off every year.” Job security was a common thread throughout the themes. Many addressed how lack of job security negatively impacted staff morale.

Lack of pay equity, pension or benefits can lead to low staff morale, and this can lead to staff not feeling valued. These factors can result in people seeking employment in more stable environments and sectors. When there is a high turnover of staff the organization is impacted and service delivery to clients suffers. All of these factors serve as barriers

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Limited funding in ANPs leads to limited wages for employees, which impacts staff wellness.

One research respondent noted, “Our staff don’t make a lot of money and so eating well is hard for some.”

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to strengthening the ANP workforce and promoting workplace wellness.

One potential way to address poor wages is to have earnings identified as tax exempt. There are many complexities and legal ramifications related to this issue. Tax exemption was raised in our research; therefore we have included it in our findings, however we suggest seeking expertise from taxation and finance experts.

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ANP employees are overwhelmed with having to constantly write proposals to meet the basic needs of their organizations. Constant proposal writing compromises the day-to-day work of ANPs and contributes to staff burnout.

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The operational funding challenges identified by research participants ranged from stringent reporting requirements to proposal writing fatigue. Participants stated they were overwhelmed with having to constantly write proposals to meet the basic needs of their organizations. In addition, they noted seeking additional funding was more of a necessity than a luxury. Supplementing core funding was required in order to deliver adequate programming to their communities. During the Regional Sharing Circles, participants indicated that their day-to-day work of serving the community was compromised by the amount of proposal writing and reporting required by various funding bodies. Additionally, employees found the required reports didn't accurately reflect the success of the programs.

Respondents indicated community needs change over time and programming needs to be reflective of the current environment. For example, when the Common Experience Residential School claims were awarded to survivors, there was a demand for financial literacy workshops. ANPs needed to be able to respond quickly to provide this support and this may not have been a part of their regular programming. The turnaround time required to seek, apply for and receive funding may have impacted the ability of the ANP to provide appropriate services at the appropriate time. Respondents strongly voiced that longer-term funding or funding blocks could improve programming and service delivery for ANPs.

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**60%** of surveyed ANP employees said they lacked adequate resources to do their job effectively.

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A related aspect of this finding demonstrates how the lack of sufficient funds contributes to the high rate of burnout experienced by ANP managers and employees: 44% of respondents indicated they experience burnout as a result of having too many job duties. Additional feedback from the Workplace Wellness survey indicated that 64% of employees find wearing too many hats is a key challenge. These numbers are further quantified in survey feedback, which showed that 62% of employees find that too much work is a key challenge.

According to the survey, 60% of respondents felt they did not have adequate resources to do their job effectively. This finding was further echoed during Regional Sharing Circles and in the Key Informant Interviews. Employees felt they spent too much time compensating for lack of space, technology and equipment. This plays a large role in employee burnout. Qualitative feedback noted lack of technology was a challenge that impacted the staff and organizations ability to delivery services efficiently. Some research participants noted that ANPs could benefit from:

- Database software for storing and retrieving necessary programming and funding information
- Information sharing technology such as *Dropbox* or *iCloud* that is necessary for sharing reports, templates, etc. and would aid employees for sharing report templates etc.
- Computers and operating software capable of running software programs required for service delivery.

Lack of operational space and spaces for program delivery also serves as a barrier to promoting workplace wellness. Several respondents indicated frustration at renting classroom space outside their facility for program delivery. Respondents found this practice took additional time and financial resources away from the organization. Since many programs are funded from supplemental government bodies, some ANPs are not permitted to use funds to contribute to operational costs. Many participants noted that organizational funding rarely if ever, reflects the true cost of operations.

ANPs acquire funding from multiple sources in order to meet community needs. Each funder has different reporting requirements and each requires distinctive and unique reports. The funding and reporting pressures can lead to burnout and low employee morale in ANPs, which serves as a barrier to achieving workplace wellness.

### Safe Workplace Environment

Creating a safe workplace environment can help strengthen workplace wellness and work-life balance. Safe workplace environments include the interconnecting elements of emotional, intellectual, and cultural and spiritual safety: one cannot exist without the other. Aboriginal people continue to carry emotional trauma associated with the historical effects of colonization and so a holistic view of safety is essential.

Negative stigma around the historical effects of colonization is still harboured by some respondents and was prevalent in the feedback received from all three data collection methods. Furthermore, from a holistic perspective, Aboriginal respondents indicated that the very separation of work from their personal, family or community life was little if at all. They face the same issues in the workplace (i.e. multigenerational trauma) as they do at home. Strengthening



and healing the individual can have a profound effect on the individual, their family and the organization they serve. This healing is a necessary step in achieving workplace wellness and work-life balance in the ANP sector.

One of the attractions of the ANP sector is that community members feel they can work towards positive change for their children and communities. For community members and youth to fully access and embrace available programs and services, ANP organizations require a foundation of safety. This allows community members, Elders, and youth to feel welcome in ANP organizational environments thus increasing opportunities for guidance from Elders, and recruiting young people to the ANP workforce.

“My staff cares so much for our clients they work without proper support or resources. The burnout is incredible. I see it after one year. It’s difficult to keep people longer than that, maybe two years.” (Key Informant, July 2013)

**Emotional Safety.** Emotional safety was identified as a key challenge faced by employees on a daily basis. Research findings showed three major challenges to emotional safety: a) Lateral Violence, b) Racism, and c) Access to Aboriginal led counselling or coaching.

**a) Lateral Violence.** Lateral violence was identified as a complex problem by participants and evidenced as a key challenge in all three methodologies. In fact, 69% of survey respondents identified negative gossip as a challenge in the workplace, and 63% of respondents indicated that lateral violence posed a challenge in the workplace. Participants from the Regional Sharing Circle identified lateral violence as a significant threat to emotional workplace safety. Quotes from research participants include:

“I was fearful of saying anything. I started to doubt myself and in some senses felt my whole career aspirations were being ruined. This was caused by the leadership and there were multiple incidences.” (Participant, Regional Sharing Circle, 2013)

“Leadership controlled me to the point of not effectively being able to move projects forward in a timely manner” (Participant, Regional Sharing Circle, 2013).

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Lateral violence includes gossip, shaming of others, blaming, backstabbing, family feuds and attempts at socially isolating others. This form of violence occurs when out of anger and frustration, an oppressed group turns on itself and begins to violate each other (Helin, 2011, p.168).

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Key respondents offered insight into this complex issue noting that lateral violence can stem from emotional scarring and trauma such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Often managers, co-workers or board members are emotionally triggered by the very work they are performing. Issues arising from addiction, family, education or residential school traumas are prevalent topics in service delivery to clients. Lateral violence can also stem from historical or political relationships among groups or between families. Additionally, lateral violence can stem from lack of knowledge or understanding of Aboriginal culture and/or appropriate protocols. It may surface among displaced Aboriginal employees, non-Aboriginal employees, managers and/or board members. Lateral violence must be eliminated from the ANP sector in order to promote workplace wellness.

- b) **Racism.** Racism may be considered another form of lateral violence as it can stem from the same lack of understanding towards Aboriginal culture. Respondents indicated that racism is another challenge to maintaining wellness in the workplace, and requires a proactive strategy to overcome. Respondents felt racism from three primary groups: the general public, governments and non-Aboriginal managers and leaders. As one respondent stated “We have to work twice as hard for the same credit as non-Aboriginal peoples” (Participant, Regional Sharing Circle, 2013).

Racism can serve as a silent repressive force: it is often present at various intersections of the funding and reporting processes. Both managers and employees expressed they felt marginalized and struggled to remain diplomatic while fighting for resources and programs required to serve their clients.

Additionally, participants stated that in order to access adequate resources, they felt they needed to use negative language and labelling in their requests for funding. Negative language and labelling consistently measures Aboriginal peoples’ lack of success against success as defined in a mainstream Western European framework.

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The exercise of seeking pity to obtain funding for ANP organizations is detrimental to promoting workplace wellness and celebrating the resiliency of Aboriginal people.

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- c) **Access to Aboriginal-led counselling or coaching.** Having access to Aboriginal counseling and coaching emerged as a key research theme to promoting workplace wellness. Many of the day-to-day challenges of dealing with trauma carried by Aboriginal employees can be addressed through coaching and/or counseling. One respondent stated:

“I have always been challenged by food. I go through periods of survival. I learned that food was one of my key issues and I associated it with survival. I learned through counseling how my relationship with food was determined by me feeling like an orphan and my residential school experience.” (Key Informant, July 2013)

Counselling or coaching support for ANP employees was identified as being best provided by trained and qualified Aboriginal people. Many ANP employees, board members and managers struggle with similar issues as their clients in the ANP sector. Assisting clients to overcome challenges was described as heavy work and employees often found that they required counseling to cope with day-to-day workplace challenges and trauma.

“Employees are affected by the same issues as our clients [violence, substance abuse, residential school]. They need healing to deal with these issues and to do their jobs better and create a healthier environment. We don’t have the funds for this.” (Key Informant, June 2013)

Respondents also indicated that coaching and counseling would provide a safe place for employees to discuss issues ranging from lateral violence, racism, or challenging leadership and relationship issues. Counseling and coaching are key factors to promoting workplace wellness and work-life balance.

**Spiritual and Cultural Wellness and Safety.** The spiritual and cultural environment of the workplace has a significant impact on employee performance. Six themes emerged from the research that supports the important role that spiritual and cultural wellness and safety play in the workplace: a) Collaboration, b) Eating and preparing food together, c) Experiencing gratitude and joy, d) Freedom to practice culture, e) Access to Elders, and f) Traditional healing.

- a) **Collaboration.** A key aspect of many Indigenous cultures is collaboration. Participants suggested that this theme should be present in the strategic direction of all ANPs. When working from place of collaboration, answers come from learning through doing things together. Learning takes place within the collective action and outcomes. The spirit of collaboration contradicts what is often demanded of employees, which is performing job activities in isolation of each other. Respondents consistently stated they see greater progress, feel more support, and are more spiritually grounded through collaborative efforts. Collaboration within the organization and amongst community partners can aid in building healthy relationships, sharing the workload and promoting workplace wellness.
- b) **Eating and Preparing Food Together.** Eating together is a part of workplace wellness. Respondents shared that eating together is a traditional value. A common teaching is that when you share a meal while conversing with others you are digesting information and teachings as you digest your food. This exemplifies the wellness model of interconnection among physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual quadrants. Sharing a traditional meal together assists in teaching and practicing self-care and ensures all employees have access to healthy foods in the workplace. Preparation of traditional foods also provides the opportunity to: give thanks to the Creator; share stories and teachings; practice traditional hunting, fishing and gathering methods;



practice traditional values of giving and sharing; practice teambuilding; talk about personal challenges and solutions in a safe environment; and incorporate youth and Elders into the workplace environment. These activities promote organizations to interact with the communities they serve while exercising the value of taking care of one another as a community. Sharing meals is a traditional value that can help strengthen the workforce and promote workplace wellness.

- c) **Experiencing Gratitude and Joy.** The role that ANPs play in restoring the culture and healing of Aboriginal communities from the traumatic events of the past is heavy work. Laughter and joy remains one of the most powerful medicines employed by Indigenous peoples to aid the heavy lifting.

Apparently, serious business and funny business are two sides of a well-balanced coin. In the midst of great endeavors and exploits, there is also a time for fun, games, and laughter. Having fun provides relief from one serious activity and a healthy transition to another. There is a Nuu-chah-nulth word for this kind of fun. It is called *nee-kee-chill*. (Atleo, 2004, p.48)

The teaching regarding gratitude and joy was evidenced throughout the entire research process. Respondents stated that fun, joy and laughter were key components to creating an environment of safety, peace and hope. Creating space for gratitude, joy and laughter within the ANP sector can improve workplace wellness and work-life balance.

- d) **Freedom to Practice Culture.** Research respondents referred to spiritual wellness and safety as the acknowledgement of their culture in the workplace: this included freedom to be Aboriginal according to personal teachings. The spiritual environment within the organization must also acknowledge the protocols and teaching of the First Nation upon whose territories the organization operates.

Aboriginal culture needs to be embraced and embedded at the foundational level of an organization for it to be the driving force within the ANP sector. However, the research indicated that there are complex challenges to embedding culture in the workplace.

First, loss of language and cultural teachings make it difficult to define and practice culture. Secondly, each ANP organization hosts Aboriginal peoples from across Canada and cultural beliefs and practices can significantly vary. Research participants stated that culture should first emerge from the local First Nation and through a protocol practice, whereby permission is granted to practice other cultural teaching on the First Nations Territory. Thirdly, Managers indicated it was often not possible to hire

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Workplace wellness needs to be born of culture. This is true for youth as well. (Sharing Circle participant, 2013)

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culturally educated employees due to their lack of formal western education. Additionally, writing programming, proposals and reports for funders is rigid and bureaucratic posing a critical challenge to incorporating Aboriginal culture as a valid way of operating.

- e) **Access to Elders.** Research participants stated that the presence of Elders supports the practice of foundational cultural ideologies and practices. According to employees and managers Elders bring a safe form of recognized cultural knowledge and help to facilitate peace and wellness in the workplace.

- f) **Traditional Healing.** ANP staff can benefit from accessing counseling and coaching that is consistent with traditional healing practices. The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health notes, “Indigenous ideologies embrace a holistic concept of health” (Loppie & Wein, 2009, p. 3). Qualitative feedback from all three research methodologies identified that access to traditional healing is an important requirement for wellness. Respondents also expressed they would like to be able to share traditional healing methodologies with their clients.

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“Spiritual healing works much faster than mainstream. It calls on a person's relationships with their ancestors and incorporates our interconnectivity to the earth. When you are in touch with this, it becomes hard to hold on to pain. Instead it invites the Creator to work with you to accept your pain and transform it into gratitude. It can take years of counselling to accomplish this”.  
(Elder interview, July 2013)

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**Intellectual Wellness and Safety.** Research findings showed that healthy leadership, open communication with ANP board members, access to Elders, and clarification of roles and responsibilities were key factors in promoting intellectual wellness and safety.

Intellectual wellness and safety includes providing positive feedback and acknowledgement of good work, and plays an important role in healing. Much work remains in undoing the damage of the Indian Residential School system, and positive feedback and acknowledgment of a job well done can aid in undoing that damage. This is best illustrated in the voices of one of the research participants:

“I was spoken down to in residential school, made to feel like I was a dumb Indian. I can still hear the critical voices of the teachers and the nuns. I struggle today and need to know I am doing a good job and that I am valuable” (Key Informant, June, 2013).

Other forms of acknowledgement were recognizing that staff had a life and connections with the community outside of work. Often a staff member's personal life will overlap with work-life. Workplace flexibility was cited as important: staff felt valued and respected when they had the support and time to participate in community and cultural events. Therefore, an important aspect of acknowledgement became trust and personal merit.

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99% of surveyed ANP employees identified acknowledgement of good work as important to creating a positive workplace environment.

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Respondents stated that acknowledging them as a whole person with life outside of work meant that they would feel more confident in performing their roles and managing deadlines. As one manager stated:

“I allow my staff flexibility to attend cultural events or deal with personal issues. I lift them up and publicly acknowledge their good work. I find by doing this my staff work harder and longer hours, not less. I often have to send them home or insist they take much needed wellness days.”  
(Key Informant, May 2013)

Finally, respondents stated that a part of being acknowledged was to be recognized for their unique strengths, skills and talents. Staff need to have a sense of belonging, understand the vision for the organization and the role they have within that vision, and have access to the support and resources to fulfill their role in order to feel valued. When staff feel valued and appreciated they are equipped to support other team members in promoting workplace wellness.

### Healthy Relationships in the Workplace

There are myriad stakeholders involved in the ANP Sector and each individual plays a strong role in strengthening the success of this unique and valuable sector. Respondents stated that clear and open communication was key to forming lasting relationships. Many cultures are present in the ANP sector and somewhere within these contrasting systems consensus must be found so that all parties are comfortable with moving in a common and sustainable direction.

“Experiences in Canada and elsewhere have shown that strategies for achieving sustainability generally need active involvement from, and clear understandings among, a wide array of actors and groups.”(Cormick, Dale, Edmond, Sigurdson, & Stuart, 1996, p. 13)

Relationships are best managed when all parties are clear about their direction. Respondents stated that ongoing, healthy and open communication was needed between their organization, government, community partners, and funders. Feedback from the Regional Sharing Circles and Key Informant Interviews strongly evidenced that forward movement requires relationships and partnerships based on mutual trust and respect. Respondents felt this would take a commitment to ongoing dialogues with stakeholders.

Effective communication and collaboration within the organization is key to creating a healthy and respectful workplace. Stakeholders could also benefit from healthy and respectful relationships. When ANPs, governments, community partners and funders work collaboratively they collectively achieve greater success in: sharing spaces and other capital resources, providing more holistic services and programs, sharing knowledge and promising practices, building capacity, and working collectively for positive change.

Feedback from respondents indicated that tools and policies to support healthy communications within the workplace would be of great value. This finding overlaps and supports key themes of eating together and having access to Elders. Employees further stated that a mentorship approach be taken to assist more experienced staff to pass on knowledge and advice to younger or newer staff members. Supporting and fostering healthy relationships provides a foundation for promoting workplace wellness. Healthy relationships can lead to meaningful partnerships and collaboration which can help strengthen the ANP sector.

### Youth in the Workplace

Youth play an important role in workplace wellness. While feedback from youth was somewhat limited, the feedback the few youth research participants did provide was profound and inspiring. The Aboriginal youth that participated in the Key Informant Interview and Regional Engagement Sessions were passionate about three primary themes: Culture, Technology and Confidence.

- a) **Culture.** A beautiful aspect of Aboriginal youth today is their lack of having personally experienced repression of culture to the same extent as their ancestors. While they are impacted by it, they have not learned that culture is a bad word. One youth delegate shared a teaching of Dr. Bruce Perry:

“Rhythms sooth us, like rubbing one’s back, the drum, flute, breathing in and out, shaking hands, hugs, drinking water... culture is what brings us back, like these rhythms. Often you go into your workplace and you’re already in a reactive state.”

Youth participants were both passionate and knowledgeable about their culture. They bring hope to the ANP sector reminding employees of the hope they once embodied. Another interesting aspect of feedback from youth was their ability to see opportunities instead of challenges. Finally, Aboriginal youth today reported they engage and form strong relationships with other youth nationally and internationally.

- b) **Technology.** Feedback from older respondents evidenced that they needed to acquire more flexibility and technology to better manage workloads and work-life balance. In contrast, the youth we interviewed were not asking for these items to be provided, rather, they were currently using them in their day-to-day way of being. From social media to film and art, youth reported that they are using technology to solve some of the largest challenges faced by the ANP sector. They are collaborating, forming relationships, incorporating culture in a modern context and communicating with all stakeholders young and old and across cultures.

- c) **Confidence.** The Aboriginal Youth we spoke with embraced a sophisticated understanding of wellness and naturally incorporated this understanding into their working environment. They were more focused on getting the work done than fighting with obstacles or burning themselves out by attempting to be Aboriginal persons in a non-Aboriginal system. To these shining stars, being Aboriginal is a normal, healthy and pride-filled way of being.

Through the many hardships of colonization and the heaviness of healing our communities and organizations, we have managed to raise some great youth. These wise and knowledge-savvy young people are a catalyst for change, helping ANPs weave traditional teachings into a modern day context.

### Elders in the Workplace

Much of the success of our next generation can be credited to Elders who have taken the time to pass on language and culture to our baby boom of emerging youth. Elders play a crucial role in creating workplace wellness. They provide guidance and support at a variety of levels including: individual, family, staff, board, client and organizational. They serve as an anchor to our past and help maintain traditional teachings, peace and wellness in the workplace.

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Elders play a crucial role in creating workplace wellness as they provide guidance and support at a variety of levels.

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Nine Elders were interviewed during the Key Informant Interviews and nine Elders participated in the Regional Sharing Circles. Pioneering Elders in an attempt to heal Aboriginal peoples and communities started many of ANPs in BC and across Canada. It is part of our modern-day story to acknowledge these Elders for their good work and find ways to respect their initial intentions for healing by providing opportunities for them to participate in ANP workplace environments. The theme of Elder participation was most prevalent in findings from Key Informant Interviews and Regional Sharing Circles. Managers and employees reported that the presence of Elders supported an environment of peace, culture and collaboration. Furthermore, respondents reported there was a critical need for Elders to have relationships with Aboriginal youth in their workplaces. The need for participation from Elders is so desired that many Elders find they are burned out or not able to provide for their communities due to lack of transportation, energy or financial resources. Managers reported it was difficult to pay Elders as they were not allowed to give honorariums or the Elders didn't have the correct Western accreditation required for coaching, counseling or teaching.

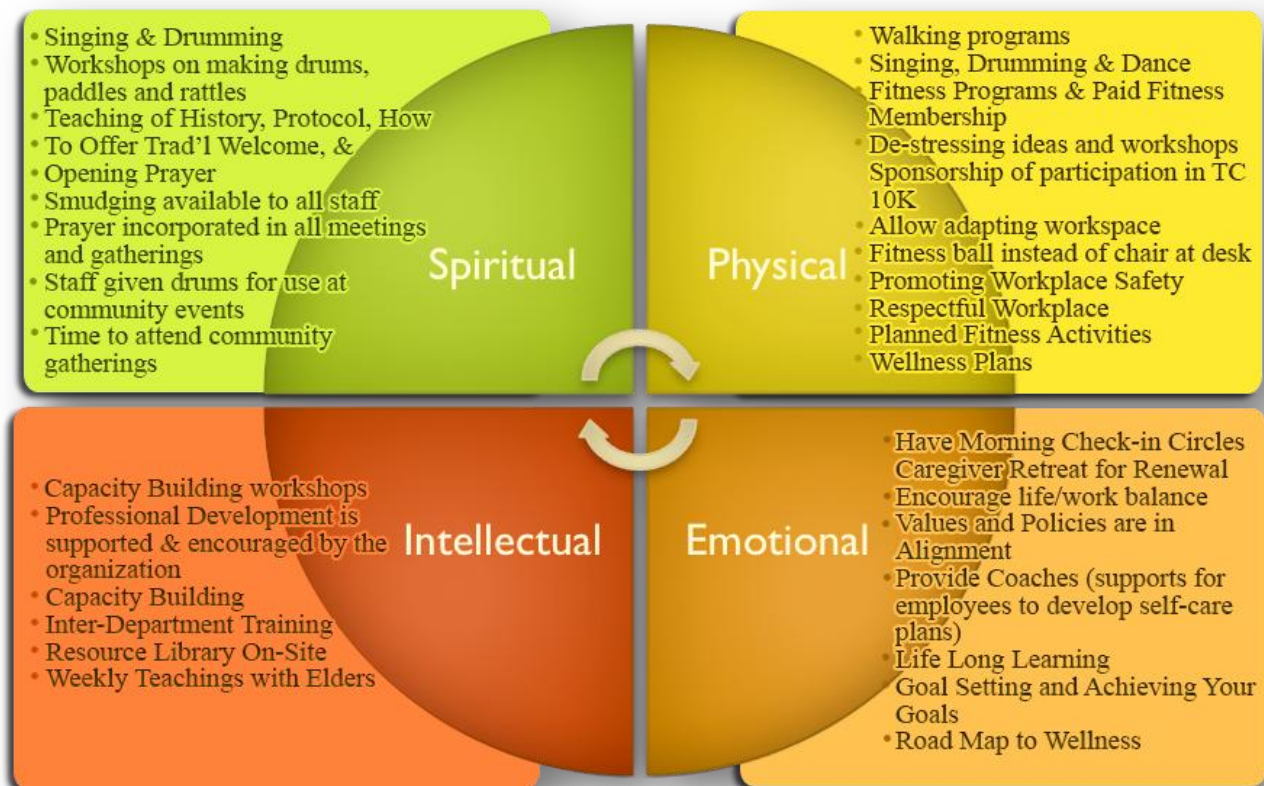
Respondents felt that the cultural knowledge and experience of Elders should be recognized so they can be incorporated into organizational staffing. Further, respondents stated functional spaces for Elders would encourage them to visit and share cultural teachings. Some types of spaces that were recommended included an Elders lounge, garden, or kitchen or food preparation area suitable for traditional food preparation. As two respondents put it:



“We need space for Elders to be comfortable and hang out – it’s good for everybody. Elders, children, youth, managers, staff, families, community.” (Participant, Regional Engagement Session, 2013)

“Elders should be the heart of the organization: history, protocol, traditional processes.” (Participant, Regional Engagement Session, 2013)

In addition to the themes above, participants also discussed the concept of a workplace wellness wheel. The graphic below represents ideas generated at the Sharing Circles. One participant drew the circle and labeled the four quadrants and other participants began to fill in the spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional areas with activities they either practiced in the workplace or would like to practice in the workplace.





## Discussion

Significant lessons have emerged from wellness in the workplace with regards to health and lifestyle, workplace culture and supportive environments, and physical and occupational health and safety.

**Health and Lifestyle.** Our findings noted healthy individuals contribute to the health of an organization. When individuals are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance they are more present in the workplace. The workplace plays a role in supporting a healthy lifestyle for employees and there are a variety of no cost or low cost activities organizations can promote.

**Workplace Culture and Supportive Environment.** Research participants identified the following components as factors that contribute to workplace wellness: safety; respect; effective and healthy communication; culturally based programming for staff and clients; promotion of self-care and healthy activities in the workplace; acknowledgment of contribution to the organization; and support to achieve departmental and organizational goals. When these components are present staff feel supported and the workplace culture is in harmony with Aboriginal values.

**Physical and Occupational Health and Safety.** Lateral violence was raised in a number of themes as well as in all forms of data collection. It was identified as a major threat to a safe working environment. As long as lateral violence is present in the workplace, wellness cannot be achieved or sustained. Lateral violence impacts the ability of staff do their job. When they are constantly under attack, undermined and threatened, their self-esteem and self-worth will diminish. Staff need to feel safe and valued. Organizations need to protect staff and have a zero tolerance for lateral violence in order to achieve workplace wellness.

The physical space of an organization can serve as a barrier or an asset to workplace wellness and work-life balance. Adequate space with ergonomically correct desks and chairs can improve workplace wellness. Access to natural light, fresh air and fitness equipment also promote wellness. Participants identified adequate workspaces and lack of appropriate technology as not only barriers to workplace wellness but as major contributors to stress and anxiety.

Underling all themes was the need for adequate funding. Adequate funding impacts workplace wellness and the ability to attract and retain employees and deliver effective programming responsive to client and community needs. There are two separate lenses to look through in relation to funding: wages and organizational. Funding for wages relates to the ability to provide staff fair and equitable salaries and benefits. Organizational funding relates to the ability of the organization to sustainably deliver programs and services to meet the needs of the people it serves. Throughout the research journey we heard that ANPs struggle to attain adequate funding for both.

# Recommendations

## 1. Training and Mentorship

### Recommendation

Develop a Training and Mentorship Program. This program can be supported by a Train the Trainer Model that can be offered regionally throughout the province to assist ANPs in developing and maintaining capacity in organizational wellness in a cost effective manner. Training areas may include how to create and maintain:

- Wellness Plans
- Cultural Identities
- Emotional and Spiritual Safety in Aboriginal Organizations
- Strategic Plans
- Leadership Development
- Teambuilding
- Financial Literacy

### Related Research Theme

Organizational planning and strategic development

### Practice Example

The Aboriginal Finance Officers Association of BC (AFOABC) offers First Nations Financial Fitness (FNFF) workshops and Train the Trainer programs. AFOABC delivers the FNFF workshop and trains trainers with the goal of having local community organizations take the lead in continuing to deliver the workshops in the community on an ongoing basis. The First Nations Financial Fitness Handbook is a free download from <http://www.afoabc.org/downloads/financial-literacy-handbook.pdf>

Business Development Canada (BDC) offers an Aboriginal summer student internship program. The goal of the program is attract Aboriginal students to the business sector. Through the program, students are trained and mentored so they qualify for permanent employment as customer service officers or account managers with BDC once they have completed their education and are looking for full-time employment. The ANP Sector can benefit from this program in two ways: by accessing mentorship resources and information that may be transferable to creating a mentorship program within the sector, and by working with BDC to expose their mentees to the ANP sector and



exchange ideas how they may assist ANPs (i.e. developing social enterprises).

## 2. Wellness Assessment Tools

### Recommendation

Creation of wellness assessment tools for ANPs: ANPs either create or access an existing assessment tools to help organizations identify what workplace wellness means to them. These assessment tools should be created from an Indigenous perspective and vary by sub-sector. The assessment tool can serve as a starting point for developing a strategy to address barriers and challenges to workplace wellness.

### Related Research Theme

Organizational planning and strategic development

### Practice Example

The Ministry of Health has a user friendly, 12-question assessment that measures the strength of the workplace. <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/environments/workplace/orgwellness.html>

New Brunswick's Wellness Strategy contains an action plan that classifies activities under the following categories: Partnerships and Collaboration, Promoting Healthy Lifestyles, Developing and Supporting Healthy Policies, Conducting Surveillance, Evaluation and Research as well and identifies how to apply the activities in a variety of settings. Settings include: schools, communities, homes, workplaces and within the province. <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/hic-csi/pdf/Wellness-MieuxEtre/WellnessStrategyActionPlan2013-2014.pdf>

## 3. Wellness Toolkit

### Recommendation

Develop a Workplace Wellness Toolkit to support organizations in promoting workplace wellness and work-life balance. The toolkit can be a component of the Train the Trainer Mentorship Program and should be available online. The toolkit will assist ANPs to build on existing capacity in the area of workplace wellness, and identify existing promising practices within the ANP sector. The toolkit may include templates, information on processes, culture and healthy ways to address workplace challenges. The toolkit can include culturally based templates on developing policies that acknowledge teachings (i.e. traditional conflict resolution). The toolkit can also contain a template for HR policies that address racism, bullying, harassment and lateral violence in the workplace.

## Related Research Theme

Organizational planning and strategic development

### Practice Example

This article identifies common challenges and practical considerations in the promotion of workplace wellness for Aboriginal people. <http://www.benefitscanada.com/benefits/health-wellness/culturally-specific-health-and-wellness-43933>

The Workplace Mental Health Promotion – A How To Guide: This website provides information, tools, case studies and practical step-by-step processes that can assist ANPs in developing and promoting workplace wellness. <http://wmhp.cmhaontario.ca>

This resource provides practical committee materials including overview of responsibilities and templates for meetings agendas, meeting minutes and staff surveys. These materials could easily be adapted to meet the needs of ANPs as they develop workplace wellness strategies. <http://wmhp.cmhaontario.ca/healthy-workplace-committee-materials>

## 4. Creative Employee Incentives

### Recommendation

Identify creative incentives for employees through developing a template and incentive process. The template can provide support for organizations to offer creative incentives and benefits that assist in attracting and retaining employees. For example, ANPs can build social enterprises into their organization to generate additional revenue that can assist in paying for incentives and employee benefits. The ANP sector could host a regional forum on social enterprise. Additionally, the ANP sector could create an opportunity for a joint dialogue between ANPs and government with the focus on developing a strategy to close the gap on common issues of concern related to funding (proposals, parameters, reporting). The ANP sector could create an assessment tool for organizations to use in identifying and prioritizing challenges specific to space/infrastructure, resources and technology.

## Related Research Theme

Creative funding solutions

### Practice Example

The Best Practices Toolkit: Strategies and Tools for Employing Aboriginal People offers ideas to address many of the Human Resources challenges identified in the research process. The toolkit covers topics including: communicating clear expectations, workplace mentoring, monitoring outcomes and performance reviews. Helpful checklists can aid ANPs in addressing various challenges related to attracting and retaining employees.

<http://www.centralalberta.ab.ca/imagesedit/Edmonton%20Workforce%20Connection%20BP%20Toolkit.pdf>

This resource can be used to help guide funding policies and practices discussions between the funders and the ANPs: A Code of Good Practice on Funding – Building an Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector 2002. [http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/funding/pdf/codes\\_funding.pdf](http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/funding/pdf/codes_funding.pdf)

This link from the University of James Cook in Australia provides information on workplace ergonomics and includes a link to a self-assessment checklist. The checklist can be utilized as a resource to identify current workspace challenges faced by ANP staff. [http://www.jcu.edu.au/whs/healthwellbeing/JCU\\_113974.html](http://www.jcu.edu.au/whs/healthwellbeing/JCU_113974.html)

This link from the BC Partners for Social Impact offers a plethora of resources related to social innovation including information on social enterprise development. The site includes research and recommendations relevant to ANPs, for example: the Social Innovation Council recommendation that “Aboriginal leaders, businesses, and organizations, together with government, community organizations, social entrepreneurs, business, and academia, should partner to develop a targeted strategy to build social entrepreneurship and innovation capacity in BC First Nations and Aboriginal communities.” (“Supporting Social Enterprise,” 2012, para. 2). <http://socialimpactpartners.ca>

Mama’s Wall Street Studio is a social enterprise solely owned and operated by the Aboriginal Mothers Centre Society. Aboriginal men and women create socially, ethically and responsibly made products. All of the revenues go towards the centre’s support and housing programs. Check out the link at the Aboriginal Mothers Centre Society. [http://www.aboriginalmothercentre.ca/page/mama%27s%20wall%20street%20studio.aspx#.UuIM\\_6Wts3g](http://www.aboriginalmothercentre.ca/page/mama%27s%20wall%20street%20studio.aspx#.UuIM_6Wts3g)

The Potluck Café Society is an award winning Social Enterprise. Potluck Café Society operates Potluck Café & Catering to create jobs for neighborhood residents with barriers to traditional employment and earn revenue to support its community programs. The mission of Potluck Café Society is to transform lives by creating jobs and providing healthy food for people living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). <http://potluckcatering.org>

## 5. Tools and Policies for the ANP Sector

### Recommendation

Create Consistent Tools and Policies for the ANP Sector such as:

- Workshops on racism, bullying, harassment and lateral violence at work
- Templates for culturally responsive ways to address conflict in the workplace

- Lists of external or community partners that can offer free or low cost support in the area of health and wellness.
- Guidelines towards offering employees self-care days, this may include counseling for staff, massages, acupuncture, etc. (This was also identified as a promising practice).

### Related Research Theme

Creating Safe Workplace Environment: Emotional Safety, Spiritual Safety, and Intellectual Safety

### Practice Example

The Justice Education Society website offers information on restorative justice and resources that can be used within the ANP Sector. One of the programs offered through the society is “Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Violence and Abuse.” This program offers instructional materials for teachers and facilitators including handouts and slides. This resource could be used as a guide to begin dialogues on how to create policies that stop the cycle of violence.

<http://www.justiceeducation.ca/research/aboriginal-sentencing/restorative-justice>

<http://www.justiceeducation.ca/resources/breaking-the-cycle>

## 6. Culture and Spiritual Practice in the Workplace

### Recommendation

Embed cultural and spiritual practice in the workplace, and sustain a safe working environment through the regular practice of engaging in cultural and spiritual activities. For example: having an Elder in residence or Elder available to all staff, opening and closing of events with a prayer, starting the work day with prayer, time off for participation in traditional activities (i.e. hunting and fishing), flexible workdays, mental health days, and time off to attend traditional ceremonies.

### Related Research Theme

Creating Safe Workplace Environment: Emotional Safety, Spiritual Safety, and Intellectual Safety

### Practice Example

“We have circles every Friday to address tensions and hard lessons of the week – a debriefing of sorts. It clears the air for everyone – they get better rest over the weekend and feel better about Monday.” (research participant)

“My door is always open for my staff. I help them deal with lateral violence issues. We try to work through them at first and if we are not successful in healing the person who is being abusive, we let them go. I protect my staff from that and they know it. It makes their work environment feel safe.” (research participant)

“We send our staff to a treatment center that has a trauma program. It’s three weeks and is for professionals. It helped me to get past the trauma and is offered all over BC. Paddling Your Own



Canoe – was described by a participant as “They go right to the core place of where you lose yourself and project it on to others. You learn to script your own story.” (Participant, Regional Engagement Circle, 2013)

Paddling Your Canoe Colleagues program can provide support to people who have “responded to prolonged or excessive trauma their community, have feelings of sadness and emptiness, and find it hard to get up and go to work each day...” <http://www.tsowtunlelum.org/events.html>

## 7. Partnerships

### Recommendation

Formalize Partnerships with other organizations (ANPs or not), such as the First Nations Health Authority, that can support workplace wellness initiatives.

### Related Research Theme

Facilitating Healthy Relationships in the Workplace

### Practice Example

This practical tool includes a variety of resources that are flexible enough to meet the needs of a variety of stakeholders. There is a focus on relationships with government. Some of the tools include needs analysis, good practices assessments, conversation starters and policy planning aids. <http://www.vsiisbc.org/eng/relationship/pdf/workbook.pdf>

The Human Resources Council was created by the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector and offers a variety of toolkits that aid in promoting workplace wellness and healthy relationships within the organization. The same principles can be applied to formalizing partnerships and relationships with other organizations. Together ANPs and their partners can explore relevant resources that include: Workplaces that Work, Diversity at Work and Health and Safety Legislation. <http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/access-point-employee.cfm>

## 8. Youth Opportunities

### Recommendation

Create a “Youth Inclusion Project” for the ANP sector. Youth participation in ANPs provides benefits for the organization as well as the youth. Youth today have expertise in technology, film, and social networking, and bring fresh perspectives to the organization. The inclusion of youth in all levels of the ANP should be integrated into operational and strategic plans. While many ANPs include youth in various aspects of the ANP, the formalization of an ANP Youth Inclusion Project will assist in sustainable development of programs and outcomes, such as:

- BC-wide supports such as an ANP Youth Inclusion Website, social media sites and yearly events could encourage Aboriginal youth to develop goals and plans at the individual, community and provincial levels
- ANP Youth Board Participation Program: Youth would participate on ANP Boards to learn board functions, roles and responsibilities. Feedback would be elicited by the Board from the Youth and incorporated into organizational practices. Youth could share knowledge and experiences through social media sites and at yearly conferences and events.
- ANP Youth/Elder Culture Program: Youth and Elders would work together to identify program goals. Activities could include: cultural sharing, planning a traditional meal and eating together, and language programs. The Youth would be encouraged to write or share successful outcomes through established communications (website, social media, events and conferences).
- Youth in Technology Internships or practicum: Youth are an excellent way for ANPs to keep up-to-date on technology from contract relationship management to data sharing and social media. A BC-wide program should be established to teach youth about these technologies and how to apply them in an organizational setting. These youth could then utilize their knowledge during internships or practicums to boost efficiency at ANPs.

## Related Research Theme

Youth in the workplace

## Practice Example

Aki Energy is a young Aboriginal social enterprise. Aki installs geothermal heating systems on two reserves, Peguis First Nation and Fisher River Cree Nation. Workers are local people who face multiple barriers to employment. Aki Energy connects Aboriginal workers to the green economy, which benefits the community, the environment, and, hopefully, the workers themselves.

<http://www.akienergy.com>

<http://www.socialenterpriseworldforum.org/blog/2013/07/29/aki-energy-a-green-aboriginal-social-enterprise-strengthening-two-manitoba-reserves/>

Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association's (KAYA's) mandate is to advocate for Aboriginal youth voice, representation and participation in all levels of decision-making processes. KAYA works to enhance effective youth-friendly strategies, trainings and opportunities for urban Aboriginal youth to become advocates within their own communities. KAYA operates on an experiential youth-to-youth peer driven model. The Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association was formally incorporated in November 2003 and was formed out of the program Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Advocates. <http://kayavancouver.org>

BC Provincial Aboriginal Youth Council's vision is to create a healthier future for Aboriginal Youth by being a voice, taking action and making positive changes at local and provincial level. This promising program is supported by the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation through The Community Development Branch, and creates relationships with youth from several First

Nations communities and helps them to create opportunities based on what they feel is important.  
<http://bc-payc.com>

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is available to both the Federal Government and Aboriginal Organizations. This program offers a quick win for a BC-wide ANP inclusion project pilot program for all three of the recommended program areas list above. The BC Public Service Agency, in partnership with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Aboriginal Leadership, and Aboriginal youth organizations developed the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program as part of government's commitment to the *New Relationship* with Aboriginal people. The program is designed to support Aboriginal youth in developing their leadership skills and encourage them to consider the BC Public Service or Aboriginal organizations as a place to pursue a rewarding career.  
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/myhr/article.page?ContentID=da597988-e529-b2e7-7289-498126786486&PageNumber=4>

## 9. Elders

### Recommendation

Engage Elders in all ANP aspects and day-to-day operations. For example, develop a list of promising practices in the area of Elder engagement and share with the sector. Provide opportunities for Elders throughout the organization, such as: board members, staff, staff support, committee members, opening and closing of events and mentoring.

### Related Research Theme

Elders in the workplace

### Practice Example

One research participant shared that their ANP has their board includes three Elder representatives (out of nine total members). This same organization has an Elder in residence. The resident Elder is available to staff and clients 24 hours a day 7 days a week during the six week residency.

A key informant shared, “We have a sweat lodge and had an Elder run the lodge for one year. We are currently looking for a new Elder to run the lodge. It’s not a traditional thing in this territory but we asked the local First Nation and they were fine with us having it here.”

# Conclusion

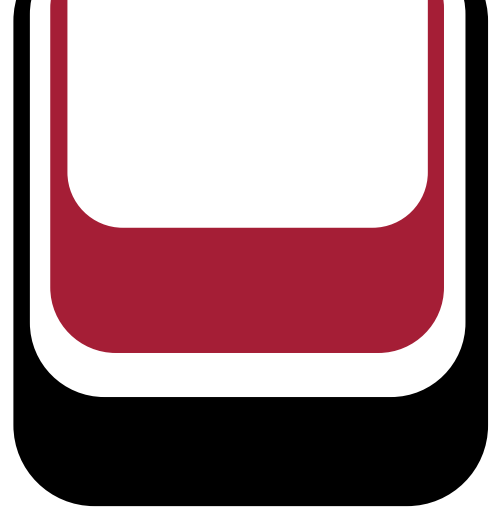
The research journey exploring workplace wellness and balance within the ANP sector proved to be very rewarding. We learned the ANP sector can and will thrive with the right supports in place. The sector faces unique challenges, none of which are insurmountable. We need only look within ANPs for answers to many of the challenges they face. Building healthy relationships with community partners, government, and funders will be a necessary step moving forward. Working together in the spirit of collaboration will lighten the load as ANPs take action on the recommendations to improving workplace wellness and balance.

We heard from participants that the journey to achieving workplace wellness and balance would be as unique as the individuals serving the ANP sector. We also learned from the research participants that the journey to strengthening the ANP sector requires healthy individuals leading the way.

Woven within the recommendations of this report is the knowledge and wisdom of the brothers and sisters who have sustained the ANP sector through conception to birth to where we are now. Their knowledge, expertise and passion for serving people are as comforting as a mother's heartbeat. These brothers and sisters are indeed the heartbeat of the ANP sector. Moving forward requires engaging and supporting the staff and leadership as they breathe life into the recommendations.

Finally, we learned healing must take place before we can achieve workplace wellness. ANPs will need to tap into the resiliency of the people serving them and harness that energy for the work ahead. Healing will need to occur at a variety of levels to manifest positive change. The work ahead is summarized in the eloquent words of Ovide Mercredi: "If you heal a child, you will heal a family. If you heal a family, you will heal a community. And if you heal a community, you will heal a Nation" (The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health).

Let the healing begin.



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