



September 28, 2023

Mingling Minds Research Award Review Committee Member
College of Medicine Research Awards
College of Medicine
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK

Re: Nomination of Dr. Stuart Skinner and his team for the College of Medicine Mingling Minds Research Award

Dear Committee Member,

We are very pleased to nominate Dr. Stuart Skinner and the Wellness Wheel team for the College of Medicine Mingling Minds Research Award at the University of Saskatchewan. The Wellness Wheel program has used a team based, community approach to deliver an innovative, culturally responsive, community driven model of care and research. This program has truly embraced a publicly engaged scholarship approach where Dr. Skinner has developed the program in partnership with the communities involved. Dr. Skinner completed his medical training at the University of Saskatchewan and has continued to practice medicine through the Division of Infectious Diseases (Regina) in the Department of Medicine, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Skinner has been faculty at the University of Saskatchewan since 2007.

The Wellness Wheel program (<https://www.wellnesswheelclinic.ca/index.html>) is based around three strategic directions agreed upon by the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), Health Canada, and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health. These strategic directions include: 1) Restore Indigenous community-based wellness systems; 2) Establish a middle ground for engagement between mainstream and Indigenous systems and worldviews and; 3) Transform mainstream service delivery to become culturally responsive. Along these lines, the program follows the guiding values and principles of being community driven, culturally based, relationship focused, local and action oriented, and ethical and responsible while using a strength-based approach, being streamlined, and focused on patient centered care. Following these strategic directions and principles, the program works through four main areas:

1. Medical care and wellness: The team has developed a care system to provide integrated primary, specialist and traditional and contemporary care for chronic, complex and communicable disease delivered in the First Nations communities they serve.
2. Research and data management: The team has worked to evaluate and expand their community programs, and ensure development of an innovative network model to expand on programming needs, sharing knowledge translation to build community capacity, and support other practitioners and communities interested in implementing similar models.
3. Policy and program advisory: The team has worked to support stakeholders on health system and associated policy changes required for providing better care to Indigenous people in Saskatchewan with a goal of improving equitable access to care.

4. Education and outreach: The team has worked with the ultimate goal of increasing engagement and empowerment to build capacity with Indigenous individuals, families, and communities through the planning of health education and awareness events.

With regard to research specifically, Dr. Skinner and the Wellness Wheel team have been very successful while embracing the public engagement practices on which the role of research is based including knowledge translation, sharing, and mobilization; community driven action research, community engagement, the 4Rs of Indigenous research (Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility); program evaluation; and relationship building. This model has led to a number of traditional research outputs including over \$3 million dollars in academic and non-academic funding specific to the research program, including CIHR of which Dr. Skinner has been the PI. Dr. Skinner is also the co-PI for a recent (2020) CIHR Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) grant worth \$3.8 million dollars. He has been a lead or co-author on 24 publications, more than 40 conference publications, and more than 80 presentations, many of which included knowledge users as the primary audience.

The research program established by the Wellness Wheel program is currently involved in a number of projects with community partners aimed to make structural, systemic, and service delivery change leading to better outcomes and equity in health care. This has led to great success in contributions beyond traditional outputs through the development of innovative health care delivery models and services. Examples of these innovative research and practice models include the “Know Your Status”(KYS) initiative in First Nations communities in Saskatchewan which began in 2011 and was established in response to concerns from Indigenous communities around access to on-reserve HIV testing and care; research support around the The Muskowekwan Family Healing and Wellness Centre, a newly developed centre; and *nato' we ho win*, an innovative intervention program that addresses the mental and physical health needs of Indigenous women who have experienced intimate partner violence. The team was also funded to investigate the COVID response in rural and remote communities. The team has received numerous grants over the past two years to fund projects within the program including two from CIHR, one looking at the impact of methamphetamine on sexually transmitted infections and the other looking at syphilis point of care testing.

While the traditional research productivity has been impressive, the strength of the program is in its inter-disciplinary design, novel approach, and engagement with the community. The Wellness Wheel team has developed an innovative model of care that is community led, Indigenous led, and bridges Traditional and Western approaches to medicine and health. The focus is on care in the communities where the program includes 19 communities served with 19 team members. This work has led to over 80 outreach clinics and 1000 patient visits with over \$220,000 in in-kind contributions. Not only has the program led to advancing knowledge and practice through a community approach but it has strengthened between community partnerships through the development of the Peer Health Advocacy Wellness Network (PHAWN). This is a peer network within the partner communities participating in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) “Know Your Status” (KYS) Implementation Grant. Groups identify their own community needs and PHAWN works to support these needs while linking with other communities as well as to provincial and national resources to support peer based capacity building. This includes a branch called 'Wellness Warriors' including Elders, who support care for inner city vulnerable populations in Regina.

Wellness Wheel works with the communities and includes local participation at all levels. It also offers practicum & residency opportunities for students, which has included at least nine students who have formally trained within the Wellness Wheel program. Dr. Skinner has co-supervised Bachelor's level

students (non-medical), medical students, medical residents, Master's students, and Doctoral students from across multiple disciplines.

Evidence for the influence and impact of the program can be seen from a number of sources. Because of its strong relationship building and engagement, the Wellness Wheel program has grown over the past decade. Working with community leaders, it has designed programs to tackle health and wellness issues through an integrated approach. The impacts on health can be seen as HIV outcomes have met the 90/90/90 benchmark for success. This model was expanded to Hepatitis C with similar success and now into diabetes. Community engagement can be seen through the development of peer networks and growing engagement.

The success of the Wellness Wheel program has been recognized internationally by professional and community organizations. The program won the Global Grand Prize in the Global Hepatitis Elimination video contest (2020). It also won the award for the most promising idea for health care innovation in the Ward of the 21st Century Innovation Academy Competition held at the University of Calgary (2019). The program was a finalist for the 2020 Governor General of Canada Innovation Awards. In a recent (2023) funding competition, the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation recognized the Wellness Wheel program in addictions care with an excellence award. In addition to these program recognitions, Dr. Skinner has received the Department of Medicine Unified Head Award for Researcher of the Year (2017-18), the Touchwood Agency Tribal Council Recognition for Community Health, a letter from the Honourable Jane Philpott to recognize the important contributions Dr. Skinner has made to Indigenous Health care in Canada, and the Canadian Deputy Minister's Health Award for Excellence in the Contribution to the Improvement of the Health of Canadians category.

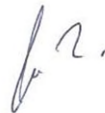
In addition to the awards mentioned above, the HIV program (KYS), which launched out of Big River First Nation, has received numerous national and international accolades. This has included presentations and meetings at the national and international level. The results of this research were significant enough that Premier Moe held the first day of the 2019 Canadian Premier meeting in Big River First Nation (the first Premiers meeting to occur in a FN community) and 45 minutes of this meeting was dedicated to the KYS program. Further, KYS was presented in video form at World AIDS. In September of 2019, the Wellness Wheel program was selected as one of 3 International models of Hepatitis C care to be showcased at a plenary and by a video documentary at the 8th International Conference on Hepatitis Care in Substance Users (INHSU). This was done with partners at Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation.

Once again, it is with strong support that we nominate Dr. Skinner and the Wellness Wheel team for this award. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



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