

Inuit Mental Health Model

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Introduction

The need for accessible mental health services, that are both led by Indigenous peoples and founded in traditional knowledge, is clearly stated in final reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Final Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)¹. However, there are no mental health centres in Nunavut², and for decades the only formal modes of mental health treatment available to Inuit have been Western³ counseling, psychotherapy, and psychiatry from non-Inuit providers⁴. These non-Inuit approaches, in addition to having failed to satisfy the needs identified by TRC, MMIWG, and UNDRIP, are inadequate at meeting the crisis-level need for mental health services in Inuit communities.

“The reality for many Inuit communities is that services in several areas simply do not exist. In many areas, there may be few or no mental health services.... The inability of the government systems to provide adequate services places enormous strains on the community to respond to trauma and crisis, let alone to the continuous demands of sustaining health and wellness.”

- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010

Furthermore, Western counselling, psychotherapy and psychiatry are often philosophically at odds with Indigenous views on mental health. For example, within psychiatric frames of reference, mental health challenges are often seen as problems in brain chemistry; problems that are treated most often through medication. This frame of reference, and way of interpreting the world, often neglects to consider contextual (social, cultural, environmental, and spiritual) causes that often support psychological and emotional well-being and healing. Furthermore, much of conventional Western psychotherapy and counselling promote individualistic values, and do not include concepts such as spiritual healing⁵. Rather, they focus on individual’s acceptance of their mental health challenges and ways in which clients can “cope with” and “manage” their “condition”. In contrast, Indigenous perspectives are inherently holistic and tend to see mental health issues as imbalances in one’s life – imbalances that can be rebalanced,

¹ See Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, Government of Nunavut, and Health Canada. Piliriqatigiinnngniq — Working together for the common good: Health Integration Initiative Project in Nunavut, 2006; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2018; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Indigenous Peoples, 2007.

² See National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: The role of Indigenous knowledge in supporting wellness in Inuit communities in Nunavut, 2010; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2016.

³ ‘Western’, in this context, refers to historical roots and values that have been developed to and for Western European (and by extension, settler) audiences.

⁴ See Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, Government of Nunavut, and Health Canada. Piliriqatigiinnngniq — Working together for the common good: Health Integration Initiative Project in Nunavut, 2006.

⁵ This is not to deny the existence of group therapy and/or pastoral counselling. However, these approaches still promote Western values and Western ways of interpreting and relating to the world, and as such do not emerge from, or support, the Inuit cultural, spiritual, and healing traditions.

often resulting in complete healing. Finally, non-Inuit approaches to mental health do not support the restoration of Inuit culture and identity, which is critical for healing from the effects of colonization.

The current application of Western mental health frameworks in Northern communities is a continuation of colonial structures, including elements of top-down policy, the imposition of paternalistic “solutions”, and the delivery of service by non-Inuit providers who lack cultural training and a deep understanding of community dynamics. Furthermore, having non-Inuit providers who spend only short periods of time in Northern communities be the primary providers of mental health services ensures that the funding allocated to Inuit mental health inevitably stays in non-Inuit hands.

Finally, the current pathways to become qualified as mental health practitioners is inherently discriminatory for Inuit. To be employed in a mental health field, one must meet Canadian mainstream standards, such as needing a multi-year degree (in psychology, social work, or similar disciplines) from recognized universities; and yet, no such program exists in the North. Furthermore, for an Inuk to pursue a career in mental health they would have to overcome multiple mental, emotional, cultural, financial and logistical hurdles: they would have to leave their homeland, their culture, their family, their food, and all that is familiar, to travel thousands of kilometers, and finally, to pay thousands of dollars in airfare for a single flight along with the university fees. Continuing to impose these colonial barriers-to-entry upon Inuit who seek to make meaningful contributions to the healing of their own communities is shortsighted and neglectful of the Canadian government as well as terribly uncreative and deeply disrespectful. emotional,

“There is no culturally appropriate, Inuit-based approach to mental health and addiction counselling.”

- Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2006

For many years, Elders and Inuit organizations have been emphasizing that it is time for Inuit to heal each other; for both Inuit-specific approaches to be developed, and for training in such approaches to be made available to all Inuit communities⁶. It is time to decolonize mental health in Inuit Nunangat.

⁶ See Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Embrace Life Council. *Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan 2017-2022*. 2017, June; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. Inuit-specific Approaches to Healing from Addiction and Trauma. Mamisarniq Conference, 2007; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2016; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: The role of Indigenous knowledge in supporting wellness in Inuit communities in Nunavut*, 2010; Arnakaq, M. *The Iceberg Healing Manual*. Pangnirtung, NU, 2010; Government of Nunavut. *The Bathurst Mandate*. Legislative assembly, Government of Nunavut, Iqaluit, 1999; Alianait. *Alianait Inuit Mental Wellness Action Plan*. Alianait Inuit-specific Mental Wellness Task Group, 2007; Gentile, A. and A. Peters. Notes from interview with Simon and Annie Nataq, Tundra Valley, Iqaluit, 2019, July 3rd; Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. *Applying Inuit Cultural Approaches in the Prevention of Family Violence and Abuse*, 2005; Inungni Sapujijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing. *Our Words Must Come Back to Us*, 2003.

**“To achieve pride, we must train our own people in our own communities.
We must stop training outside all the time.”**

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

Inuit Elders and organizations have frequently recommended that the best of both Inuit and non-Inuit approaches to healing be made available, so that Inuit have access to the best opportunities for healing⁷.

**“We cannot go back to the way our ancestors lived.
We can take what’s good in them, and good in the Western way.”**

- Bernadette Dean in Nunatsiaq News, 2004

“We need to blend the traditional with the modern to ensure our future.”

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

Training programs need to be made available in all Inuit communities, so that Inuit are empowered to engage in healing within their own communities⁸. These training programs need to be congruent with Inuit culture⁹ and need to be delivered in ways that are responsive to the present realities in Inuit communities: namely, the presence of deep and widespread personal and intergenerational trauma, a history of distrust in formalized educational institutions, and a need to return to a traditional approach to learning that does not involve schools—but a gradual process of knowledge transmission from older to younger generations. In contrast to the colonial Canadian model, pathways into the field of healing need to be numerous, open, welcoming, and need to be available for those that are interested in pursuing such a path, but are impeded by various barriers. The end vision of fully decolonized mental health in Inuit Nunangat is Inuit-specific mental health content that is delivered by Inuit, to Inuit.

“Culturally relevant services and approaches need to be developed to address unresolved trauma and grief, including the impacts of historical trauma stemming from colonization and rapid social change.”

- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016

In response to these recommendations, I entered into a collaboration agreement with the Toronto Inuit Association and it’s then director, Bryan Winters, to combine Inuit mental health concepts and healing approaches with the best of non-Inuit holistic concepts and healing approaches, with the goal to create a comprehensive mental health and healing training program rooted in Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* (traditional knowledge). Since *Ikajuqtigiinniq* (*working*

⁷ Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing. *Our Words Must Come Back to Us*, 2003; Gentile and Peters, 2019; Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Embrace Life Council. *Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan 2017-2022*, 2017, June; Nunatsiaq News. *Aboriginal Healing Foundation Seeks Best Way to Heal Inuit*, 2004, March 24th.

⁸ Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, Government of Nunavut, and Health Canada. *Piliriqatigiinnngniq — Working together for the common good: Health Integration Initiative Project in Nunavut*. Ottawa, ON, 2006.

⁹ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

together towards a common cause) is a value of Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*, Bryan named this endeavour *The Ikajuqtigiinni Project*, in order to capture this spirit of collaboration.

The Ikajuqtigiinni Project was the first step in a larger vision we shared to empower Inuit individuals and communities with Inuit-specific knowledge and tools needed for healing from the effects of personal and intergenerational trauma as well as other adverse effects resulting from colonization. This higher purpose of this vision was, and continues to be, to empower Inuit society with the knowledge, skills and capacity that it needs to restore itself to the levels of health, resilience, and self-sufficiency that it knew prior to colonization. Through the Ikajuqtigiinni Project, we began to work toward realizing this vision by:

1. Developing an Inuit-specific set of mental health concepts and approaches to healing (Inuit Mental Health Model);
2. Designing a detailed curriculum for training Inuit healing practitioners that focuses on content from the Inuit Mental Health Model and complemented by culturally congruent non-Inuit content (Training Program); and
3. Beginning to outlining a sustainable service delivery model (Inuit Healing System) for graduates of the Training Program, in order to be able to put the Inuit Mental Health Model into action.

This infrastructure will be used to train Inuit in culturally congruent mental health concepts and healing practices. The process of learning these concepts and practices will facilitate healing for participants, who will then be equipped to bring these practices to others and begin to heal their own communities. Over time, graduates of these training programs will become experts in their own work and will be able to innovate, adapt, and improve the concepts and approaches that are presented in the original training. In alignment with this continual innovation, this document will be a living document and will be updated as new information becomes available and new innovations are made.

Developing an Inuit Mental Health Model

Introduction

This Inuit Mental Health Model describes a way of understanding mental and emotional wellness through the lens of Inuit traditional societal values, known as *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (“IQ”), which translates as “what Inuit have always known.” For hundreds to thousands of years, these values provided the framework for living that allowed Inuit to maintain high levels of resilience and group harmony in some of the planet’s most challenging conditions.

These values are often distilled down to a set of eight key principles, called *IQ Principles*:

- Inuuqatigiitsiarniq (respecting others, relationships and caring for people)
- Tunnganarniq (fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive)
- Pijitsirniq (serving and providing for family or community, or both)
- Aajiqatigiinni (decision making through discussion and consensus)

- Pilimmaksarniq or Pijariuqsarniq (development of skills through practice, effort and action)
- Piliriqatigiinniq or Ikajuqtigiinniq (working together for a common cause)
- Qanuqtuurniq (being innovative and resourceful)
- Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq (respect and care for the land, animals and the environment)

On one level, IQ Principles are philosophical guidelines on how to live a good and successful life that meets both the needs of the individual and the community. On another level, these values provide guidelines for actions and behaviours, including guidelines for acceptable forms of communication and interaction among community members. Yet on another level, these values describe an ideal mindset that each individual community member should strive for: one through which the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions are all harmoniously aligned with these shared values in such a way as to bring about the success of each individual and the community in an easy, natural, and peaceful way. With this understanding, IQ Principles provide guidelines for how to define, maintain, and restore balance and harmony within one's mind, emotions, community, and the land. Through IQ Principles, Inuit already have an existing psychological framework and guidelines for healing.

In order to clearly understand the already existing Inuit approach to mental and emotional well-being and healing, it is important to first explore how mental health was viewed, conceptualized, maintained, and addressed in traditional Inuit society. Then, it is important to examine how contemporary Inuit are talking about mental health and how they approach healing. Conjoined, the knowledge of both traditional and contemporary Inuit approaches will allow for identification of concepts, themes, and approaches that will form the "Inuit Mental Health Model". This Model can then contribute to Inuit identity and traditional knowledge as related to mental health and healing while also providing a framework for the development of culturally aligned mental health education and healing programs for Inuit communities.

Inuit Elders and Inuit organizations have repeatedly emphasized that, due to the rapid and drastic cultural changes that Inuit have experienced, not all traditional concepts and approaches are applicable, feasible, or compatible with contemporary Inuit circumstances, lifestyles and belief systems¹⁰.

"Today, as Elders, we just watch people in pain; we do not attempt to help them like they were helped in the past. As Elders, we do not hold the same control and status as our Elders did in the past; our leadership structure has changed dramatically."

- Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak

To address the gaps left from the significant changes Inuit society has undergone since the beginning of colonization, we have the opportunity to identify culturally aligned non-Inuit holistic mental health concepts and approaches and incorporate them into any Inuit-specific mental health programming. By combining the best of both Inuit and non-Inuit content, we can ensure that programming is maximally effective, accessible, and applicable to today's diverse Inuit

¹⁰ Karetak, J., Tester, F., and S. Tagalik. *Inuit Qaujimagajuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True*. Fernwood Publishing, 2017; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

society. To do so, we must first verify that, in the spirit of cultural continuity, any non-Inuit concepts and approaches are congruent with Inuit concepts and values or that they can be adapted to become so.

While this Inuit Mental Health Model document represents the first aspect of the Ikajuqtigiinniq Project, the next section outlines the second: namely, the creation of the first level of a robust Inuit-specific mental health practitioner training curriculum that is culturally congruent, rooted in traditional values, and rich in traditional concepts and approaches that are suitable in a contemporary Inuit context. The curriculum that I developed draws upon non-Inuit concepts and techniques only to the extent to which it is necessary to fill identified gaps and to strengthen the trainees' ability to put the Inuit-sourced model into action.

Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the process of developing the Inuit Mental Health Model and the resulting curriculum.

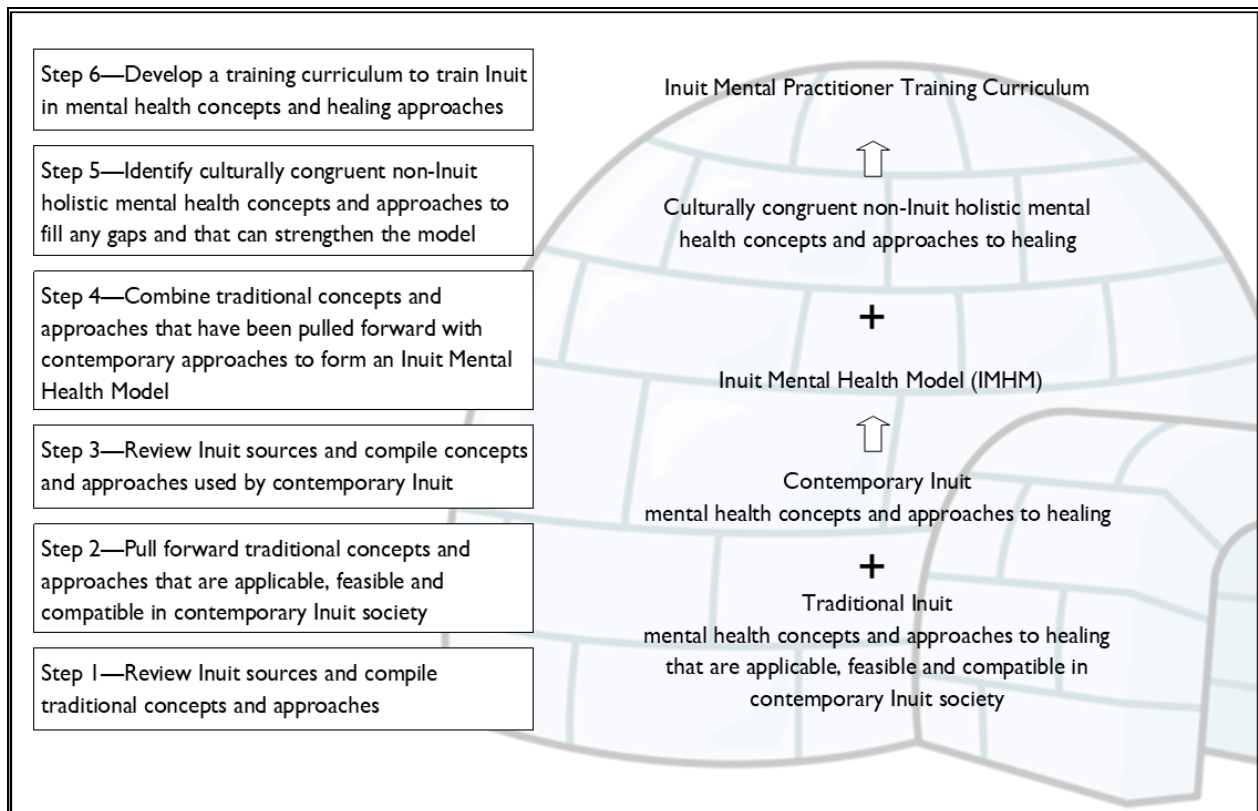


Figure 1. Inuit Mental Health Model and Curriculum Development Process.

Inuit Mental Health Concepts and Healing Approaches

The most Inuit-centric place to start in the process of developing an Inuit Mental Health Model is to understand both how Inuit communities traditionally survived and thrived from a mental health perspective and how modern Inuit helpers and healers view and approach mental health and healing today. Information from contemporary Inuit is a key component of this foundational

knowledge because: (1) ideas and needs change between generations; (2) Inuit culture is dynamic, innovative, resourceful, and always evolving; and (3) healing practices used today within an Inuit context can be assumed to have been at least partially informed by traditional views and approaches.

To develop this foundational understanding of Inuit-specific approaches to mental health in both traditional and modern Inuit society, I reviewed the following sources:

- Alianait. *Alianait Inuit Mental Wellness Action Plan*. Alianait Inuit-specific Mental Wellness Task Group, 2007.
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- Karetak, J., Tester, F., and S. Tagalik. *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True*. Fernwood Publishing, 2017.
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- Kirmayer, L.J., Fletch, C., Corin, E., and L. Boothroyd. *Inuit Concepts of Mental Health and Illness: An Ethnographic Study*. Cultural & Mental Health Research Unit, Department of Psychiatry, Jewish General Hospital, Montreal, 1994.
- Korhonen, M. *Helping Inuit Clients: Cultural Relevance and Effective Counselling*. National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2005.

- Kral, M. J. *Unikkaartuit: Meanings of Well-Being, Sadness, Suicide, and Change in Two Inuit Communities*. Final Report to the National Health Research and Development Programs, Health Canada. Project #6606-6231-002, 2003, February.
- Minor, N. K. M. *A review of counseling among cultures with emphasis upon culture-specific counseling within the Inuit society: a method and training program*. University of Massachusetts Amherst, Doctoral Dissertations, 1983.
- Morris, M. and C. Crooks. *Structural and cultural factors in suicide prevention: The contrast between mainstream and Inuit approaches to understanding and preventing suicide*. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2015, pp. 321-338. DOI: 10.1080/02650533.2015.1050655.
- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. *Inuit Qaujimaqatunngit: The role of Indigenous knowledge in supporting wellness in Inuit communities in Nunavut, 2010*.
- Nunatsiaq News. *Aboriginal Healing Foundation Seeks Best Way to Heal Inuit, 2004*. March 24th.
- Nunavut Department of Education. *IQ Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum, 2007*.
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- Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. *Applying Inuit Cultural Approaches in the Prevention of Family Violence and Abuse, 2005*.
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- Wihak, C. and N. Merali. Culturally Sensitive Counselling in Nunavut: Implications of Inuit Traditional Knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2003.
- Wihak, C. and N. Merali. A Narrative Study of Counsellor's Understandings of Inuit Spirituality. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2005.

“We are tired of being poked and prodded.

Researchers, organizations and governments come to understand from us so often.

Yet we never hear back from them.

We don't hear back if what we voiced was the right thing to say.

We don't hear if a program has been established

or we don't hear back on what was used with the words we gave.

Our words must come back to us.

We must be told if the information we gave helped people or if it will help our society.

Our knowledge that we shared needs to benefit our society.”

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

The above research represents over 40 years of data collection on Inuit mental health concepts and approaches to healing. Within this collection lies a wealth of knowledge that was collected through: interviewing Elders, community consultations, academic research, and intergovernmental collaborations that resulted in various reports and action plans. However, until now, the cultural knowledge of Inuit perspectives on mental health and approaches to healing has never been returned to Inuit society. It is my hope that the information provided here can consolidate into a clear and accessible format what Inuit have

always known to be true, and that this accessible knowledge can finally be of direct benefit to contemporary Inuit society.

Mental Health in Traditional Inuit Society

Inuit language, concepts and cultural practices are highly variable across the massive geographic area that Inuit have called home for thousands of years. Even without considering the Greenlandic Inuit and the Iñupiat of present day Alaska, *Inuit Nunangat* (the Inuit homeland within Canada) is home to substantial cultural diversity and several distinct regional dialects. One can assume a similar degree of variability across Inuit Nunangat regarding Inuit views on mental health and illness as well as approaches to healing.

Any attempt to source pre-contact Inuit views on mental health and healing is limited, given the fact that Inuit did not have any written language prior to contact with Europeans. This means that any documentation of traditional Inuit views was sourced after contact with Europeans and therefore could have included European influence. Nevertheless, recorded concepts and approaches that stand in stark contrast with European ideas are likely to have been uniquely and traditionally Inuit, especially when those concepts and approaches align with traditional Inuit worldviews and cultural values.

Much of the information gathered for this project was sourced from documents that produced this information at a grassroots level, with information often having been collected from Inuit from individual communities. This means that many of the individual concepts, Inuktitut terms, and healing approaches or techniques were recorded as reported by one Inuk, at one point in time, in one geographic location (or it was gathered by a group of Inuit from within a single community). In other words, presented information was not necessarily reported by multiple individuals or by individuals from multiple communities.

While certain concepts, terms, healing approaches or techniques may not be familiar to some Inuit learning about them here for the first time, this by no means lessens their validity as part of traditional Inuit knowledge. Inuit knowledge comprises the totality of all Inuit perspectives and wisdom across *Inuit Nunangat* and across all time periods, including today.

Mental Well-being

While traditional Inuit communities had no known term for mental health,¹¹ there seems to have been a general agreement among Inuit that in order to maintain harmony and success within the group there are healthy and appropriate ways of thinking, acting, and interacting. From the descriptions of these elements of traditional Inuit ways of being that have been articulated by Elders over several decades we can extrapolate a general understanding of how Inuit traditionally viewed mental well-being.

¹¹ Kirmayer, L.J., Fletch, C., Corin, E., and L. Boothroyd. *Inuit Concepts of Mental Health and Illness: An Ethnographic Study*. Cultural & Mental Health Research Unit, Department of Psychiatry, Jewish General Hospital, Montreal, 1994.

Mental well-being was often synonymous with how well an Inuk was able to live in alignment with *maligait* (spiritual laws) and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ Principles; cultural values). Just as the successful alignment of community members with *maligait* and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* ensured group harmony¹², individual's ability to align themselves with these laws and values seems to have also been a reflection of their inner harmony; that is, of their psychological and emotional wellbeing.

“Taking back what is meant to be a healthy person needs to be taught and shown.”

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

Through the framework of IQ Principles, a sense of personal health and wellness is dependent upon the individual having:

- A strong sense of identity and belonging;
- An understanding of one's purpose and one's role (in terms of a personal contribution for improvement of the common good and serving others); and,
- An appreciation of the specific skills and abilities that one has, and offering of those skills to the community, as a contribution to the common good¹³.

The foundations of mental well-being were deliberately, intentionally, and thoughtfully developed and taught during the traditional Inuit child rearing process, *inunnguiniq*. *Inunnguiniq* sought to make a human being who:

- Is able to help others
- Has a good heart, is always ready to help others
- Has a good mind, is quick to think
- Is always aware of its surroundings
- Is able to look at the brighter side of different situations¹⁴

In order for someone to be able to meet these requirements, one needs to have mental well-being. For example, having anxiety can make looking at the brighter side of a situation quite difficult, and it can often become so debilitating that the individual is not in a position to help others. Similarly, depression is the opposite of being able to look at the brighter side of things, and often involves a slow, clouded mind. The fatigue and hopelessness of depression often render an individual unable to help them self, let alone to help others. These examples demonstrate how mental health challenges substantially interfere with the development of the above outlined qualities.

“Young people are prepared for life through the hunt, how to be patient, to be bold under pressure, to withstand stress, to focus, be tenacious, how not be impulsive, to be courageous, to exercise sound judgment and ultimately, how to be wise.”

- Sheila Watt-Cloutier

¹² National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

¹³ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

¹⁴ Karetak, J., Tester, F., and S. Tagalik. *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True*. Fernwood Publishing, 2017.

When a young person acquired a healthy mind through *inunnguiniq training* this became the individual's opportunity to continue on a path of personal development that would extend throughout one's life. From the Inuit perspective, the process is thought of as the development of *inuusiq* (life and living) and ultimately *isuma* (wisdom). It is a process that leads one to become an *inummarik*: a human being or an able person who can act with wisdom¹⁵. Inummarik has also been translated as "the free Inuk; one who has struggled and overcome physical, emotional and spiritual barriers"¹⁶.

Given this direct correlation between mental well-being and the qualities of being *inummarik*, we can take the qualities of *inummarik* provided by Elders to be a traditional Inuit description of qualities of someone in good mental health. In summary, from the traditional Inuit perspective, to have mental well-being is to:

- Have a good mind;
- Have a good heart;
- Be able to help others;
- Be always ready to help others;
- Be always aware of one's surroundings;
- Be able to look at the brighter side of different situations;
- To be capable;
- To be able to act with wisdom; and,
- Have struggled and overcome physical, emotional and spiritual barriers.

Perhaps the highest expression of mental well-being, in traditional Inuit culture, even beyond being *inummarik*, is the development of *isuma* (wisdom), to the extent that one is considered by others to be an *issumatuq*: a wise individual. *Isuma* is a higher level of mental and emotional mastery and excellence as it describes the ability to think clearly. An *issumatuq* is one who is so clear in their thinking that others seek their advice and counsel¹⁷. While *issumatuq* is the term used in North Baffin, the term used in South Baffin is *angajuqqaq*, which translates to a wise older person¹⁸.

Traditional Cultural Elements Supportive of Mental Well-being

Many, if not all, traditional Inuit cultural elements provided holistic and healthy ways of being that were naturally protective and supportive of mental well-being. They also provided healing medicine for mental health challenges when they did arise. The following list was created by applying a non-Inuit holistic mental health lens to the traditional Inuit cultural elements, in order to further explore and understand the value provided by each traditional cultural element. The bolded text in each item highlights the key **mental health components** of various cultural

¹⁵ Nunavut Department of Education. *IQ Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum, 2007*.

¹⁶ Minor, N. K. *M.A review of counseling among cultures with emphasis upon culture-specific counseling within the Inuit society: a method and training program*. University of Massachusetts Amherst, Doctoral Dissertations, 1983.

¹⁷ Minor, 1983.

¹⁸ Aupilaarjuk, M., Tulimaaq, M., Joamie, A., Imaruittuq, E., and L. Nutaraaluk. *Interviewing Inuit Elders, Volume 2: Perspectives on Traditional Law*. Nunavut Arctic College, 1999.

elements that were supportive of mental well-being. These bolded components will be used later in this document.

- A primary cultural value of, and social pressures towards, maintaining **group harmony**.¹⁹
- A deep sense of **love, care, and companionship within the family home**.²⁰
- A deep sense of **connection** to others in one's group due to living in close quarters and spending large amounts of time **working together for a common cause**, which gives each person a sense of **being a part of something bigger than one's self**.
- A deep sense of **self-worth, being valued by others**, and of **being wanted and needed** based on one's contribution of time, energy and skill.
- A primary cultural value of **continual learning, personal growth, and deep thinking**, which validates one's **sense of personal potential** and which encourages one to **strive for improvement of inner strengths, skills, and capacities**, partially achieved through the process of storytelling (*unikkaaqtuat* and *unikkaat*).²¹
- A **normalization of life challenges** and guidance by providing **perspective** through storytelling about difficult experiences from times past as well as from direct experience of life filled with an ongoing struggle to survive.²²
- A deep sense of **meaning and purpose** gained through the interdependence of all members within a group (each member is needed for everyone else's survival).²³
- A sense of **reassurance** and **confidence** due to having **access to wisdom** through an *issumatuq* (wise person, usually an Elder) who could be consulted on all matters.²⁴
- Close relationships with Elders, who often provide younger group members with **validation of their worth** and **perspective and context** on challenging life experiences.
- A primary cultural value of *ajurnarmat*: **accepting that which cannot be changed**.²⁵
- A cultural value of **respecting one's inner privacy** through silent presence with one another²⁶, which may also promote individuals to develop a **deeper connection with one's thoughts, emotions, memories and imagination** as well as cultivate better **skills of awareness of details in their surroundings**;

¹⁹ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

²⁰ Minor, 1983.

²¹ Aupilaarjuk *et al.*, 1999.

²² Minor, 1983.

²³ Minor, 1983.

²⁴ Minor, 1983.

²⁵ Minor, 1983.

²⁶ Minor, 1983.

- A **comfort level with emotions of self and other** due to the cultural practice of being silently present for one another during times of grief.²⁷
- An emphasis on **humour and laughter** during throat singing and conflict-solving song-duels.
- A sense of **connection to something bigger than one's self**, a sense that **the environment is alive and conscious**, and feelings of **humility, respect, awe** and **wonder** in relationship to the natural-spiritual world.^{28,29}
- A sense that **one is never alone** due to the spiritual presence and influence of ancestors.³⁰
- A sense of **being able to influence, or control, elements of one's experience, moving** towards harmony and wellbeing through adherence to *maligait*, the respecting of taboos, and through engaging in healing rituals, when necessary.^{31,32}
- A focus on spousal companionship for fostering cooperation; the **intimacy of shared experiences, fears, struggles and pains; assured privacy and feeling safe to engage in emotional expression**, and **continual emotional support** for each individual throughout life.³³
- A culture of **addressing issues right away**³⁴ ensured that old issues do not accumulate, so that individuals' feel that their **feelings are acknowledged** and that their **minds and hearts can come to peace**.
- A culture of **expressing thoughts and feelings** of anger and regret through methods such as *pisiit* (songs), so as not to turn them against themselves or others.³⁵
- A culture of **confession and automatic forgiveness**³⁶ allowing for issues to be resolved, and also acting as a **protection against development of guilt, shame and regret**.
- The **presence of *angakkuit***, individuals who could see when someone was carrying a secret wrong-doing that needed to be confessed, and who could **initiate the release of such burdensome material from people's psyche**.³⁷

²⁷ Minor, 1983.

²⁸ Wihak, C. and N. Merali. *A Narrative Study of Counsellor's Understandings of Inuit Spirituality*. University of Alberta. Canadian Journal of Counselling, vol. 29, no. 4, 2005.

²⁹ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

³⁰ Wihak and Merali, 2005.

³¹ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

³² Minor, 1983.

³³ Minor, 1983.

³⁴ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

³⁵ Aupilaarjuk *et al.*, 1999.

³⁶ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

³⁷ Aupilaarjuk *et al.*, 1999.

- A cultural view that **success in elderhood** is defined primarily by **having a good attitude** and by one's **willingness to transmit accumulated wisdom and knowledge** to junior community members, which gives a continuing sense of meaning, purpose, self-worth, and continuity through to the end of life.³⁸

From a holistic mental health perspective, it is well known that most mental health challenges are sourced in the unexpressed and unaddressed feelings associated with the lack of connectedness, isolation, loneliness, worthlessness, powerlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, not belonging, and a lack of meaning and purpose. The traditional societal values and practices described above all supported a deep sense of connection, belonging, self-worth, harmony, meaning, and purpose. Traditional ways also included normalizing challenge and loss, and provided individuals with opportunities to make choices to maintain or improve life's conditions. Furthermore, traditional Inuit culture insisted on introspection, deep thinking, silence, personal evolution, the cultivation of wisdom, and emotional expression. These cultural elements are not only supportive of positive mental and emotional well-being, but are also curative ingredients for many mental health conditions.

Mental Illness

Inuit traditionally viewed mental illness as a spiritual issue, being caused either by: (1) the actions of evil spirits³⁹; (2) a disruption in harmony resulting from the breaking of taboos; (3) a disruption in harmony by not following the *maligait*⁴⁰; or (4) by soul loss, which is generally the result of traumatic experiences⁴¹.

“Maligait provides the big picture view of the world based on the belief that there is a protector for all things, so if you go out of balance, there will be consequences.”

- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010

One of the frequently referenced causes of mental illness is keeping a wrongdoing secret; keeping such a secret was understood to cause anxiety and sickness⁴². We can consider this to fall under the third category mentioned above (“a disruption in harmony by not following the *maligait*”).

“If you were keeping a wrong-doing hidden you would be anxious, you would become so anxious that you would get sick from keeping this inside you.”

- Aupilaarjuk *et al.*, 1999

³⁸ Collings, P. “If you got everything, it's good enough”: Perspectives on successful aging in a Canadian Inuit community. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, vol. 16, 2001, pp.127–155.

³⁹ Minor, 1983.

⁴⁰ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

⁴¹ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁴² Aupilaarjuk *et al.*, 1999.

Traditionally, Inuit tended not to label individuals as “mentally ill” but rather described a person’s mental illness as a current state of being that can change. This way of viewing mental illness supports the notion that healing is always possible⁴³.

Traditional Inuit society recognized various forms of ill mental states, which are described in the following paragraphs.

Isumaluktuk (thinking too much)

Isumaluktuk is a term that translates to “thinking too much”, “having heavy thoughts”, “a lot on one’s mind”, “being worried”, or being anxiously preoccupied. *Isumaluktuk* is a broad term that covers a wide range of mental health challenges, ranging from day-to-day worrying and being preoccupied, to being profoundly depressed, to being withdrawn. Inuit sometimes use this term to describe behavior that Western psychology might label as psychosis.⁴⁴

Isumakangngituk (having no mind) and isumaqatsiangutuq

Isumakangngituk is a term that has been translated to “having no mind,” “not thinking at all,” “crazy,” “doesn’t know what’s going on around him”, “doesn’t know what he’s doing”, and “acting strange”. *Isumakangngituk* implies more severe mental problems, including intellectual disabilities and dementia. Inuit have used this term to both describe individuals with severe psychoses whose behavior was erratic and bizarre, and individuals who were violent for no apparent reason.⁴⁵

Another term that is a more accurate translation of “mental illness” is *isumaqatsiangutuq*. This term has similar connotations of “losing their mind”, “going crazy”, and “having a mental illness”.

Contrary to the general view of most mental illnesses being temporary in nature, these terms implied a long-term or even permanent state of being. When a mental illness of this nature was temporary, it was denoted with a change of infix as *isumaqasiangituk*.⁴⁶

Qitsatuq (depression)

Qitsatuq is a term used to describe both depression, and the grief associated with mourning. *Qitsatuq* may be experienced as a result of a great loss, but it is also understood that it can just exist on its own. When someone suffers from *qitsatuq* without a tangible cause, they are often very withdrawn and feel guilty for no particular reason, or for something small that someone in a healthier mental state would have put behind. *Qitsatuq* implies that the person is beyond the ability to help themselves on their own, that they are struggling with feelings of helplessness, and that they need more attention than someone who is simply sad.⁴⁷

⁴³ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁴⁴ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁴⁵ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁴⁶ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁴⁷ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

Qissaatuq, quvarpuq/kavarpuq

The terms *qissaatuq* and *quvarpuq* are similar in their description to *qitsatuq* and it is unclear how exactly they differ. *Qissaatuq* and *quvarpuq* have been described as episodes of passivity, withdrawal and depression. This state is mostly characterized by immobility and silent brooding. In some cases, brief flurries of manic activity occurred. This emotional state involves feeling bad and unworthy, sometimes blaming oneself for misfortunes in the community, sometimes including self-harm or other behaviours.⁴⁸

Quajimaillituq

Quajimaillituq has been defined as “he does foolish things and does not know what he does.” It is a term that is also used for rabid dogs during the violent phase of their illness. Individuals in this state are: hyperactive or agitated; have incoherent or disjointed speech; make loose associations in their thoughts, speech and other expressions; have paranoid suspicions; and engage in compulsive rituals. People suffering with *quajimaillituq* avoid sleep, are aggressive, blasphemous and may harm themselves and/or others. Individuals in this state might report messages from some supernatural agent directing them to be wary of others who were going to harm them. *Quajimaillituq* was viewed as an infection or possession by an evil spirit, and it was remarked that people who were strong of head and heart were less susceptible. *Quajimaillituq* in a Western psychological context matches closely with the diagnosis of schizophrenia including at times the symptoms of psychosis.⁴⁹

Pibloktoq (arctic hysteria or kayak-angst)

Pibloktoq, which has been referred to in English as “arctic hysteria” or “kayak-angst”, was a term used to describe the behaviour of “running about wildly and risking life and limb.”⁵⁰

Traditional Inuit Approaches to Mental Health Healing

This section outlines the traditional Inuit approaches for healing mental health issues. Some portions of the following paragraphs are bolded, given that references to these points will be made later on in the text.

In Inuktitut, healing is represented by the concept of *mamisarniq*, which has been translated as “to seek healing in one’s life.” In the high Baffin region, the term *aniattiniq* conveys the idea that a person is taking things out of their inner being, revealing what the unresolved issues are.

From what we can understand, when mental health issues were seen to be the result of life situations, such as loss or interpersonal conflict, individuals would **talk with an *issumatuq*, a wise elder** in the group. The *issumatuq* would help the individual by determining **whether the issue was *ajurnarmat***, that is, something that cannot be changed. If it was determined that the issue could not be changed, the *issumatuq* would encourage the individual to **accept the**

⁴⁸ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁴⁹ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁵⁰ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

situation and to move on. If it was determined that something could be done about the situation the *issumatuq* could provide **advice about how to move forward.**⁵¹

In cases of grief or stress, group members provided **silent support** for the affected individual(s). This silence provided the individual with a **release of tensions**, and all members of the group knew that the act of employing silence was an indication of **concern and understanding**. The quality of the silence was **warm and human**. The expectation of the one suffering was that they would **bear through the hurt, come to accept** the matter, and then **continue on**, having **gained new insight for their personal growth and strength by virtue of having overcome grief**. There was no need to explain or discuss grief; instead, the bonds of silent support strengthened the individual to first accept, and then move forth.⁵²

In cases of guilt or regret, individuals would engage in the process of **confession**. The process of **confession frees a person and allows them to come back into balance**. This process is known as *aajiiqatiniiniq*⁵³. Part of the collective agreement was that the issue was never to be brought up again and could never be used against the person⁵⁴. **If a person kept a wrongdoing secret, an *angakkuit* was often able to discover that this was the case** and initiate a process of releasing the burdensome psychological material from the individual.⁵⁵

“In Inuit culture, there has always been a tradition that thoughts and feelings, of anger or regret, should be expressed, so that they do not turn against oneself or others.”

- Aupilaarjuk et al., 1999

It was understood that **healing required all emotions to be let out** and individuals were encouraged to do so during **counseling with Elders.**⁵⁶

In cases of interpersonal conflict between two men, ritualized song duels were used. Through **humour** and **full-community engagement**, built up pressures and **frustrations were released** and relations between the dueling parties were stabilized and restored. The opponents were expected to **laugh off their animosities** and return to a friendly relationship.⁵⁷

The Saunik name-sharing tradition helped to manage grief when someone died because it meant that the soul of the person who has passed on will soon be back in the community in a new body, and the **relationship with that soul can continue**. Some adults could also be effectively **reborn through being renamed** if they were ill and close to death.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Minor, 1983.

⁵² Minor, 1983.

⁵³ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

⁵⁴ Karetak et al., 2017.

⁵⁵ Aupilaarjuk et al., 1999.

⁵⁶ Brooker, A. L. Counselling within Inuit Systems in Canada's North. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2018.

⁵⁷ Eckert, P. and R. Newmark. Central Eskimo Song Duels: A Contextual Analysis of Ritual Ambiguity. *Ethnology*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1980, pp. 191-211. doi:10.2307/3773271

⁵⁸ Kirmayer et al., 1994.

When the cause of an individual's depression was unclear, Inuit would often use the ritual of *qilaniq*. *Qilaniq* involved suspending the depressed individual's head or leg in a light rope and asking yes or no questions about the causes of the depression and possible options for addressing it. The weight and force of the individual's head or leg would be used to determine the answer to each question.⁵⁹ **Understanding the underlying cause of a problem and possible solutions created clarity and confidence in moving forward.**

When the cause of mental and emotional imbalances and distress was understood to be spiritual in nature, a healer would be consulted, and many approaches were used to return the individual's soul to its normal natural balance.⁶⁰ Treatments included physical manipulations, medicines, and the intervention of healers (*angakok*), which involved spirit journeys to confront any hostile evil spirits and placate or defeat them with the healer's own spirit allies.⁶¹

When a person was hearing voices in their head, it was considered important that the person **talk with others about what the voices were telling them** to do. By talking about what the voices were saying, the individual would be **less likely to believe the voices and less likely to follow any instructions they may be giving**.⁶²

As I bring this section to a close, let's deepen our understanding by looking at the same information through a somewhat more structured holistic mental health lens. I define holistic mental health in the following way:

“Holistic mental health is a framework grounded in the lived human experience. It sees good mental health as the natural result of basic emotional needs being met, including a strong and positive self-concept (identity), self-worth (self-esteem), a sense of connection, belonging, meaning and purpose, along with being free of substantial unprocessed trauma. In addition, developing self-mastery and self-control, which is the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and actions, further supports good mental health. Finally, being in an environment that one understands and feels capable of managing is necessary for sustained mental health.”

Table 1 on the following page provides an overview of how each cultural element discussed above contributes to each factor that is supportive of mental well-being in relation to the above definition of holistic mental health. The way the following table was filled out represents one possible way; each person would likely fill out this table differently. The table is presented here in order to deepen our understanding and appreciation of traditional cultural elements in terms of their role in mental well-being, and to stimulate contemplation and consideration of how these elements, or any aspects of them, might be used in a contemporary Inuit-specific approach to mental health and healing.

⁵⁹ Wihak, C. and N. Merali. Culturally Sensitive Counselling in Nunavut: Implications of Inuit Traditional Knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2003; Aupilaarjuk et al., 1999.

⁶⁰ Minor, 1983.

⁶¹ Kirmayer et al., 1994.

⁶² Aupilaarjuk et al., 1999.

The rows of Table 1 present the cultural elements discussed so far. The columns of Table 1 present factors from the definition of holistic mental health that are supportive of mental well-being. The presence of a dot in a given cell indicates where I have identified that a specific cultural element provides a specific factor that supports mental well-being. The very last column on the right provides a scoring of how many mental well-being factors were identified for each cultural element. It is my hope that readers of this document will use this table as a starting point to make their own interpretations of the underlying mental health supports provided by various cultural elements.

Table 1. Traditional Inuit Cultural Elements and their Contributions to Mental Well-being

Cultural Elements	Factors Supportive of Mental Health									Score
	Connection / Belonging	Self-Concept/ Identity	Self-Esteem / Skillfulness	Perspective	Meaning	Purpose	Emotional Expression	Self-Mastery / Self-Control	Ability to Manage Environment	
Access to Issumatuq	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	9
Learning and Using Traditional Skills	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	8
Family & Kinship	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	7
Spirituality and Spiritual Practices	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	7
Being on the land	●	●	●	●	●	●				6
Saunik	●	●	●	●	●				●	6
Throat singing	●	●	●				●	●		5
Confession	●	●	●				●	●		5
Unikkaaqtuat and Unikkaat (stories)	●	●		●	●		●			5
Pisiit (songs)	●	●		●	●		●			5
Learning and Using Inuktut	●	●	●						●	4
Country food	●	●		●	●					4

Ajurnarmat				•				•	•	3
Song duels	•						•	•		3
Qilaniq					•				•	2

Which Traditional Ways Can Be Brought Forward?

It is important to honour, preserve, and move forward all aspects of traditional Inuit culture that can be applied in a contemporary context. In order to do so, my analysis looks at traditional Inuit culture from four angles: **traditional values** that are supportive of mental health, **traditional mental health concepts**, **traditional cultural elements** supportive of mental health, and **mental health components** of traditional culture. Let's define each of these:

- Traditional **values** - these are IQ Principles, like *Qanuqtuurniq* (being innovative and resourceful), which are guidelines for a good life and mental well-being.
- Traditional mental health **concepts** - these are encapsulated by the general understanding that well-being results from following the *maligait* and maintaining harmony and balance in all aspects of life.
- Traditional cultural **elements** - these are the actual cultural practices as identified in Table 1, like throat singing, *pisiit*, and *unikkaaqtuat*, and include specific healing practices like confession and use of *ajurnarmat*.
- Mental health **components** - these are holistic mental health factors identifiable within traditional Inuit culture that are supportive of mental well-being and healing, like connection, self-esteem, and emotional expression.

To build a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model, we need to look at which items within each of these categories are **applicable**, **feasible**, and **compatible** with today's diverse Inuit society. Let's look at each category.

Traditional Values (IQ Principles)

As discussed earlier, IQ Principles have been continually embraced in contemporary Inuit society and are being increasingly emphasized during the process of decolonization. As discussed earlier under "Traditional Inuit Views on Mental Well-Being", **IQ principles are fundamental guiding principles that, when followed, lead an individual to strive to become *inummarik*, which is synonymous with mental well-being**. From this, we can determine that IQ Principles are clear and robust guidelines for creating, maintaining and restoring mental well-being. Furthermore, IQ Principles are highly applicable, feasible, and compatible with contemporary Inuit society. IQ Principles can be brought forward in their entirety as part of an Inuit Mental Health Model.

Traditional Mental Health Concepts

Traditional Inuit mental health concepts support the idea that living in alignment with *maligait* (spiritual laws) and IQ Principles both result in and maintain well-being. They also teach that mental illness is due to being out of alignment with these laws and principles.

The *maligait* were an expression of a set of spiritual beliefs that are generally not compatible with the majority of contemporary Inuit who now follow Christianity.

The traditional view that mental illness was a spiritual issue resulting from either evil spirits, the breaking of taboos, a failure to follow the *maligait*, or soul loss, is generally not compatible with contemporary Inuit values and mindsets and it may not be helpful to be brought forward.

However, soul loss was acknowledged to be a result of traumatic experiences, and this is a concept that can be brought forward -- namely, that **many mental health issues result from unresolved trauma**.

What can also be brought forward is the acknowledgment that **using IQ Principles as a guide in one's life is strongly supportive of a healthy life, including good mental and emotional health**.

Another traditional view that can be brought into the modern context is the idea that **keeping a secret about wrong-doing can cause mental health issues such as anxiety and sickness**.

Additionally, while the use of taboos in order to maintain balance may not be compatible with contemporary Inuit values and mindsets, we can acknowledge that there are elements of taboo that are supportive of mental well-being. For example, the successful adherence to taboos requires **restraint, self-control/impulse control, and delayed gratification**, all of which are aspects of mentally strong and healthy people. Taboo was a concept that encouraged the development of mental and emotional strength and maturity. These individual traits can be thought of as mental and emotional strengths that are encouraged and cultivated as a part of a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model.

Yet another idea that can be brought forward is that **individuals are generally not to be labeled as "mentally ill" but rather described as being in a state of suffering that is potentially healable**.

Traditional Cultural Elements

Determining which traditional cultural elements are applicable, feasible and compatible in a modern Inuit context is a somewhat subjective exercise and the answers to these questions may vary based on the circumstances of any individual Inuk. Let's look at some examples.

A young Inuk who does not have Elders in their life whom they trust and respect may find that some traditional cultural elements are not **applicable** to their present day life. An urban Inuk without access to the land, country foods, close family, Elders and community members may find that many traditional cultural elements may not be **feasible** to incorporate into their day-to-day life. Likewise, a Christian or Atheist Inuk may find that some traditional spiritual concepts and healing approaches are not **compatible** with their faith.

Since the experience of each Inuk is unique, we must honour the value of all individual traditional cultural elements while focusing on bringing forward only those elements that will be most applicable, feasible, and compatible with as many contemporary Inuit as possible.

Table 2 provides a screening tool, highlighting which traditional cultural elements have the greatest potential to be brought forward into a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model.

Table 2. Traditional Cultural Elements and their Applicability, Feasibility and Compatibility for Inuit Today

Cultural Elements	Applicability	Feasibility	Compatibility
Access to Issumatuq	Variable, depending on level of respect of and trust in Elders in general	Variable, depending on location and access to Elders who have knowledge and wisdom to share	Variable, depending on the congruence of beliefs and values across generations
Learning and Using Traditional Skills	High	Variable, depending on location, access to resources and Elders	High
Family & Kinship	High	Variable, depending on family history, trauma, mental health	High
Spirituality and Spiritual Practices	Variable	Low, due to the lack of adherents and practitioners	Low-to-Variable, based on individual belief system
Being on the land	High	Variable, depending on location and access to resources	High
Saunik	High	High	Variable, depending on belief system
Throat singing	High	High	Variable, as many men may not be comfortable adopting a traditionally female cultural practice
Confession (emotional expression)	High	High	High
Unikkaaquat and Unikkaat (stories)	High	Variable, based on access to Elders and continuity of cultural knowledge	High
Pisiit (songs)	High	Variable, depending on access to other community members also engaging this practice	Variable, depending on whether the content of songs are spiritual in nature and compatible with beliefs
Learning and Using Inuktut	High	High	High

Cultural Elements	Applicability	Feasibility	Compatibility
Country food	High	Variable, depending on location and access to resources	High
Ajurnarmat	High	High	High
Song duels	Low, due to the lack of Elders and close-knit family and social units that mandate conflicts be resolved	Low, due to the loss of knowledge on how to implement this practice, and due to the lack of close knit community to participate	Low, due to potential discomfort with open and semi-public involvement in individual conflict, emotional expression, and this type of creative song-writing and showmanship
Qilaniq	Low, given that many individuals already understand why they are emotionally hurting, and not being as open to spiritual explanations	Low, due to the lack of practitioners	Low-to-variable, based on individual belief system

From the analysis in Table 2, we can see why many of the cultural elements are not completely applicable, feasible or compatible for all modern Inuit.

Elements that ranked High on applicability and compatibility, but of variable feasibility, were **family and kin, country food, being on the land, and learning traditional skills**. Elements that ranked High in all categories were **Learning and Using Inuktut, Ajurnarmat, and Confession**.

Across Inuit Nunangat, there is already a high degree of awareness and attention placed on access to country food, teaching of traditional skills, and time spent on the land. Inuktut study and use in a modern Inuit context is already a vibrant part of Inuit cultural preservation and revitalization. All of these elements are already widely acknowledged for their healing value and are included as primary components of Inuit-led on-the-land addiction treatment programs. Whenever location and resources allow, these components should be folded into any comprehensive Inuit healing program.

Family and kin are important factors in mental health and well-being, but these interpersonal relationships are not a directly controllable variable. Improving relationships with family and kin can be one of the most important goals of an individual's healing journey, and elements of a comprehensive healing program should address topics and skill-building to help individuals achieve success in that area of life.

Ajurnarmat

Ajurnarmat is a mental skill of being able to identify if something can be changed or not, and accepting those things that cannot be changed. This is a psychological strategy that ensures that both time and emotional energy are used efficiently on things that *can* be changed. This skill also allows for rapid movement toward acceptance of things that *cannot* be changed. The concept of Ajurnarmat is highlighted as a key element of wisdom in the *Serenity Prayer* from Alcoholics Anonymous, which is commonly recited as follows:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Ajurnarmat is a flexible concept that can be taught as a mental skill, as an element of traditional Inuit wisdom, and as a Christian prayer. Ajurnarmat can be easily pulled forward into a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model.

Confession / Emotional Expression

Whereas Ajurnarmat describes an internal mental process, **Confession** is an act of emotional expression. Traditionally, confession was used as a way to admit to wrongdoing for the purpose of releasing the emotional burden of guilt that comes with keeping it a secret. Confession is essentially the process of “getting it off one’s chest.” Traditionally, confession happened in a very specific context that included the agreement of the group to never raise the issue of wrongdoing again; **confession is easily brought forward into a modern context in a more general way as a way of talking about our feelings, or more simply, emotional expression.** Emotional expression and confession have the same intention -- to unburden the individual, to restore balance within their mind and emotions, and to help them feel understood and accepted by others.

Table 1 shows that *emotional expression* was also achieved through other traditional elements that are not as easily carried forward into a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model. When we look at the underlying processes of emotional expression in each cultural element, we can more easily bring the underlying benefit of each one into a modern context. Emotional expression was achieved through the following elements:

- Access to Issumatuq - **emotional expression by talking to an older, wiser, compassionate person**
- Learning and using traditional skills - **emotional expression by channeling emotional energy into physical tasks that are often repetitive and meditative and allow for deep contemplation and the bringing of emotions up to the surface**
- Throat singing - **emotional expression through focus, emotional containment, and then a release through laughter**
- Unikkaat and Unikkaat (stories) - **emotional expression through telling one’s stories**
- Pisiit (songs) - **emotional expression through voice, creating music, and telling story**
- Song duels - **emotional expression of anger intermixed with comedy and collective amusement and laughter**

Each of the above forms of emotional expression can be adapted into a modern context and brought forward.

Mental Health Components

Even though there are some traditional mental health **concepts** and cultural elements that we cannot easily bring forward, once we understand the mental health **components** embedded within each of the **elements** we can ensure that we bring those **components** forward in one form or another into a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model. These components were identified earlier (as bolded text within the bulleted list at the beginning of the section entitled *Traditional Cultural Elements Supportive of Mental Well-being*). The following list is a condensed form of those bolded **components** that I have identified within the cultural **elements**:

- Group harmony
- Love, care, and companionship
- Connection to others
- Working together for a common cause
- Feeling that one is a part of something bigger than one's self;
- Self-worth
- Feeling valued by others, feeling wanted and needed
- Being engaged in continual learning, personal growth, and deep thinking
- Being aware of one's personal potential
- Striving for improvement of inner strengths, skills, and capacities
- A deep sense of meaning and purpose
- Having access to a wise person/people to provide: guidance, teachings, reassurance, validation of one's worth, perspective and context on challenging life experiences
- Listening to others' stories to help normalize one's challenges and provide perspective
- Being able to accept that which cannot be changed
- Feeling one's inner privacy is respected
- Spending time in silence
- Developing a deeper connection with one's thoughts, emotions, memories and imagination
- Cultivating skills of awareness of self, other and environment
- Becoming more comfortable with emotions of self and other
- Using humour and laughter to help neutralize heavy feelings
- Having a sense of connection to something bigger than one's self
- Feeling reverence for the environment and all of life
- Access states of awe, wonder, respect and humility in relationship to the natural-spiritual world
- A sense that one is never alone due to the presence of spiritual intelligence
- Confidence in being able to influence or control elements of one's experience
- Working on relationship skills to foster opportunities for healthy companionship
- Within romantic partnership, fostering cooperation: the intimacy of shared experiences, fears, struggles and pains; emotional expression with safety and assured privacy, and continual emotional support for each other

- Addressing issues right away
- Acknowledging all feelings so that minds and hearts can come to be in peace
- Expressing thoughts and feelings so that they do not turn against oneself or others
- Confessing/expressing guilt in a safe environment so one can experience forgiveness and release guilt, shame and regret
- Cultivating a good attitude
- Having a life goal of transmitting accumulated wisdom and knowledge to younger people

This list provides us with the essential components that made traditional Inuit culture a rich and effective system of mental health development, maintenance and healing. We can pull forward all of these essential factors into a contemporary Inuit Mental Health Model.

Contemporary Inuit Views of Mental Well-being, Mental Illness, and Healing

Just as contemporary Inuit culture is a blend of traditional Inuit culture and non-Inuit culture, contemporary Inuit concepts of mental well-being, mental illness, and approaches to healing are also a blend of traditional Inuit and non-Inuit concepts and approaches. Inuit culture promotes innovation and resourcefulness, and so even concepts and approaches that were not originally sourced in Inuit tradition can today be considered to be adopted by Inuit as long as they are currently being used by Inuit.

Spirituality plays a significant role both in terms of personal identity and how mental health is understood and addressed. Contemporary Inuit spirituality often reflects a blend of organized Christianity and traditional healing practices, with individuals self-identifying on the spectrum from completely and solely Christian to completely aligned with traditional ways. Many Inuit follow and find spiritual nourishment in both traditional Inuit spirituality and Christianity. Individuals may go to church and seek pastoral counseling for their problems while also seeking the counsel of Elders, and perceiving that the spirits of their ancestors are present and influencing their current circumstances. The spiritual diversity in Nunavut allows Inuit to find ways of healing that work for them.⁶³

In this section, the following questions are answered through the lens of contemporary Inuit:

- What constitutes mental well-being?
- What elements are supportive of mental well-being?
- What causes mental health problems?
- Which approaches bring about healing?

What Constitutes Mental Well-being?

There is no agreed-upon definition of mental well-being found in contemporary Inuit sources; however, being *inummarik* has been equated with being resilient⁶⁴, which is often considered a correlate of mental well-being. Resilience is defined in the Inuit literature as ‘the ability to keep,

⁶³ Wihak and Merali, 2005.

⁶⁴ Morris, M. and C. Crooks. *Structural and cultural factors in suicide prevention: The contrast between mainstream and Inuit approaches to understanding and preventing suicide. Journal of Social Work Practice*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2015, pp.321-338. DOI: 10.1080/02650533.2015.1050655.

regain and build hope, emotional wellness, and positive ways of coping through times of difficulties in life'.⁶⁵ The goal of becoming *inummarik* continues to be a guiding principle in contemporary Inuit society so much so that it has been folded into the Nunavut educational framework.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada have defined a set of “adult behaviours”⁶⁷, qualities of which match closely the qualities of an *inummarik*. And an Elder has stated that “balance can only be maintained if one’s life is flexible.”⁶⁸ Taken together, these sources provide us with some characteristics present in a healthy adult:

- Self-control;
- Patience;
- Good heartedness;
- Generosity;
- Consideration for others;
- Being helpful, and being both able and always ready to help others;
- Learning skills that will be helpful later in life;
- Flexibility;
- Having a good mind, being quick to think;
- Being always aware of one’s surroundings; and
- Being able to look at the brighter side of different situations.

What Elements are Supportive of Mental Well-being?

Contemporary Inuit have identified that the following elements are supportive of mental well-being:

- A loving and caring home, especially during childhood⁶⁹
- Being proud of where one comes from⁷⁰
- Positive self-esteem⁷¹
- Living harmoniously⁷²
- Helping others⁷³
- Having a sense of place; being familiar with one’s physical environment, including it’s plants and animals; being in an environment that holds positive memories; being out on the land, especially for men^{74,75}

⁶⁵ Morris and Crooks, 2015.

⁶⁶ Nunavut Department of Education, 2007.

⁶⁷ Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*, 2006.

⁶⁸ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁶⁹ Minor, 1983.

⁷⁰ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. *Inuit-specific Approaches to Healing from Addiction and Trauma*. Mamisarniq Conference, 2007.

⁷¹ Korhonen, M. *Helping Inuit Clients: Cultural Relevance and Effective Counselling*. National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2005.

⁷² Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁷³ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁷⁴ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁷⁵ Kirmayer, L.J., Fletcher, C., and R. Watt. Locating the Ecocentric Self: Inuit Concepts of Mental Health and Illness. Chapter 13 of book: *Healing Traditions: The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Edited by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, 2008.

- Country foods^{76,77}

What Causes Mental Health Problems?

Some Inuit have experienced that not eating enough country foods can result in feelings of ill health, including weakness, lassitude, tiredness and emotional states or irritability, uncooperativeness, lack of interest in daily events, indifference towards children and generalized depression.⁷⁸

Some Inuit have expressed that phases of the moon and tides can accentuate mental health problems in those prone to them, and can bring about bizarre or violent behaviour or drinking binges even among those who don't typically have those problems.^{79,80}

Some Inuit sources have expressed the view that mental and emotional problems can be sourced in genetics, trauma or use of drugs and/or alcohol during pregnancy, a difficult labour, or accidental trauma at a young age. Some Inuit have expressed their view that the major cause of the complete range of mental health problems is trauma resulting from negative family relationships, including abuse, particularly sexual abuse, family conflict, and neglect.⁸¹

Violence, drug abuse, depression, and suicide are understood by some Inuit to be due to trauma such as childhood abuse, neglect, and ongoing family violence. Other recognized causes are interpersonal conflicts connected to social issues, such as isolation, unemployment, and poverty.⁸²

Elders have taught that excessive scolding and yelling at children hardens their conscience and directs their personality to rebellion.⁸³

Drinking alcohol has been reported to be often associated with violence, especially spousal abuse. It has been expressed that addictions change personality, and that sometimes the absence of drugs and the craving or irritability associated with not having them precipitate violence.⁸⁴

Some Inuit have stated that unresolved negative feelings and hurtful experiences can create deeper mental health and behavioural issues⁸⁵, and that these issues can start to layer and become overwhelming as life becomes more and more unbalanced. One Elder expressed that people try to cope with their unbalanced lives by numbing themselves out or by distracting

⁷⁶ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁷⁷ Kirmayer *et al.*, 2008.

⁷⁸ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁷⁹ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁸⁰ Aupilaarjuk *et al.*, 1999.

⁸¹ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁸² Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁸³ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁸⁴ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁸⁵ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

themselves through gambling, drugs, alcohol and misbehaving, which in turn only causes more imbalance, resulting in these people starting to shut down, wanting to be by themselves, hiding from everyone, and either directly or indirectly affecting the community⁸⁶.

Inuit sources have expressed that trauma affects all levels of a person's being: soul, spirit, physical body, and emotions, and that when trauma is unresolved, one never feels grounded or at home⁸⁷ and that it is a constant struggle to have joy in one's life⁸⁸.

Inuit sources have expressed that when trauma is not resolved, victims of abuse often become perpetrators, creating a cycle of abuse. Much of today's intergenerational trauma and cycle of abuse started with the non-Inuit colonization and the abuse of Inuit⁸⁹. The pain and trauma experienced by Inuit is acknowledged to have then been intensified by a decades-long lack of means to address the abuse through judicial means, or process the trauma through talking openly about it. Inuit have expressed that the inability to attain justice or process trauma caused the internal pain and imbalance to live on within the victims⁹⁰. Victims then used alcohol to cope with the pain (by numbing and distracting themselves), and experienced PTSD (including anxiety and depression). Finally, they then projected it onto others, including the next generation of children in their families and communities.

Putting all of this information together, we can understand that the children of abuse victims not only experienced their own abuse, but also often grew up in homes rife with other effects of their parents having unprocessed trauma: homes filled with addiction, mental illness, and a lack of a healthy and intentional parenting based in the traditional ways. Furthermore, there are additional layers of negative effects that colonization has been having on Inuit children. These include the destruction of and shame around a traditional identity, diminished means of self-reliance, diminished access to country foods, confused and conflicting attitudes around Elders, competency issues with Inuktut and cross-generational communication, confused and conflicting messages around spirituality and sources of authority, and the lateral violence resulting from all of these pains, pressures, confusions and frustrations. We can see that all of these factors have been compounding to amplify the mental and emotional challenges faced by each new generation.

Inuit have acknowledged that repression of painful emotional events results in various health problems. It has been expressed that such memories can be forgotten or suppressed and can result in a variety of bizarre, antisocial or disturbed behaviours. Inuit sources have articulated that people exhibiting these behaviours are generally not aware of the underlying causes, and in some cases may not even realize that their behaviours are problematic. Furthermore, these Inuit sources have expressed that when these individuals are parents or siblings, these

⁸⁶ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁸⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

⁸⁸ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁸⁹ Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2005; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁹⁰ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

problematic behaviours can cause psychological and emotional distress in children, contributing to trauma and mental illness in subsequent generations.⁹¹

“It has been said that keeping something inside for a long time will create problems. That is why, while growing up, we were taught to be open with our families and others. If there was some unhealthy thinking that someone is keeping to themselves and not seeking help, that problem will come out sooner or later, probably in the wrong way. If a person has something unhealthy in their mind and does not seek help, they could pass it on to their children years later. When we were children, we were taught never to keep something unhealthy to ourselves, but to seek help before something bad happens.”

- Jose Angutinnurniq

Some Inuit have said that men have a harder time talking about personal or emotional matters and that women can hide or suppress their emotions out of not wanting to burden others.⁹²

“All these things that happened in my life...you know I always thought this stuff never bothered me, and I buried it, because it was too painful to go near. The fear of talking about it. The fear of feeling that pain, feeling those emotions, reliving those experiences, kept me away from dealing with it...and I never realized how much of an impact it had on me...Not talking about things and burying it -- creating walls within myself to forget those things -- that didn't help. The shame, the anger, everything that happened to me was still inside of me.”

- Hunter Tootoo

One Elder has explained that one of the reasons some Inuit don't seek healing is because Inuit were told to never dig back into the past, as it has gone. She explained that it has been the Inuit way of being to focus on moving forward and that these instructions are extremely hard to let go of because they are built into everyone's lives. This Elder acknowledged, however, that in the past, one's pain would have been noticed and addressed right away.⁹³

Inuit have acknowledged that unresolved issues can put one's life out of balance and negatively impact the person even if they are not consciously aware that this is the case. It has been acknowledged that while people may be aware that they had bad experiences in the past, they often assume that they are not affected by those experiences. Inuit have identified that many issues can be indicators of unresolved issues that need healing, including:

- Feeling unsafe;
- Feeling like people can't be trusted;
- Feeling not good enough;
- Feeling unwelcome, not belonging;
- Feeling like nobody understands;
- Feeling unsupported;

⁹¹ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁹² Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

⁹³ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

- Feeling alone;
- Disliking or hating one's self;
- Being withdrawn; wanting to be away from people;
- Bad habits, like stealing, lying, cheating, or spreading rumours; and,
- Having not attempted to live a good life or to improve conditions in life, including living conditions, health conditions, relationship quality, and income.⁹⁴

Further, Inuit have acknowledged that not being able to forgive someone who caused one pain may make the suffering worse, and that obsessive thoughts can be thought of as a form of addiction.⁹⁵

Which Approaches Bring About Healing?

Inuit today are open to a variety of approaches to healing, including both traditional Inuit and non-Inuit approaches like psychological counseling. Many Inuit feel that the best healing techniques from each culture should be made available.

Contemporary Inuit have identified a wide range of factors and methods that contribute to healing. In some sources, Inuit have elaborated on how and why these factors and methods contribute to healing. Where Inuit sources did not elaborate in this way, I have added interpretation from a holistic mental health lens. The Inuit-identified factors and methods that contribute to healing are detailed in the section below.

Strong and Healthy Bonds with Family and Kin

Having strong and healthy bonds with family and kin, especially with respect to talking and communication, has been expressed by Inuit to be the most important factor in healing.⁹⁶ Through the lens of holistic mental health, we understand that feelings of connection, acceptance, and belonging are prime human needs, and that these are satisfied by deep, stable bonds such as those experienced in healthy family relationships. Time with family helps one feel safe, provides continual reminders of one's identity, and helps provide context and perspective for one's life. Healthy family members often serve as safe and confidential people to talk to, where emotional expression can occur, and can also often serve as sources of wisdom. Contributing to the well-being of other family members also provides meaning and purpose in one's life.

Country Food

Eating country food is understood to have a beneficial effect on mental health. The consumption of country food is understood to rejuvenate the blood and hence the body and mind.⁹⁷ When Inuit have described the healing effects of country food, it is nearly always linked to discussion

⁹⁴ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

⁹⁵ Karetak *et al.*, 2017; Kirmayer *et al.* 1994.

⁹⁶ Kral, M. J. *Unikkaartuit: Meanings of Well-Being, Sadness, Suicide, and Change in Two Inuit Communities*. Final Report to the National Health Research and Development Programs, Health Canada, February, 2003. Project #6606-6231-002.

⁹⁷ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

of being together with family.⁹⁸ We might say that when eating country food with one's family, many Inuit feel nourished physically, mentally, and emotionally. We might also see that eating country food is a tangible link to one's Inuit identity, knowing that these are the foods that one's ancestors ate, and that there is also an experience of gratitude and appreciation of animals, the land, and the hunters, which all come together to make nourishment possible.

We also know that country food is rich in several nutrients that have now been linked to physical and mental well-being, such as iron, vitamin D, and omega-3 fatty acids. In a time when much of the diet in the North has become reliant on imported, processed, low-nutrient foods, country foods are more important for mental well-being than ever.

Being Out on the Land

Being out on the land is acknowledged as being therapeutic, since nature supports self-care and healing.⁹⁹ Being out on the land is a component of existing culturally appropriate healing programs.¹⁰⁰ Being out on the land is often tied in with multiple other healing factors, including time with family, country food, time with Elders, and learning and using traditional skills. From a holistic mental health perspective, we can see that time on the land provides a feeling of spaciousness and timelessness, where all modern problems and worries are more likely to feel far away and insignificant. We can notice that being out on the land returns one's focus to the present moment, creating value to satisfy immediate needs -- food and water collection and preparation, shelter preparation and maintenance. Having tangible tasks that create direct and immediate value gives a sense of meaning and purpose that calms and soothes the mind and brings about a feeling of well-being. Many people experience that being out on the land also reconnects one to the plants, animals and landscapes of one's ancestors. Reflecting on what life must have been like for one's ancestors helps to place one in a larger spatial and temporal timeframe -- feeling like one is part of a large, long history of survival and resilience. This helps one to feel more connected to a people, history, and a way of life, while also putting one's personal problems into context, making them seem smaller. Being out on the land also usually involves being in close, cooperative connection with family members, allowing for time spent together without the distraction of television, smart phones, neighbours, work schedules, and other commitments. Being out on the land restores connection, belonging, identity, perspective, purpose, and meaning, all of which support a sense of well-being.

Developing Traditional Skills

Inuit have identified the healing effects of engaging in traditional skills such as camping, hunting, making clothing, drying meats, making traditional tools, and building igloos.¹⁰¹ From a holistic mental health perspective, we can see that these tasks bring a sense of belonging, cooperation, interdependency, and create value for others, which is an important part of self-esteem. Giving and receiving value from others, in addition, can stimulate feelings of appreciation and gratitude. The tasks also require one to be mindfully present in the moment without external distraction, providing relief from the abstract concerns of modern day-to-day life. The tangible results of

⁹⁸ Kral, 2003.

⁹⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Nunatsiaq News, 2004; Kral, 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. *et al.*, 2006; Nunatsiaq News, 2004.

¹⁰¹ Nunatsiaq News, 2004; Kral, 2003.

one's efforts when using traditional skills can give one a direct experience of one's own value, thereby contributing to self-esteem. The intense focus required at certain moments during a hunt are a type of "flow state" where one feels purposeful, in control, powerful, and there is the thrill of the possibility of success. These positive experiences and emotional states build positive memories and self-esteem. The relaxed, meditative states during repetitive tasks like making clothing allow one to spend peaceful time with others in shared activity, and provide opportunities to self-reflect, and make new mental connections, insights and realizations, which is a key part of the healing process.

Additionally, having traditional skills demonstrates a level of maturity and a level of abilities that are recognized by Inuit.¹⁰² Being recognized for one's skill supports one's identity, self-esteem, self-confidence, and can open opportunities for greater meaning and purpose in life.

Learning Inuktitut

Learning Inuktitut has been identified as a culturally appropriate element for healing programs.¹⁰³ Learning one's ancestral language is often emotionally experienced as reconnecting to a part of one's self that has been lost. It can feel like plugging into a source of power that has been disconnected. Learning one's ancestral language can feel like a powerful way to honour, respect, and reconnect to one's ancestors. It is easy to imagine that one's ancestors are thrilled and proud that their descendents are reconnecting to their language. The increasing sense of belonging, connection, and a sense of identity and pride are all positive for mental and emotional well-being.

Recreation

Recreation was identified as an element of Cambridge Bay's Residential Treatment Program.¹⁰⁴ Recreation can bring out a sense of being present in the moment, playfulness, creativity, problem-solving, spontaneity, and connection. Depending on the nature of the activity, recreation often fosters acceptance and belonging. Recreation is typically an activity that has a purpose -- an end goal -- whether it is to make something, get somewhere, or win a game. These mental and emotional qualities and states of being are all positive antidotes to many of the dominant qualities of anxiety, depression, and other mental and emotional challenges like rumination, worry, feeling lethargic, disconnected, powerless, helpless, and having no sense of meaning or purpose.

Learning about Inuit History and Traditional Knowledge

Learning Inuit history and traditional knowledge, especially from Elders, has been identified as contributing to healing.¹⁰⁵ Learning Inuit history helps build a sense of identity and pride in one's history, including a history of natural resilience. Learning from an Elder grounds the knowledge in lived experience (as opposed to being presented academically, as abstract concepts), and therefore brings greater depth, meaning, and a sense of connection to the teachings and to

¹⁰² Inungni Sapujijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹⁰³ Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. *et al.*, 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. *et al.*, 2006; Government of Nunavut, 1999; Alianait, 2007; Kral, 2003.

one's ancestors. Learning about history and traditional knowledge helps one make sense of today -- of why things are the way they are, and how they got that way. Having this deeper perspective and context for one's life and one's surrounding reality often gives a sense of having more power, more control, and more choice, which are all factors that help calm and stabilize the mind and emotions. These deeper perspectives of why things are the way they are, and why people are the way they are, can bring about greater compassion and acceptance.

Learning about Intergenerational Trauma

It has been suggested that any effective healing process includes learning about the link between cultural and community trauma, and how these have been transmitted to subsequent generations at the individual level.¹⁰⁶ Through learning about intergenerational effects, an individual can make sense of the suffering they have experienced in their life, shifting from thinking "I'm crazy" to "what happened to me is crazy."¹⁰⁷

“Trauma is an important contributing factor in understanding patterns of substance use and abuse, and is not limited to the Inuit Culture. Due to Inuit collective experience of social-cultural trauma over the course of the past fifty years or so, any treatment program must understand the link between cultural and community experiences of trauma, and how these have been transmitted to subsequent generations at the individual level. It is a holistic understanding of this link between individual and community experiences of trauma that a treatment approach can begin to support individuals to heal their personal traumas, and so, over time, heal communities.”

- Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. et al., 2006

Learning that one's individual suffering is part of a larger collective experience allows one to have more self-compassion, to depersonalize one's life's challenges, to have greater compassion for others, and to feel less alone in one's struggles. Depersonalizing experiences can alleviate self-blame for problems and the shame, guilt and regret that often goes along with self-blame.

“An understanding of how many of the abusive attitudes and practices evolved through the generations from the traditional Inuit world to today, is essential to any effective healing process.

Only when an individual recognizes his own roots will he/she be able to begin the healing process.

Without an understanding of how his/her attitudes and ways of dealing with problems evolved, he/she cannot begin the break the cycle, often both victim and perpetrator.”

- Pauktuutiit Inuit Women of Canada, 2005

Learning about Emotional, Behavioural and Interpersonal Topics

Inuit have identified that learning about each of the following topics is important for healing:

¹⁰⁶ Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. et al., 2006; Pauktuutiit Inuit Women of Canada, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

- Abuse¹⁰⁸
- Addictions¹⁰⁹
- Anger^{110,111}
- Betrayal¹¹²
- Emotions/Feelings, including coping and management skills^{113,114,115}
- Family violence¹¹⁶
- Reconciliation¹¹⁷
- Rejection and its causes¹¹⁸
- Relationships and families¹¹⁹
- Relapse prevention¹²⁰
- Self-care, including making a self-care plan¹²¹
- Self-inflicted pain/self-harm¹²²
- Transition back to home and community, where applicable¹²³
- Trust¹²⁴
- Violence¹²⁵

Self-Reflection and Self-Expression

Self-reflection and self-expression are key components of the healing process.¹²⁶ We can only solve a problem when we fully understand the problem.¹²⁷

Self-reflection is the process of contemplating one's problems in relation to oneself and gaining insight.¹²⁸ It is an inner exploration of how and why one thinks, feels, and acts the way one does, including how life events have impacted oneself. Self-reflection can happen through talking, writing, making art, or simply by thinking deeply (reflecting).

¹⁰⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹⁰ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹¹ Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹¹² Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹³ Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Embrace Life Council. *Inuusivut Anninaqtuq Action Plan 2017-2022*, June, 2017; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹¹⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹⁵ Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹¹⁶ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹¹⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹²⁰ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹²¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹²² Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹²³ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹²⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹²⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹²⁶ Alianait, 2007; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹²⁷ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

¹²⁸ Korhonen, 2005.

**“If you are feeling like you do not belong,
or do not feel you are part of the family,
something has created that situation
and you need to dig for the roots of these thoughts.”**

-Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak

Self-expression is another key part of the healing process and is achieved through talking or any art form. This process of bringing what has been hidden within oneself out into the outer world helps to relieve the pressure on the psyche and also helps the individual to begin to examine that content more objectively.

Writing is a simple and powerful means of both self-reflection and self-expression, and has been recognized by Inuit sources as a means of healing.¹²⁹ In order to write, one needs to look within and ask “what am I feeling? What am I thinking?” Putting thoughts onto paper helps to get them out. Thoughts become more organized and one comes to understand oneself and one’s feelings better. Dots are often connected and insight is gained.

Learning Grieving Skills and Having Grieving Opportunities

Teaching skills to help those who have lost individuals to suicide and/or incarceration, and to provide safety and support for people to remember and grieve loved ones who have died, have been identified as part of healing.¹³⁰ A healthy grieving process requires allowing oneself to feel and express the emotional pain of loss. Teaching the importance of this and providing instruction or opportunities for grieving are important to the healing process.

Depersonalizing Painful Experiences

Shifting one’s thinking from “I’m crazy” to “what happened to me is crazy” and gaining an understanding of why one feels the way one does is a helpful part of the healing process.¹³¹ The reexamining of past painful experiences and looking at them in new ways that shift the cause away from the self and onto other external factors helps to “depersonalize” one’s self-narrative, resulting in alleviation of self-judgment, self-blame, shame, guilt, and regret. It also can result in the cultivation of self-compassion and self-kindness, which are central to full emotional healing.

Gaining Understanding of Why One Feels the Way One Does

Understanding the mechanisms behind the mind and the emotions, including how painful experiences and trauma are processed by the mind, helps a person to feel “normal” in what they have been experiencing¹³². This is important in a healing journey as it alleviates feelings of

¹²⁹ Nunatsiaq News, 2004.

¹³⁰ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Government of Nunavut et al., 2017; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016; Gentile and Peters, 2019; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹³¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹³² Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

brokenness, of being flawed, and the related feelings of shame that can worsen mental health issues and block people from seeking help or healing.

Forgiving

Moving past anger and forgiving the wrong-doer is imperative for healing¹³³. A lack of forgiveness can cause mental illness¹³⁴; therefore, moving past anger and forgiving the wrong-doer is imperative for healing. However, forgiveness must be arrived at in a healthy way and must be genuine, not forced due to external pressure to forgive.¹³⁵

“There is delight in forgiveness.... When you truly forgive, you will experience absolute peace all over you.”

- Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak

Shifting from “Victim Mentality” to “Empowerment” Mentality

One Inuit source explained that when one person does something bad to another person, the recipient of that treatment may choose to view the resulting relationship as a “contest” between the two people, where winning the contest can look like taking action resulting in the wrong-doer having to pay a price and be accountable for the actions, such as receiving some form of justice.¹³⁶ This win can affirm the individual’s inner strength. This is a way of viewing abuse dynamics that is different from the victim-perpetrator narrative.

Even if we are not able to bring a perpetrator to some sort of consequence or justice, reclaiming one’s power and well-being can be seen as a declaration of freedom from the effects of the perpetrator and their actions. Furthermore, feeling powerless is an inherent part of any trauma, so stepping into an “empowerment” mentality is powerful for healing.

Building Self-Esteem

Helping an individual to recognize their natural skills, abilities, strengths and validating them, is a component of healing.¹³⁷ This process is replacing a key function of *inunnguniq*, and can help a person come into a sense of being worthy and capable of making meaningful contributions to others.¹³⁸

“Strength-based approaches are at the heart of *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit*.”

- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010

“We counsel people from a place of love and compassion, with the goal of restoring their sense of personal pride, emphasizing to them that they have the capacity to heal, and that they can contribute to the community.”

¹³³ Karetak *et al.*, 2017.

¹³⁴ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹³⁵ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

¹³⁶ Kirmayer *et al.*, 1994.

¹³⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Korhonen, 2005; Alianait, 2007; Gentile and Peters, 2019; Inungni Sapujijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003; Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. *et al.*, 2006.

¹³⁸ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.

- Simon Nataq

Having Access to Safe and Supportive Environments

Safe and supportive environments can be created in one-on-one settings with a trusted counsellor, or in group settings such as healing/talking circles, workshops and training.¹³⁹

Talking Directly, in Confidentiality, about One's Issues and Traumas

Talking with somebody trained in helping with unresolved issues is an important part of removing emotional pain.¹⁴⁰ Even talking with others in general has been identified as a helpful way to resolve some mental health problems.¹⁴¹

“We must find a way to remove the pain, and to do that we must talk to somebody who is gifted in helping with unresolved issues.”

- Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak

“Only by facing those issues and talking about them, I feel now that I'm at peace with them. I'm able to leave them behind me now.”

- Hunter Tootoo

Talking about inner pain and painful past events makes one feel vulnerable, and so it takes bravery to talk about such things with sincerity. The more safe an individual feels, the more comfortable it feels to let go and share one's inner thoughts and feelings.¹⁴² The process of opening up must be allowed to unfold in a way that is natural and comfortable for the individual. Working on core issues takes safety and time.¹⁴³

“Individuals must be able to speak about their issues without being afraid...Talking is a powerful way of moving on with issues, to not dwell in the past.”

- Inungni Sapujijiit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

Talking in confidentiality also creates the conditions for an individual to unburden themselves through sharing things that have never been spoken before. This “confession” was understood to be a form of healing in both traditional Inuit culture and is also used in modern Inuit culture in a Christian context.

“Healing comes when trauma is faced head on and discussed.”

- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007

¹³⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Karetak et al., 2017; Government of Nunavut et al., 2017; Inungni Sapujijiit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Karetak et al., 2017; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Inungni Sapujijiit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹⁴¹ Kirmayer et al., 1994; Kral, 2003.

¹⁴² Karetak et al. 2017.

¹⁴³ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

Being Part of Talking/Healing Circles

Talking/healing circles can be healing¹⁴⁴ as long as they feel safe to each individual. Ensuring the compatibility of participants is important to create the safety and comfort needed for individuals to open up and talk about their pain. Discussion of abuse and violence can feel safer within same-gender groups.¹⁴⁵

Talking about emotional pain in safe groups can allow one to experience acceptance from others. The acceptance and support from others can alleviate shame, guilt, regret and other negative self-judgments and can be an important part of coming into self-acceptance, self-compassion, and self-love, all of which are key components of healing. A group setting can also serve as a proxy for the larger world -- as a person feels accepted by a specific group of people, they can start to consider the possibility of being accepted by the world at large.

We can think of the healing process as being represented by a set of concentric circles. A completely isolated individual can be represented by the dot in the middle. A healing circle is the first inner ring within which a person feels comfortable, and gains support for expanding outward. As the individual's safety, acceptance and belonging in that first, safe, inner circle grows, it provides the sense of safety and comfort that expands outward to the next layer in one's world.

Drumming

One Inuit source expressed that drumming "frees the spirit".¹⁴⁶ Aside from its traditional uses in spiritual practices, drumming is a form of traditional Inuit musical expression, and therefore provides the benefits of both cultural and emotional expression. Drumming can provide a greater sense of connection, identity, context, and perspective. When carried out in the presence of others, drumming can build a sense that one is providing value to others, and this builds self-esteem. When drumming as part of a group, it can help with a sense of belonging.

Drumming is also active and requires a mental presence in the moment. Traditional Inuit drumming engages the entire body in a dance. Dance is an expressive art that helps move emotions that may be stuck. Traditional Inuit drumming also creates a soothing rhythm of deep tones that can be felt in the chest and the stomach, which are the emotional centres of the body. This stimulation of sensation in the emotional centres of the body can assist with emotions moving and coming to the surface for expression.

The low frequency of drumming in Inuit drum dancing, of approximately one-to-two beats per second, activates lower "delta" brainwave states in the brain, which are associated with deep sleep. This beat frequency has a relaxing effect on the nervous system, which can bring about

¹⁴⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Korhonen, 2005; Government of Nunavut et al., 2017; Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. et al., 2006.

¹⁴⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁴⁶ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

feelings of calm, well-being, and can help with sleep. These beat frequencies have been found to positively affect key hormones related to health and well-being.¹⁴⁷

A small but growing body of scientific evidence suggests that music and other rhythmic stimuli can alter mental states in predictable ways and even heal some damaged brain regions. Research on this topic of “brainwave entrainment” is still in its infancy, but advocates hope that it may prove a cheap, safe and effective way to treat a variety of mental health issues, from depression to attention deficit issues, and even prove invaluable in repairing brain damage.¹⁴⁸

Current research is now verifying the therapeutic effects of traditional drumming techniques from various cultures. Recent research reviews indicate that drumming accelerates physical healing, boosts the immune system and produces feelings of well-being. It also helps in releasing emotional trauma, and reintegration of the self. Other studies have demonstrated the calming, focusing, and healing effects of drumming on Alzheimer’s patients, autistic children, emotionally disturbed teens, recovering addicts, trauma patients, and prison and homeless populations. Research results have demonstrated that drumming is an effective treatment for stress, fatigue, anxiety, hypertension, asthma, chronic pain, arthritis, mental illness, migraines, cancer, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, stroke, paralysis, emotional disorders, and a wide range of physical disabilities.¹⁴⁹

In many ways, drumming in general, and Inuit drum dancing in particular, hold much benefit for mental and emotional well-being.

Developing Positive Thinking

As thoughts and emotions are two aspects of the same mental-emotional activity, positive thinking is both a supportive factor of mental and emotional well-being and a result of such well-being. Learning to think more positively is an important part of the healing process.¹⁵⁰

Learning through Stories, Analogies and Metaphors

Stories, analogies and metaphors are powerful tools to shift one’s mind and emotions¹⁵¹ toward more positive perspectives and understandings, thereby lessening the mental and emotional burden.

¹⁴⁷ Breus, M.J. *How Can Binaural Beats Help You Sleep Better?* Psychology Today. October 11, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sleep-newzzzz/201810/how-can-binaural-beats-help-you-sleep-better>. Accessed January 31, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Saarman, E. *Feeling the Beat: Symposium explores the therapeutic effects of rhythmic music.* Stanford Report. May 31, 2006. <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2006/may31/brainwave-053106.html>. Accessed January 31, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Rhythm Research and Resources. 2021. *An Introduction to the Benefits of Drumming.* <https://www.rhythmresearchresources.net/research-drum-therapy-introduction.html>. Accessed January 31, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁵¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

Becoming Empowered

Traumatic experiences always involve a feeling of being powerless. Any opportunity for an individual to become more empowered will contribute to healing.¹⁵²

Healing Trauma

Unresolved trauma is at the root of most mental health issues. Having safe, simple, and effective ways to heal trauma is of prime importance to healing.¹⁵³

Seeing Healing as a Voyage of Self-Discovery

It is important to see healing as a voyage of self-discovery.¹⁵⁴ Seeing healing in this way elicits a specific positive mindset that maximizes the ease and success of the healing process. Qualities of this mindset, like those of any voyage of discovery, include curiosity, patience, determination and perseverance. The self-discovery mindset stands in contrast to an unhealthy attitude toward healing: namely, as seeing the self as flawed or broken, which often involves thoughts of “I just want to be fixed” or “I need to fix this problem”.

Demanding Change of Oneself

Demanding change of oneself is a key aspect of a successful healing journey.¹⁵⁵ Demanding change means setting a higher standard for oneself. Demanding change is like an internal declaration of “I deserve better! I won’t give up - I will do whatever it takes to achieve that change.” This determination and perseverance is important to staying the course during the waves of the healing process.

Accessing wisdom

Gaining wisdom often involves gaining access to someone who can provide options and ideas from which to choose¹⁵⁶. Often, when one is suffering, one’s thinking is stuck in a certain limited and negative way. It often takes an outside party with greater knowledge, life experience, and wisdom to offer options and ideas for the new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Not Taking Ownership of Other People’s Problems

Well-being is supported by not taking ownership of other people’s problems.¹⁵⁷

Heal Yourself First, Then Focus On Others

It’s plenty of work to simply take ownership of one’s own healing. The only way one can help others is to help oneself first. Some of the key messages for those wanting to do healing work with others are: *You need to be healed, you need to be grounded yourself.*¹⁵⁸ *Once you heal*

¹⁵² Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁵³ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹⁵⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁵⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Korhonen, 2005.

¹⁵⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007.

¹⁵⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

yourself, you can be grounded enough to help others. First things first. Let yourself be your top priority for now. You can help others later.

Developing Communication and Relationship Skills

Gaining new skills of interpersonal communication can rapidly build self-esteem, self-confidence, and the enthusiasm to build new and healthy relationships in one's personal and professional lives.¹⁵⁹ Learning about healthy relationships and how to solve problems in relationships is also important.¹⁶⁰ Improved communication and relationship skills create healthier families, healthier children, and contribute to the dismantling of intergenerational trauma.

“A main reason for so much hardship is because our husbands and wives have not been taught about healthy relationships.”

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing 2003

Setting Goals and Having Access to Help in Decision-Making

As individuals heal and come into greater harmony with themselves, their bodies, other people, and with their environment, there is a process of learning that healthier choices are available. If someone doesn't have a history of healthy choices, they may not know which choices are healthy or unhealthy. Having a support system of healthy people allows one to access the wisdom of others. This external input can help individuals in making healthy choices and improving their lives.¹⁶¹

Healing Gatherings and Support Groups in All Communities

The presence of healing gatherings in a community helps to shift the mindset, focus, and values of a given community toward healing. As this happens, individuals within a community find it easier to both talk about their healing and take advantage of opportunities for healing that are being made available. As a given community develops a culture of healing, the comfort level in talking about emotional wounds increases. Individuals and families can then have greater access to starting points for healing and ending patterns of intergenerational trauma.¹⁶²

Being part of a support group in one's community is important, since a support group is a place where successes are supported, acknowledged, and celebrated. This, in turn, creates a powerful and energizing motivation to stay on the healing path. Being a part of such a group creates its own microcosm of a culture, including a set of perspectives, values, attitudes and beliefs. When the purpose of such a group is the healing of individuals and the community, such groups can be powerful catalysts for change.

¹⁵⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Korhonen, 2005; Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. et al., 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

¹⁶¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2007; Korhonen, 2005.

¹⁶² Government of Nunavut et al., 2017; Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003.

Traditional Ceremonies, for those interested

For those who feel aligned with traditional beliefs, traditional ceremonies may reduce emotional suffering.¹⁶³

Consolidation of Traditional and Contemporary Inuit Concepts and Approaches into an Inuit Mental Health Model

Developing an Inuit Mental Health Model that meets the needs of Inuit today starts with honouring and bringing forward those aspects of traditional Inuit mental health concepts and healing approaches that are applicable, feasible, and compatible with today's diverse Inuit society. We can then add in the wisdom, concepts and approaches used by contemporary Inuit. At this point, we would have a comprehensive Inuit-sourced description of mental health and healing: an Inuit Mental Health Model. This model can then contribute to the ever-growing body of Inuit culture, support Inuit identity, and can also provide a framework for future Inuit-specific mental health education and healing programs.

**“We need to relearn our ability to maintain
and take care of people and things we care for.”**

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

While this model would form an important body of traditional knowledge and cultural identity, the fact that some traditional mental health concepts and approaches to healing are no longer applicable, feasible or compatible for all members of contemporary Inuit society (and could not be brought forward), means that a purely Inuit-sourced model may contain some gaps and may not meet all the needs of all Inuit today.

In recognition of these potential gaps, Inuit Elders and Inuit organizations have repeatedly recommended that the best of both Inuit and non-Inuit approaches be used so that Inuit have the best quality healing opportunities available.

**“We have realized that we can't keep all of our traditional culture,
nor can we push away what the modern culture has given us.
We must find ways to blend the both to ensure that Inuit still have a future.
Many of our “tools” for survival in the social field are less practical
than what you would see for survival “tools” for going out hunting.
We must determine what these tools are and integrate them
with more modern ways of dealing with social issues.”**

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

From these recommendations, we have the invitation to identify non-Inuit holistic mental health concepts and approaches that can enhance the ability of Inuit practitioners to implement the model in a way that is maximally effective, accessible, and applicable to today's diverse Inuit society. However, in the spirit of cultural continuity, any non-Inuit-sourced concepts and

¹⁶³ Wihak and Merali, 2005.

approaches must be either congruent with Inuit concepts and values to start with, or be adapted to become so.

Presenting the Inuit Mental Health Model

The Inuit Mental Health Model combines all of the inputs that identified in previous sections from traditional and contemporary Inuit culture. The Inuit Health Model is made up of four parts:

- Mental Well-being
- Elements Supportive of Mental Well-being
- Mental Illness
- Healing Approaches

Mental Well-being

Becoming *inummarik* is synonymous with living in alignment with IQ principles, which is synonymous with mental well-being. Someone in optimal mental health:

- Respects others, the land, animals, and the environment
- Is good hearted
- Has a good mind and is quick to think
- Cares for people
- Serves, helps and supports others
- Has healthy relationships
- Fosters good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive
- Understands their purpose and role in helping others
- Comfortably engages in discussion and consensus-building
- Has an attitude of life-long learning, continually development new skills through practice, effort and action
- Is innovative and resourceful
- Has an appreciation of the specific skills and abilities one has to contribute to the betterment of others
- Works well with other people toward a common cause
- Has a strong sense of identity and belonging
- Acts with wisdom
- Has a good mind, is quick to think
- Is always aware of their surroundings
- Is able to look at the brighter side of different situations
- Is able to keep, regain and build hope
- Has emotional wellness
- Has positive ways of coping through times of difficulties in life
- Has good self-control
- Has patience
- Is generous
- Has consideration for others
- Is flexible

With time, an individual in the state of mental well-being ideally develops *isuma* (wisdom) and uses this clear thinking to help counsel others.

Elements Supportive of Mental Well-being

The following elements are supportive of mental well-being. These elements can be considered to be the key ingredients for building and maintaining mental well-being, and for preventing mental health issues. These elements are also key supportive aspects of the healing process.

Harmony

- A loving and caring home, especially during childhood
- Living harmoniously and group harmony

Connection

- Connection to others
- Having a sense of connection to something bigger than one's self
- Feeling reverence for the environment and all of life
- Companionship
- Working on relationship skills to foster opportunities for healthy companionship
- Within romantic partnership, fostering cooperation; the intimacy of shared experiences, fears, struggles and pains; emotional expression with safety and assured privacy, and continual emotional support and care for each other

Spirituality

- The ability to access states of awe, wonder, respect and humility in relationship to the natural-spiritual world
- A sense that one is never alone due to the presence of spiritual intelligence

Identity

- Being proud of where one comes from
- Having a sense of place; being familiar with one's physical environment, including its plants and animals; being in an environment that holds positive memories; being out on the land, especially for men
- Having access to country food

Self-Esteem/Self-Worth

- Developing and keeping self-esteem/self-worth
- Feeling valued by others, feeling wanted and needed
- Being aware of one's personal potential
- Confidence of being able to influence or control elements of one's experience

Contribution to Others

- Helping others
- Working together for a common cause
- Feeling that one is a part of something bigger than one's self
- A deep sense of meaning and purpose
- Having a life goal of transmitting accumulated wisdom and knowledge to younger people

Continual Learning and Growth

- Being engaged in continual learning, personal growth, and deep thinking
- Striving for improvement of inner strengths, skills, and capacities

- Having access to a wise person/people to provide guidance, teachings, reassurance, validation of one's worth, perspective and context on challenging life experiences
- Listening to others' stories to help normalize one's challenges and provide perspective

Mental and Emotional Self-Mastery

- Being able to accept that which cannot be changed (*ajurnarmat*)
- Becoming more comfortable with emotions, both within oneself and others
- Addressing issues right away
- Cultivating a good attitude
- Using humour and laughter to help neutralize heavy feelings

Emotional Expression

- Acknowledging all feelings so minds and hearts can come to peace
- Expressing thoughts and feelings so that they do not turn against oneself or others
- Confessing/expressing guilt in a safe environment so one can experience forgiveness and release guilt, shame and regret
- Feeling one's inner privacy is respected

Introspection

- Spending time in silence
- Developing a deeper connection with one's thoughts, emotions, memories and imagination

Awareness

- Cultivating skills of awareness of the self, other people and the environment

Mental Illness

The statements below form an understanding of mental illness.

Causes

- Mental and emotional problems can be sourced in genetics, trauma or use of drugs and/or alcohol during pregnancy, a difficult labour, or accidental trauma at a young age; however, most mental and emotional problems are due to trauma.

Trauma

- Trauma is a major cause of the complete range of mental health problems, including violence, drug abuse, depression, and suicide. Additional causes are social issues, such as isolation, unemployment, and poverty.
- Primary sources of trauma are negative family relationships, including family conflict, neglect, and abuse, particularly sexual abuse. Excessive scolding and yelling at children hardens their conscience and directs their personality to rebellion.
- Trauma affects all levels of a person's being: the soul, spirit, physical body, and the emotions.
- When trauma is unresolved, one never feels grounded or at home and it is a constant struggle to experience joy.
- Memories of painful emotional events can be suppressed or forgotten and can result in various health problems as well as in a variety of bizarre or antisocial behaviours. People exhibiting these behaviours are generally not aware of the underlying causes, and in some cases may not even realize that their behaviours are problematic. When these individuals are parents or siblings, these problematic behaviours can cause

psychological and emotional distress in children, contributing to trauma and mental illness in subsequent generations.

Forgiveness

- Not being able to forgive someone who caused one pain may make the suffering worse.

Intergenerational Trauma

- When trauma is not resolved, victims of abuse often become perpetrators, creating a cycle of abuse. Much of today's intergenerational trauma and cycle of abuse started with the colonization and the abuse of Inuit.
- The pain and trauma experienced by Inuit was intensified by a decades-long lack of means to address the abuse through judicial means, or to process the trauma through talking openly about it.
- The inability to attain justice or to process trauma caused the internal pain and imbalance to be relieved within the victims, who then used alcohol to cope (numb, distract). This also contributed to the experience of PTSD (including anxiety and depression) and the projection of these experiences and trauma onto others, including the next generation of children in their families and communities.

Importance of Expressing Emotions

- Keeping a wrong-doing secret can cause mental health issues such as anxiety and sickness
- Men have a harder time talking about personal or emotional matters
- Women can hide or suppress their emotions out of not wanting to burden others
- When someone has unresolved issues, it can result in them:
 - Feeling unsafe;
 - Feeling like people can't be trusted;
 - Feeling not good enough;
 - Feeling unwelcome, and not belonging;
 - Feeling like nobody understands;
 - Feeling unsupported;
 - Feeling alone;
 - Disliking or hating one's self;
 - Being withdrawn; wanting to be away from people;
 - Having bad habits, like stealing, lying, cheating, or spreading rumours; and,
 - Having not attempted to live a good life or to improve conditions in life, including living conditions, health conditions, relationship quality, and income.

Addictions

- Drinking alcohol has been reported to often be associated with violence, especially spousal abuse.
- Addictions change personality; sometimes the absence of drugs and the craving or irritability associated with not having them precipitate violence.
- Unresolved negative feelings and hurtful experiences can create deeper mental health and behavioural issues, which can start to layer and can become overwhelming as life becomes more and more unbalanced.
- People try to cope with their unbalanced lives by numbing themselves out or distracting themselves through gambling, drugs, alcohol and misbehaving, which in turn only causes more imbalance, resulting in these people starting to shut down, wanting to be

by themselves, hiding from everyone, and either directly or indirectly affecting the community.

- Obsessive thoughts can be thought of as a form of addiction.

Influence of Food and Environment

- Not eating enough country foods can result in feelings of ill health, including weakness, lassitude, tiredness and emotional states or irritability, uncooperativeness, lack of interest in daily events, indifference towards children and generalized depression
- Phases of the moon and tides can accentuate mental health problems in those prone to them, and can bring about bizarre or violent behaviour or drinking binges even among those who don't typically have those problems.

Cultural Value of Looking Forward

- Some people don't seek healing because Inuit were told to never dig back into the past, as it has gone.

Temporary Nature of Most Mental Illness

- Individuals are generally not to be labeled as "mentally ill" but rather described as being in a state of suffering that is potentially healable

There are Inuktitut terms available for various forms of mental illness. Full descriptions of each of these terms are available earlier in this document. These terms, with brief definitions and descriptions, are:

- *Isumaluktuk*: thinking too much; having heavy thoughts; having a lot on one's mind; worried; anxiously preoccupied; difficulty in concentrating; confusion; dysphoric mood. May also describe being depressed, withdrawn, and sometimes more severe mental illness akin to psychosis.
- *Isumakangngituk*: having no mind; not thinking at all; not knowing what's happening around them; doesn't know what they are doing; acting strange; including intellectual disabilities, dementia, psychosis; erratic and bizarre behaviour; violent for no apparent reason. Implied long-term or even permanent state of being.
- *Isumaqatsiangutuq*: losing one's mind; having a mental illness. Implied long-term or even permanent state of being.
- *Qitsatuq, quvarpuq/kavarpuq*: depression; grief associated with mourning; sometimes with brief manic episodes.
- *Quajimaillituq*: doing foolish things without awareness of it. Attributes include: being hyperactive or agitated; having incoherent or disjointed speech; making loose associations in their thoughts, speech, and other expressions; having paranoid suspicions; engaging in compulsive rituals; avoiding sleep; being aggressive; breaking taboos; may harm themselves and/or others; may report messages from the evil spirits or some other supernatural agent directing them to be wary of others who were going to harm them.
- *Pibloktoq*: English versions of this term are arctic hysteria or kayak-angst. Used to describe the behaviour of "running about wildly and risking life and limb."

Healing Approaches

In Inuktitut, healing is represented by the concept of *mamisarniq*, which has been translated as “to seek healing in one’s life.” In the high Baffin region, the term *aniattiniq* conveys the idea that a person is taking things out of their inner being, revealing what the unresolved issues are.

Different approaches to healing can be used depending on the nature of the mental and emotional distress. More details on each of these are provided earlier in this document.

- For Mental and Emotional Distress from Day-to-Day Life Experiences, such as Loss or Interpersonal Conflict:
 - Talking with a wise and trusted person (counselor)
 - The counselor should help the individual to determine whether the issue is *ajurnarmat*, something that cannot be changed.
 - If the issue cannot be changed, the counselor should encourage the individual to accept the situation and to move on.
 - If something can be done about the situation the counselor might provide advice about how to move forward.
- For Grief or Stress
 - Loved ones can provide silent support for the affected individual(s), showing their concern and understanding.
 - This provides the individual with the space for a release of tensions -- to let their emotions move and express.
 - The individual should understand that they need to bear through the hurt, come to accept the matter, and to continue on.
 - The individual should understand and work toward appreciating gaining new insight for their personal growth and strength by virtue of having overcome grief.
- For Guilt or Regret
 - The individual should confess their guilt or regret to the affected individuals, where appropriate, otherwise to a wise and trusted family member, friend, or other wise and trusted person (counselor)
 - Those hearing the confession should agree to put the issue in the past, to never bring it up again, and to never use it against the person.
 - The process of confession frees a person and allows them to come back into balance. This process is known as *aajiiqatiniiniq*.
- For Hearing Voices
 - When a person hears voices in their head, it is important to talk with others about what the voices are telling them to do. By talking about what the voices are saying, the individual is less likely to believe the voices and less likely to follow any instructions they may be giving.

In addition to the healing approaches for specific categories of mental and emotional distress mentioned above, there are a multitude of efforts and actions that can contribute to a robust healing process for any individual. Most of these efforts and actions are covered in greater detail earlier in this document. All elements from the earlier section on contemporary Inuit healing approaches have been carried forward into this section except for “Traditional Ceremonies”, since this may not be compatible with the belief systems of all contemporary Inuit.

These efforts and actions have been grouped into themes for ease of understanding the major components of a healing process, and to begin creating an organized structure for this content so that it can be transformed into a training curriculum. I acknowledge that this content could be organized differently; the current presentation is only one way of presenting it.

- Emotional Expression / Self-Expression
 - Accessing Safe and Supportive Environments
 - Talking Confidentially and Directly about One's Issues and Traumas
 - Participating in Talking/Healing Circles
 - Drumming
 - Healing Gatherings and Support Groups in All Communities
- Emotional Education / Introspection / Self-Reflection
 - Understanding Cause of One's Mental Health Challenges
 - Identifying Solutions for One's Mental Health Challenges
 - Learning about Intergenerational Trauma
 - Learning about Emotional, Behavioural and Interpersonal Topics, including:
 - Abuse
 - Addictions
 - Anger
 - Betrayal
 - Emotions/Feelings, including coping and management skills
 - Family violence
 - Reconciliation
 - Rejection
 - Relationships and families
 - Relapse prevention
 - Self-care, including making a self-care plan
 - Self-inflicted pain/self-harm
 - Transition back to home and community, where applicable
 - Trust
 - Violence
- Empowerment / Skill-Building / Developing Self-Mastery
 - Developing Positive Thinking
 - Learning Grieving Skills and Having Grieving Opportunities
 - Shifting from "Victim Mentality" to "Empowerment" Mentality
 - Building Self-Esteem
 - Seeing Healing as a Voyage of Self-Discovery
 - Demanding Change of Oneself
 - Setting Goals
 - Not taking Ownership of Other People's Problems
 - Taking the approach of "heal yourself first, before focusing on others"
- Strengthening Identity
 - Eating Country Food
 - Being Out on the Land

- Developing Traditional Skills
- Learning Inuktut
- Learning about Inuit History and Traditional Knowledge
- Improving Bonds with Family and Kin
 - Forgiving
 - Developing Communication Skills
- Accessing Wisdom / Support
 - Accessing wisdom from a trusted source
 - Getting Help in Decision-Making
 - Learning through Stories, Analogies and Metaphors
- Healing Trauma
 - Depersonalizing Painful Experiences
- Recreation

These healing approaches should be considered in conjunction with the earlier section on “Elements Supportive of Mental Well-Being”. Since mental health is often largely a result of one’s past and present environment, optimal healing means not only engaging in active healing, but also attending to elements that are supportive of mental well-being. In many cases, the elements and approaches from these two areas overlap with each other; in other words, they are often describing the same thing in different ways.

“We must take back our ways of healing. Although healing wasn’t part of our vocabulary, we had means of ensuring we lead healthy lives.”

- Inungni Sapujjijit Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Community Healing, 2003

Our well-being is a reflection of the well-being of our environment: it has been said that we cannot heal in a sick environment. One way of thinking about the interrelationship of these two categories is this: when we are deprived of the elements that are supportive of mental well-being, we are likely to experience diminished mental health. Conversely, restoring elements that are supportive of mental well-being contributes to the restoration of mental well-being; in other words, it generates healing. As such, the development of any comprehensive healing system or training program should take into consideration all of these elements and approaches.