WHO IS AN INDIGENOUS ELDER?

Due to low life expectancy, an Indigenous Elder (senior) is any person 55 years of age and older.

The term "Elder" may:
- mean frail elderly
- simply mean old
- signify wisdom and experience and/or spiritual knowledge, regardless of age

Traditionally Indigenous Elders are those people, usually older, who are recognized by the community as possessing great wisdom. Elders are called upon to act in the role of “Teacher” to advise or act on important family and community matters.

By 2016, it is estimated that the number of Canadian Indigenous people aged 65 and older will triple and those aged 35-64 will double, with many likely to suffer chronic illnesses. Indigenous Elders have the lowest life expectancy of all groups in Canada.

A FEW SOURCES

Anishnawbe Mushkiki
29 Royston Court
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7A 4Y7
(807)343-4819
http://www.anishnawbe-mushkiki.org/

Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
219 Front Street East
Toronto, Ontario M5A 1E8
Toll free: 1 800 772 9291
http://www.ofifc.org

Health Canada
First Nations, Inuit & Aboriginal Health
180 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5V 3L7
Toll free: 1 866 999 7612

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:
AN OVERVIEW

“After more than a century of well-funded dominance by bio-medicine of the institutions of health and healing in our societies, the western world is now beginning to evaluate the potential contributions of other approaches. Traditional medicine and healing practices are a source of ideas that may ultimately benefit not just Aboriginal peoples, but all peoples (INAC, 1996).”
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF ONTARIO

Ontario has 127 First Nations, a sizeable urban population, and many Aboriginal settlement areas (communities without reserve lands or First Nation status).

Most First Nations are affiliated with a Political Treaty Organizations such as:

- Grand Council Treaty No. 3
- Nishnawbe-Aski Nation
- Anishinabek Nation
- Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI).

Treaties That Exist Within Ontario Are:

- Robinson Superior, 1850
- Robinson Huron, 1850
- Treaty 3, 1875
- Treaty 5, 1875 with adhesions in 1910
- James Bay Treaty 9, 1905
- Williams Treaties, 1923

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Since time immemorial Indigenous people have lived within an elaborate holistic healthcare system. They strive for spiritual well-being and balance in everyday life by living in harmony with the environment. Traditional medicine healers have unique skill sets while all relying on medicines provided from Mother Earth. Illness is seen as an opportunity to grow and enhance one’s self-awareness.

Initial European Contact:

- 1829 the entire Beothuk First Nations in Newfoundland was wiped out
- Settlers often gave blankets infested with smallpox to Indigenous peoples
- The Indian Act of 1876 assumed control over Indigenous peoples’ affairs; forcing people onto reserves until the early 1900s
- Indigenous holistic healthcare system is undermined
- Europeans imposed laws and values through the church, police and trading companies
- Banning of traditional institutions (i.e. Potlatch ceremonies; Sundance ceremonies; language)
- Since 1876, the Indian Act has defined who is a “Indian” and administered health care services to people living on reserves

EOLVING TERMS

Post European contact brought many changes to Indigenous people. Confusion of terms is due to evolving bureaucratic terminology related to Indigenous peoples as defined by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, such as:

- Indian: one of three groups of people recognized as Aboriginal in the Constitution Act, 1982.
- Status Indian: a person who is registered as an Indian under the criteria of the Indian Act, 1876
- Non-status Indian: a non-registered Indian
- Aboriginal Peoples: descendants of the original inhabitants of North America (Indians, Métis, and Inuit)
- First Nation: replaced the widely perceived offensive term “Indian.” No legal definition of this term exists.
- Indigenous peoples is the preferred term describing people who adopt community values associated with the land.

We can never lose our way of life. We cannot let it go.
We have to stand up for our way of life. All of us.
Elder Madeline Davis (November, 1992)