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At the Kamulamun (heart) of Wellbeing for Mi'kmaw Women

BACKGROUND: Indigenous women are significantly affected by heart disease, experiencing a 53% higher mortality rate than non-Indigenous women. This is significant because cardiovascular disease (CVD) has been declining in Canada but Indigenous women continue to be disproportionately impacted. The Western biomedical model of health has been at the core of interventions within the dominant society and have not resulted in better health outcomes for Indigenous women. There is currently no research that focuses on the experience of Mi'kmaw women and their understanding of heart health and wellbeing. Understanding the cultural and gendered experiences of Mi'kmaw women is crucial.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Inquire into the experiences of Mi'kmaw women regarding the meaning of heart in relation to health and wellbeing 2) Co-conceptualize meaningful and sustainable interventions focused on heart health and wellbeing that are grounded in the knowledge and experiences of women and their communities.

OVERVIEW: As a Mi'kmaw woman of Newfoundland I am guided by my values for multiple worldviews and ways of knowing which are grounded in Mi'kmaq knowledge systems and understanding of relations. This has shaped my methodological approach which is an Indigenous research methodology grounded in community (Mi'kmaq) knowledge while using the principles of community based participatory design and utilizing storyworks of Joann Archibald. Building on my relationship with community, I will further strengthen the involvement of Elders, community leaders, families, and women within the research. My methodological approach is grounded in ceremony and reflects the unique worldviews and knowledge held by Mi'kmaq communities.

RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS: Gathering information from Mi'kmaw women I hope to provide information to push for interventions grounded in Indigenous knowledge, which is critical to the relevance and meaningfulness of care and holds the possibilities to address current health inequities by designing new pathways to health and well-being for and with Indigenous peoples.