

# Stamsh Sihanay Lhawat: Warrior Women Healing

## The importance of culture and ceremony in infectious disease care with Indigenous women

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### Background

The purpose of this study is to:

- Observe how Indigenous women living in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver maintain wellness
- Recognize that Indigenous women are traditionally the matriarchs and healers in their communities
- Identify structural barriers that hinder Indigenous women's ability to experience wellness through land-based cultural practices
- Implement a Two-eyed Seeing approach: using an Indigenous lens and Western lens to conduct research

Indigenous women in urban communities remain over-represented among people involved in substance use and living with infectious diseases. Fentanyl and its analogues have claimed the lives of numerous women in the DTES. **We want to acknowledge the three women who passed away during the study. Two of these women died from fentanyl overdose.**

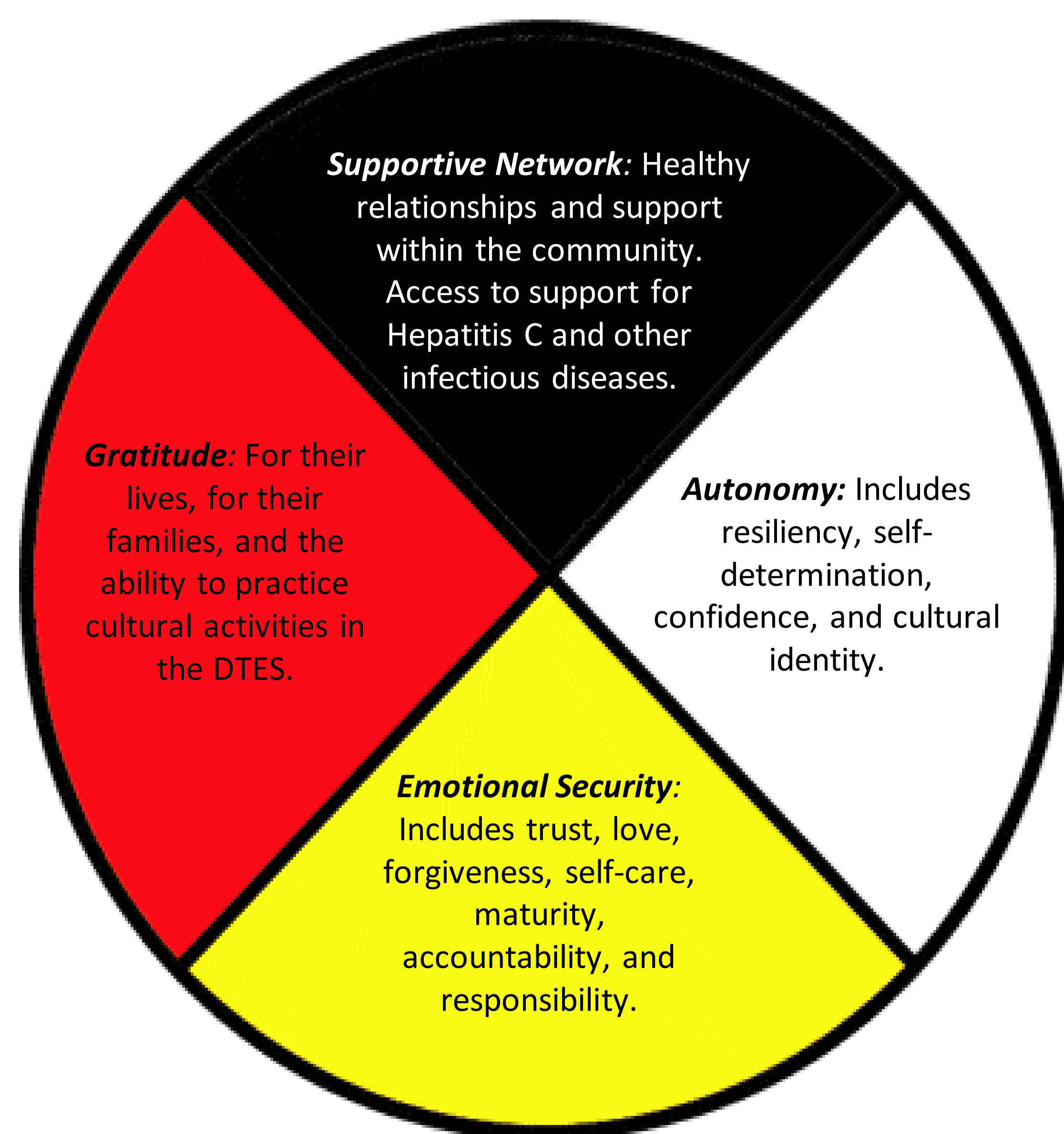
### Objectives

- 1) Involve Indigenous women in the development of wellness programming: which includes land-based healing strategies for disease prevention and intervention in urban settings
- 2) Integrate Indigenous methodologies into western models of research through collaboration between Indigenous community-based researchers and academic researchers.
- 3) Indigenous women will continue to connect with the land through ceremony, and learn, teach, and participate in traditional healing activities

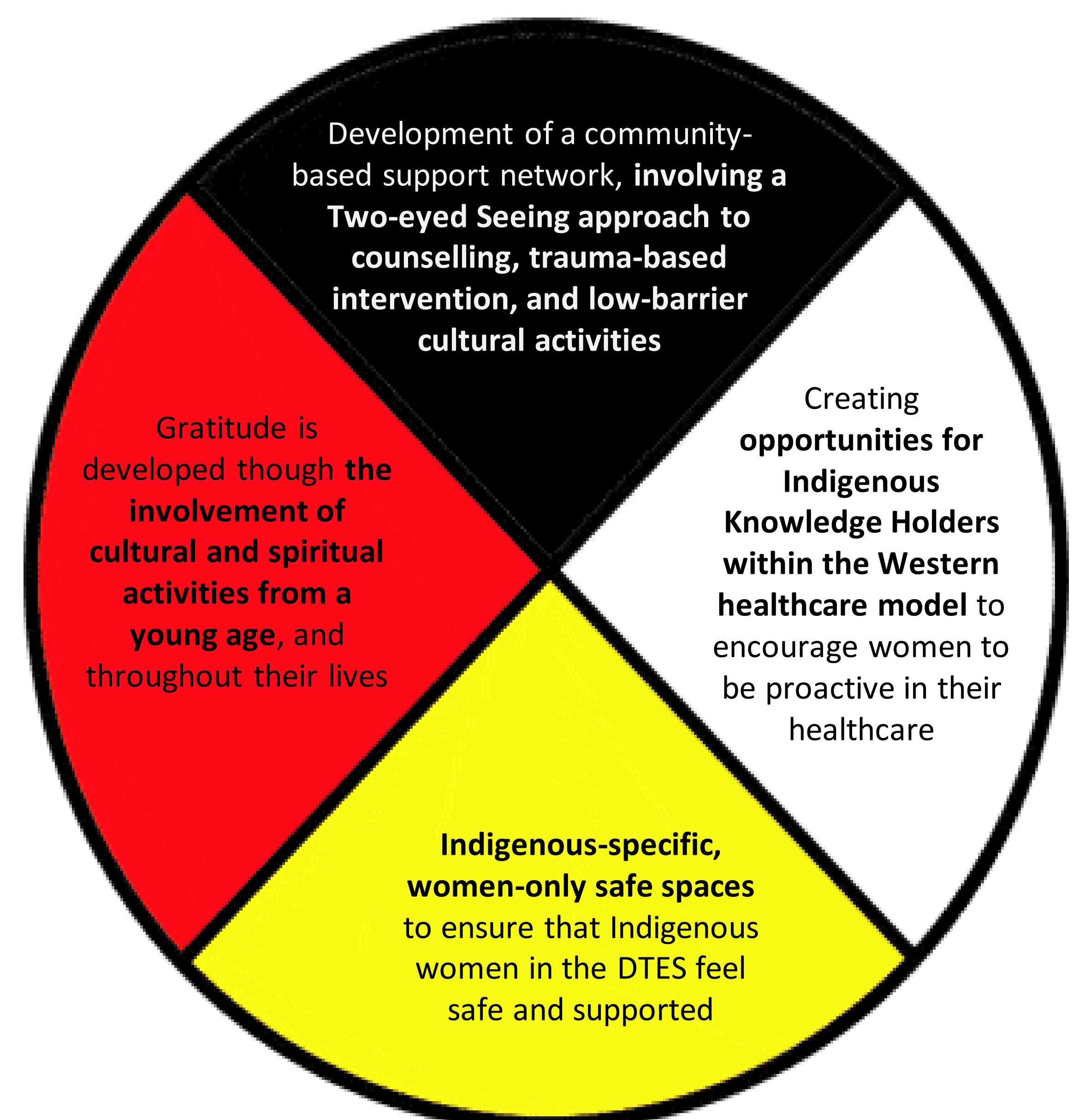
**The project included a cohort of Indigenous women (n=23) from Vancouver, BC**

- 17% were living with HCV
- 69% actively or formerly engaged in substance use
- 17% were in recovery from substance use
- 60% were engaged with suboxone or methadone treatment

### What Indigenous women need for their wellness:



### Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing:



### Core activities

- **Sequential sharing circles:** four sets of four, which supported richer, deeper sharing (n=23 women)
- **Cultural activities:** preparing ceremonial berries, sharing circles, drumming, singing
- **Land-based cultural retreat** (n=8) strengthening their cultural identity and them as a community
- **Validation session:** following coding and analysis, we hosted a sharing circle (n=12) to present our findings to the participating women for their feedback.

### Barriers to achieving wellness

- **Stigma** associated with infectious diseases
- **Indigenous women's voices were not heard** when discussing health services for Indigenous women
- **Abandonment issues** linked to adoption, foster care and residential schools
- **The loss of cultural identity** resulted in low self worth, and little incentive to seek out wellness
- the **psychological effects** and **the environment** of the DTES made it difficult for many to break free from substance use