

College of Dentistry Report

Phase 4 ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan: The Gift Past, Present, and Future

The College of Dentistry at the University of Saskatchewan is committed to advancing Indigenization, Decolonization and Reconciliation (IDR) across oral health education, research, service, and community engagement. Our work leading into and through the University's Indigenous strategy, ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan ("let's fly up together"), has been guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, ongoing relationship-building with Indigenous communities, and collaboration with the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement (OVPIE). Through these relationships and commitments, the College recognizes its shared responsibility to address historical and ongoing inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples within oral health education systems and access to care. The College understands equity not as a separate objective, but as an outcome realized through meaningful engagement with the principles and practices of IDR embodied within ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan.

This report has been developed within the framework of ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan and highlights current initiatives, programs, partnerships, and relationship-centred approaches that contribute to the realization of the strategy's commitments within the College of Dentistry. These efforts include supporting Indigenous students, enabling culturally safe and inclusive learning environments, strengthening respectful and reciprocal community partnerships, and improving access to oral health services for Indigenous communities. Collectively, this work reflects the college's ongoing commitment to advancing IDR through education, collaboration, community engagement and inclusive, culturally responsive oral health care.

Land Acknowledgement

Respect for Indigenous lands, histories, languages, and relationships is foundational to reconciliation and integral to the College of Dentistry's academic, clinical, and community practices. In alignment with the spirit and commitments of ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan, the college recognizes that meaningful reconciliation requires an ongoing relationship with the land, with Indigenous peoples, and with the histories and responsibilities connected to the places where we learn, teach, provide care, and build community. This understanding informs the College's approach to education, engagement, and relationship-centred oral health practice, grounding our work within the broader commitments of IDR.

Guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and the University's Indigenous engagement commitments, the College understands land acknowledgement not as a symbolic exercise, but as part of an ongoing practice of reflection, accountability, and respectful relationship-building. During public speaking engagements and events, the College of Dentistry includes the University of Saskatchewan-approved land acknowledgement:

"As we gather here today, we acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another."

The land acknowledgement is also included in the course syllabi for all College of Dentistry programs, reinforcing its role as a continual reminder of our responsibilities to the land, to Indigenous communities, and to advancing respectful and reciprocal relationships through education, service and care.

Admissions and Recruitment

Supporting Indigenous student access and success is a critical component of IDR in health professional education. The College of Dentistry recognizes that historical, financial, and systemic barriers have limited Indigenous participation in oral health professions and has implemented targeted admissions and recruitment strategies to address these inequities.

The College reserves 17% of seats for applicants of Indigenous membership in the Certificate in Dental Assisting, Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene, Doctor of Dental Medicine programs as well as in our MSc and PhD graduate programs. In the Bachelor of Science in Dental Therapy program, preference is given to Indigenous applicants for all available seats.

Recruitment and retention efforts include active participation in University of Saskatchewan initiatives such as the Indigenous Student Experience Days and New Indigenous Student Welcome Mini Expo, supporting engagement with both prospective and newly admitted Indigenous students.

Verification of Indigenous membership or citizenship follows the *deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin*: Indigenous Truth Policy. The Admissions Office works closely with the policy's Standing Committee to ensure respectful, transparent, and appropriate verification processes and equitable allocation of designated seats.

Collectively, these measures promote equitable access, strengthen Indigenous representation in oral health professions, and support student retention and success in our academic programs.

Dental Therapy Program

The Dental Therapy program provides a strong example of the College's commitment to IDR through community-engaged, culturally responsive oral health education. It is designed in direct response to disparities in oral health access experienced by Indigenous and northern communities. By prioritizing community-based education and culturally responsive care models, the program supports Indigenous self-determination in health service delivery.

The program was established to prepare mid-level oral health professionals to serve Indigenous populations across Saskatchewan and Canada. It is jointly delivered through collaboration between the College of Dentistry, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Northlands College, and the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA). Unlike traditional three-year Bachelor of Science programs at the University of Saskatchewan, the Dental Therapy curriculum integrates Spring/Summer terms as a third academic term each year, enabling completion of six academic terms within two calendar years.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous applicants are eligible for admission; however, priority is given to Indigenous, agency-sponsored applicants who meet admission requirements. The

admission model is intentionally structured to reduce barriers for Indigenous students and enable graduates to return to their communities as oral health providers and role models.

Central to the program's success is the integration of Elders' knowledge and lived experience into curriculum and student support. They contribute significantly to cultural safety education by providing mental, spiritual, social, and cultural support to students. Activities include opportunities for reflection, smudging ceremonies, and sweat lodge participation. These teachings support the development of trauma-informed, culturally responsive care practices and contribute meaningfully to student learning and reconciliation outcomes.

College Initiatives and Courses

Reconciliation within the College of Dentistry is embedded across curricula, co-curricular learning, and student supports. Programs and courses are designed to enhance understanding of Indigenous histories, promote cultural safety, and prepare graduates to provide respectful, relationship-centred care.

Overarching initiatives: All College of Dentistry students are required to complete the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation online course, a professional development program addressing Indigenous history, social justice, healing, equality, and reconciliation in Canada. The course consists of ten modules completed over a two-month period. Faculty members are also encouraged to participate. All programs at the College of Dentistry encourage student participation in programming offered through the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre. Students attending these activities are not penalized for lateness or absence, reinforcing institutional support for cultural engagement and connection. Additionally, The College also hosts monthly Coffee with the Dean sessions, with Indigenous Achievement Week events highlighting Indigenous leadership, accomplishment, and community contributions.

Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) Program: Principles of cultural safety, culturally congruent communication, and trauma-informed care are deeply embedded across all years of training, spanning both pre-clinical and clinical education. These competencies are introduced and reinforced through core courses such as Principles and Practice of Dentistry and Communication Skills I and II and are further integrated into clinical teaching and patient care. Emphasis is placed on dentistry's social responsibility, encouraging students to consider the social determinants of health and the root causes underlying patients' presenting conditions, rather than focusing solely on clinical symptoms. This approach is particularly critical when serving Indigenous patients and communities, where historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, systemic racism, and intergenerational trauma may shape health experiences, trust in care providers, and access to services. By grounding clinical education in cultural humility and relationship-centred practice, the DMD program prepares graduates to provide respectful, equitable, and responsive oral health care that supports reconciliation and improves health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Dental Therapy program: Reconciliation initiatives within the Dental Therapy curriculum continue to expand (see description above), with instruction informed by Elders from NITHA and Northlands College. These teachings address mistrust of oral healthcare resulting from physical and psychological trauma and support competency development in trauma-informed practice.

Dental Hygiene program: The Indigenous Health and Wellness course in the Dental Hygiene program provides a foundational understanding of Indigenous perspectives on health and wellness while exploring oral and systemic health disparities affecting Indigenous populations. Through reflective, experiential, and collaborative learning, students develop cultural humility and reconciliation-aligned competencies. Key learning activities include:

- a) Land Acknowledgement Video and Reflection – Students create and reflect on a personal land acknowledgement, demonstrating respectful research and delivery.
- b) Sharing Circle Participation and Reflection – Engagement in an Indigenous Sharing Circle, emphasizing respectful participation and active listening.
- c) Truth and Reconciliation Photo Reflection – Exploration of Indigenous experiences and shared history through visual storytelling.
- d) Indigenous Health Disparities Mind Mapping Project – A team-based project examining interconnected factors contributing to oral health disparities and potential solutions.
- e) Ten reflective writing assignments focused on reconciliation and cultural safety.

Student feedback in this course consistently reflects the course's transformative impact:

“Because this instructor leveraged materials provided by Indigenous people, I felt far more informed and aware of Indigenous racism as it relates to dentistry.”

“This learning experience changed how I approach patient care.”

“The course was meaningful and engaging, encouraging critical thinking and personal reflection.”

Dental Assisting program: Within the Dental Assisting curriculum, students are introduced to Jordan's Principle and its role in ensuring equitable access to services and care for First Nations children. This awareness prepares students to contribute to respectful, inclusive, and equitable environments in future clinical roles.

Interprofessional Education (IPE) Focused on Reconciliation

The College of Dentistry contributes to university-wide reconciliation efforts through IPE that brings together students across health disciplines. The IPE SITE (Skills for Interprofessional Team Effectiveness) event titled Reconciliation in Action focuses on early childhood caries in northern Saskatchewan. It was developed collaboratively with the USask Health Sciences IPE Team following extensive consultation with representatives from all Health Sciences programs, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Northern Medical Services, the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching, and the Learning Indigenous Voices team. The SITE has four primary aims:

- a) To actively integrate oral health into overall health discussions
- b) To support learning grounded in reconciliation principles
- c) To foster skills and attitudes aligned with relationship-centred care
- d) To apply upstream, root-cause analysis to health inequity scenarios

Each year, approximately 600–700 students from programs including Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Public Health, and Kinesiology participate. Continuous quality improvement informed by student feedback has resulted in increased registration and consistently positive evaluations. Most of our programs- Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD), International Dental Degree Program (IDDP), Dental Assisting, Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy, participate in this IPE learning activity.

Research

The College of Dentistry also demonstrates its commitment to reconciliation through research conducted in respectful partnership with Indigenous communities. Several faculty members are actively engaged in community-based and public health–focused research projects that are co-designed and, in many cases, co-led by Indigenous partners. These initiatives prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing and emphasize shared governance, mutual benefit, and ethical research practices grounded in trust and long-term relationship building. Research activities focus on addressing longstanding oral health and broader public health disparities in northern and remote communities, including access to care, preventive services, workforce models, and the social and structural determinants that influence oral health outcomes. By taking a community-engaged approach, this research moves beyond deficit-based frameworks and instead supports Indigenous-identified priorities, builds local capacity, and generates actionable knowledge to inform policy, education, and service delivery. Through these partnerships, the College contributes to innovative, sustainable solutions that advance oral health equity and support Indigenous self-determination in health research and practice.

Outreach Clinics

Community-based outreach dental clinics are a primary mechanism through which the College of Dentistry translates reconciliation commitments into day-to-day action. The College currently supports dental services in Red Earth Cree Nation, Shoal Lake Cree Nation, Big River First Nation and Pediatric OR services at Nipawin Hospital. These clinics operate year-round with schedules tailored to community needs, provider availability, and logistical considerations. They deliver essential oral health services to underserved rural and remote communities across Saskatchewan, addressing long-standing inequities in access to care.

This work supports the College’s strategic goal of becoming Canada’s leader in inclusive community care, addressing systemic inequities and improving oral health outcomes for priority populations. Barriers such as geographic isolation, limited transportation, financial constraints, workforce shortages, and the enduring impacts of colonial policies often prevent community members from receiving timely dental care. By delivering services directly within communities, outreach clinics reduce travel burdens and provide care in culturally safe, familiar settings. Strong partnerships with local leadership and service providers are foundational to clinic sustainability and success.

Indigenous Student Awards

Recognizing and celebrating Indigenous student achievement is an important element of enhancing belonging, visibility, and success within the College of Dentistry.

Awards include:

- a) An award for graduating Indigenous Dental Assisting students recognizing academic achievement, community involvement, and cultural integration in professional practice.
- b) The annual Indigenous Student Achievement Award, honouring excellence in academics, leadership, community engagement, research, and resiliency.

Student Practicums

Community-based practicums are designed to provide students with experiential learning opportunities, where they can reinforce cultural safety, relationship-building, and community-responsive care in real world environments with diverse clientele. Currently, Dental Assisting students complete community placements in variety of urban, rural and remote settings. Dental Therapy practicums introduce students to community-based practice environments, enhancing clinical efficiency and culturally safe care delivery. Examples of practicum locations include Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Big River First Nation, George Gordon First Nation, and Inuvik, Northwest Territories

Future Directions and Ongoing Commitments

The College of Dentistry views reconciliation as an ongoing responsibility requiring sustained reflection, meaningful collaboration, and purposeful action. As programs and partnerships continue to evolve, the college is committed to deepening relationships with Indigenous-led communities, organizations, and educational institutions to advance oral health equity and support Indigenous self-determination in health and education.

The College also recognizes that establishing and sustaining dental outreach clinics in under-resourced areas and communities presents significant challenges. In the past, the College has undertaken the responsibility of delivering care despite limited infrastructure, workforce shortages, and logistical complexities. Experience has shown, however, that without coordinated, collective support from community leadership and partner organizations, such efforts are not sustainable over the long term.

Our future efforts will focus on expanding Indigenous partnerships across all programs, strengthening collaboration on curriculum and experiential learning, and further embedding Indigenous perspectives into teaching, outreach, and student support initiatives. Ongoing evaluation, guided by Indigenous partners and student feedback, will ensure IDR remains meaningfully integrated into the College's educational mission, community engagement, and service delivery.

The initiatives outlined in this report collectively reflect the College of Dentistry's ongoing realization of the University of Saskatchewan Indigenous strategy, *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan* ("let's fly up together"), through intentional, relational, and sustained action across education, research, service, and community engagement. Through this work, the college seeks to embody the Seven Fundamental Commitments of *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan*. Safety is advanced by embedding cultural safety and trauma-informed practices throughout curricula, clinical training, and outreach services, creating environments where Indigenous students, patients, and communities feel respected and supported. Wellness is reflected in a holistic approach to oral health education and care that recognizes the interconnected physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions of health. Stewardship is demonstrated through respectful acknowledgment of land, ethical community-engaged research, and responsible partnerships that honour Indigenous knowledge and shared obligations to people and place. Representation is strengthened through Indigenous admissions pathways, Elders involvement, student recognition, and the inclusion of Indigenous voices in teaching, learning, and research. Right relations continue to guide the college's approach to community engagement through reciprocal, long-term, relationships with Indigenous communities built on trust, accountability, listening, and shared decision-making

particularly in clinical outreach and research initiatives. Creation is supported through innovative, co-designed education, service delivery, and research models rooted in Indigenous priorities and ways of knowing. Finally, Renewal is reflected in the College's recognition that realizing ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan requires continuous reflection, humility, learning, and action to transform systems, strengthen relationships, and improve oral health and educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples and communities now and into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Walter Siqueira". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Walter" and last name "Siqueira" clearly distinguishable.

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