



INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUITY PLAN



Victoria Gardens is located in the City of Hamilton, which is situated upon the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase, 1792, between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Today, the City of Hamilton is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island (North America) and we recognize that we must do more to learn about the rich history of this land so that we can better understand our roles as residents, neighbours, partners, and caretakers.

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PURPOSE

Victoria Gardens Long-Term Care is committed to providing equitable, culturally safe, trauma-informed, and person-centred care for all residents. The purpose of this Indigenous Health Equity Plan is to establish a framework that recognizes the unique health experiences of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Urban Indigenous Peoples, while ensuring that Indigenous residents and their families receive respectful, inclusive, and culturally safe care.

This plan acknowledges that historical and ongoing colonial policies, systemic racism, and discrimination have contributed to the significant health inequities experienced by Indigenous Peoples. In response, Victoria Gardens will embed Indigenous health equity principles into all aspects of resident care, organizational culture, quality improvement, and decision-making to help address these inequities.

Through this plan, Victoria Gardens affirms its commitment to reconciliation by taking meaningful, sustained action that supports equitable health outcomes and fosters culturally safe, respectful relationships with Indigenous residents, families, communities, and partners.

SCOPE

This Indigenous Health Equity Plan applies to all staff, service providers, students, volunteers, management, residents, families, and substitute decision-makers. The principles contained within this plan shall be incorporated into all programs, policies, procedures, quality improvement initiatives, and resident care practices throughout Victoria Gardens.

POLICY STATEMENT

Victoria Gardens recognizes First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Urban Indigenous Peoples as distinct Peoples with unique histories, cultures, languages, traditions, and rights. We acknowledge that many Indigenous residents may have experienced the impacts of colonialism, including intergenerational trauma, residential schools, forced displacement, systemic racism, discrimination, and barriers to accessing health care.

Victoria Gardens is committed to creating a culturally safe and welcoming environment where Indigenous residents are treated with dignity and respect, have equitable access to high-quality care, are supported in practicing their cultural and spiritual traditions, can access traditional healing practices when requested, and are active partners in decisions about their care.

We recognize that reconciliation is an ongoing journey that requires meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities, continuous learning, and regular reflection on our policies, practices, and organizational culture.

BACKGROUND

Victoria Gardens recognizes that Indigenous Peoples continue to experience poorer health outcomes than the general Canadian population due to the lasting impacts of colonization, racism, inequitable access to health care, and the social determinants of health. These inequities are not the result of individual choices but of systemic barriers that continue to affect access, trust, and health outcomes. Victoria Gardens accepts its responsibility to foster reconciliation by providing culturally safe, trauma-informed, and equitable care.

Victoria Gardens is committed to:

- Promoting Indigenous health equity throughout the Home
- Recognizing and addressing Indigenous-specific racism
- Providing culturally safe and trauma-informed care
- Respecting Indigenous identities, cultures, traditions, and knowledge systems
- Recognizing traditional healing practices as valuable components of holistic wellness
- Supporting Indigenous residents in maintaining cultural, spiritual, and family connections
- Working collaboratively with Indigenous organizations and community partners
- Continually evaluating and improving Indigenous health outcomes through quality improvement initiatives

Victoria Gardens has four objectives to achieve over the next three years:

Objective 1: Provide culturally safe care for every Indigenous resident. 100% of Indigenous residents who choose to disclose their identity will have documented cultural preferences incorporated into their care plan.

Objective 2: Maintain staff knowledge and confidence. 100% of staff shall complete Indigenous Cultural Safety education annually. 100% of new employees shall complete orientation education within 30 days of hire.

Objective 3: Support traditional healing practices. Residents requesting smudging, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, traditional medicines, ceremony, or spiritual support will be accommodated whenever possible and this shall be documented within their care plan.

Objective 4: Promote continuous quality improvement. An annual review of Indigenous Health Equity indicators will be completed by the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee with recommendations incorporated into the following year's operational plan.

VISION

Victoria Gardens envisions a long-term care home where Indigenous residents experience equitable access to high-quality, culturally safe, trauma-informed, and person-centred care that honours their identities, cultures, traditions, languages, spiritual beliefs, and lived experiences. The Home strives to create an environment where Indigenous residents and their families feel respected, welcomed, heard, and empowered to participate fully in decisions regarding their care. Through meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities and a commitment to continuous learning, Victoria Gardens will contribute to reconciliation by eliminating barriers to care and advancing health equity.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles guide all decisions, policies, and practices relating to Indigenous health equity at Victoria Gardens.

Respect: Victoria Gardens recognizes and respects the diversity of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Urban Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge that each resident's experiences, beliefs, traditions, and cultural practices are unique and must never be assumed based on identity alone. Residents will determine the degree to which they wish to participate in cultural or traditional practices.

Cultural Safety: Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness or cultural competence. Victoria Gardens recognizes that culturally safe care is determined by the resident, not the care provider. Employees will reflect on personal beliefs and biases, recognize power imbalances, provide respectful care, avoid assumptions, encourage resident choice, and seek to understand rather than judge.

Cultural Humility: Staff are expected to approach every interaction with curiosity, openness, and lifelong learning. Rather than becoming experts on Indigenous culture, employees are expected to continually reflect on their own perspectives while recognizing Indigenous residents as experts in their own experiences.

Equity: Victoria Gardens recognizes that treating everyone the same does not always result in equitable outcomes. Health equity means providing support based on individual need rather than identical services. Examples may include access to traditional healing, culturally appropriate meals, Indigenous spiritual supports, family participation beyond traditional definitions, accommodation of ceremonies, and flexibility in care planning.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation requires meaningful action. Victoria Gardens commits to building respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through collaboration, transparency, accountability, and shared decision-making. The Home recognizes reconciliation as an ongoing journey requiring continual evaluation and improvement.

Trauma-Informed Care: Many Indigenous residents have experienced personal, family, or intergenerational trauma. Staff will provide care that promotes emotional safety, minimizes re-traumatization, respects resident choice, supports trust, encourages collaboration, and recognizes resilience and strengths.

Person-Centred Care: Residents remain the experts in their own lives. Care decisions shall reflect resident goals, personal values, cultural identity, family preferences, spiritual beliefs, language preferences, and traditional wellness practices.

INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Victoria Gardens will integrate Indigenous health equity into all organizational practices through five strategic priorities.

Strategic Priority 1: Culturally Safe Care

- Provide health services that recognize Indigenous histories, cultures, identities, and experiences while eliminating barriers created by racism or discrimination.
- This includes culturally appropriate communication, resident-directed care planning, culturally appropriate programming, traditional healing supports, and respect for spiritual beliefs.

Strategic Priority 2: Workforce Development

- Develop a knowledgeable workforce capable of providing culturally safe care.
- The Home will provide mandatory education, encourage ongoing learning, promote reflective practice, address discriminatory behaviours, and evaluate learning outcomes.

Strategic Priority 3: Community Partnerships

- Victoria Gardens recognizes Indigenous organizations as equal partners in improving resident health outcomes. The Home will establish respectful relationships that support education, consultation, traditional healing, cultural programming, and quality improvement.

Strategic Priority 4: Resident and Family Engagement

- Residents and families will participate in planning, evaluating, and improving Indigenous health initiatives.
- Victoria Gardens will encourage resident feedback and support culturally appropriate family involvement.
- Recognizing that Indigenous concepts of family may extend beyond biological relationships, residents will determine who they identify as family and who they wish to participate in their care.

Strategic Priority 5: Continuous Quality Improvement

- Health equity will become part of Victoria Gardens' Quality Improvement Program.
- Quality indicators will be monitored, reviewed, and reported annually.
- Results will be used to improve services, education, policies, and partnerships.

UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS HEALTH INEQUITIES

Victoria Gardens recognizes that health inequities experienced by Indigenous Peoples result from historical and ongoing systemic factors rather than individual choices. These factors include, but are not limited to, colonization, residential schools, forced displacement, systemic racism, discrimination within health care, loss of language, loss of culture, historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, barriers to education, poverty, inadequate housing, food insecurity, and reduced access to culturally appropriate health services. Employees are expected to understand these realities to provide compassionate, equitable, and respectful care.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF INDIGENOUS HEALTH

Victoria Gardens acknowledges that health is influenced by social, economic, environmental, cultural, and historical factors. Important determinants include income, education, employment, housing, food security, access to health care, social inclusion, language, culture, connection to community, spirituality, experiences of racism, access to transportation, geographic location, historical, and intergenerational trauma. Recognizing these determinants enables staff to better understand residents' lived experiences and reduce assumptions regarding health outcomes.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Victoria Gardens commits to integrating Indigenous health equity into all organizational systems by embedding equity into policies and procedures, incorporating Indigenous health considerations into strategic planning, and including Indigenous health equity in the annual Quality Improvement Plan. Policies will be reviewed through an equity lens, and Indigenous partners will be consulted when developing programs that may affect Indigenous residents. Where appropriate and with consent, feedback from Indigenous residents and families will be collected to guide improvements. The Home will also support staff in identifying and addressing barriers to culturally safe care, and will evaluate progress annually to identify ongoing opportunities for improvement.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Victoria Gardens recognizes that meaningful land acknowledgements are one part of reconciliation and must be accompanied by meaningful action. The Victoria Gardens Land Acknowledgement will be displayed in prominent areas throughout the Home, published on the Home's website, and shared at Resident Council, Family Council, and other meetings, as appropriate. It will be reviewed periodically in collaboration with Indigenous community partners to ensure it remains respectful and accurate. Staff will also be encouraged to learn about its history and purpose so it reflects a genuine commitment rather than a scripted statement.

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RESIDENT ASSESSMENT AND CARE PLANNING

Victoria Gardens is committed to providing culturally safe, individualized care that begins at admission and continues thereafter. Residents shall be respectfully offered the opportunity to self-identify as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or another Indigenous identity. Self-identification is voluntary, and residents may choose to disclose this information without fear of discrimination or impact on the care they receive. When a resident chooses to self-identify, staff will respectfully discuss and document the resident's cultural, spiritual, and wellness preferences in the health record and individualized care plan.

Admission assessments should include a discussion of each resident's preferred name and its pronunciation, preferred language, and communication needs. Residents should also be given the opportunity to share their Nation or community affiliation, if they wish, as well as any spiritual or cultural practices that are important to them. The assessment should identify any traditional healing practices, traditional medicines, ceremonies, or sacred items the resident would like respected or incorporated into their care. It should also include dietary preferences related to culture, family and community support, the involvement of an Elder or Knowledge Keeper, and any cultural preferences for end-of-life care. Residents have the right to revise or update these preferences at any time to ensure their care continues to reflect their values, beliefs, and wishes.

Victoria Gardens recognizes that culturally safe care must be individualized and reflect each resident's preferences, values, beliefs, and lived experiences. Individualized care plans for Indigenous residents who choose to share cultural preferences will incorporate relevant cultural, spiritual, and wellness goals, including traditional healing practices, traditional medicines, ceremonies and cultural observances, dietary and language preferences, family involvement, community supports, involvement of Indigenous organizations in care, and resident goals related to cultural wellness. Care plans will be reviewed on admission, quarterly, following any significant change in condition, and at any time requested by the resident or substitute decision-maker.

See Appendix A - Indigenous Cultural Assessment Questions

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Victoria Gardens recognizes that Indigenous concepts of family may extend beyond biological or legal relationships. Residents will determine who they consider to be family and who they wish to participate in care planning and decision-making. With resident consent, staff will welcome family participation, encourage family presence during significant events, facilitate visits from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or other Indigenous community supports, and respect the cultural protocols identified by the resident.

CULTURAL SAFETY IN DAILY CARE

All staff are responsible for creating an environment that promotes cultural safety. Employees shall introduce themselves respectfully, explain care before providing it, and ask permission whenever appropriate. Staff should also encourage resident choice, avoid assumptions regarding beliefs or traditions, and recognize historical mistrust of healthcare. During resident interactions, staff shall use respectful, person-centred language, maintain privacy and dignity, and encourage questions. When possible, staff should seek to understand the meaning behind cultural practices rather than making assumptions about their purpose.

TRADITIONAL HEALING AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

Victoria Gardens recognizes that traditional healing practices are an important component of wellness for many Indigenous Peoples. Residents requesting traditional healing practices will be supported when reasonably possible and in accordance with applicable legislation, infection prevention practices, fire safety requirements, and clinical considerations. Traditional healing may include prayer, ceremony, smudging, drumming, singing, talking circles, traditional medicines, cultural teachings, or visits from Elders or Knowledge Keepers.

Traditional healing is recognized as complementary to Western biomedical care and should be incorporated into care planning when requested by the resident or substitute decision-maker and where clinically appropriate.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers: Victoria Gardens recognizes the important role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers in supporting spiritual, emotional, cultural, and community wellness. When requested by the resident or substitute decision-maker, the Home will make reasonable efforts to facilitate visits from Elders or Knowledge Keepers. Staff will provide a private meeting space, coordinate visits with the interdisciplinary team, support resident participation, and respect cultural protocols identified by the Elder or resident.

Smudging and Ceremony: Victoria Gardens supports residents who wish to participate in traditional ceremonies. Where appropriate and safe to do so, the Home will provide designated locations for smudging, coordinate with fire safety procedures, ensure ventilation requirements are met, notify affected departments, and support participation by family members and community representatives. Policies related to fire safety shall not unnecessarily restrict cultural practices and will be reviewed to ensure reasonable accommodation when possible.

Traditional Medicines: Residents have the right to discuss the use of traditional medicines with their physician. Victoria Gardens will encourage open discussion regarding traditional medicines, document traditional medicines within the resident's health record, consider potential interactions with prescribed medications, collaborate with the interdisciplinary team, and respect resident choice.

Recreation and Cultural Programming: Victoria Gardens will promote opportunities for Indigenous residents to maintain connections to their culture through meaningful recreation and social engagement. Programming may include music, storytelling, traditional crafts, teachings by Elders, Indigenous literature, Indigenous art displays, seasonal ceremonies or celebrations, and educational presentations. Programming shall be developed in consultation with Indigenous partners, when possible.

FOOD AND NUTRITION

Victoria Gardens recognizes that food is an important part of cultural identity, community, and wellness. The Registered Dietitian and Food Services Manager will work collaboratively with residents and families to accommodate traditional food preferences when possible and in accordance with food safety requirements. Examples may include traditional soups, wild rice, game meats, fish, berries, and teas. Residents and families may bring traditional foods into the Home in accordance with food safety policies.

SPIRITUAL CARE

Victoria Gardens recognizes spirituality as an important component of holistic health. Indigenous residents will be supported in accessing spiritual care that reflects their own beliefs and traditions. Support may include access to Elders, ceremonies, sacred medicines, prayer, sacred objects, and community spiritual leaders. Residents may also choose not to participate in spiritual care, and this decision will be respected.

END-OF-LIFE CARE

Victoria Gardens is committed to providing compassionate, culturally safe palliative and end-of-life care. Care planning will include discussions about the resident's cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial preferences related to death and dying. Where requested, the Home will make reasonable efforts to support cultural, spiritual, ceremonial, and family practices in collaboration with the resident, family, spiritual leaders, and community partners, while ensuring safe and compassionate care.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Victoria Gardens recognizes that meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities are essential to providing culturally safe care and advancing reconciliation. The Home is committed to developing respectful, reciprocal, and sustainable partnerships with local Indigenous organizations, and community leaders. Where appropriate, Victoria Gardens will collaborate with Indigenous partners to provide guidance on culturally safe practices, support resident care planning, facilitate access to traditional healing and wellness services, assist with staff education, provide cultural programming and events, and identify opportunities for quality improvement.

STAFF EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Providing culturally safe care is the responsibility of every employee. All staff, students, and volunteers will receive education appropriate to their role.

Within 30 days of hire, all new employees shall complete education related to cultural safety, anti-racism, and Indigenous Health Equity. This is completed on the Surge Learning online learning platform. In addition, all staff will complete annual refresher education related to anti-racism, updates to Home policies, and cultural safety. This is also completed on the Surge Learning Platform. In-person education sessions shall also be held at the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre on an ongoing basis to provide education by Indigenous leaders.

The management team within the Home will also be assigned to complete additional education related to supporting culturally safe practices, quality improvement related to Indigenous health equity, equity-based leadership, and address discrimination.

RECRUITMENT AND WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Victoria Gardens values a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. The Home will strive to create culturally safe hiring practices, and foster an inclusive workplace free from discrimination and harassment. Employment decisions shall be based on equity, fairness, transparency, and respect.

INDIGENOUS-SPECIFIC RACISM

Victoria Gardens acknowledges that Indigenous-specific racism exists within Canadian society and health care systems and contributes to poor health outcomes. The Home has zero tolerance for racism, discrimination, harassment, or stereotyping directed toward Indigenous residents, families, visitors, employees, students, volunteers, or community members. Employees are expected to recognize discriminatory behaviour, intervene when appropriate, report concerns promptly, support respectful communication, and contribute to a safe environment. Failure to comply with these expectations may result in corrective action in accordance with organizational policies.

REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

Residents, families, employees, volunteers, students, and visitors are encouraged to report concerns related to racism, discrimination, or culturally unsafe care. Victoria Gardens will ensure that concerns are investigated promptly, addressed respectfully, and documented appropriately. Individuals reporting concerns will be protected under the Home's Whistle Blowing policy. Where appropriate, Indigenous community partners may be consulted to assist with learning and improvement.

LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY

The Administrator, Director of Care, and leadership team are responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of this plan. Leadership responsibilities include promoting Indigenous health equity, supporting culturally safe care, monitoring education completion, reviewing quality indicators, supporting staff, removing barriers to culturally safe care, and ensuring organizational accountability.

COMMUNICATION

Victoria Gardens will communicate its commitment to Indigenous Health Equity by making the plan available to residents and families upon request, sharing the plan during orientation, reviewing annual progress reports with staff, Resident Council, Family Council, and the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, and promoting Indigenous awareness throughout the year.

RECOGNITION AND AWARENESS

Victoria Gardens recognizes the importance of celebrating Indigenous cultures and promoting awareness throughout the year. The Home will observe, where appropriate National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21), National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30), and any locally significant Indigenous events and cultural celebrations.

Activities will be planned in collaboration with Indigenous partners, when possible, and may include educational displays, guest speakers, traditional teachings, cultural performances, artwork, and resident engagement opportunities.

DOCUMENTATION STANDARDS

Documentation related to Indigenous cultural preferences shall be objective, respectful, and person-centred. Health records will include, where applicable and with consent, cultural preferences, spiritual practices, traditional healing requests, ceremonies, family participation, traditional medicines, community supports, and any care provided in response to identified preferences. Documentation shall avoid assumptions, stereotypes, or any language that could stigmatize Indigenous residents.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Victoria Gardens will implement this Indigenous Health Equity Plan using the following framework.

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Indicator
Provide culturally safe care	Review the admission process to include voluntary self-identification and cultural preferences.	Director of Care	Within 6 months	Admission documentation updated
Individualized care	Incorporate cultural preferences into care plans.	Registered Staff	Upon admission	100% audit compliance
Traditional healing	Support access to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, ceremonies and traditional medicines.	Director of Care / Recreation Manager	Admission and Ongoing	Resident requests accommodated whenever possible
Staff education	Complete Indigenous Cultural Safety education.	Management Team	Annually	100% staff completion
Leadership development	Complete advanced Indigenous Health education.	Management Team	Annually	100% completion

Quality Improvement	Monitor Indigenous Health Equity indicators.	Quality Committee	Quarterly	Reviewed quarterly.
Policy Review	Review Indigenous Health Equity Plan and associated policies.	Administrator	Annually	Plan and policy updated and approved

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Victoria Gardens will monitor the effectiveness of this plan using measurable performance indicators:

- Percentage of Indigenous residents with individualized cultural care plans
- Staff orientation completion rate
- Annual Indigenous Cultural Safety education completion rate
- Leadership education completion rate
- Resident satisfaction regarding cultural safety
- Family satisfaction
- Number of complaints related to culturally safe care
- Number of complaints related to racism or discrimination

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Victoria Gardens recognizes that Indigenous Health Equity is an ongoing process of learning and improvement. Quality improvement activities will include review of audit findings, resident and family feedback, review of complaints and compliments, consultation with Indigenous partners, identification of improvement opportunities, and annual action planning. Improvement initiatives will be incorporated into the Home's annual quality improvement plans.

ANNUAL REVIEW

This plan will be reviewed at least annually, and more frequently if there are changes to legislation or if new evidence or feedback identifies opportunities for improvement. The annual review will include input from residents and families, where appropriate, leadership, the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, and interdisciplinary team members. All recommendations will be documented and incorporated into the updated plan.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Victoria Gardens has undertaken the following initiatives in support of Indigenous Health Equity:

- Developed and implemented an Indigenous Health Equity Plan.
- Implemented a Land Acknowledgement recognising the traditional territories on which the Home operates.
- Incorporated Indigenous Cultural Safety education into new employee orientation.
- Established annual Indigenous Cultural Safety education for all employees.
- Recognized National Indigenous Peoples Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation through resident programming and education.
- Began developing partnerships with Indigenous organizations and community resources.
- Incorporated culturally safe practices into resident care planning.
- Committed to supporting traditional healing practices whenever possible and in accordance with resident preferences.
- Integrated Indigenous Health Equity considerations into organizational quality improvement activities.
- Reviewed the needs and preferences of current residents, engaged residents and families in conversations, and updated care plans to reflect identified needs and culturally safe practices.

APPENDIX A - INDIGENOUS CULTURAL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The following questions may be asked during admission or care conferences, with the resident's consent:

1. Do you identify as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or another Indigenous identity?
2. Are there cultural or spiritual practices that are important to you?
3. Would you like your care team to know about any traditional healing practices?
4. Are there ceremonies you would like supported?
5. Are there traditional medicines you use?
6. Are there sacred items you would like respected or incorporated into your care?
7. Would you like visits from an Elder or Knowledge Keeper?
8. Are there traditional foods that are important to you?
9. Who would you like involved in your care planning?
10. Are there cultural wishes you would like respected at the end of life?
11. Is there anything else that would help us provide culturally safe care?