

# Anishinaabeg Elders' Land-based Knowledge: Enacting Bagijigan for Health and Well-being

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Article abstract

Indigenous Elders carry knowledge systems that are embedded within their respective land-based systems of knowledge. When Indigenous Elders pass away, their knowledge systems, if not preserved and documented, also pass away, which has lasting impacts on the continuance of Indigenous knowledge and practices of health and well-being. As a result of the enduring presence of settler colonialism, Indigenous Elders pass away at far earlier ages in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts. This article shows the results of an Indigenous health and well-being research project led by an Anishinaabe community in partnership with an Anishinaabe researcher. Guided by Anishinaabeg Elders and a Community Advisory Board, this research project preserves and documents Elders' knowledge of the land for community use and asks, how does knowledge of the land inform our health and well-being practices? In this article, we argue that Elders' knowledge is integral for regenerating critical well-being practices. We demonstrate that placing Elders' knowledge at the forefront of our well-being is an actionable practice of ganandawisiwin or good health. Without such knowledge and practices, we risk missing an opportunity to learn about well-being practices from our most precious knowledge holders.

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# Anishinaabeg Elders' Land-based Knowledge: Enacting Bagijigan for Health and Well-being

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# Anishinaabeg Elders' Land-based Knowledge: Enacting Bagijigan for Health and Well-being

## Abstract

Indigenous Elders carry knowledge systems that are embedded within their respective land-based systems of knowledge. When Indigenous Elders pass away, their knowledge systems, if not preserved and documented, also pass away, which has lasting impacts on the continuance of Indigenous knowledge and practices of health and well-being. As a result of the enduring presence of settler colonialism, Indigenous Elders pass away at far earlier ages in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts. This article shows the results of an Indigenous health and well-being research project led by an Anishinaabe community in partnership with an Anishinaabe researcher. Guided by Anishinaabeg Elders and a Community Advisory Board, this research project preserves and documents Elders' knowledge of the land for community use and asks, how does knowledge of the land inform our health and well-being practices? In this article, we argue that Elders' knowledge is integral for regenerating critical well-being practices. We demonstrate that placing Elders' knowledge at the forefront of our well-being is an actionable practice of ganandawisiwin or good health. Without such knowledge and practices, we risk missing an opportunity to learn about well-being practices from our most precious knowledge holders.

## Keywords

Knowledge keepers, resurgence, Anishinaabe women, gifts, sharing

## Acknowledgments

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We acknowledge the Anishinaabeg Treaty 3 Territory upon which this research took place. We also wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for funding this research project. This article presents the results of a research study conducted in partnership with an Naicatchewenin First Nation. This research study was co-developed in a community-driven research process for the duration of the project, which is from 2018-2022, and received Research Ethics Certificates from both the University of Alberta (2018-2019) and the University of Ottawa (2019-2020). Dr. McGuire-Adams is grateful to have been invited to do this research with the community for the benefit of their community first and foremost, and to then inform the broader field of Indigenous health, wellbeing, and policy with this academic article. The Community Advisory Board and the Elders of the community shared that the community needs to preserve Elders' knowledge about the community, the land, and land-based practices; there was an acknowledgement that the Elders' knowledge is precious and that too many Elders are passing away and with them their knowledge. This truth was felt very deeply throughout the project, as two Elders who were involved in the project from the start, passed away. Through this project, their knowledge will be forever acknowledged and kept by the community for future generations to learn.

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## **Anishinaabeg Elders' Land-based Knowledge: Enacting Bagijigan for Health and Well-being**

Indigenous health literature is expansive regarding the health disparities experienced between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In nearly all chronic health indicators, Indigenous peoples experience higher rates of ill health than non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (Foulds et al., 2018; Reading, 2015; Walker et al., 2020). For example, Indigenous peoples experience higher rates of Type 2 Diabetes and cardiovascular disease, as well as an overrepresentation of morbidity and mortality (Gracey & King, 2009). Broadening the scope of how Indigenous researchers and communities address health disparities and how health itself is conceptualized within research demonstrates an Indigenous-informed opportunity for health regeneration. This process captures our ancestral knowledge systems to better inform our health practices. Broadly, this ganandawisiwin approach fosters a decolonial application of addressing ill health, simultaneously disrupting the settler colonial deficit analysis (McGuire-Adams, 2017).

Indigenous health research seeks to include Indigenous understandings of health and well-being to better address ongoing ill health disparities (Reading et al., 2009; Tobias et al., 2013). Reading (2009) acknowledged that to address ill health disparities, the field of Indigenous health needs to “identify new, innovative, and transformative ideas from the broader Indigenous community” (p. 1). Such a focus will reveal novel solutions, particularly in the realm of Elders' cultural transmission of knowledge (Varcoe et al., 2010); however, an equal focus on implementing the solutions by Elders is also needed to create the systemic changes necessary for long-term solutions. Recently, Indigenous scholars showed that everyday acts of resistance centred within an Indigenous community are important spaces to deepen our responsibilities to decolonization and resurgence practices (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019). Thus, by centring the lived experiences of Elders, we can disrupt the siloed health-deficit views about Indigenous peoples' health to focus on how our daily actions can also result in resistance to ill health.

In this article, we take a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to honour the ganandawisiwin gikendaasowin, or good health knowledge, of the women Elders from the Naicatchewenin First Nation to learn about specific well-being practices informed by the land. In what follows, we first present a literature review to contextualize the research project. Second, we describe the Anishinaabeg-informed CBPR methodology and our research methods. Third, we present the result of the sharing circle with women Elders. Finally, we discuss the results and conclude the article.

### **Literature Review**

There is much to learn from Elders' perspectives regarding our health and well-being concepts, particularly their knowledge of the land (McGuire-Adams, 2021), which occurs by participating in on-the-land activities. Land-based activities, also cited in the literature as land-based learning, often include being out on the land or learning about the land and occur in both formal and informal ways (Bowra et al., 2021). The purpose of these activities varies significantly among Indigenous peoples in Canada, recognizing that each community has its unique history and meanings of these activities. Bowra et al. (2021) found that land-based activities have commonalities, including land as a teacher, holistic perspectives (emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual), land fostering self-reflection and a space to ignite Indigenous resistance to colonialism.

The knowledge derived from land-based research recognizes that the “land and cultural traditions have healing power that can enable individuals in distress deal with pain and self-hurt” (Radu et al., 2014, p. 87). The land is also an important factor in reconnecting with traditional foods (Bagelman et al., 2016) and in the regeneration and preservation of traditional Indigenous languages (Baloy, 2011; Schreyer, 2008), as well as traditional medicines (Manitowabi & Shawande, 2012). Despite the positive benefits achieved through engaging in land-based activities among Indigenous peoples, there were noted barriers to participation in these activities, which include, but are not limited to, ongoing impacts of settler colonialism that creates a barrier for participation, including land loss, displacement, and unequal power relations (Bagelman et al., 2016; Delormier et al., 2017; Tomiak, 2017). Additionally, obtaining consistent sources of funding and climate change were discussed as barriers to accessing and engaging in land-based ways of life (Bowra et al., 2021; MacDonald et al., 2015; Noah & Healy, 2010; Robbins & Dewar, 2011; Wildcat et al., 2014).

The need to learn from Elders' knowledge, life experiences, and healing processes regarding their lands is particularly vital, as Indigenous Elders' life expectancies are far shorter than the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2016). There is an ongoing need to create opportunities for Elders to participate, guide, and co-author Indigenous health research. Tobias and Richmond's (2016) study among Anishinaabeg communities found that Elders' voices “are seldom heard within typical health research” (p. 240), but their knowledge systems contain “important visions for the futures of their communities [that] include clear strategies for improving health” (p. 240). Thus, in this study, we sought a community-driven partnership with Elders in Naicatchewenin First Nation to better understand how their specific knowledge of the land passes important teachings on health and well-being. This study achieves a deepening of Anishinaabeg knowledge imparted by women Elders to assist in strengthening Indigenous health approaches to address the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous health and well-being.

### **Methodology: Indigenous-Informed Community-Based Participatory Research**

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a well-used method to conduct research with Indigenous communities. It helps to foster ethical relationships and creates space for the Indigenous community to direct the approaches to research (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Howard (2017), however, critiques CBPR as focusing too much on individual changed behaviours rather than deepening the connections to Indigenous sovereignty, which requires prioritization of transformative CBPR goals directly informed by Indigenous sovereignty. To this end, she posits that CBPR emerged as a method informed by Indigenous Peoples' practices of, and ethics about, self-determination in research. More scholarship is beginning to centre Indigenous self-determination in research, coupled with the method of CBPR (Kovach, 2021). For instance, more Indigenous scholars are weaving ceremony into their research projects and establishing community advisory boards. Such actions create more opportunities for Indigenous communities to direct research that enhances their sovereignty in and through the research process itself, rather than solely relying on Western or colonial research processes (Shawanda, 2020).

In this study, we centre Anishinaabeg knowledge and ceremony coupled with the method of CBPR to foster an Indigenous-informed CBPR approach to research. This approach is attentive to Indigenous

sovereignty as informing the rationale for and meaningful engagement with the research project. Additionally, Naicatchewenin First Nation positioned their desires for research and outcomes first and understood academic outputs as secondary.

A key component of CBPR is for research to be helpful for the community; as such, we did not just produce academic articles but created useful community outputs that were produced before the academic articles. This choice was intentional and is the subject of a methodology article to be published elsewhere. The community outputs included audio and videos of Elders sharing their knowledge, transcripts of each audio and video, a photo book, a series of video collages, a community report, and a template for a community presentation that includes the project goals, research findings, and outputs. Once the community outputs were complete, we engaged in the preparation of academic articles. This approach is innovative as research articles typically outweigh community outputs within the Western/colonial academy.

### **Indigenous-Informed CBRP: Relationships and Community-Led Approaches to Research**

The first author was invited to work with the Elders of the Naicatchewenin First Nation to learn about Anishinaabeg land-based knowledge related to health and well-being while ensuring the preservation of their knowledge systems for the community to use. Before the research began, a community advisory board with leaders from the community was formed to advance the CBPR approach, which was formally honoured by creating a Partnership Statement. A Partnership Statement is a helpful way to document an academic-community research relationship and the community's needs, concerns, and aspirations. It outlines the ethical parameters regarding data ownership, the axiology of the researcher, and collective goals and objectives. The first author also received Research Ethics Board approval from the University of Ottawa. A sub-grant was also shared with the community to ensure community governance over the project.

The Elders led the advisory board and the researcher in an opening ceremony held in the community's roundhouse. Prayer and offerings were made, after which the Elders offered guidance on the project's direction. We also continued to receive guidance from the Elders and presented a research update during their annual Elders' gathering (fall of 2018), after which they provided additional guidance and feedback. In taking direction from the Elders, we added two additional goals to the research project: documenting the sacred stories of the community and learning the stories of the community drums. Preserving the community's sacred stories is solely meant for the community and will not be published in academic venues. The stories are sacred to this place and will not be shared for public consumption. Instead, these stories are preserved for the community and are a demonstrable act of reciprocity in research. The results from learning the stories of the community drums related to health and well-being will be published elsewhere. After the primary story collection was finalized, the first author visited with the Elders to "make meaning of the stories" (Absolon, 2011). During this making meaning visit, the Elders reviewed the knowledge shared for accuracy and provided guidance on which stories would be used for our co-authored article and presentations.

## Methods

For this research project, we coordinated a sharing circle with the women Elders that was held in the community's roundhouse.<sup>1</sup> The guiding question used in the sharing circle was what does land-based knowledge teach us about well-being? Upon analysis, which aligned with an Anishinaabeg-informed thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2020), we identified four main findings that inform Anishinaabeg well-being practices, and they include: being on the land fosters well-being but is often not accessible to Elders; the legends teach us about how to live with well-being as Anishinaabeg; when visiting the land, healing and connection to ancestors is found; and to engage in reciprocal sharing through implementing the practice of sharing and gift giving, or *baagijigan*.

## Results

1. Being on the land and water fosters well-being but is often not accessible to Elders.

Norma shared that there is a deep sense of being well when she is on the land:

And I think it's good for people to go out into the land because when you're out there, you just have a good relaxing feeling . . . you know, you're relaxed and you don't worry about anything and you're just . . . I don't know, it's hard to explain how being out in the land. Me, I'm Muskrat clan. I love being on the water, I love fishing, and it's been a long time since I fished so I miss that. Even just paddling around. When I had a partner, I use to go out with him to go hunt with him and it was nice. I love being out on the land, it gives me a good feeling, a good sense of just being well . . . like well-being. Yeah, I love it out there. But this day and age, where I am right now because I'm older and limited to walking . . . I don't know if I could do it- maybe a short distance but I can't do what I use to do a long time ago, which is very much missed.

Doris also shared that she wished to be out on the water more, but sickness in her family prevented that from happening. She shared,

It's nice to be out in the wild and go paddling. When we retired, that was our plans to be out in a canoe all of the time—you know, go paddling in the water. But it didn't happen because Walter [her husband] got sick right away after he retired. So nothing like that happened and I miss that, I really miss it. And I've been a town person for forty years (laughter).

The feeling of missing being on the land was also shared by Marcella as she shared in English and in Anishinaabemowin,

I miss that. I did a lot of helping him [her husband], helping with fishing and hunting. I did a lot to help him. We did a lot of this together. But I still come out when they do [the fall harvest].

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<sup>1</sup> In the sharing circle, the Elders spoke Anishinaabemowin most of the time, and some also spoke English. As the first author is not fluent in Anishinaabemowin, the community facilitator ensured that we had an interpreter present, who immediately translated what the Elders said. Much of the analysis of this paper reflects the translation from the interpreter.

Translated from Anishinaabemowin: "she used to enjoy being outside. You know, they all use to go. She always helped her husband out and about doing that. She mentioned the fall harvest that she enjoys coming to the fall harvest because she can see what she used to do many years ago. And she's disabled so she can't do anything, so she really misses the outdoor way."

Delia went on to share how the land provides healing for her, but she cannot go out on the land anymore because of the immobility that often comes with aging:

I used to go to the beach a lot of times, and I used to sit on that big rock there and I had a tree over there, a poplar tree where I used to go and put tobacco. And I would just go and think to get rid of my problems. And one day, I was really feeling sad [so] I went back there and I sat on that big rock, Sandy Beach. That is where I sat, on top, and I was sitting there and I started feeling the rock rising like a big turtle. That was really something. But, as I grew older, I cannot, like what Norma says, I cannot really go into the bush anymore, and now I have started to get sick again because I do not do what I used to do. And people go out there when they fast, they do not take food or water for four days and that is where everything and the bush is alive when you talk . . . I use to talk to that tree over there asking for help and it tells me quite a bit. And there's lots of medicines in the bush that tells you [about healing]. And I have been wanting to take [names her daughter] to show her the herbs in the bush and what they are for. But I never have time, and now that I am old, I cannot do that anymore. Maybe I would trip if I go take her.

## 2. The legends teach us about how to live with well-being as Anishinaabeg.

Speaking about being on the land allowed Norma and Doris to have a conversation that recounted stories about the animals and connecting these stories to the role legends play in our understanding of well-being as Anishinaabeg. Norma shared:

I was just thinking about rabbit, waboose. They [our ancestors] didn't eat rabbit-like all year round . . . they only ate rabbit certain parts of the year. They would be eaten in the wintertime. And there are lots of different stories about the rabbit and how it came to be; like the feet or why their feet are yellow, brown. There are different stories about that. Doris intervened in Anishinaabemowin, Norma translated and said, "she said when the rabbit turned white, that is when you could start eating the rabbit." Then Doris added in English, "You can't stand up a rabbit, you know, standing it up when you killed it." Norma added, "otherwise how high it stands, that is how much snow will fall. This happened to someone I know, Norman. He had a couple of rabbits on the table, and he stands up that rabbit and then put it down. And I said, "don't do that," and then he stood it up again, and again I said "don't do that." And you know what, there was a big snowstorm and it was like this high, and twice as high as the rabbit (laughter). And I really believed that you know? And he couldn't get out of his house, (laughter) because he didn't believe it why he probably did that.

Doris added, "Even the skunk, there is a story why he has stripes at the ball, there is a legend for that too. Every bird, everything [has] their own legend." Norma goes on to connect these and other stories to the stories of Nanaboozhoo:



A lot of the stories about the animals and birds. They come from the legends, that's where everything Nanaboozhoo tells us about everything for the animals, the birds, the ants. Every living thing comes from the legends, even the colours of birds there is a reason why they are that colour. Everything is just amazing, like what we hear [today] it is not even a scratch on what could be told. If you knew all of the legends and because the legends is [our] way of life because they teach us how to live, they tell us how to live. It is like the Bible for Christians, that is what the legends are. That is what was given to Anishinaabe people. I do not know a whole lot, but I do try to share what I know. And I love sitting like this, so I learn more from other people every time I sit together with the other Elders . . . For us Anishinaabe people, we weren't the first ones here as human beings; it was the animals who were here before us. They prepared this place for us; they prepared what we are going to eat, what we are going use for clothing and how we are going to live. They prepared this place for us. Nanaboozhoo asked all the animals, "what are you going to give to the Anishinaabeg to live? And to survive?" And each animal gave us something, and that is in the legends, and that is why I always go back to the legends because the legends are so . . . it is about life and teaches us about how to live. The animals were here first; and I always think that the non-Native people have it backwards, you know, that they are on top of the food chain, but it is backwards. That is not how I see it because the animals were here before us.

3. When visiting the land, healing and connection to ancestors is found.

Delia shared the healing knowledge she learned from the land.

I want to talk about land a little bit. From long ago, when I was a little girl, I spent a lot of time in the bush. We use to play in the bush, me and Mable and some other kids. The boys use to shoot little birds with slingshots, and then we would cook them and eat them cause a long time ago we were poor and we did not really have any food. And as I was growing up, I still did that around in my 20s, I still went into the bush. That is where I went when I had problems. I had a drinking problem for quite a while and nothing helped me so I turned to my tobacco and I went to a big rock-cut and I took my tobacco there and asked for guidance, [for] help. And when I was saying, talking and my Anishinaabe language, I felt the wind power around me like someone was listening, and at that time, I did quit. I never went to treatment. I did it on my own with the help of the power I felt when I was there . . . there is a lot of help in the bush if you ask for help [just] put down your tobacco.

Norma listened to what Delia said and then shared:

I like what Delia had to share how she became sober and stuff like that. I think there is a lot of help out there with our tobacco. Tobacco is always the first in our culture to help us. It leads the way, it shows us the way. And I just wanted to share a story that she just reminded me when she was telling her story. When I was with my partner, I use to walk every day, every morning—one morning, I just decided [that] I am gonna go for a walk so from that day on, I walked every morning just automatically it was my routine, I would just get up and go walk and it did not matter if it was raining, snowing . . . but that one day, my partner, he was mad at me and he was giving me the silent treatment and I was feeling really sad when I was walking on my morning

walk. And while I was walking, I heard a whistle like the Eagle whistle, because I was walking and tears were coming down and I was feeling sad. And I stopped and looked up and there was an Eagle. And I looked up, and I was just in awe, I did not even know what to think. And I just stood there and looked at the Eagle [who was] just there, stationary. After a while, it flew north. And it was like my sadness was taken away; it came to take my sadness away. That was an awesome experience. I did not know that could happen.

4. It is necessary to engage reciprocal sharing through implementing the practice of sharing and gift giving, or baagijigan.

The Elders shared in Anishinaabemowin about the importance of wiizhaandim—which is when people will come together for a round dance where everyone engages in reciprocal gift-giving. For example, for a person to dance at the round dance, they first have to give a gift to someone to share a dance. And then the person who received the gift, they also must give a gift to someone else, and so on. Alice, Doris, and Marcella spoke in Anishinaabemowin and the translator shared the following:

Alice was not really into powwows back in the day (light laughter). She said they were told to stay back when they use to have them wiizhaandim, you know. Their mother says, “stay back, you know, don't hang around there.” So I guess one time, she snuck over, her and her sister. . . they snuck over and another Elder by the name of Dolly use to give them tobacco to come in and join the wiizhaandim. So they ended up going in there and her mother happened to be at the wiizhaandim and said, “Hey what are you guys doing here? You're supposed to stay home. You go sit over there and don't touch anything. Don't give anything.” (Laughter). So I guess the wiizhaandim continued and sure enough, Jane's father came over with a bunch of pennies and gave it to Alice for, you know, for wiizhaandim dance so they danced and. . . So the mother says . . . the mother went up there, “Alice, hey—now what are you going to pay back? You have nothing. I told you to stay there and not to participate.” (Laughter) But somehow, I guess the mother gave her something to re-pay back that as a gift and they mentioned . . . Jane mentioned that metal was so important back in the day like copper, you know, that was very important back in the day. And she mentioned the boys always mentioned to use a copper bowl as a ceremony because it was one of those sacred items. Yes, and Doris said wiizhaandim was a gift of life. You know, you give something, in return you get another something back. It was very sacred. You get strength from there. And Marcella wanted to share that she always comes here for wiizhaandim. She's got a very bad hip. So, once she participates and when she leaves—she's way different. It's very helpful for her well-being.

### Discussion

It is well established in the literature that colonialism has created a profound and lasting impact on the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. While these health disparities demonstrate important findings, there is a growing movement not only to focus on disparities but to create a parallel focus on strategies for resurgence (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2020). For instance, Greenwood and Lindsay (2019) found that Indigenous peoples “maintained connections to their lands, languages, and cultures, and are actively contributing to a resurgence of Indigenous

knowledge that is passed through the generations” (p. 83), which is necessary to foster resistance to ongoing colonialism. Similarly, Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019) shifted their focus from the impacts of colonialism to give voice to the regeneration practices that flourish Indigenous land-centred literacies. The knowledge shared by the women Elders tells of a deep engagement of critical regeneration practices, which are imperative to learn as we continue to grapple with the impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous health and well-being.

As the Elders described, healing is found on the land. Delia shared that she would go to the bush whenever she had problems because she could find healing. Healing happens when a person asks for help by using semma or tobacco. The Elders described their healing experiences, which are deeply connected to the land, manitous/spirits, and animals. They paid particular attention to Anishinaabeg legends and stories about animals, particularly rabbit, and their role in fostering health and well-being. The Elders shared stories of the rabbit to impart the teaching that we have much to learn from our animal relatives. Redvers (2016) described land-based knowledge as “a deep connection with and non-separation between human beings and the natural world [that includes] plants, animals, ancestors, spirits, natural features, and environment (air, water, earth, minerals)” (p. 90). Further, Altamirano-Jiménez and Kermoal (2016) attest to the societal benefits Indigenous women's knowledge produce because “being an Indigenous woman is intertwined with lived experience and the worldview of her community . . . and [they are] active producers of knowledge” (p. 4). The women Elders who shared their lived experiences of land-based knowledge are just that, active producers of knowledge for the community. This finding resonates with Tait Neufeld and Richmond's (2020) recent research, where they found that Indigenous women's connection to the land ignites a “collective resilience” amongst families and the land.

Anishinaabeg are taught to listen to aadizookaan or traditional legends only during certain times of the year (winter). Anishinaabeg, however, often share dibaajimowinan or what Geniusz (2009) describes as “teachings, ordinary stories, personal stories, histories” (p. 9–10) at any time. The stories the Elders shared about the animals were dibaajimowinan, which are meant to teach people about our Anishinaabeg worldview, and our deep-rooted connections to our land and all living beings. Murdock (2020) emphasized that our language, stories, and connection to land are essential elements of our Anishinaabeg education, resurgence, and continued survival from settler colonialism. He states, “Nenaboozhoo gave us the road map to how to live. Everything is coded in those stories . . . I think the place where there is a Rabbit, the pictograph there, maybe I'll go there and put some tobacco there and ask a question” (p. 101). Our language and stories carry profound teachings that we must learn and apply to live with well-being. Thus, when the Elders shared their knowledge about the legends of Nanaboozhoo (also spelled Nenaboozhoo or Waynaboozhoo), the land, and their healing connections, they were profound teachings about how to live with well-being and to create balance when we feel unbalanced and in need of healing.

The Anishinaabeg knowledge this article shares relates to the land, healing, legends and ancestors, and reciprocal relationships. As Greenwood and Lindsay (2019) state, Indigenous peoples' deep connections to our lands and territories flourish our governance systems, including language, culture, kinship systems, and ceremonies. Privileging the knowledge systems of Indigenous communities

regarding the connection to the land is a vital element to ensure Indigenous survival. The Elders' knowledge shared in this project also teaches us that a meaningful way to enhance our well-being is by sharing and gift-giving.

Anishinaabeg do not necessarily understand gifts monetarily; gifts may include knowledge and teachings. Through offering these types of gifts, Anishinaabeg attend to our relationships with one another and purposefully make time to visit and share. The Elders' discussed sharing through *wiizhaandim*, an Ojibway style of round dance where participants begin with sharing a gift with someone, which then reverberates to someone else, and so on. Giving and receiving a gift occurs to honour, renew, and create relationships, which is a practice amongst the Anishinaabeg that pre-dates colonization (Bohaker, 2020). While the *wiizhaandim* allowed some people to feel enhanced well-being, like Marcela, who experienced less body pain after the *wiizhaandim*, the broader act of sharing amongst each other is a profound teaching about well-being and reciprocity. The teaching imparted by *wiizhaandim* is that when we practice sharing and gift giving in our everyday lives, we are ensuring our personal and community well-being. This resonates with Bohaker (2020), Doerfler et al. (2013), and Kuokkanen's (2007) scholarship regarding the concept of the gift for Indigenous peoples, which is important to many Indigenous nations' practices and worldviews. For instance, the Anishinaabeg used *bagijigan*/*bagijiganan* (an offering; a gift) to achieve reciprocity with one another and other Indigenous Nations through creating relationships and being responsible to them, which is a foundational enactment of Anishinaabeg governance (Bohaker, 2020; Doerfler et al., 2013). Giving and accepting a gift reflects an Indigenous-informed social order that “is grounded in an understanding of the world that is rooted in intricate relationships that extend to everyone and everything” (p. 7), including the land and animal relations.

Simpson (2011) re-tells one of the Creation stories of the Anishinaabeg, which relates to the importance of sharing and continued survival. She describes the Creation of Turtle Island, where many animals gathered to help Nanaboozhoo create land. In this recounting of the Creation story, Nanaboozhoo could not have survived on his own. He needed the help of the animals to survive, each one sharing their responsibility to enhance each other's and Nanaboozhoo's well-being. Simpson (2011) connects this story to Anishinaabeg resurgence practices. She states, “resurgence cannot occur in isolation” (p. 69). Anishinaabeg stories about Creation demonstrate that well-being is created and maintained by meeting our “individual and collective responsibilities . . . in order to dance a new world into existence, we need the support of our communities in collective action. This story [the Creation story] tells us everything we need to know about resurgence” (p. 69–70). Through understanding *bagijigan*, in the context of sharing and being on the land, we connect to our deepest responsibilities and teachings about who we are as Anishinaabeg—we are re-enacting our Creation story by coming together to share and giving gifts, which aids in our individual and collective well-being.

The research project findings also impart vital areas where research is needed for the accessibility and disability concerns among Elders. Through this project, we learned that visiting the land, hunting, being on the water or simply being in the bush fosters a profound sense of well-being in oneself, but this type of visiting is not accessible to Elders. The Elders shared how they experience grief and longing to be on the land. Viscogliosi et al. (2017) found that more research is needed to understand environmental barriers

to Elders' participation in wellness practices. More attention is needed to situate land-based activities within an accessible practice. For instance, if communities can create land-based activities with accessibility in mind, it may create more opportunities for Elders to have access to and participate in more land-based activities (Littlechild et al., 2022).

In conclusion, Anishinaabeg knowledge shared in this research project teaches how Indigenous Peoples may amplify our health and well-being practices with knowledge from the land. The results from this study deepen the understanding of how Anishinaabeg knowledge and practices of land-based activities amplify health and well-being and help Indigenous Peoples, communities, and scholars better understand the role of land-based knowledge in implementing well-being. We showed that the knowledge systems of the Elders about the land and land-based practices are integral to regenerating well-being practices and may influence Indigenous health policy and practices. For instance, policy analysts and makers may integrate Indigenous knowledge to adapt or create new policies towards implementing Indigenous-led solutions to health disparities at the Indigenous community level to expand to provincial and federal levels. This Indigenous-led approach can better address issues from an Elders-informed perspective rather than solely relying on colonial understandings of ill-health deficits. An approach that centres on Indigenous stories, specifically from Elders' who can share their on-the-land experiential knowledge, will advance the field of Indigenous-led health research. More specifically, this study has shown that Anishinaabeg women Elders' knowledge directly works to deepen our understanding of how to live with well-being.

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