HOLISTIC HEALTH: APPLYING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: Grades 4 to 6

SUBJECT: Health

Suggested time: 50 minutes

Essential Question: What is the purpose of the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel and how does it influence health outcomes?

LEARNING GOALS
Students will:
• Learn about the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel
• Discuss health, equity and social determinants of health and health and the influence these have on themselves and Indigenous populations
• Create a personal Anishinaabe Medicine wheel that reflects aspects of their life positively contributing to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES
• Holistic Health & Medicine Wheel
  www.naho.ca/blog/2011/07/25/holistic-health-and-traditional-knowledge/
  connectability.ca/2010/11/10/wikwemikong/
• Social Determinants of Health
  www.who.int/social_determinants/en/
  www.thecanadianfacts.org/
  www.med.uottawa.ca/sim/data/Aboriginal_Health_Determinants_e.htm
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXcSjTcrskM
• Alternative Medicine and Therapies.
  www.alive.com/health/aboriginal-medicine/
  www.med.uottawa.ca/sim/data/AlternativeTherapy_e.htm
  www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/traditional-healing

1. RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: Before sharing the video below, inform students that a “inequity” is a lack of fairness or justice and “disparity” is a great difference to guide their understanding. Show students a video on health equity. “What Is Health Equity?” produced by the Health Equity Institution www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPVwgnp3dAc (3:24).

From the information in the video use the following discussion questions to begin a conversation with the class on health and wellness:

a. Why is there a difference in the type of health care people receive?

b. List three types of causes that contribute to inequity in healthcare?

c. How can attending school impact your health?

d. How can your neighborhood and surrounding influence your health?

e. What can we do to make a positive difference in everyone’s health?

2. In small groups, ask students to discuss and research the term “social determinants of health.” Encourage students to use a dictionary, the internet and other sources to create a definition for the term. Remind students to break down the term in separate components, “social,” “determinants,” and “health”.

Social Determinant of Health: The conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. These conditions are shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics. Source: World Health Organization (WHO).

If necessary, break down the term further:
• Social: Your interactions with the environment around you (your friends, family, places and different systems such as gender, race, religious affiliations, etc.).
• Determinants: Affecters or indicators. A factor that influences something else, for example, the foods you eat and physical activities you do are factors that affect and determine your health.
• Health: Your level of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental well-being.

3. In pairs, have students brainstorm and record a list of social determinants of health that affect someone’s health and well-being.

4. Bring the class back together and have students share the factors. Create a master list on the board for students to reference. Factors may include ideas related to the following categories:
• Income
• Education and literacy
• Unemployment, job security
• Employment and working conditions
• Early childhood development
• Food insecurity
• Housing
• Social exclusion
• Social support network
• Personal health practices and coping skills
• Stress
• Access to health services
• Geographic location
• Gender
• Race
• Disability
• Access to clean water

5. Have a brief discussion on social determinants of health using the following discussion questions:
   a. Which factors do you think affect children the most?
   b. Were any of the examples surprising?

6. Introduce holistic health and the Medicine Wheel.
   a. Holistic health focuses on the four parts of a person’s well-being: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.
   b. The Medicine Wheel dates back to stone circles found in North America from the earliest of times and its concept and teachings continue to be relevant today. The circle is a powerful symbol that accounts for and acknowledges every aspect of existence in its four quadrants.
   c. Traditional knowledge teaches that good health requires a balance of all four parts. The symbol of the Medicine Wheel demonstrates this holistic health model: it is circular, each element is equal and interconnected, and factors influence one another.
   d. An imbalance in any area may negatively affect your overall health. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to all kinds of health, not just the physical health of your body.

7. Show students the image of the Anishinabe Medicine Wheel below. Source: goo.gl/RLj84Y.

8. **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING:** Explain the meaning of each section and the importance of the number four and the use of four stages. Four is a prominent number in the culture of some Indigenous Peoples:
   a. Four sacred medicines: tobacco, sage, sweetgrass, cedar
   b. Four seasons: winter, spring, summer, fall
   c. Four directions: North, West, East, South
   d. Four elements of being a human being: mental, emotional, physical, spiritual
   e. Four stages of life: childhood, youth, adult, elder
   Ensure students understand the representation of the four elements of each human being and the four main factors that influence your holistic health and well-being (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual).

9. Distribute Blackline Master: My Medicine Wheel to each student or have students draw or make their own Medicine Wheel with construction paper and markers. Instruct students to fill in their Medicine Wheel with factors that positively influence their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual (or social) health. For example: Mental: friendship, Physical: playing soccer, Emotional: sketching, Spiritual: reading.

10. **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING:** Bring students back together to share their Medicine Wheels with the class and discuss different ways to positively promote each category of holistic health and how to overcome the obstacles too.

**EXTENSION:** Students may select one or two of the social determinants of health and research more in-depth how they affect Indigenous populations, Newspapers, news magazines, TV news, online news outlets, government sites and organizations offer a wealth of information that address Indigenous Peoples health and the factors involved in negatively or positively promoting well-being.
Blackline Master:
My Medicine Wheel

^Legend: WHITE = Spiritual Health      YELLOW = Physical Health      RED = Mental Health      BLACK = Emotional Health