

Chapter 6

“Where Are Our Men?”: How the DUDES Club Has Supported Indigenous Men in British Columbia, Canada to Seek a Path of Healing and Wellness



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Introduction

Indigenous Peoples of Canada have long suffered the consequences of colonization, much like other Indigenous Peoples around the world. The Canadian context in this regard is characterized in large part by the legacy of the Residential School System, which spanned from 1828 to 1997 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015a). This system was overseen by the Canadian government, in partnership with many churches in Canada at the time, via the Indian Act of 1876. The aim of the schools was to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their homes to be stripped of their language and culture while educated in mostly church-run schools

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(TRC, 2015a). Thousands of children died at these schools (TRC, 2015a). The ongoing intergenerational traumas that have resulted from this system and many other ongoing racist, destructive government policies (e.g., the “Sixties Scoop,” when thousands of Indigenous children were removed from homes deemed unsafe by social services) has sadly led to numerous poor health and social outcomes for Indigenous Peoples of Canada (Adelson, 2005; Allan & Smylie, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2015).

To document the toll of Residential Schools and guide and inspire reconciliation in Canada, the TRC was carried out from 2008 to 2015. As a result of this extensive work, the TRC published 94 Calls to Action to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (TRC, 2015b). Many organizations in Canada attempt to address these Calls to Action, either led by or in partnership with Indigenous people and their communities. However, very few of these organizations focus on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous boys and men.

One such organization is the DUDES Club, which began in 2010 in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) at the Vancouver Native Health Society, a local health clinic and drop-in centre (Efimoff et al., 2021; Gross et al., 2016). The DTES is one of Canada’s most marginalized communities with exceptionally high rates of homelessness, poverty, substance overuse, crime, and poor health outcomes (Krausz & Jang, 2015). These conditions have all been dramatically amplified by the opioid crisis in the last five years where First Nations people¹ across British Columbia were five times more likely than the general population to experience an overdose and three times more likely to die of an overdose (First Nations Health Authority [FNHA], 2017). In addition, 82% of all overdose deaths in 2018 were men (regardless of ethnicity) (Henry, 2018). The DUDES Club is a participant-led initiative to support men in building healthy relationships, engaging in healthcare (Efimoff et al., 2021), and promoting Indigenous health and wellness worldviews (Gross et al., 2016). Each DUDES Club aims to provide a sanctuary where men can “take off their armour” and be open about any physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual challenges they may be facing. DUDES Clubs are run by local men who plan and coordinate the activities that help break the cycle of silence and isolation that all too often contribute to poor health and social outcomes for men (Goldenberg, 2014). DUDES Clubs facilitate a space where men can enhance their connection to community, oneself, Indigenous language, culture, and Mother Nature (through land-based activities like ice-fishing, going out on trap lines, seasonal harvesting, and retreats). We believe that a meaningful connection to these elements is vital to good health and wellness. In addition, DUDES Clubs are founded on values of non-judgment and inclusion, creating a welcoming environment for all members who identify as men (Efimoff et al., 2021). Conversations about the impact of gender on health and wellness are frequent at DUDES Club gatherings. Local leaders and DUDES Club staff often apply evolving and deconstructing concepts of masculinity in carrying out their work. Since its inception, the DUDES Club has supported 50 sites throughout British Columbia (Fig. 6.1), most of which are located in Indigenous communities in the northern part of the province thanks to a successful partnership with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA). The DUDES Club Society



Fig. 6.1 Map of British Columbia with all DUDES Club sites. (DUDES Club, [n.d.a](#))

officially became a registered Society and Charitable Organization in March 2020, working in partnership with many academic, governmental, non-profit, and community-level organizations.

The DUDES Club has demonstrated a sustainable, meaningful, and consistent impact across its sites over the years. We conducted extensive research and evaluation in 2013–2016 (thanks to funding from the Movember Foundation) and again in 2020 (thanks to a partnership between the Canadian Men’s Health Foundation and FNHA). These efforts were always community-driven and designed with the support of DUDES Club team staff along with academic and governmental colleagues. From the very beginning, the intention was to follow a grassroots “organic” growth model in which participants determined which outcomes were most meaningful to them and their communities. As one participant so eloquently stated: “We once had this discussion about management executive decisions, they don’t make them, this is by us, about us, and for us” (DUDES Club, 2021). As such, the impacts measured by the research and evaluation have intentionally been directly relevant to the men.

Furthermore, capturing the powerful narratives of DUDES Club members has been a central focus of our evaluation work. Throughout this chapter, we tell the story of the DUDES Club using a mixed-methods approach while honouring the lived experiences of the men who have contributed to, and benefited from, this movement for men’s health and wellness in British Columbia, Canada. We also emphasize the importance of the intergenerational impacts and our work with adolescent and young men who direct innovative programs of their own (i.e., NexUp) inspired by the DUDES Club model. Finally, it is with a deep appreciation for, and respect of the traditions and worldviews of the many Indigenous Peoples of British Columbia that we share the story of the DUDES Club with you.

Quantitative Findings and Evaluation

The DUDES Club is an innovative and decolonising¹ model for men's health promotion that destigmatises men's health issues by supporting men in accessing health care services on their own terms, with the support and affirmation of other men (Efimoff et al., 2021; Gross et al., 2016). As we continued to develop the DUDES Club program in Vancouver's DTES community, we received more interest from academic colleagues and funding organizations. To demonstrate the impact of the DUDES Club and encourage other communities to adopt a similar model in their setting, we were encouraged to evaluate the DUDES Club model. The leadership team of DUDES Club (i.e., community members, medical and social service providers, and academic colleagues) were committed to pursuing evaluation methods that aligned with the participatory and community-driven nature of the DUDES Club. The ideal opportunity came in 2013 when, with funding from the Movember Foundation, we joined the Men's Depression and Suicide Network at the University of British Columbia, led by Dr. John Oliffe and Dr. John Ogradniczuk. The three-year research program was designed to engage five different projects highlighting innovative approaches to promoting men's mental health in Canada.

We contributed to this network with a program evaluation of the Vancouver DUDES Club and an iterative scale-up of three DUDES Club pilot sites in diverse community settings in Northern British Columbia. The evaluation was designed with the support of a community advisory committee composed of Elders, DUDES Club members, academics, and service providers. In our mixed-methods approach, we used both a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups and individual interviews. The survey was developed using an applied logic model approach grounded in Indigenous wellness perspectives (i.e., medicine wheel teachings of balance between mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of health). We administered the evaluation survey to 150 men at the Vancouver DUDES Club from 2014–2015 (Gross et al., 2016). In the article by Gross et al. (2016), readers can find a detailed description of the history and function of the Vancouver DUDES Club in its early years when an innovative blend of safety, comfort, support services, food, and cultural teachings empowered men to connect and improve their overall health and wellbeing.

There were two main findings in the evaluation survey. The first was a positive correlation between frequency of attendance and a greater overall benefit across the four dimensions of the medicine wheel (Fig. 6.2). This “dose-response” relationship was of value and also encouraging as it indicated that consistent attendance was related to better health and wellness outcomes. Furthermore, this finding emphasized the essential power of a space that prioritizes consistent relationships between the participants, leaders, and professional service providers. This relational practice has gradually become the cornerstone of DUDES Club and is one of the core values of our work. The second salient finding from the evaluation survey was that DUDES Club members who identify as Indigenous reported a greater sense of trust, social support, and improved connection to their cultural heritage when compared to

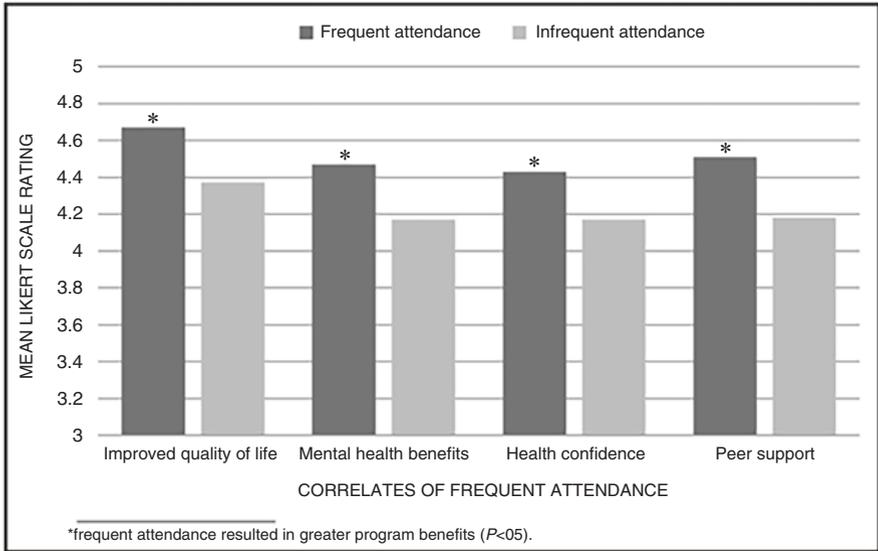


Fig. 6.2 Frequent Attendance Improves Outcomes. (Gross et al., 2016)

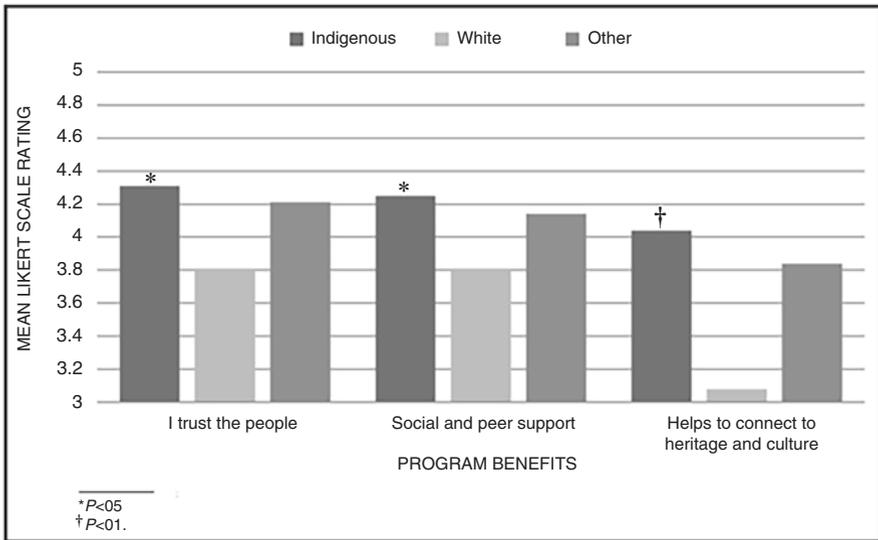


Fig. 6.3 Outcomes by Ethnic Identification. (Gross et al., 2016)

members who did not identify as Indigenous (Fig. 6.3). This was strong evidence that the DUDES Club is a culturally safe space where Indigenous men could reclaim aspects of their identity that had been stolen as a result of colonisation.

Recent publications further reinforce the impact of the DUDES Club and similar models for marginalized populations affected by social and health inequities, such

as Indigenous boys and men, around the world. For example, the importance of health literacy, particularly for isolated men experiencing poverty and low education, has been highlighted as a consideration for effective program design in Canada (Oliffe, McCreary, et al., 2020a). In Australia, Smith et al. (2019) demonstrated the importance of addressing similar social determinants of health like employment, housing, education, youth incarceration, and the importance of social support in relation to the health of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males. Open and informative health discussions, often supported by a health professional or local Elder, are central to DUDES Club and help improve health literacy for all involved (Efimoff et al., 2021). This is just one example of a variety of important considerations for designing men's health promotion programs including ongoing program evaluation and a focus on populations most affected by social and structural marginalization, among others (Oliffe, Rossnagel, et al., 2020b).

The quantitative findings from the evaluation survey (Gross et al., 2016) laid the foundation for our continual process of grassroots, organic and iterative program design. This process provides a fertile environment for men to cultivate individual and collective agency through their engagement in the DUDES Club. For instance, men are encouraged to move along a trajectory from being silent or avoidant about their health and social connections to becoming curious and interested, and ultimately, to serious and committed. This impact, among many others, is described in richer detail through the qualitative observations of the Movember-funded evaluation (Efimoff et al., 2021), summarized in the following section of this chapter.

In 2016 the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) Northern Region began an extensive and ongoing collaboration with the DUDES Club Society (DCS) to respond to the need of addressing men's health in more direct ways. This was initiated during the planning for the first Northern Guys Gathering in 2017, followed by a series of community support visits, consultations on hiring a Northern Men's Wellness Coordinator, land-based retreats, and 10 sub-regional Train-the-Trainer events for Elders and facilitators from more than 35 northern communities. These activities led to the development of Indigenous Men's wellness groups meeting regularly, involving 32 of the 54 northern First Nations communities. That changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic when communities had to make adjustments, taking their activities online, outdoors, or going on hiatus. These community sites have benefited from the innovative public-private partnership with the FNHA (Northern Region) that provides the groups with a modest amount of annual funding (\$7500) allocated to meals, traditional activities (e.g., drum-making, canoeing, singing), or other wellness activities (e.g., nature walks, talking circles) decided upon by the local group.

In 2020, having reached our fourth year of collaboration with FNHA Northern Region, we conducted a survey-based evaluation (for the full report referenced in this section, see DUDES Club, n.d.b). To create this survey, we started with our original evaluation survey (see Gross et al., 2016) and refined the questions through a series of advisory consultations with the DUDES Club members, community leadership, and FNHA staff. We had 139 participants respond from 23 communities. Most respondents (99) were living on-reserve, with the rest (40) in urban centres.

The urban sites show diversity with an increased number of men away from their home territories and traditional teachings, and also an increased number of men who did not identify as being Indigenous. With few exceptions, community (on-reserve) sites tended to be composed entirely of Indigenous men. In contrast, approximately 65–70% of DUDES members at urban sites are Indigenous (membership at the urban DUDES Club sites is more transient making accurate attendance data difficult; this approximation is based on discussions with our urban site coordinators and leaders). Importantly, when comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous men, the results of both the 2020 and 2013–2016 surveys indicated that Indigenous respondents consistently expressed higher levels of satisfaction with DUDES Club.

For our 2020 survey, we used two very similar surveys: one questionnaire for urban sites and one for community sites. Both surveys included survey questions covering health services, connection to culture, relationships with others, and overall satisfaction with the program. Respondents in the survey cited significant benefits from participating in their respective DUDES Clubs, including social and peer support, connection to heritage and culture, trust in other people, community participation, and awareness of healthcare services. Highlights of the survey data include the following:

- 96.38% of respondents would recommend the DUDES Club to other men
- 84.00% reported an increased awareness of health services
- 85.56% reported that their health had improved
- 82.83% reported an increase in the use of their voice
- 82.8% reported increased community participation
- 84.10% reported an increase in trusting others

The men we work with have consistently told us that, pre-colonization, they would come together in community. Colonization has disrupted the traditional ways in which men would gather. DUDES Club is helping to change that. According to a DUDES Club facilitator in the community of McLeod Lake in North Central BC: “Men are building men’s confidence. Men are having pride in themselves. It has helped change the dynamics of the reserve.” In the island village of Gitxaala on B.C.’s Central Coast, the facilitator has seen “an increase in pride in the community and an increase in community unity.” He adds that the community drug and alcohol counsellor attends gatherings as a support for the DUDES Club and is welcomed in that setting. “Guys in the Gitxaala club have developed ideas for projects that are sparking motivation in other men.”

Qualitative Findings

“We look after each other as DUDES, we’re a brotherhood of men.”

In this section, we draw from our thematic analysis of 15 focus groups with approximately 100 DUDES Club members, Elders, and providers (Efimoff et al., 2021).

The rich qualitative findings we present here highlight four interwoven themes within men's narratives of being a DUDES Club member: (1) creating safe and inclusive spaces for men; (2) forging new connections and intergenerational relations; (3) reclaiming what it means to be a man and (4) decolonising healthcare.

Most men who attend the DUDES Club live with past and/or current experiences of trauma, violence, poverty, mental illness, and addictions issues as well as other stigmatized health conditions. These experiences spurred the men's need for safe spaces where they can "leave their armour at the door." Though men talked about valuing different aspects of the DUDES Club, most agreed that what made them want to come back to the DUDES Club was that it offered a space where "once you walk through that door you know you're safe." This sense of safety enabled men to form friendships with one another that contributed to a feeling of brotherhood and camaraderie among the members, and ultimately "a sense of belonging and community." As one man who frequently attended one of the DUDES Clubs explained:

I think with the DUDES, our self-identity is really important and I think that's what many of us are looking for – like, how do I fit in ... is there somebody that is going to accept me ... and when you come into a DUDES meeting, there it is. You're not judged, you're able to speak in the way you wish, the way you're comfortable with, um, in a polite and respectful manner, whereas outside you may have to come across a little bit more gruff ... that sort of thing.

As this man's narrative illustrates, men's everyday "armour" can be taken off. In many support-group and health-care settings, people may be turned away if they are actively using drugs. A key way the DUDES Club creates safety is by cultivating a non-judgmental and inclusive atmosphere where everyone, including those who are actively using drugs, are treated with respect and welcomed with dignity rather than turned away, as often happens in other support groups and settings, including health care. As one man commented:

You can come in here and even if you are using drugs you talk about all kinds of stuff, it's nonjudgmental. That's the big thing, because you walk into most places and I'm an addict and this is a problem ... I am just a fucking addict.

In several DUDES Clubs, members fostered respect and unconditional positive regard through the co-creation of rules of engagement that governed their interactions with one another. DUDES Clubs also used peer-based and peer-driven activities to promote self-care and caring for others among the men, such as free haircuts, fishing, tai chi, or serving food. Instead of sitting in a hierarchically-structured doctor's office to meet for a few minutes, members decide amongst themselves how they can best support one another as a community, and invite health providers to support where desired. This environment, where a community of men decide how to engage with and support one another, is arguably a way to decolonize health care interactions. DUDES Club members provided many examples of how simple acts of kindness and caring – such as giving and receiving a haircut – enhanced their sense of wellbeing and positive outlook. For example, one member said the free haircuts were "worth a million bucks" when talking about how they made the men feel. One

man who self-identified as Indigenous reflected on his experiences of offering free haircuts to men during the DUDES Club meetings:

[C]oming to this group and participating and volunteering ... it also increases my awareness of what the guys are going through as well as [what] I'm going through....So you can communicate with one another especially when I'm cutting their hair... and ... when a person gets their hair cut that also increases their confidence, their kindness, you know, like ... it makes you feel good to walk out the door. ... Guys ... need to feel clean and keep grooming yourself, you know, like because sometimes after a while living down here, you basically give up.

For many men, the DUDES Club was identified as instrumental to their wellbeing, and often the only source of support in their lives. Repeatedly giving and receiving support from other men who share similar lived experiences was particularly powerful, because it fostered an environment where men felt “able to trust ... and open up a lot more” about their personal struggles and issues that mattered to them. Members discussed topics that are often considered controversial or taboo, such as substance use, depression, experiences of sexual abuse, and grief. In the voice of one man who had experienced the tragic loss of his son: “In a lot of ways it’s saved me too, like, from depression, and at the time I was grieving, so in a lot of ways I returned to life ... Only men understand men and what they go through.” Though healthcare providers are often present at DUDES Club meetings to share health information with the men, consistent with a decolonising model of health care, the DUDES Club members decide what health issues they want to discuss and where the discussions go. As many of the men emphasized, the experience of “finally being heard and ... able to voice their concerns over things that are really bothering them” was profoundly meaningful. This was especially the case because of many members’ experiences with healthcare providers outside the DUDES Club, as described by one participant: “they think they know all the answers ... they think they can tell you what’s wrong with you” and “they don’t listen to what your real problems are.”

Two issues that were at the forefront of many of the men’s discussions were intergenerational engagement and being a father. For example, many members expressed the desire to mentor younger men, noting that “there’s a lot of young men out there that are angry ... they’ve got nowhere to go, no one to talk to.” One member saw the potential for DUDES Club members to be father figures while others discussed the desire to pass on skills to the next generation of men. Perhaps not surprisingly, men valued being able to bring their children or grandchildren to the DUDES Club as “mini-DUDES” and having access to a safe space for discussing issues of fatherhood. This enabled them to challenge dominant masculine stereotypes and gender norms while reframing healthier strength-based ideals of masculinity. For example, one member described how the DUDES Club is helping men to get “to the point where they can be loving fathers and strong warriors ... at the same time.” Contrary to the dominant ideals of masculinity, this man believed that “the two don’t have to be exclusive.” Such an open discussion of fatherhood pushes against the stereotypes that men are not nurturers and the male ideal of always needing to show up as the “strong and silent type.” As one man shared, “you gotta cry, man.

You gotta. You can't hold it in." In addition, at one of the Northern B.C. communities, adolescent men would bring their sometimes-reluctant fathers and uncles along to DUDES Club meetings. This was a great example of how the intergenerational impact of the DUDES Club model is bidirectional and, depending on the context, can be designed to encourage the participation of younger and/or older men based on the preference in each community.

Many members also discussed ways to improve their DUDES Club's reach and to help the community. For example, one member discussed how he joined the DUDES Club to try to make the community safer for his children, saying "... I mean I want it to be safe for my children and I don't feel it's safe for them right now. So, I have to make a change. And that's why I joined the DUDES club." Members discussed how attending the DUDES Club not only improved their own wellness, but also improved their relationships with their partners, children, and the broader community, explaining that "the healthier the men in the community are, the healthier the whole community is." One healthcare provider described how a man returned to the DUDES Club to "thank" the members for providing him with the emotional support he needed to cope with a conflict in his relationship rather than getting "drunk," to use his words, as he said he would have done previously.

Other important sources of healing, resilience, and support that men – regardless of their ethnicity, but particularly Indigenous men – identified included (re)connecting with Indigenous culture and Elders. Elder Henry Charles, one of six fluent Musqueam speakers, encouraged all members to reconnect with their culture and relearn their language. Many participants acknowledged Elder Henry Charles's important role. One participant, for example, said "his stories, his smudges, and giving us an opportunity just to have something different. Maintain the culture." Participants also indicated they valued elders sharing their language:

P1: I think it's great that he actually speaks in his own tongue.

P2: And shares it with us.

P3: Yeah, and shares it with us very openly, and that's very rare down here. Like, he's the only one that I think that I've ever actually heard speak his own language...

P4: I speak my own language... [the elder's language is] a different dialect than my Chilcotin but I enjoy hearing it like, yeah. Some words I recognise...

Elder Henry Charles carried and shared this knowledge with DUDES Club members until he joined the spirit world in 2017.

Although the role of Elders varied between DUDES Clubs, depending in part on the Elder's knowledge and their availability, there was a deep appreciation of having an Elder present. According to King and Gracey (2009), in many Indigenous cultures, "Elders are those who have shown wisdom and leadership in cultural, spiritual and historical matters within their communities, and might not necessarily be old. Elders represent an essential connection with the past; they are keepers of the community knowledge and supporters of its collective spirit" (p. 82). As described above, at one DUDES Club located in the inner city of a large metropolitan area, men described how the Indigenous Elder played a central role in reconnecting members to their cultural identity by sharing "traditional knowledge." This was especially significant

given that disconnection from community and/or culture was common among the men due to such factors as geographic barriers, the legacy of colonial policies such as residential schooling, the Sixties Scoop, and current child welfare practices, and because cultural and language revitalization are increasingly recognized as important health promotion strategies for Indigenous Peoples (King & Gracey, 2009).

Future Directions

In the 2020 survey, we found that only 24.4% of respondents were under 40. Overall, this finding was consistent with the data from our earlier study which showed an average participant age of 46. In light of these findings, the DCS worked on developing new programs, namely NexUp, to attract younger participants to reduce social isolation and improve wellness among vulnerable populations of Indigenous youth and young men in B.C. We have yet to evaluate NexUp and briefly introduce this new and exciting initiative here.

The NexUp Initiative was launched in 2020 by DUDES Club staff members Ryan Avola and Tekka Everstz. The goal is to build supportive and responsive strategies for the dynamic needs of the new youth and young adults. Nexup is a youth-focused, youth-built, and youth-led approach to health and wellness dedicated to building spaces that embrace Indigenous ways of knowing to support the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health of young men. Through collaborative community-based projects and activities, NexUp continues to uphold, enhance, support and advance the DCS mission and vision. NexUp works within communities with significant Indigenous populations, including urban neighbourhoods, small towns, rural villages, and on-reserve communities. NexUp focuses on supporting younger individuals during their unique learning journeys and encouraging continual collaboration on projects that focus on reimagining and redefining “men’s health,” as inspired by the DUDES Club model. An important part of re-imagining relationships is about breaking down the gender binary, and as such, NexUp is committed to listening, learning, and adapting new ways to create spaces that are safer, supportive, and motivating for all trans, two-spirit, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and gender queer individuals of all races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. This means that NexUp welcomes and acknowledges the beauty, knowledge, and lived experience of all gender identities, expressions, and sexualities. As such, it incorporates elements of Connell’s true vision and purpose for a plurality of masculinities as applied to men’s health program design (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

NexUp builds on the foundational approaches that made DUDES Club so successful and sustainable over the years. This applied evolution of the DUDES Club for younger participants holds great promise for formalizing the power of intergenerational learning and participation.

Policy Implications

We have long considered the DUDES Club to play an advocacy role on behalf of the Indigenous communities that we support. We have been in a position of trusted partner with these communities which has provided us the opportunity to listen, reflect and act in a good way to bring greater attention to the significant challenges that Indigenous communities continue to face in Canada. This process would also likely apply to other marginalised, racialised, and colonised groups in diverse settings around the world. Here are four key policy recommendations that we believe require urgent and sustained attention in partnership with the affected communities:

1. *Advocate for more innovative approaches to wellness that effectively decolonise how the health care system is set up to engage and care for Indigenous and racialised people.* As the health care system is rife with systemic racism that causes many harms, it needs to be replaced with models such as the DUDES Club to invite men to engage with the healthcare system in a positive way, while focusing on the prevention of illness and therapeutic partnerships with healthcare providers. DUDES Club is a noteworthy Canadian example of how governments can realize their commitments to implement the United Nations Declaration Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007)³ and TRC Calls to Action in health and beyond.
2. *Support Indigenous-led health partnerships and local Indigenous and community-driven program development.* This can help enhance Indigenous community control in health program design and delivery for Indigenous communities. Relatedly, models of care should be expanded to provide continuous support for people living on and off-reserve and account for the reality that while more than half of Indigenous people live off-reserve and many migrate back and forth (e.g., TRC Call to Action #20, 2015b)
3. *Advocate for more flexible sources of funding that allow for organic, community-responsive programming.* Governments have been improving in this regard, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustained pressure is required to ensure this novel approach to funding continues to provide greater creativity and responsiveness in program design, delivery and reporting at the community level.
4. *Address men's health with an eye toward community health.* Addressing men's health is one aspect of overall community health and will enrich the future of whole communities when all members are given a place to find safety, trust, and support.

Conclusion

The DUDES Club is a disruptive social innovation primarily because of the disconnection between the mainstream health system and the richness and power of Indigenous wellness practices in Canada. DUDES Club members are recovering

practices that have withstood the onslaught of Canada’s colonial history. Indigenous ways of knowing and healing are essential in addressing the dire health and social problems wrought by colonialism. When we began sharing the success of the DUDES Club model with various Indigenous communities around British Columbia, the matriarchs and female leaders would often ask “where are our men?”, referring specifically to how men had lost their way within themselves and within the community. This question still echoes today, but since the beginning of DUDES Club we have seen, heard, and felt the many ways that DUDES Club members are reclaiming their spirit and their role in community while supporting each other to walk a path of healing. In time, we hope that this question “where are our men?” shifts to a resounding affirmation: “our men are home; healthy and proud sons, uncles, fathers, grandfathers, husbands, partners, and friends.” Above all, the connections that DUDES Club members establish with each other, their language, their culture, and the land resonate as the very source of success for this model, and its potential to inspire similarly impactful models in other communities around the world.

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