



Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO) MIYÓYÂWIN Initiative



**Métis Mental Wellness: Rooted in
Culture, Strengthened in Community
Summary of Key Findings from the Literature**

Summary

Background: Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO) has been investigating available literature concerning Métis' mental wellness. A thematic analysis of the literature highlights what supports Métis mental health and the challenges in accessing culturally safe and meaningful care. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding Métis identity, culture, and community and having safe spaces to promote health and well-being for Métis.

Methods: 16 articles, including published manuscripts, grey literature, presentations and news articles, outlining mental health and wellness from a Métis perspective were examined. Of all the literature reviewed, 10 were qualitative in nature emphasizing the experience of Métis, 1 utilized mixed methods (presentation), and 1 applied quantitative approaches. The remaining 3 were news articles released to the public. A thematic analysis was conducted, following a grounded theory where codes became more refined throughout the data coding process resulting in finalized themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results: Emergent themes were rooted in Métis methodologies, ensuring that analysis was conducted from LFMO's Métis-specific GBA+ Framework (2019) to illuminate the systems and structures that impact mental health outcomes of Métis populations.

Conclusion: The analysis yielded six key themes: 1) Culturally Safe and Relevant Care; 2) Métis Definitions of Health and Wellness; 3) Health Disparities and Barriers; 4) The Importance of Métis Identity and Community; 5) Safe Spaces and Support Systems; 6) Resilience and Self-Determination. This preliminary literature review reiterates that Métis identity, cultural connection, and community relations are critical to defining and understanding mental wellness from a Métis-specific lens.



Key Themes and Findings

1. Culturally Safe and Relevant Care

Métis people need health and social services where they feel safe being who they are. Cultural safety means recognizing social, economic, political, and historical factors—especially colonization—and working to balance power dynamics in care settings.

The Red River Cart Model (Atkinson et al., 2023) presents a holistic Métis health framework. The framework is helpful for health workers unfamiliar with Métis culture as a key determinant of wellness.

“I think that culture impacts my health and wellness in very positive ways.... Feeling strong and settled in my identity contributes to my sense of resilience, contributes to the level of self-care that I take with myself, and the sense of pride in identity that I have.”

— Female adult (Auger, 2021)



Taking Action Together:

Health services can improve Métis wellness by learning and respecting Métis culture, and creating Métis-specific safespaces within existing systems.

2 . Métis Definitions of Health and Wellness

Health is viewed as a whole — mind, body, spirit, and community are interconnected. Many Métis seek access to traditional medicines and Elders for healing. However, barriers exist: lack of culturally appropriate resources, fear of stereotypes, and difficulty navigating mainstream services.

“When my spirit loses a sense of purpose, lack of love, too much stress, life distractions, then my health starts to decline and my whole sense of well-being suffers adversely. We must feed all: mind, body, soul, spirit and love!” (Participant C-013) (Ginn et al., 2021).

Métis-informed and guided spaces increase trust and access to care (Monchalin, 2019; Kinsely et al, 2023).



Taking Action Together: We can nurture holistic health by embracing traditional healing and welcoming Elders' guidance within the community and care settings.

3. Health Disparities and Barriers

Colonial impacts have caused health inequities. Métis people experience higher rates of chronic illness and mental health challenges. Many face exclusion from programs like the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB), which increases burdens.

“In Canada, Métis people experience health disparities, which stem from impacts of colonization including the Scrip system, exclusion from non-Insured health benefits, and inequitable and culturally unsafe health care service.” (Atkinson et al., 2023)

Discrimination and marginalization are common when accessing services.

“If I hide my Métis identity, my spirit and my health suffer. If I share my Métis identity with mainstream society, I suffer racism. (Participant C-002)” (quoted from Ginn et al., 2021).



Taking Action Together:
Advocating for equitable, culturally safe Métis-specific services will help remove barriers and reduce health disparities.

4. The Importance of Métis Identity and Community

Strong Métis identity and connection to the community are essential for mental wellness. Sharing stories, culture, and language supports healing and resilience.

“Once I knew I was Métis and met more Métis, I felt like I had come home. (Participant C-008)” (Ginn et al., 2021)

Métis women, Aunties, Elders, and Knowledge Holders are vital caregivers and culture keepers (Gaudet et al., 2020).



Taking Action Together: Building and celebrating Métis identity through storytelling, cultural practices, and community connections strengthens mental wellness for all.

5. Safe Spaces and Support Systems

Métis people create their own cultural spaces to feel safe and heal. Family, Aunties, Elders, and kinship networks are important supports.

“The multi-use space was filled with Métis culture in the form of art, music, and dance that reflected a Métis kitchen-feel. This space connected all of us, and offered a relaxed and fun atmosphere. We felt an ease and safety that enabled us to remember and to share what being an Auntie meant, and what our Aunties meant to us” (Gaudet et al., 2020).



Taking Action Together: Encouraging the development of Métis-led safe spaces and kinship supports promotes healing and belonging.

6. Resilience and Self-Determination

Despite challenges, Métis communities show how great strength. Resilience and cultural resurgence are key to wellness.

“We learned that, having endured so much difficulty for generations, Métis women’s ability to maintain traditional knowledge and wisdom is a testament to their resilience and strength in the face of adversity. By strengthening our relationships with other Métis women through ceremony, we have begun to better understand our familial matriarchal role models, and, just as important, to identify our own lives with theirs. Placing value on Métis Aunties helped us to recognize the complex set of dynamics and systems needed to uphold healthy and loving relationships.” (Gaudet et al., 2020)

Self-governance and matriarchal leadership sustain community wellness (Monchalin, 2019; Atkinson et al., 2023; Gaudet et al., 2020).



Taking Action Together: We can empower Métis communities by supporting self-determination and honouring matriarchal leadership roles.

What This Means for Our Communities

- For Métis, mental wellness is deeply tied to cultural identity, community, and safe, respectful care.
- Métis-specific services and resources are needed to reduce barriers and build trust.
- Supporting Elders, women, and Knowledge Keepers is essential for passing on traditions and strengthening mental health.
- Creating culturally safe spaces and addressing systemic barriers will improve access and outcomes.

Direct Words from Métis Voices

“I think that culture impacts my health and wellness in very positive ways.... Feeling strong and settled in my identity contributes to my sense of resilience, contributes to the level of self-care that I take with myself, and the sense of pride in identity that I have (Female adult). (Auger, 2021)

“That personal connection is key. It’s important. We come from a background where culturally we work together.” (Kinsley et al., 2023)

“When my spirit loses a sense of purpose, lack of love, too much stress, life distractions, then my health starts to decline and my whole sense of well-being suffers adversely. We must feed all: mind, body, soul, spirit and love! (Participant C-013) (Ginn et al., 2021)”

“Once I knew I was Métis and met more Métis, I felt like I had come home. (Participant C-008)” (Ginn et al., 2021)

Conclusion

This review confirms the importance of centring Métis identity, culture, and community in mental wellness. Ensuring identity and cultural connection remain at the core of well-being is essential. Moving forward, we must build more Métis-informed spaces, improve access to culturally safe care, and uplift the vital roles of women, Elders, and kinship in healing.



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