



WALKING SIDE BY SIDE:

Support on your Journey with Alcohol Use

September 2025 Toolkit



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



ELDER ROSIE WHITE ELK

Elder Rosie White Elk shares a story about thinking of yourself as an eagle feather covered by a cloth. The cloth is whatever substance we may use in an effort to cope with experiences of trauma, racism, stigma and pain (whether mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual). Elder Rosie says that we must feel safe in our healing in order to come out of the cloth.

“With respect, this is my teaching.

The individual is the baby eagle feather, as they move through transitions the feather grows.

Wrapped in our traditional cloth from one of the Four Directions for comfort and stay safe in what it knows.

Through that lived experience of substance abuse, the emotions are raw, through the three aspects: The mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual.

There are so many emotions to deal with or work through, the addiction(s) are the blanket (cloth) that protects, nurtures, and keeps safe the individual who is experiencing an overload of emotional, mental and physical pain, etc.

The emotions fuel the mental stresses that increase the struggles, traumatic memories, then creates an overload in the thinking. The blanket is a soother, to comfort the individual through the pain, struggles, memories of abuse that was experienced.

This is why an individual can heal through each emotion one step at a time, instead of dealing with all the emotions, then it repeats as a PTSD.

When ready, the blanket/cloth can be lifted off the individual slowly, as each person heals differently.

Through recovery it is intensely difficult to manage, due to the blanket(s) being removed too quickly.

It depends on the individual and their lived experiences.

Sometimes exposing the individual to all emotions attached to the traumas all at once can lead to traumatic behaviors on the part of the individual healing... without that person obtaining the skills to manage or cope positively.

It must be repetitive in healing and building skills and changing a cause to a different effect as each person moves forward. That is why the blanket/cloth is crucial in the understanding of the ‘teaching’ aspect and treated with respect.

Each individual goes back to the cause, through the reaction of pain outcomes... when the blanket(s) are lifted slowly and individually for each trauma.

Then miracles happen, to feel safe and work through trauma, the blanket/cloth remains until most of the traumas are released through many forms of healing modalities and resources.

Keep in mind, there are many blankets to soothe and comfort each individual.”

- Rosie White Elk Medicine Woman, Cree, Ojibway, Saulteaux and Croatian



BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

This toolkit is designed to help you or someone you care about reflect on your current relationship with alcohol and identify where you are on your journey. At the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) we acknowledge that we each live with our unique and individual experiences, and this includes our relationship to alcohol.

When considering alcohol use, it is important to think about how to support your ongoing mental health and wellness. It is crucial to reflect on your strength, resilience, inherent gifts, and supportive teachings that you have carried with you for generations and generations. This toolkit offers a pathway for reflection and support on your journey towards wholistic well-being (spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical). It incorporates cultural and traditional healing practices, meeting you where you are at on your journey, free of judgement and shame.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION CHECK-IN

Here are some questions to consider that may help you learn more about your unique relationship with alcohol use, along with a couple of tools to support deeper reflection (i.e., next steps):

- Do you have cravings for alcohol?
- Do you ever drink more than you intended?
- Do you continue to drink even though it causes issues in your personal or work life?
- Have you thought about why you drink?
- Is there anything you have been unable to participate in because of drinking?
- Do you notice any health impacts from drinking?

[The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test \(AUDIT\)](#)¹ Interactive Self-Test can assist in identifying next steps:

Check in with your health care provider or a trusted Elder, friend or community member. Sometimes it can be surprising to see the results of these assessments, so remember to always continue to reflect on your personal and inherit strengths, you may want to connect with traditional medicines, ceremony and the support around you, as you are not alone on this journey!

REFLECTING ON YOUR WELLNESS JOURNEY

Here are some questions to consider to assist you in recognizing your strength, resilience, inherent gifts and supportive teachings. The aim is to help you utilize the tools you already have, to continue to honor and strengthen your wholistic well-being.

- [FNHA's Wellness Diary Self-Assessment: Where Am I?](#) (page 11)
- What makes you feel more grounded and connected? You may consider your connections to culture, family, community, land, work, art, or anything else that helps you feel grounded and connected. Then, how might you increase these connections to support you if you make changes to consumption of alcohol or other substances?
- Reflect on what your hopes, dreams or visions are for your best life. What does your best self-look and feel like for you? Does it involve ceremony and traditions to help support, is it a commitment to learning about your culture and traditional ways?
- You may want to reflect on the barriers you experience, what and who can help you remove those barriers in a good way. Is it a trusted friend, Elder, family member or colleague? Is it going to ceremony, a sweat, a potlatch, a sun-dance, being on the land or going to the water?

¹ Please note that this assessment uses a binary gender specific checkbox and leaving it blank will not allow you to proceed. We will research and update to an all-genders inclusive assessment when available.

OPTIONS FOR YOUR JOURNEY



This section is intended to support you in deciding what your next steps are for your unique relationship to alcohol. Keep in mind that alcohol use may vary greatly depending on your personal goals.

Perhaps you are somewhere in the middle and don't want to change your habits with drinking, but you do want to learn how you reduce the potential harms associated with alcohol. Regardless of what you choose, the following options are intended to foster more self-awareness and support your wholistic well-being and whatever that means for you!

What steps would you like to take on this journey?

1

Option 1: I don't want to reduce my drinking, but I want to be safer when doing it.

2

Option 2: I want to drink less alcohol.

3

Option 3: I want to stop drinking alcohol.

OPTION 1: I DON'T WANT TO REDUCE MY DRINKING, BUT I WANT TO BE SAFER WHEN DOING IT

If you would like to consume alcohol in a safer way without changing your consumption, here are some tips:

Know your own limits and stick within them

- If you've noticed that you don't feel well if you go beyond a certain number of drinks, try and cut yourself off before that point. Reflecting on how your body, mind and spirit feel when this happens, can support you in adjusting your limit as and when you need to.

Start slow, and go steady.

- Drink at a slower and steadier rate to allow your body to process alcohol at a rate that your body can more easily manage. This can help to slow the emptying of the stomach, which helps regulate how quickly alcohol enters your system.

Eat a balanced meal or snack when you drink, and include a carbohydrate such as sweet potato, healthy fat such as avocado, and protein like salmon, eggs and chicken.

- Food can slow the body's absorption of alcohol, helping your body more easily manage.

For every alcoholic beverage you drink, drink one non-alcoholic beverage. Water is a great choice.

- Drinking water while you consume alcohol minimizes the risks associated with dehydration, such as headaches (hangover).

Drink alcoholic beverages with lower percentages.

- Lower percentage could mean consuming drinks with an already low alcohol level (such as beer or cider), or watering down or diluting drinks yourself by adding ice or juice.

Think about where you are drinking and who you are drinking with to ensure you are safe.

- Plan for your safety as well as the safety of those around you. For example, do not bring your car keys to drive if you are drinking away from home, or have somebody who is sober who can get you home safely.

Be mindful of your medical needs.

- Consider any medications or medical conditions that can negatively interact with alcohol. Some drugs, including both regulated and unregulated, like opioids and some sedatives, can dangerously amplify alcohol's effects, while others, like stimulants, can create dangerous strain on the body when combined with alcohol. Common medicines like cold medicines can also interact with alcohol and increase the risk of liver damage and side effects like drowsiness.
- Mixing alcohol with other drugs can have unpredictable results. Alcohol may either block the absorption of the other drug, making it less effective, or it may increase the effect of the other drug, to the point of danger. The general rule is never to mix alcohol with any other drugs—whether the other drug is a medication or an unregulated substance. If you are taking a medication and you want to drink, check first with your doctor or pharmacist, or explore the following resource: <https://www.drugcocktails.ca/>

OPTION #2: I WANT TO DRINK LESS ALCOHOL

If you are at a place on your journey where you are ready to reduce your alcohol intake, here are some additional ideas:

Sip your drink or skip a drink!

- Drink a glass of water between drinks. If you have a bottle of beer, when it is nearly empty, fill it with water so that others will not get you another drink right away.

Consume non-alcoholic beverages instead.

- There is an abundance of alcohol-free cocktails (mocktails) and beers out there to satisfy your thirst. You can find alcohol-free beverages in grocery stores, at local restaurants, and even purchase them online.
- Check out the [Native Infusion: Rethink Your Drink- A Guide to Ancestral Beverages](#) for alternative non-alcoholic beverages.

BYOB! Bring Your Own Beverage!

- When you attend a social gathering or dinner, bring your favorite alcohol-free beverage, such as juice, fruit-infused water, or traditional hot and iced teas. It is important to be mindful of beverages with higher sugar content, as they can lead to rapid spikes in blood sugar levels. Consistently consuming sugary drinks increases the risk of weight gain, insulin resistance, and Type 2 Diabetes. Moderation and healthier beverage choices can help maintain better overall health and reduce these risks.

Engage in Wellness Activities.

- Engage in activities that increase your wellness and nurture your spirit. It can be anything from participating in sports and physical activity, making art of any kind (like painting, carving, beading), being on the land, learning new recipes and more!

Make a plan.

- For example, you could plan to drink alcohol only on weekends or only at special events, like someone's birthday party or a wedding. Whatever works for you and the goals you are creating for yourself, it isn't about being perfect, it is about being consistent! You could consider setting limits as suggested in [Canada's low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines](#).

Reflect on why you are drinking alcohol.

- If you are using alcohol as a coping mechanism (self-medicating), to deal with social anxiety or to cope with painful events in your life, such as intergenerational trauma and the impacts of colonialism, it might be time to seek or utilize professional support services. For example, from a [mental health care provider](#) or attending a [treatment program](#) if that is the route you think you would benefit from most.

OPTION #3: I WANT TO STOP DRINKING ALCOHOL

It is important to think about safety when consuming, reducing, or stopping alcohol completely. If you drink alcohol regularly and then cut down or suddenly stop, you may go through withdrawal - which can cause physical and emotional symptoms while the alcohol is clearing out of your system. Many people may be able to cut down or stop with only mild withdrawal, but people who drink a large amount of alcohol should not attempt to cut down without support from a health care provider. Severe alcohol withdrawal can cause major medical problems or even death.

If you have ever had seizures, delirium tremens, blackouts or withdrawals before, please seek **immediate medical assistance**. These are serious withdrawal symptoms that should not be ignored. There are supports and medications to eliminate these risks included on the next page. For more information, refer to [HealthLinkBC's alcohol withdrawal webpage](#).

If you want to stop drinking alcohol altogether, and believe this choice aligns with your wellness journey, here are some tips that aim to support you on this path:

Depending on how much and how regularly you consume alcohol, you may need to seek professional/medically managed withdrawal support, as stopping drinking suddenly can be dangerous and even lead to death.

- Withdrawal could be an issue if:
 - You have six or more drinks per day (except for older adults, who can experience withdrawal at lower amounts)
 - Drinking begins at a predictable time in the morning or afternoon.
 - When you stop drinking, symptoms include sweating or tremors. These symptoms are quickly relieved by alcohol.
 - You have required medical treatment for withdrawal in the past or have had withdrawal seizures.

Remove alcohol from your environment, such as your home, car, personal bag, boat, cabin or any other place where it would be easily accessible.

- Removing access to alcohol can help decrease your use. If it is not readily available, it may be more supportive to discontinue alcohol use as it will be less accessible to you.

Have an exit plan for social gatherings or dinners if you feel tempted to drink.

Seek support!

- Connect with a friend, community member or Elder for guidance and encouragement.
- Go to places and spaces that focus on sobriety such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Wellbriety, Smart Recovery, on the land, and ceremony, or a powwow or potlatch for example.
- For more support, explore FNHA's [Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service](#) which provides individuals with access to specialists in addictions medicine and psychiatry as well as mental health and allied health care professionals.

Volunteer!

- Giving back, even with your time, is a great way to support your wellness while helping others. Many First Nations value the teachings of reciprocity, so this is one way to (re)connect to your culture and community. For example, you can be a designated driver when going out with friends, or volunteer to drive Elders to appointments, shopping, and events in your community.

Learn more about FNHA Treatment Centre options.

- [FNHA Treatment Centres](#)

Set up regular appointments with your counsellor or other trusted wellness supports in community.

- Review FNHA's Mental Health Benefit information [here](#) on Mental Health Benefits such as counselling and accessing coverage.

A First Nations [harm reduction approach](#) means not putting blame or shame on those who use alcohol and other substances, or oneself. Meeting people wherever they are—using substances or not—is respecting their individual healing journey. Ensure that you tell your loved ones you support their path and set healthy boundaries on the journey. This approach ensures everyone is accepted and cared for, no matter where they are in their journey of wellness.



Totem Poles at Stanley Park, Vancouver BC — Representing the Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Musqueam, Nisga'a, Nuu-chah-nulth, Squamish & Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE JOURNEY

- FNHA's [Mental Health and Cultural Supports](#)
- FNHA's [Virtual Doctor of the Day](#)
- FNHA's [Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service](#)
- [Mental Health and Wellness Supports \(fnha.ca\)](#)
- [All Paths Lead to Wellness](#)
- Canada's new [Low-risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#)
- [Indigenous Harm Reduction](#) (resources and videos)
- Native Infusion: [Rethink Your Drink- A Guide to Ancestral Beverages](#)
- With Open Arms: [Supportive Conversations Among Friends – A resource for keeping friends close in conversations about substance use.](#)

SAFER CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL

This involves drinking alcohol in a way that minimizes health risks, such as adhering to guidelines for moderate drinking, and ensuring that alcohol is consumed in safe environments.

- [Helpful tips for safer celebrating](#) during the holidays.
- [Low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines - Canada.ca](#)

MANAGED ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

This refers to programs that provide controlled doses of alcohol to individuals with severe alcohol dependence in a regulated and supervised setting, aiming to reduce harm and improve health outcomes. You can learn more at:

- [The Canadian Managed Alcohol Program Studies \(CMAPS\)](#)
- [Community Managed Alcohol Program](#) (Vancouver Coastal Region)

REDUCING ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

This involves decreasing the amount and frequency of alcohol intake to lower health risks and improve overall well-being, often through strategies such as setting limits, seeking support, and making other lifestyle changes.

- Many medications are available which may be prescribed when you are reducing your alcohol consumption. Consult your doctor.
- [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, Public Summary: Drinking Less is Better](#)
- Canada's Communication Toolkit- [Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#)

Medication Options:

- [Questions about Cutting Back on Alcohol](#)
- [Medications for Alcohol Use – quick guide](#)
- [Naltrexone](#): a medication that can be prescribed when you are reducing your alcohol consumption. You can take this medication even if you are still drinking alcohol!

For additional information on support, explore the following resources:

- [What Herbs help with Alcohol Withdrawal](#)
- [Natural Treatments of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Withdrawal](#)

STOPPING DRINKING COMPLETELY

This involves completely abstaining from alcohol for various reasons, including health reasons, personal or cultural preference, or as part of a recovery process from alcohol dependence.

- FNHA [Treatment Centres](#)
- [What is Land-Based Treatment and Healing?](#)
- FNHA's [Finding your Pathway to Treatment](#) Infographic

Medication Options:

- [Questions about Cutting Back on Alcohol](#)
- [Medications for Alcohol Use – quick guide](#)
- Acamprosate: a medication that may be prescribed to support eliminating your alcohol consumption, read more [here](#).
- [Jeff Harries: Hope, Compassion, Knowledge: Treating Alcoholism](#) (YouTube Video, 8 minutes, 28 seconds)

If you are someone who feels that their substance use is a problem and that you need professional support, help is available through the [First Nations Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service](#) and or FNHA's [Virtual Doctor of the Day](#). Addiction support staff serving First Nations Communities can also call the British Columbia Centre on Substance Use 24/7 line at 778-945-7619. If you want support accessing a healing (treatment) centre through FNHA, contact MHWPprograms@fnha.ca or through your regional FNHA team. The FNHA has Regional Addictions Specialists and Harm Reduction Educators in every region in BC.

If you have questions about substance use programming in your community, you can contact SUNursing@fnha.ca.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Overdose Prevention & Harm Reduction: Get Informed](#).
- [A message from Chris Wycotte](#) who shares his inspiring story of recovery. For other inspiring stories explore our [Sober for October](#) page on our FNHA website.



Not everyone who wants to stop drinking alcohol needs to go to treatment or detox! Talk to a health care provider to find out more.

REFERENCES

The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test:

<https://auditscreen.org/check-your-drinking>

FNHA's Wellness Diary Self-Assessment: Where Am I? (page 11)

https://www.fnha.ca/WellnessSite/WellnessDocuments/Wellness_Diary.pdf

Drug Cocktails – facts about mixing medicine, alcohol and street drugs

<https://www.drugcocktails.ca/>

Native Infusion: Rethink Your Drink- A Guide to Ancestral Beverages

<https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NativeInfusion-Book.pdf>

Canada's low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/alcohol/low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines.html>

FNHA Mental Health Benefit page

<https://www.fnha.ca/benefits/mental-health>

HealthLinkBC's alcohol withdrawal webpage

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/alcohol-withdrawal>

FNHA's Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/ehealth/virtual-substance-use-and-psychiatry-service>

FNHA's Virtual Doctor of the Day

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/ehealth/virtual-doctor-of-the-day>

Harm reduction and the Toxic Drug Crisis

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/harm-reduction-and-the-toxic-drug-crisis>

FNHA's All Paths Lead to Wellness

<https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Harm-Reduction-All-Paths-Lead-to-Wellness.pdf>

Indigenous Harm Reduction

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/harm-reduction-and-the-toxic-drug-crisis/indigenous-harm-reduction>

With Open Arms: Supportive Conversations Among Friends – A resource for keeping friends close in conversations about substance use.

<https://harmreduction.fnha.ca/>

Helpful tips for safer celebrating during the holidays

<https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/tips-for-safer-celebrating-over-the-holidays>

The Canadian Managed Alcohol Program Studies (CMAPS)

<https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/projects/map/index.php>

Community Managed Alcohol Program (Vancouver Coastal Region)

<https://www.phs.ca/program/community-managed-alcohol-program/>

Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, Public Summary: Drinking Less is Better

<https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-05/CGAH-Drinking-Less-is-Better-en.pdf>

Canada's Communication Toolkit- Guidance on Alcohol and Health

<https://www.ccsa.ca/en/guidance-tools-resources/substance-use-and-addiction/alcohol/canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health#communications-toolkit>

Questions about Cutting Back on Alcohol

<https://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles/uploads/documents/alcohol-patient-booklet.pdf>

Medications for Alcohol Use – quick guide

https://www.metaphi.ca/wp-content/uploads/Pamphlet_AUDMedication.pdf

What Herbs help with Alcohol Withdrawal

<https://alcoholawareness.org/alcoholism/detox/medications/herbs/>

Natural Treatments of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Withdrawal

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/integrative-mental-health-care/201901/natural-treatments-alcohol-and-drug-abuse-and-withdrawal>

What is Land-Based Treatment and Healing?

<https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-What-is-Land-Based-Treatment-and-Healing.pdf>

FNHA Treatment Centres

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/treatment-centres>

FNHA's Finding your Pathway to Treatment Infographic

<https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Pathway-to-Treatment.pdf>

Questions about Cutting Back on Alcohol

<https://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles/uploads/documents/alcohol-patient-booklet.pdf>

Medications for Alcohol Use – quick guide

https://www.metaphi.ca/wp-content/uploads/Pamphlet_AUDMedication.pdf

Acamprosate: a medication that may be prescribed to support eliminating your alcohol consumption, read more here.

https://vch.eduhealth.ca/en/viewer?file=%2fmedia%2fVCH%2fDB%2fDB.320.A23.pdf#search=topic_free%3a%22Alcohol%20Use%20Disorder%22&phrase=false

Jeff Harries: Hope, Compassion, Knowledge: Treating Alcoholism (YouTube Video, 8 minutes, 28 seconds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=XXa0P34KE-o>

Overdose Prevention & Harm Reduction: Get Informed

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/harm-reduction-and-the-toxic-drug-crisis/get-informed>

A message from Chris Wycotte who shares his inspiring story of recovery. For other inspiring stories explore our Sober for October page on our FNHA website

The story: <https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/soberer-for-october-chris-wycotte-from-the-williams-lake-first-nation-shares-his-inspiring-story-of-recovery>

Sober for October

<https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/community-wellness/sober-for-october>





First Nations Health Authority
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