Making Connections
An Indigenous Framework for Health

October 2015

Kōkua Kalihi Valley
&
Islander Institute
INTRODUCTION

What is your story of health?

Beginning in 2014, Kōkua Kalihi Valley and Islander Institute held a series of formal and informal conversations to hear people’s perspectives on personal and community health. Much can be learned from listening to stories of struggle and success, pain and joy, frustration and understanding. In this process, our aim was to find common themes that define what matters to indigenous and island people. In doing so, a more universal view of health and wellness emerged.

The current healthcare system is a conglomeration of markets and industries, regulations and rules, social norms, personal practices, and terminology that purports to make people healthy. Each of these elements is bent around a health framework that makes generally unchallenged assumptions about people. Theses assumptions include:

- Health is merely the absence or avoidance of illness, disease, pain, or death.
- Getting healthy is an individual’s concern, motivated by one’s self-interest in being healthy.
- Your degree of health is a measurable condition and it is measured by external observers.
- The truest pathway to good health is determined by science; everything else is, at best, “complementary.”
- Real health care is provided by the healthcare market—doctors, drug companies, fitness programs, health educators, etc.
- If people are unhealthy, it is because of a personal failure rather than the failure of the system.

Despite tremendous growth of the healthcare system in the United States, it is becoming clearer that it is failing to make people feel healthier. In fact, a recent study from Ohio State University found that 25 years of expansion of the medical system in the Western world has led people to feel less healthy. In this atmosphere of skepticism, community efforts are taking root to challenge, reform, reject, and/or remake the health care system to improve its effectiveness.

This report doesn’t suggest specific changes to the healthcare system. Rather, it challenges the foundational assumptions of the system and puts forth a different framework around which a better system can be built. Our intent is to offer an alternative way to describe what it means to be healthy based on the actual experiences and stories of people—in particular, indigenous and island people.

The framework below is in its most early stage of formation. Our hope is that people will apply and refine this rough sketch to further develop a new paradigm of health, wealth, wholeness, and happiness around which a functioning and meaningful system can be built.
LISTENING FOR A NEW FRAMEWORK

A health framework derived from indigenous values and practices looks quite different from what we currently see. In our conversations, these differences became apparent immediately and consistently:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Framework</th>
<th>Indigenous Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disintegration</strong> – You are an assembly of parts and conditions, which can be disaggregated, diagnosed, and fixed independently of everything else.</td>
<td><strong>Wholeness</strong> – We want to move toward greater and greater degrees of connection with people and places and within ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An individual’s concern</strong> – Health is between you and your doctor. It is assumed that you will always do what’s in your self-interest.</td>
<td><strong>A family/community concern</strong> – We are part of a community of care that includes our doctors, families, neighbors, as well as our ancestors and our places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exclusive</strong> – Health is different for different people based on your status, characteristics and category.</td>
<td><strong>Inclusive</strong> – Health is something that unites us and our ideas. It can incorporate many views while binding us together in a common humanity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deficit and scarcity</strong> – The focus is on the symptoms and conditions that keep you from &quot;good health.&quot; The resources to get healthy are insufficient and must be rationed.</td>
<td><strong>Abundance</strong> – Health begins wherever we are at with whatever resources we have, and there are many kinds of resources around us. It grows from there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakness</strong> – You are a victim of forces outside of you and a passive recipient of the situation you find yourself in.</td>
<td><strong>Resilience</strong> – Health is positive action that emerges from our struggles and challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A test</strong> – You are either healthy or not; for most people, “good health” is an unattainable ideal that you will never reach.</td>
<td><strong>A life’s journey</strong> – We move forward and strive toward increasing connectivity and that movement is positive even if we never “get there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defined externally</strong> – An expert tells you how and why you are healthy or not, and what you need to do about it.</td>
<td><strong>Defined internally</strong> – Along with our doctors and others, we assess how we are doing and what we need in order to feel whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incomprehensible</strong> – It is your job to navigate the jargon, science, payment systems, and rules in order to obtain health.</td>
<td><strong>Relatable</strong> – Our understanding of health comes from common experience and common sense. Everyone should be able to access health, especially when working as a community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central to this framework of health is the use of stories to understand people, and the identification of practices both as expressions of the things people value and as tools for helping individuals and communities become healthier.

STORIES

Stories are usually more difficult to quantify than other data, but they are superior for gathering an accurate and meaningful understanding of what is really happening with people. Since our goal is to create a relevant and useful health framework, stories are the building blocks. Often we think of stories as mere complementary information to medical data and scientific observation, but when we put human beings at the center of the work, we find the opposite to be true—the story is central and the data is complementary. When stories are used to initiate conversations about health and health care, we are more likely to focus on the goals that really matter to people. Furthermore, stories connect people to one another, fostering hope and understanding; telling stories is a healthy practice.

PRACTICES

Practice is the way that island people think about getting healthy. A practice is something you do, alone or with others, on a regular basis. Practices can be helpful or unhelpful. Ingesting pharmaceuticals and exercising are practices, but they are only two of a multitude of practices that people employ to feel better. This framework acknowledges there are many practices equal to and sometimes superior to modern therapies and drugs. Specifically, we identified a sampling of practices, which advance the four vital connections that constitute this health and wellbeing framework.

CONNECTIONS FRAMEWORK

Thinking carefully about the stories and practices of island people, one quickly senses the central importance of four connections. When people talk about good health, they refer to feeling connected in one or more of these four ways. When sharing stories of bad health, they talk about momentary or chronic loss of one or more of these connections.

- **Connection to place** – To have a kinship with ‘āina
- **Connection to others** – To love and be loved; to understand and be understood
- **Connection to past and future** – To have kuleana; a purpose in the world
- **Connection to your better self** – To find and know yourself
In the pages that follow, we look at questions that can help people assess these connections. We also give examples of practices that people employ to find or deepen these connections. Excerpts from individual stories are used to illustrate those practices.

**INTERCONNECTION**

Each of the four connections is necessary, but none are sufficient for health and happiness. For indigenous and island people, the four connections are highly interconnected. They are not four separate pursuits. This fact might best be illustrated in a story shared by one participant:

*When I see people working together on the ‘āina, or in a fishpond, or gathering limu and doing traditional practices, I actually see them get physically stronger. They get connected to who they are, and to each other. And they feel power—not power over others, but power and control over their own destiny.*

So while we identify these connections as four different types, they are in fact different aspects of a single wholeness that people hope for in their lives, families, and communities. Understanding this interconnectedness helps us realize the need for spaces and practices where multiple connections can be made.

Striving toward wholeness—toward health—is a process of connecting and feeling connected to the things that matter.
Making Connections: An Indigenous Framework for Health

Kōkua Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Place

To have a kinship with ʻāina:

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSING CONNECTION TO PLACE

• What is the story of the place you call home?
• How well do you know the people and places around you? "Map" of your place?
• Where is the story of the place you call home?
• Do you do any activities in nature? Hands in the earth; being in the ocean, etc.?
• Do you have a favorite place where you feel your best—a healing place?
• What places are special to you?
• Can you access the places you need to be in?
• Do you feel a comfort and connection to the built structures around you?
• What would you change about the built structures around you?
• Do you feel a kinship with ʻāina?
• How well do you know the ‘āina?

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES FOR DEEPENING THE CONNECTION TO PLACE

Aloha ʻāina – Deepening your love and appreciation for the land

• When asked, ‘how are you feeling?’ we often say things like ‘haven’t hit the waves long time’ or ‘haven’t hiked the mountains lately.’
• When asked, ‘how are you feeling?’ we often say things like ‘haven’t hit the waves long time’, or ‘haven’t hiked the mountains lately.’
• “When my father’s been away from home for a while, instead of first spending time with me, he first goes to Ka’āwā and jumps in the water. That’s how he reconnects, that’s how he rejuvenates his spirit.”
• “When my father’s been away from home for a while, instead of first spending time with me, he first goes to Ka‘awā and jumps in the water. That’s how he reconnects, that’s how he rejuvenates his spirit.”
• “When my father’s been away from home for a while, instead of first spending time with me, he first goes to Kāawā and jumps in the water. That’s how he reconnects, that’s how he rejuvenates his spirit.”

Mālama ʻāina – Caring for and healing the land

• “Our ʻohana incorporate our values and practice in our day-to-day life. We work in our lo‘i every week. Everyone has their own lo‘i to work on. It helps our critical thinking.”
• “Our ʻohana incorporate our values and practice in our day-to-day life. We work in our lo‘i every week. Everyone has their own lo‘i to work on. It helps our critical thinking.”
• “Our Hawaiian identity is tied to the food we eat which is connected to place. When I was on Kaho‘olawe, there was lots of fish but we couldn’t really harvest that.”
• “Our Hawaiian identity is tied to the food we eat which is connected to place. When I was on Kaho‘olawe, there was lots of fish but we couldn’t really harvest that.”

Mapping – Taking stock of the important points in your surroundings

• “In preparing for the next disaster, people knew the locations of every person who would need extra help; where they lived and what their needs were.”
• “In indigenous populations that we worked with, you see that when you destroy the population’s food systems, the health problems begin.”
• “In indigenous populations that we worked with, you see that when you destroy the population’s food systems, the health problems begin.”

ʻĀina, that which feeds us – Food from your land connects you to your land

• “Ohana, ʻāina, that which feeds us – Food from your land connects you to your land.”
• “Ohana, ʻāina, that which feeds us – Food from your land connects you to your land.”
• “Ohana, ʻāina, that which feeds us – Food from your land connects you to your land.”

Making Connections: An Indigenous Framework for Health

Kōkua Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understood

TALK STORY

Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Others

• Have you told someone how much they mean to you?
• What are the people you feel with?
• Do you feel good about the people you work with?
• Do you feel accepted by others and are you accepting of others?
• Is there someone who trusts you and turns to you when she/he needs help?
• Do you feel good enough to turn your own chances?
• What is the story of a person you feel closest to?

SKIN-TO-SKIN

Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Others

• My sister has an one-month-old baby. In order for her to produce breast milk, she needs to have skin-to-skin contact with her baby. That’s what we’re trying to do.

WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PILI—TALKING STORY—TIME WAS SLOW DOWN

Making Connections An Indigenous Framework for Health

Koko Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to Others

To love and be loved; To understand and be understande
Connection to past and future

To have kuleana: a purpose in the world

Examples of questions for assessing connection to past and future

- What is your happiest memory of someone who has passed on?
- When was the last time you held a baby? Or read to a child, or listened to a teenager?
- What do you do for the future generations?
- When was the last time you listened to an elder?
- What is your favorite part in that story?
- Do you use traditional language?
- Do you feel you are making your ancestors proud?
- What is your happiest memory of someone who has passed on?

Examples of practices for deepening the connection to past and future

Cultural understanding and appreciation

• "The fact of our genealogies makes us whole. It's an unbroken chain of stories and practices."
• "Our ancestors were a healthy people."
• "The last of our genealogies makes us who we are, in unbroken chain of stories and practices."

Carrying on traditional practices – experiencing the wisdom of our ancestors

• "On Hokule'a's World Wide Voyage, we came across a people that didn't have much, but they have everything! Some people are embracing the pearl industry to create economic opportunities. The kūpuna there, however, don't see pearls as the way to wealth. They understand the value of carrying on our traditions, that a green economy could mean economic opportunities. They keep their traditions, however, don't see the green as the way to wealth. They understand the value of carrying on our traditions, that a green economy could mean economic opportunities."
• "When we're on a long voyage – there's routine on the wa'a. We have a groove – we can only study, sing, talk story. When we come off the canoe, we get sick."
• "When we're on a long voyage – there's routine on the wa'a. We have a groove – we can only study, sing, talk story. When we come off the canoe, we get sick."

Making Connections: An Indigenous Framework for Health

Kōkua Kohala Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to past and future

To have kuleana: a purpose in the world

Examples of questions for assessing connection to past and future

- What is the story of your ancestry?
- Do you feel you are making your ancestors proud?
- Do you use traditional language?
- If you think about the past and future as chapters in a book, what is your part in that story?
- Do you use traditional language?
- Do you feel you are making your ancestors proud?
- What is the story of your ancestry?


**Connection to Your Better Self**

**To Find and Know Yourself**

**Questions for Assessing Connection to Your Better Self**

- What is the story of your name?
- What was the last time you...? Could laughed hard? Fell proud? Learned a lesson?
- Are you getting enough sleep?
- Do you feel good about the roles you play? At home? At work?
- Do you understand your medications? Take and medical procedures you've had work?
- Do you feel good about the food you are putting into your body?
- When was the last time you felt really good about something you did?
- When was the last time you fell healthy?

**Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Your Better Self**

- When was the last time you felt healthy?
- When did you share something with your friends?
- When did you have a meal?
- When did you exercise?
- When did you feel good about something you did?

**Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Your Better Self**

- Finding your gifts, living by your values
- Awareness of what we put into our bodies
- Wholeness and health in the midst of illness

**Story is self is health – find and know your truth**

- What is the story of the last time you felt healthy?
- When was the last time you felt really good about something you did?
- Do you feel good about the roles you play? At home? At work?
- What is the story of your name?

**Making Connections: An Indigenous Framework for Health**

Kōkua Kalihi Valley & Islander Institute

Connection to your better self

To find and know your self

**Examples of Questions for Assessing Connection to Your Better Self**

- What is the story of the last time you felt healthy?
- When was the last time you felt really good about something you did?
- Do you feel good about the roles you play? At home? At work?
- What is the story of your name?

**Examples of Practices for Deepening the Connection to Your Better Self**

- Finding your gifts, living by your values
- Awareness of what we put into our bodies
- Wholeness and health in the midst of illness

**Story is self is health – find and know your truth**

- What is the story of the last time you felt healthy?
- When was the last time you felt really good about something you did?
- Do you feel good about the roles you play? At home? At work?
- What is the story of your name?
Next Steps and Implications

The status quo framework of health alienates people from one another. It impedes the connections that are the very pillars of what it means for people to feel healthy.

When the health system overemphasizes physical metrics, the free market conforms to the production of those metrics, measuring the wrong things, and producing more “health care” even when something else is needed.

When the only acknowledged providers and places of health are medical professionals, drug manufacturers, hospitals and fitness facilities, we miss out on opportunities for people to be healed by the company of others, by the land, and by their sense of value in whatever context they find themselves.

When the image of health is an unattainable ideal, people stop striving for it, resigning themselves to failure and exclusion from the “world of the healthy people.”

When the conditions for good health are tilted against groups of people because of discrimination, gentrification, poverty, geographic isolation, or any other such societal factors, then we see wide disparities in health and wellness.

Rather than maintaining the status quo, an indigenous and island framework would refocus efforts on the creation and strengthening of vital connections. The next steps for this framework are to build on it, test and refine it, and apply it.

Build on it

In our experience, even in the confines of a single meeting, this four-part connections framework emerges and resonates with indigenous and island people. With more meetings and stories, we can build extensive lists of questions, practices and other useful tools for applying the framework. Additional pieces could include assessment tools, surveys, case studies, and translations of the framework into existing elements of the health care system.

Test and refine it

In formal and informal meetings, the framework should be tested. Does it resonate with people? Is it useful for thinking about personal health? Is it useful for thinking about community and public health? Structure and language can be made more precise and accessible over time based on this feedback.

Apply it

A more accurate framework for health should have significant implications for individuals and society. Among the ways that this framework can be applied include:
- **Public policy and funding** – With people feeling increasingly disconnected from the healthcare system and with increasing evidence of its failure, it begs the question of why policy and funding decisions continue to feed and conform to the existing framework. The healthcare system occupies one-fifth of the total economy. This represents a tremendous resource that could be shifted by providers, insurers, government, and philanthropy toward the production of greater health, wealth, happiness, and wholeness. Public and private investments in community wellbeing, natural resource protection, food systems, cultural practice, and other parts of the connections “infrastructure” are vital to the health of individuals.

- **Social determinants of health** – When placed alongside a social determinants framework, the connections framework helps in the development of effective “upstream” solutions to health problems. Addressing institutional discrimination, historical injustice, poverty, infrastructure neglect, environmental destruction and other underlying conditions with an approach that increases connections and interconnections will have powerful impacts on overall health outcomes. We need to create the conditions whereby people have realistic opportunities to live in accordance with their values and create wholeness.

- **Individual health** – This framework creates a more multifaceted pathway to feeling better. It puts more elements in a person’s control while also helping identify priorities and practices.

- **Health care professionals** – This framework supports and guides improvements to medical care. It acknowledges the critical role of healers, not as arms-length experts separate from their patients, but as members of a community helping people become more connected within themselves. The connections framework points to many improvements and new practices in the field of health care.

- **Business practice** – In a time when many businesses are trying to create healthier workforces for economic reasons, this framework points to a more meaningful purpose and clearly defines what it means to be a socially responsible business. One can now ask: does the business help create more connectivity for people, or is it driving people apart from knowing themselves, from others, from the land, and from their culture? The connections framework places businesses within the community as yet another element with the power to make a place more whole.

This report marks just the beginning of a large and diverse set of conversations to come. It speaks to the enormity of wisdom and knowledge developed over many generations by people and cultures that lived sustainably for centuries. From their stories, sparks fly to redesign our systems to make them work for all people and for the world.