

# **Cultural Safety Project: Western Canada Focus Groups**

**Overview**  
**March 16, 2010**

## **Introduction**

The BB project began in 2007 with the relationship between Phil Upshall of the Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) and Bill Mussell of the Native Mental Health Association of Canada (NMHAC) and the First Nations Inuit Métis Advisory Committee (FNIM AC) to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). They conceived of their collaboration as building a bridge, with each end of the bridge anchored in different “territories” representing their respective traditions and constituents, and the way between to be built by developing understanding of the differences and commonalities between the two. The mandate of the MDSC is the wellness of individuals living with mental illness, their families and social support networks. That of the NMHAC is the health and well-being of Canada's indigenous populations.

In early 2008, the FNIM AC chose to focus its attention on two projects: (a) the need for sound ethical practices; (b) the importance of relational practices identifiable with cultural safety as it was conceived by the Maoris of New Zealand. Both projects were approved and supported by the MHCC.

Also In 2008, the NMHAC and the MDSC partnered to plan and host the Building Bridges One (BB1) forum to determine issues, needs, and challenges shared by their respective constituents. Amongst the recommendations resulting from the forum was the need to pursue awareness and understanding of best/ promising practices that constitute "cultural safety".

The MDSC and the NMHAC continued their partnership in 2009 in the Building Bridges Two (BB2) project by collaborating with the FNIM Advisory Committee's cultural safety working group in a joint research project. Together they commissioned a series of focus groups in Western Canada and Eastern Canada.

The focus groups held in Eastern and Western Canada represent an important contribution to the bridge building by gathering the voices of non-aboriginal and aboriginal practitioners, consumers, and family members reflecting on their experiences with mental health and addictions. This overview describes the process followed in conducting the Western focus groups, explains the methodology to be used to draw out the messages conveyed, and presents preliminary impressions.

