

## **Indigenous Smudging Ceremony Policy**

<b>Reviewed Date</b>		<b>Number</b>	PP0111
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### **Introduction**

Smudging is a sacred Indigenous ceremonial practice used by many First Nations Peoples for purification, healing, and spiritual wellbeing. While smudging has not historically been practiced by Métis and Inuit Peoples, some may choose to initiate or participate in this practice. Smudging ceremonies are initiated and led by Indigenous Peoples, most commonly a First Nations Elder, Knowledge Keeper or experienced Indigenous community member and typically take place at the beginning of an event or service delivery.

Participation in smudging is always voluntary. Individuals may choose whether to participate, remain in the space, or step away, and inclusive alternatives are available to respect individual needs while honouring Indigenous cultural and spiritual traditions.

The health unit recognizes the importance of all ceremony types. For SMDHU locations that cannot accommodate indoor burning smudge due to landlord requirements, ventilation limitations, and/or property lease agreements, outdoor burning smudge and liquid (smokeless) smudging remain supported as culturally respectful alternatives.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to inform Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit Board of Health members, employees, students, volunteers, partners and members of the public of their obligations regarding the holding of Indigenous smudging ceremonies on health unit properties.

### **Legislative Authority**

Smoke-Free Ontario Act, Section 19 (2017)  
Ontario Human Rights Code (1990)  
Occupational Health & Safety Act (1990)

### **Policy Definitions and Interpretation**

#### **Smudging (Burning Smudge)**

A traditional First Nations ceremonial practice that involves the burning of sacred medicines, such as sage, sweetgrass, cedar, or tobacco, for purification, healing, and spiritual purposes. The smoke is used to cleanse a person or space. This practice is culturally and spiritually significant and is initiated and led by Indigenous Peoples, often an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or experienced Indigenous community member.

#### **Liquid (Smokeless) Smudging**

A modern take on a traditional First Nations ceremonial practice in which water infused with sacred medicines, such as sage, sweet grass and cedar, is used for purification and cleansing without the use of fire or smoke. The infused water is most often held in a small

spray bottle and applied by the individual to their hands, producing only a light scent. It is not sprayed into the air or into a room.

Liquid smudging maintains the same cultural and spiritual intention as a burning smudge and serves as an inclusive alternative for settings with safety, ventilation, and procedural considerations. This practice is culturally and spiritually significant and is initiated and led by Indigenous Peoples, often an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or experienced Indigenous community member.

### **Elder**

The word "Elder" is an English term, in Indigenous culture it is a title of respect and significance, recognizing someone who provides guidance, wisdom, and support to their community, separate from the concept of age.

### **Knowledge Keepers**

A Knowledge Keeper is a term used in many Indigenous Communities to describe a person who has been taught by an Elder or holds, preserves, and shares cultural knowledge, teachings, stories, and practices.

### ***Policy***

The health unit is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment while supporting Indigenous spiritual practices. All board members, employees, students, volunteers, partners, and members of the public must follow established procedures when hosting or participating in Indigenous smudging ceremonies on health unit property. These procedures are intended to protect workplace health and safety while ensuring smudging is conducted in a culturally respectful manner that reflects local Indigenous practices.

In accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code (Section 11.1), the health unit has a duty to accommodate Indigenous spiritual practices, including smudging.

In accordance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017, SMDHU facilities are smoke-free. The Act recognizes and permits the traditional use of tobacco for Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices, including smudging, through a specific exemption for traditional Indigenous use. This exemption applies when smudging is conducted for Indigenous cultural or spiritual purposes, including when non-Indigenous participants are present.

SMDHU recognizes the importance of Indigenous spiritual practices. For SMDHU locations that cannot accommodate indoor burning smudge due to landlord restrictions, lease agreements, and/or lack of required ventilation systems, outdoor burning smudge and indoor liquid (smokeless) smudging are supported alternatives.

### ***Procedures***

#### ***Medicines and Materials for Smudging:***

Ceremonies are initiated and led by Indigenous Peoples, who will be responsible for ensuring the availability of Indigenous medicines and materials for the ceremony.

#### ***Individual Smudging Requests (Staff or Clients)***

Smudging may occur not only during scheduled events or service delivery but also when an Indigenous staff member or client wishes to smudge individually before work or receiving services. These requests must be accommodated promptly and respectfully. Burning smudge may only occur in approved indoor locations or outdoors, while liquid (smokeless)

smudge may be used in any SMDHU offices. Staff are expected to support individual smudging requests in alignment with the Health Unit's policy and duty to accommodate Indigenous spiritual practices under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

**Smudging Outdoors (Burning Smudge)**

- Burning Smudge is permitted on the outdoor property of all SMDHU offices.
- Landlords have been informed as a courtesy that outdoor smudging may occur from time to time.
- The SMDHU manager or staff member who is leading the event/service delivery at which smudging will occur is responsible for selecting an outdoor location that considers the following factors: non-obstructing of building entrances, vehicular safety, and suitability of the location for a ceremonial event.

**Liquid (Smokeless) Smudging:**

- Liquid smudging is permitted in all SMDHU offices.
- Care must be taken to handle liquids safely and to prevent spills.
- SMDHU will provide reasonable accommodation, with supervisor support, to facilitate liquid (smokeless) smudging in a manner that honours Indigenous cultural practices and maintains a respectful environment for all individuals, including those with scent sensitivities.

***Related Links***

SMDHU Indoor Smudging Locations

***Final Approval Signature:*** \_\_\_\_\_

Review/Revision History: