

Personal Statement

My research approach and all my relationships are shaped by my formative experience as a bi-cultural woman born of an Indigenous South American mother and a loving father of European descent.

In my thirties, I emigrated from the land of my birth (Argentina) to Canada and became a visible minority. Like all immigrants, I had to find my new life in a new place. I retrained in Business Administration and rose to the level of Director at the Ottawa Hospital, which, at the time, was the largest academic hospital. Having married into a military family, I chose to leave my job at the Hospital to keep the family together as we moved across Canada. It was then that I started working for the Labrador Innu, in my young fifties, as a data consultant, while my family was posted to the military base of Goose Bay for two years. My work for the Labrador Innu has not ceased since then.

Working for Innu changed me forever, as I, for the first time in my life, accepted my Indigenous ancestry without shame, with the help of the late Elder Kathleen Andrew. I have developed lifelong ties with the family of the late Mary Janet Hill (who called me her second mom), with Christine Poker, and with many other Innu friends.

I have come to research later in life, bringing all of myself, and have been part of projects that aim to reduce inequities and increase the sovereignty of Indigenous Nations, always initiated by communities.

Given my life experience, my work is rooted in accountability and dialogue as the base of all partnership.

Summary of Research Grants and Contributions

- Co-Investigator on 4 funded studies totalling \$4,968,750, all from CIHR.
- Expert witness research for two First Nations on child welfare services (ongoing).
- Producer of a 14-minute story of Innu Healing, to disseminate the concept of Innu Healing. The story was viewed 2,500 times on YouTube.
- Peer-reviewed publications in reputable international journals (Social Science and Medicine; International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health; Journal of Water and Health). All my publications are highly cited. First Author in 3 of them, and one more in preparation for publication in the British Medical Journal.
- While almost all the articles are in health-related journals, they address issues such as traditional knowledge, ethical Indigenous research practices, and place-based healing.

Most Significant Contribution to Research

The most significant research contribution I have made relates to *influencing the direction of thought* of policymakers and the *use of research results by the right holders* (Innu) to advance self-determination. This is documented in a paper (Ward et al., 2021) which describes the primary healing process found in 53 Innu participants who participated in individual in-depth semi-structured interviews (adults) and focus groups (teenagers). Healing is the word Innu and other Indigenous Peoples in North America use to describe a journey towards health and wellbeing. This paper was published during the pandemic when much work stopped in the Innu communities.

Nonetheless, we created a short video in Innu-aimun (the Innu language) to communicate the results to the community. The video is on YouTube and has been viewed about 2,500 times, which is impressive for a total population of 3,000 people. Innu use this research for non-Innu audiences, including

policymakers. This research has been allocated a one-hour panel at the 18th International Conference of Circumpolar Health in 2024. Lastly, I am a co-author, alongside Dr. Morton Ninomiya (one of my co-supervisors for this Fellowship), of a 60-page report requested by the Commissioners conducting the Inquiry, and I will testify in December 2025.

During this research, I was involved in conceptualizing the work, the methodology, and the investigation, writing the original draft and conceiving the visualization of the results. Innu prefer visual information over written information, and we produced drawings to explain the healing process (shown in the video). Two Innu researchers and co-authors also conceptualized the work and developed the methodology. This ensured the data is correctly interpreted because I do not hold an Innu worldview.

Another significant contribution is creating an Innu *meaningful and culturally safe health research framework*. The Innu community-based participatory research (CBPR) framework for health research (Ward et al., 2020) is relational and dialogical. Its significance is evident in its application, as it uncovers Innu's knowledge and contextualizes the findings. This is the most cited of my papers, including work in Australia and New Zealand.

We described a set of crucial behaviours for the non-Indigenous researchers conducting CBPR with Innu researchers; these behaviours build on each other, creating an ethical space. The Innu CBPR framework for health research is captured in the metaphor of a canoe trip with all researchers in one Innu canoe.

The Innu framework constitutes an Indigenous methodology. The methodology was used to engage another Indigenous group, Inuit of Nunavut, for the successful application to a CIHR grant to find TB in wastewater (in the funding section of this CV). This research is ongoing, and we have not published work yet. My involvement in this contribution was similar to what was described in my previous contribution.

Education

- Ph.D. Population Health, University of Ottawa
- Master's in Business Administration, University of Ottawa
- Bachelor's Honours, Licenciatura en Fisica, Universidad Nacional de Salta, Argentina

Employment

2023/11 – present. Senior Research Associate. Delatolla Research Group, Department of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, University of Ottawa.

2021/6 – 2023/10. Senior Research Associate. TAIMA TB Research Group, General Campus, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute (OHRI)

2019/1 - 2021/11. Project Coordinator. Institute for Mental Health Policy, Ursula Franklin Site, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

2012/10 - 2016/9. Health Information Management Consultant. Labrador Innu Round Table

2010/10 - 2012/9. Leave of absence for family reasons

2008/11 - 2010/9. Administrative Director. Department of Medicine. The Ottawa Hospital and the University of Ottawa

1999/2 - 2008/11. Business Manager. Department of Medicine. The Ottawa Hospital and the University of Ottawa

Research Funding History

Awarded [n=4]

2023/4 - 2028/3

Co-applicant

Title: The Taima TB Wastewater Study

Funding Sources: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health

Total Funding: \$3,970,000

Funding Competitive?: Yes

Co-investigators: S. Aaron; B. Brophy; D. Cameron; M. Desjardin; T. Garber; R. Mallick; S. Mulpuru; C. Pease.

Principal Investigator: Gonzalo Alvarez

2022/10 – 2024/9

Co-applicant

Title: Incorporating Inuit traditional knowledge (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit – IQ) into the TAIMA TB household risk score

Funding Sources: Nunavut Tunngavit Inc.

Total Funding: \$175,000

Funding Competitive?: No

Principal Investigator: Gonzalo Alvarez

2022/4 - 2025/3

Co-applicant

Title: Focused community TB screening among high-risk residential zones in Nunavut: The Taima TB household risk prediction study

Funding Sources: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health

Total Funding: \$573,750

Funding Competitive?: Yes

Co-investigators: Andre Carrington; Christopher Pease; Yongyi Mao.

Principal Investigator: Gonzalo Alvarez

2018/4 - 2021/11

Co-investigator

Title: Outpost Program: A Cultural Intervention for Suicide Prevention for the Innu of Labrador

Funding Sources: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health

Total Funding: \$250,000

Funding Competitive?: Yes

Co-investigators: Anita Olsen-Harper; Janet E Jull; Melody Morton-Ninomiya;

Principal Applicant: Samantha Wells

Publications

Citations at the time of writing [n= 69]

Journal Articles

1. Nguyen, T., Mercier, E., Wong, C. H., Hegazy, N., Kabir, M. P., Tomalty, E., Addo F., **Ward L.**, Renouf E... & Delatolla, R. (2025). Partitioning and probe-based quantitative PCR assays for the wastewater monitoring of Mycobacterium tuberculosis complex, M. tuberculosis, and M. bovis. *Journal of Water and Health*, 23(10), 1163-1179
2. **Ward, L.**, Hill, M. J., Antane, N., Chreim, S., Olsen Harper, A., & Wells, S. (2021). "“The Land Nurtures Our Spirit”": Understanding the Role of the Land in Labrador Innu Wellbeing". *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 18(10): 5102.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18105102>
3. **Ward, L.**, Hill, M. J., Picard, Olsen Harper, A., Chreim, S., A., & Wells, S. (2021). A process of healing for the Labrador Innu: Improving health and wellbeing in the context of historical and contemporary colonialism. *Social Science & Medicine*. 113973: 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113973>
4. **Ward, L.**, Hill, M. J., Chreim, S., Poker, C., Olsen Harper, A., & Wells, S. (2020). Developing an Innu framework for health research: The canoe trip as a metaphor for a collaborative approach centered on valuing Indigenous knowledges. *Social Science & Medicine*. 113409: 1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113409>

Invited Presentations and Panels

1. Leonor Ward; Annie Picard, Innu co-researcher. (2024). **Panel:** A process of healing for the Labrador Innu: Improving health and wellbeing in the context of historical and contemporary colonialism. 18th International Congress on Circumpolar Health (ICCH18), Halifax, Canada
Main Audience: General Public
2. Leonor Ward; Annie Picard, Innu co-researcher. (2024). Barriers and Facilitators to developing public health data governance among Innu in Labrador, Canada. 18th International Congress on Circumpolar Health (ICCH18), Halifax, Canada
Main Audience: Knowledge User
3. Leonor Ward, Courtney Heffernan, Mara Nokohoo, Robin Love. (2023). Perspectives on Research Partnership and Implementation. The Union-North America Region (NAR), Canada
Main Audience: Researcher
4. Leonor Ward. (2020). Developing an Innu CBPR Framework for Health Research: The Canoe Trip as a Metaphor for a Collaborative Approach Centred on Valuing Indigenous Knowledges. Indigenous Health Conference, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, Canada
Main Audience: Researcher
5. Leonor Ward. (2019). The development of a CBPR framework for health research with the Labrador Innu. Weekly Health System Innovation and Management, Teller School of Management, University of Ottawa, Canada

Main Audience: Researcher

6. Leonor Ward, Mary Janet Hill. (2018). Knowing who you are is good medicine: Sheshatshiu Innu narratives of identity. Northern Rural and Remote Health 2017, organized by the Canadian Society for Circumpolar

Health and the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, Canada

Main Audience: Researcher

7. Leonor Ward, Mary Janet Hill. (2018). Learning from Our Roots: Evaluating the Outpost Program using

Innu Mental Wellness Indicators. Northern Rural and Remote Health 2017, organized by the Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health and the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, Canada

Main Audience: Researcher

Knowledge and Technology Translation

2024/2 Invited Speaker, Research Uptake Strategies

Group/Organization/Business Served: Labrador Innu Health Practitioner Forum

Target Stakeholder: Policy Maker/Regulator

Outcome / Deliverable: Dialogue with ISC/FNIHB Atlantic and NL Health Data to initiate Innu health data governance with a view to data sovereignty.

Evidence of Uptake/Impact: The province of Newfoundland and Labrador decided to invest \$75,000 in one-year activities to help the Innu answer specific questions and advance their data governance. The provincial fund is called Health Services Integration Fund (HSIF).

Activity Description: On behalf of the Innu Nation of Labrador, and at their request, I presented the results of 18 interviews with workers in the three jurisdictions pertaining to Innu health data (i.e., Innu, provincial and federal) and requested feedback and opinions from ISC/FNIHB and from NL Health Data senior-level employees.

2016/3 Invited Speaker/ Knowledge Broker, Policy/Regulation Development

Activity Description: Working at the interface between the Labrador Innu and First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (Atlantic Region) and the Labrador Innu, I was invited by FNIHB to present the Labrador Innu concept of health and to discuss how it can be implemented in health programming.

2014/2 Invited Speaker, Research Uptake Strategies

Activity Description: Presentation of findings from Report commissioned by the Labrador Innu Round Table on Innu Health Information Management.

2013/7 Facilitator and Leader, Technology, Product, Process, Service Improvement/Development

Activity Description: Working together with the Innu Round Table, leading the efforts to identify and assemble stakeholders from 3 jurisdictions (federal, provincial and band-level), and facilitating the achievement of a common vision and plan. Facilitated the initial meetings and created the Terms of Reference for the working group in Mental Health and Addictions.

2013/6 Facilitator and Leader, Technology, Product, Process, Service Improvement/Development

Activity Description: Working together with the Innu Round Table, leading the efforts to identify and assemble stakeholders from 3 jurisdictions (federal, provincial and band-level), and facilitating the achievement of a common vision and plan. Facilitated the initial meetings and created the Terms of Reference for the working group in Health Information Management.

2013/5 Facilitator and Leader, Technology, Product, Process, Service Improvement/Development
Activity Description: Working together with the Innu Round Table, leading the efforts to identify and assemble stakeholders from 3 jurisdictions (federal, provincial and band-level), and facilitating the achievement of a common vision and plan. Facilitated the initial meetings and created the Terms of Reference for the working group in Maternal Child Health.

Thesis/Dissertation

Innu minuinniuin: Understanding ways of achieving wellbeing among the Labrador Innu. (2021).
University of Ottawa. Supervisor: Dr. Samia Chreim. Funding Sources: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

Community and Volunteer Activities

Community Organizer for Ottawa Innerscity Health Inc

This volunteer activity took about 60 hours per week for 3 months at the beginning of the 2020 pandemic. Remembering my previous volunteer activity at the Scott Mission in downtown Toronto, I decided to help people experiencing homelessness in Ottawa (my city) during the pandemic. In Ottawa, Indigenous peoples comprise close to 80% of the homeless population. Ottawa Inner-city Health Inc. serves the healthcare needs of this population, funded by municipal grants. Inner-city Health could not purchase personal protective equipment with available funding. I came up with the idea of organizing the sewing community to make personal protective equipment. Armed with the belief that the public of my city would help when we explained the situation, we used social media to connect with sewers and donors. The response surpassed all expectations. We saved the city \$25,000 per week, but most importantly, we saved precious lives. We were featured on local radio and in newspapers.