

About The Artwork: “Heartbeat and Healing” Created by Indigenous artist Grace Swain,
Maamwesying Ontario Health Team Communications and Media Specialist

In bringing this painting to life for the signing ceremony with Maamwesying Ontario Health Team and the North Shore Health Network, I aimed to capture the heart and soul of our collaborative journey. It's the second painting in this series, each one telling the story of our expanding partnerships and the growth we're achieving together.

At the center of the canvas stands a resilient plant, echoing the Maamwesying Ontario Health Team's motto — "Indigenous health in Indigenous hands." Just like a plant needs the sun, soil, rain, and various elements to thrive, our organization thrives on the strength of our communities, hospitals, and partners.

Shaped like a heart, the painting embodies the crucial role of Indigenous health in our shared mission. In my community, these collaborations come from the heart - a force driving our commitment forward.

The heart is also significant to me because in my community, I've been taught the heart berry, which is a strawberry, represents peace and forgiveness and is often referred to as the heart berry because of its shape. I hold this teaching close as I painted this heart because there is a lot of healing that needs to be done in this work. These ceremonies represent a significant part of that.

When I think of the heart, I also think of a drum being played as a heartbeat. When we think of the heart in health it is a vital organ that keeps us alive. This is also true for our culture and traditions.

When you say "I love you" in Ojibway, I've been taught it is greater than saying "I love you." You are saying, “I feel you, I empathize with you,” which is why this heart is so significant. We are not just putting love into this sacred ceremony for all of our relations; we are showing shared compassion and understanding.

Surrounding the heart are six flowers outlined in gold, each in the four quadrants of this painting representing the four directions. These florals also symbolize the sacredness of this ceremony and emphasize the importance of our shared agreements.

As the plant in the heart grows with each new collaborator, it represents the extensive groundwork happening behind the scenes. It might look like a young plant, but it stands on a solid foundation — a reminder of the importance of thorough preparation and creating resilient systems.

Embedded in the heart is my artistic take on the NSHN logo, a symbol of our interconnected identities. Together, these symbols capture the essence of unity and mutual respect, defining this significant moment.

Taking a closer look, this painting prompts reflection on the commitment forged today. It's a visual call for Indigenous-driven health systems that are not only innovative and community-designed but also culturally safe. It's a reminder of the agreements made, affirming the value of Indigenous peoples and their right to self-determination in healthcare.