

Anishnawbe Health:

Creating a space that integrates Indigenous and Western approaches



Photography: Patrick St-Arnaud

The new Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT) center provides healing, connection and culturally grounded care for the urban Indigenous community in Toronto. Offering health programs and services that integrate Indigenous and Western approaches, the purpose-built center is designed to reflect Indigenous culture, accommodate community needs, and to highlight the importance of holistic wellness.

Celebrating Indigenous Culture

The design of AHT draws upon Indigenous cultural touchstones, the land, natural remedies, traditional healing, sunrise and woven patterns to connect people and place. Key communal areas, such as a ceremonial

space and sweat lodge, are situated on the ground floor alongside a community kitchen. A central courtyard featuring a walking path lined with tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass, underscores the significance of the connection to the land. Seven benches along the path through the courtyard symbolize the seven grandfather teachings: wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. At the heart of the atrium, a striking red staircase, which serves as the focal point for the building is inspired by the “red road” an Indigenous metaphor for making wise and spiritual choices in life.

Creating a Sense of Welcome

Nurturing a sense of welcome as visitors enter the building was a priority. Elizabeth DiFrangia, Designer President of Rx Solutions, explains, “The atrium is such a large space that we wanted to use furniture to make it



Drawing inspiration from natural elements, the upholstery on couches and chairs throughout the space features custom patterns, including sweet grass, fir, tobacco, and sage.

feel more intimate and less intimidating.” Two types of seating areas enhance the warmth of the environment: a smaller, more traditional area by the windows and soft, curving River™ lounge configuration in the center that invites visitors to connect. She adds, “It’s really become a social gathering place for both staff and patients.” A variety of soft seating extends into waiting areas and treatment rooms, contributing to a sense of calm and comfort. Drawing inspiration from natural elements, the upholstery on couches and chairs throughout the space features custom patterns, including sweet grass, fir, tobacco, and sage. These vibrant patterns are carefully mixed with neutral finishes to complement the architecture.

Integrating Flexibility and Adaptability

To ensure the space can evolve with AHT, a variety of flexible furniture solutions have been incorporated throughout. Mobile meeting tables and nesting chairs with casters can be moved easily, allowing staff and patients to rearrange the space to suit their needs. Instead of built-in millwork, freestanding storage solutions have been integrated into the rooms. Elizabeth shares, “It was a wonderful experience working alongside AHT and the project partners. There is such a strong sense of identity, and to see that identity interpreted in the architecture—and for us to reflect it in the furnishings—makes me very proud of how it turned out. Everyone was very supportive of our goals to create this unique place of healing for the local Indigenous community.”

FEATURED PRODUCTS:

River™ lounge and tables, Swap™ tables, Drift™ lounge, Primacare™ lounge and tables, Doctor Buddy™ stool, Licence™ tables and storage, Terrina™ flip top tables, Evolve™ reception, Spritz™ task chair, Moda™ guest chair

DESIGNERS:

Stantec, Two Row Architect, Prism Partners, Rx Solutions

DEALER: Harkel Office Furniture



