WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK
The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February

Horizon Health Network

Spiritual Diversity Education Day Report

United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2026

Theme: Honouring the Sacred – Understanding, Respecting, and Celebrating Spiritual Diversity

Diversity, Equity + Inclusion

RÉSEAU DE SANTÉ Horizon HEALTH NETWORK

Introduction

In recognition of United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week (February 1–7, 2026), Horizon Health Network proudly hosted its **first-ever Spiritual Diversity Education Day** a landmark moment in our organization's ongoing commitment to compassionate, inclusive, and patient-centred care.

This inaugural gathering represented more than a single educational event. It marked a meaningful step in our journey toward embracing the rich spiritual and religious diversity that exists within our communities, among our patients and families, and within our own workforce.

Over 100 staff members, physicians, learners, and volunteers joined both in person and virtually to learn, reflect, and engage in respectful dialogue. Together, we affirmed a simple but powerful truth: healing involves more than physical treatment — it involves honouring the whole person, including the spiritual and cultural dimensions that shape identity, resilience, hope, and meaning.

From the desk of

Margaret Melanson

President and CEO, Horizon Health Network

On behalf of the entire leadership team, I'm so pleased to acknowledge the importance of Horizon's Spiritual Diversity Education Day as part of the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2026. At its core, health care is about caring for the whole person and while clinical excellence and medical expertise are essential, we know that healing and wellbeing extend far beyond physical health alone.

Emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions are deeply woven into how people experience illness, recovery, grief, and hope; and recognizing these dimensions is a vital part of compassionate, people-centred care.

Spiritual care plays a meaningful role in supporting our patients, families, and our staff and physicians, and spiritual needs may be expressed through faith, belief, values, cultural traditions, or a search for meaning and connection. These needs look different for everyone, and our job as a health care organization is to listen with respect, humility, and openness.

Horizon leaders are committed to fostering an environment where diverse beliefs and world views are welcomed and respected, and we're dedicated to supporting the emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing of our patients, and to those who provide care every day in our facilities.

We want to empower our staff and physicians with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to provide care that is inclusive, responsive, and grounded in respect for diversity; because by strengthening our understanding of spiritual diversity, we strengthen our ability to build trust, enhance compassion, and deliver care that truly meets people where they are.

Horizon's Spiritual Diversity Education Day is an opportunity to learn, reflect, and to deepen our shared commitment to equity, dignity, and respect and I thank everyone involved in organizing this momentous event, and everyone who continues to champion diverse, spiritual care throughout our system.

You are all helping ensure Horizon remains a place where every person – patient, family member, or staff – feels seen, valued, and supported in all aspects of their care and wellbeing.

Thank you!

The Foundation: Ongoing Work of the Spiritual Care Department

This first Interfaith-focused education day did not emerge in isolation. It grew from years of dedicated work by Horizon's Spiritual Care Department.

Spiritual Care practitioners work alongside interdisciplinary teams to ensure that spiritual dimensions of health are thoughtfully integrated into patient care. Their work includes:

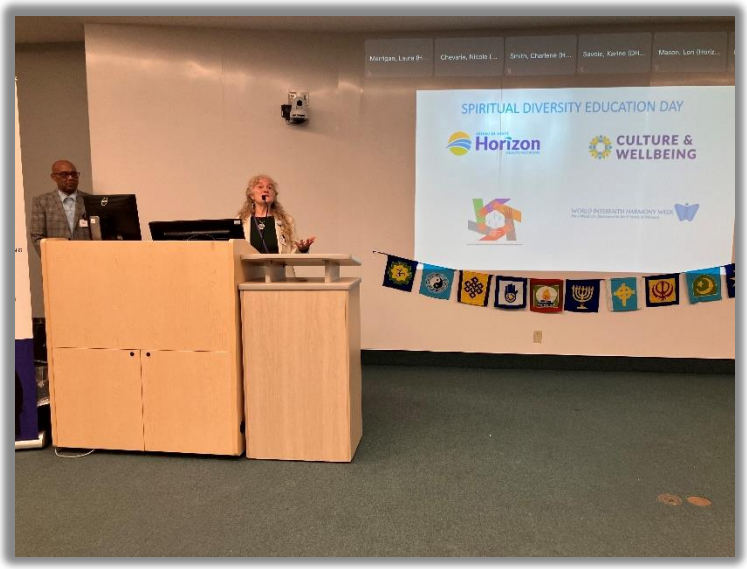
- Supporting patients and families in articulating beliefs and practices important to them while they are in hospital
- Working with patients and families to identify and address any systemic factors that may be contributing to spiritual distress.
- Advocating for the unique needs related to the religious and spiritual beliefs and practices of individuals and families.
- Helping patients access religious and spiritual resources that are important to them.
- Helping staff understand the religious and spiritual needs of individual patients and families.
- Establishing a strong working relationship with leaders from diverse religious and spiritual communities, that enables us to reach out to them when patients express a need related to a particular religion but they themselves do not have an established connection with a local religious community.
- Establishing a strong working relationship with leaders from diverse religious and spiritual communities, that enables us to reach out to them when patients express a need related to a particular religion but they themselves do not have an established connection with a local religious community.

Recent initiatives have included:

- Developing policies addressing religious and spiritual dietary needs
- Supporting the development of smudging policies within the hospital; and facilitating patient access to smudging when requested.
- Creating sacred spaces that are welcoming to people from diverse spiritual and religious backgrounds.
- Establishing protocols that allow for the practice of religious and cultural rituals and ceremonies for individual patients and families even during periods of restricted visitation.

- Ongoing work to establish a new process that ensures that every patient can request support in connecting with a spiritual or religious community of their choice while in hospital.
- Providing guidelines for staff for responding to diverse religious and spiritual needs related to birth and death.

The Spiritual Diversity Education Day for World Interfaith Harmony Week grows out of this work and is intended to help hospital staff – frontline care providers and administrators – deepen their understanding of and professional commitment to honoring and supporting the diverse spiritual and religious needs of patients, families and fellow staff members.



Honoring Spiritual Diversity: A Report on Horizon Health Network's Commitment to World Interfaith Harmony Week

In recognition of World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW), established by the United Nations, Horizon Health Network hosted its inaugural Spiritual Diversity Education Day from February 1–7, 2026. This initiative reflected Horizon's strong commitment to inclusive, compassionate care by recognizing spiritual diversity as an essential component of holistic healthcare. The event engaged more than 100 staff members, physicians, and volunteers in education and dialogue focused on the importance of spiritual care within clinical settings. Through thoughtful programming and meaningful discussion, Horizon reinforced its dedication to supporting not only the physical needs of patients, but also their spiritual, emotional, and cultural well-being.

The initiative was the result of collaborative efforts between the Spiritual Care Team and the Human Resources – Culture & Well-Being Team, along with valued partnerships from diverse faith and religious communities. A central feature of the week was an interfaith panel discussion that brought together representatives from various spiritual traditions to share perspectives on the role of spirituality in healing, patient experience, and workplace well-being. These discussions and educational activities strengthened relationships across departments, encouraged mutual respect, and deepened awareness of how spiritual care contributes to patient-centered practice and positive health outcomes.

Organizing this first-time event required significant coordination despite several practical constraints, including competing clinical priorities. Bringing together individuals from multiple religions was a notable challenge, as coordinating different panelists from diverse faith backgrounds and securing their participation required thoughtful planning and sensitivity. Additionally, clinical responsibilities toward patients made scheduling and timing a major constraint for participation. Communication also presented challenges throughout the planning process. Planning and promotion were managed through internal communication channels, and team members balanced event responsibilities alongside their regular operational duties. Despite these challenges, the strong level of participation and engagement demonstrated the organization's commitment and the effectiveness of a resourceful, collaborative approach.

This event builds on years of foundational work by Horizon's Spiritual Care Team to integrate spirituality into healthcare delivery. Previous initiatives, including the development of spiritual care policies and the creation of dedicated sacred spaces within facilities—such as dedicated Multifaith Sacred Spaces across Horizon facilities throughout New Brunswick that are accessible to staff, patients, and their families for reflection, prayer, and quiet contemplation—laid important groundwork for expanding awareness and

education across the organization. The Spiritual Diversity Education Day represents a continuation of these sustained efforts, further embedding spiritual care into Horizon's culture and services.

By observing World Interfaith Harmony Week within a healthcare context in Atlantic Canada, Horizon Health Network aligned its actions with the broader goals of the United Nations resolution, which promotes respect, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence among diverse faith traditions. Through this initiative, Horizon demonstrated leadership in advancing understanding and inclusion, reinforcing its commitment to delivering compassionate, culturally sensitive, and spiritually responsive care to the communities it serves.

Celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week

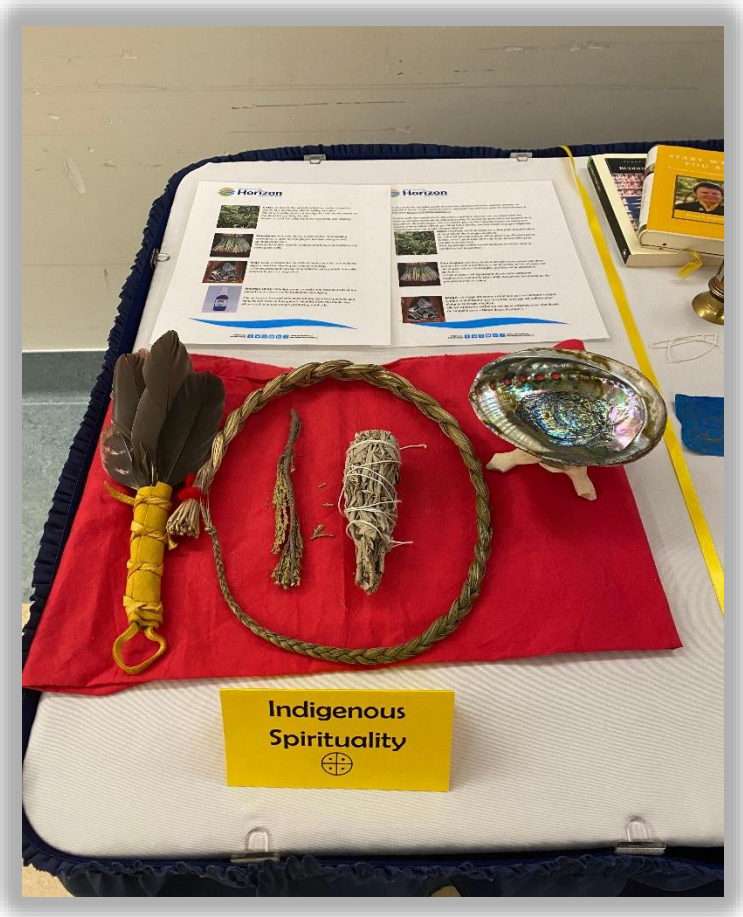
This event celebrated spiritual and religious diversity, offering participants the chance to engage in interfaith dialogue and reflect on how spirituality informs healing and well-being. Horizon's approach to spiritual diversity continues to strengthen trust and compassion in patient care.

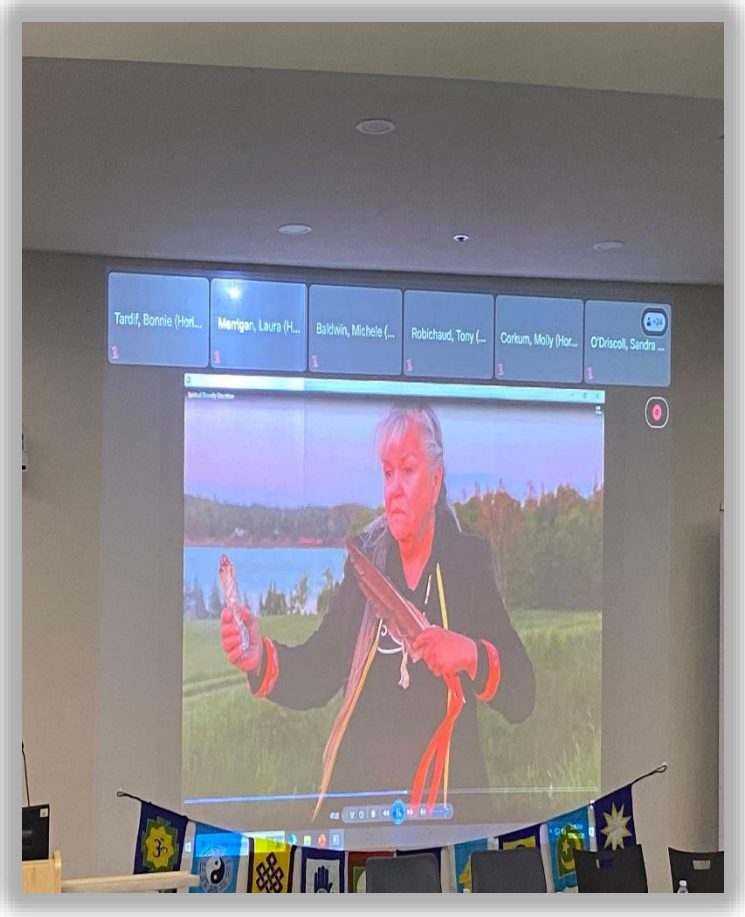
Spiritual Diversity Education Day 2026: A First Step Together

Opening and Land Acknowledgement

The day began with a thoughtful Land Acknowledgement, recognizing that across New Brunswick, healthcare and other essential services are provided on the traditional and unceded territories of the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Peskotomuhkatiyik Peoples. These communities have lived on and cared for these lands for generations, developing deep and enduring relationships with the environment, their cultures, and spiritual practices. Their knowledge and understanding of the inseparable connection between spirituality, well-being, and community life provide a foundation for approaching care with empathy, respect, and cultural awareness.

Acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land was more than a ceremonial gesture; it grounded the day in humility, respect, and a shared sense of responsibility. It served as a reminder to all participants that our work in healthcare and education is intertwined with the histories, wisdom, and values of the Indigenous Peoples whose territories we inhabit. By beginning the day with this recognition, the event set a tone of mindfulness, reflection, and openness, creating a space where diverse perspectives could be honored, and learning could occur in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration.

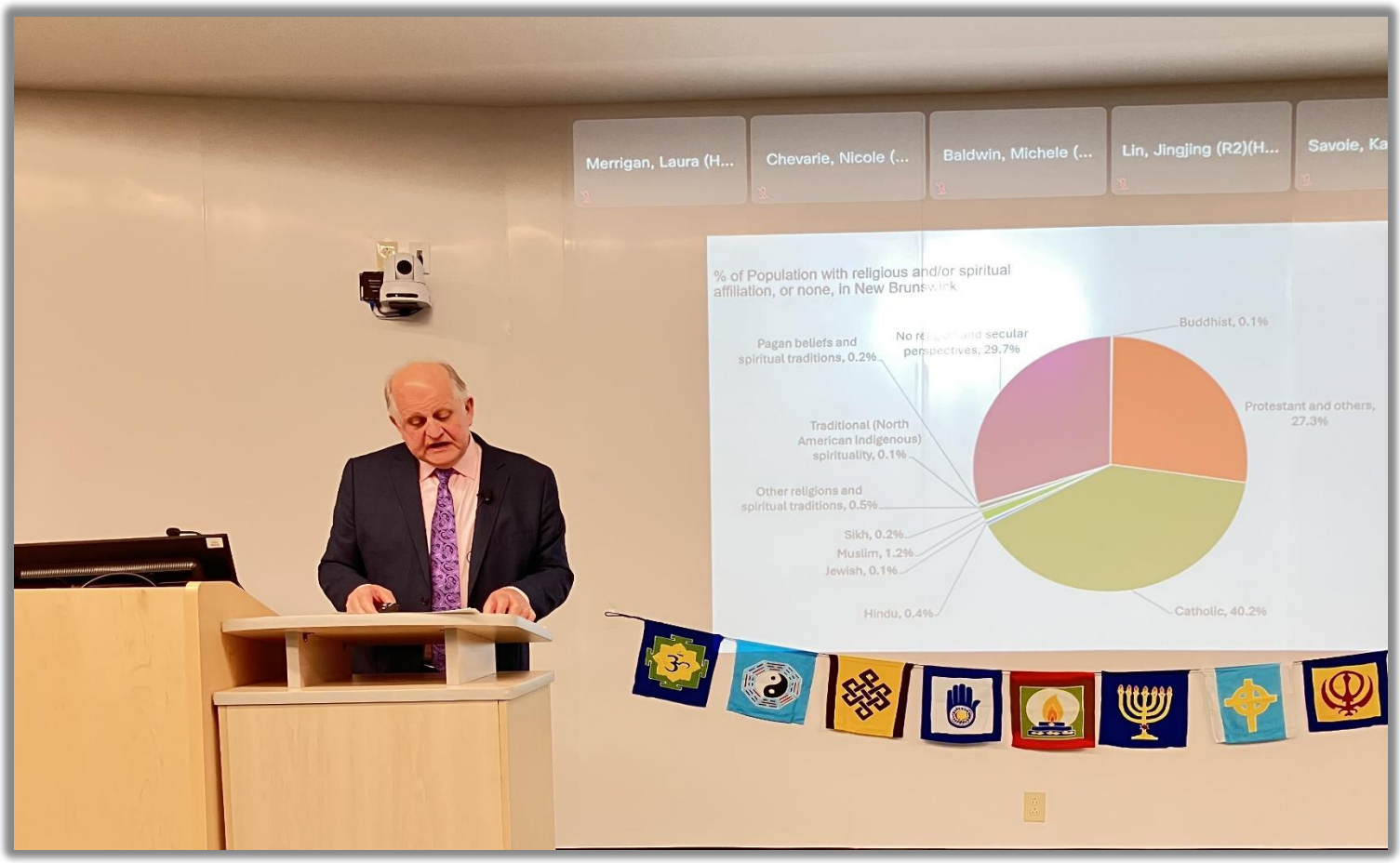




Keynote Address: Moving Beyond Tolerance to Genuine Embrace

Keynote speaker **Hugh Kirkegaard**, Regional Chaplain for Correctional Service of Canada in the Atlantic Region and a longstanding contributor to interfaith dialogue, offered a thoughtful and compelling reflection on the evolving spiritual landscape of Atlantic Canada.

Drawing on his experience in restorative justice, interfaith engagement, and community leadership, he spoke about the significant demographic shifts occurring across the region. He noted the growing presence of diverse religious communities, as well as the increasing number of individuals who identify as spiritual but not religious — or who claim no formal affiliation yet maintain deeply held personal beliefs and values.



He reminded participants that diversity is not theoretical — it is present in our hospital rooms, waiting areas, and care teams every day.

Mr. Kirkegaard challenged healthcare professionals to move beyond passive tolerance toward active respect and genuine embrace. Tolerance, he suggested, may allow us to

coexist — but it does not necessarily enable us to care well. In healthcare settings, where vulnerability is heightened and life-altering decisions are made, spiritual beliefs often shape how individuals understand illness, suffering, recovery, and hope.

He emphasized that compassionate, patient-centred care requires more than awareness of difference; it requires a sincere willingness to understand how a person's spiritual or worldview framework informs their choices, coping mechanisms, relationships, and sense of meaning.

When healthcare providers approach these frameworks with humility and openness, rather than assumption or avoidance — they strengthen trust, enhance communication, and foster deeper healing relationships.

His message resonated deeply with participants, reinforcing the idea that spiritual diversity is not an obstacle to care, but a profound opportunity to practice empathy, curiosity, and respect at the highest level of professional integrity.

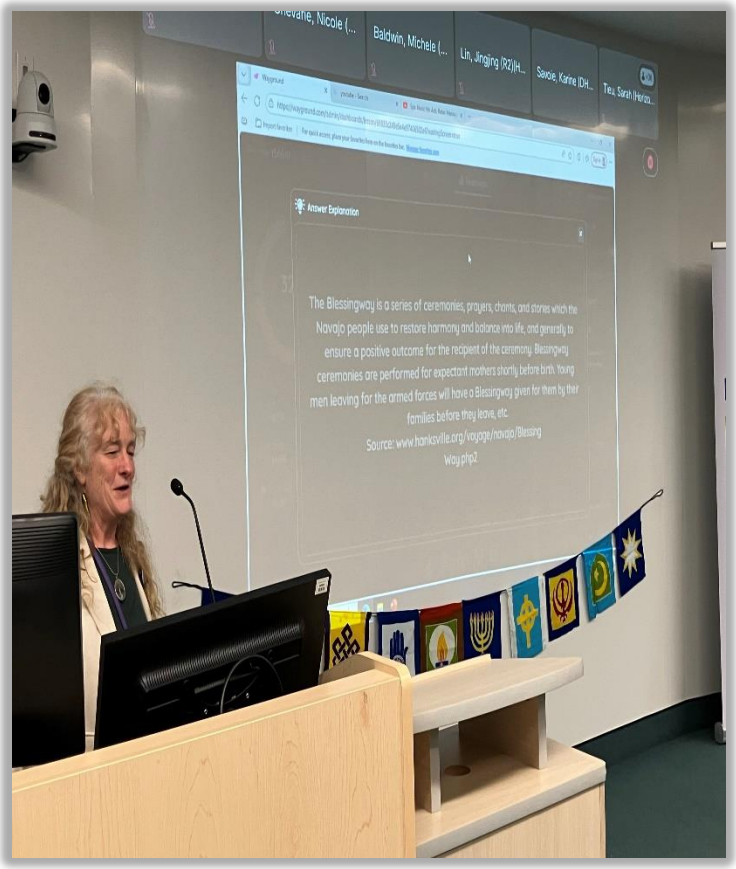
Learning Through Engagement

Participants took part in an interactive multi-faith quiz that explored the key beliefs, practices, and cultural nuances of 16 world religions. Using their smartphones, participants answered timed questions and immediately saw how their colleagues responded, which added a dynamic and engaging element to the learning experience.

The exercise was intentionally designed to be both educational and light-hearted. It encouraged humility by revealing the gaps in our own knowledge about the diverse spiritual traditions represented among our colleagues, patients, and communities. At the same time, it reinforced that learning about one another's beliefs and practices can be engaging, enjoyable, and even inspiring.

Throughout the activity, participants were invited to reflect on the insights gained and consider how increased spiritual literacy could enhance their interactions in professional and personal contexts. Suggestions were shared on how staff could continue to deepen their understanding beyond the event, highlighting that spiritual literacy is not a one-time achievement but an **ongoing professional and personal responsibility**.

By fostering curiosity, dialogue, and mutual respect, this interactive quiz demonstrated that learning about spiritual diversity can be both meaningful and memorable, creating a foundation for more inclusive and compassionate care practices.



Interfaith Panel Discussion: Spirituality as Medicine

One of the most meaningful moments of the day was the interfaith panel discussion, which brought together representatives from eight spiritual traditions: **Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Indigenous Spirituality, Islam, Judaism, Paganism, and Sikhism**.

The panel included four faith leaders, a physician, two community counsellors, and a member of hospital security. A powerful reflection of the fact that spirituality is not confined to one role or profession. It shapes people across disciplines, backgrounds, and responsibilities.

Panelists were invited to respond to two deeply personal questions:

- **How is your spirituality a form of medicine?**
- **What do you do as part of your faith or spirituality that helps you navigate difficult times?**

The responses were heartfelt, deeply human, and offered participants a rare opportunity to witness authentic reflections on how spirituality shapes resilience and well-being. Panelists shared a wide variety of practices and approaches, including prayer, meditation, ceremonial observances, sacred texts, acts of service, community gatherings, gratitude practices, and other ritual observances. Through these practices, they described how spirituality provides strength during periods of grief, clarity in moments of uncertainty, grounding in times of crisis, and hope during experiences of despair. As they shared their personal stories, emotions ran high, adding a powerful layer of depth and connection to the discussion. Each story served as a testament to the transformative power of spirituality, resonating deeply with both the panelists and the audience.

For many participants, the discussion was more than an educational exercise. It became a chance to see colleagues and community members speak openly about the values and practices that sustain them in their personal and professional lives. The dialogue created a safe and supportive space for curiosity, reflection, and meaningful exchange, allowing participants to explore differences and commonalities in spiritual experience without fear of judgment or defensiveness.

In the healthcare environment, where stress and suffering are constant realities, the panel illuminated a powerful truth. Spirituality is not an optional or peripheral aspect of well-being. For many patients, families, and staff members, spiritual practices are central to coping, healing, and finding meaning in life. By highlighting these perspectives, the panel reinforced the importance of honoring and integrating diverse spiritual needs into everyday care, demonstrating that compassionate, person-centered healthcare includes attention to the whole person, including their spiritual and emotional dimensions.

Collaboration and Organizational Impact

Spiritual Diversity Education Day was made possible through meaningful collaboration across Horizon Health Network.

The initiative began as a partnership between the **Spiritual Care Team** seven full-time and four part-time practitioners serving four cities and the **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** team under the umbrella of **HR-Culture & Well-Being Team** at **Horizon Health Network**. This collaboration expanded to include leaders from diverse religious and spiritual communities who regularly engage with the hospital system.

The majority of participants were hospital employees whose attendance required coordination and support from departmental leadership. This broad participation reflects a growing recognition across the organization that spiritual competence strengthens patient care.

The impact of the event is both immediate and ongoing.

In recent years, New Brunswick has experienced a significant increase in cultural and spiritual diversity. Healthcare settings often reflect these demographic shifts more visibly than other sectors. Participants expressed:

- A strengthened sense of trust among employees from minority traditions, who felt their beliefs and identities were acknowledged and respected.
- A renewed sense of curiosity and appreciation for the diversity present within their own teams.
- Greater confidence in engaging in conversations about spirituality in a professional, respectful manner.
- A clearer understanding of how honoring spiritual beliefs directly supports patient- and family-centred care.

By fostering dialogue in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than debate, the event strengthened interpersonal relationships and team cohesion. Stronger teams ultimately translate into better healthcare outcomes.

Participants and staff unable to attend — continue to have access to event recordings, extending the learning beyond a single day.

Communications and Promotion

The event was promoted through:

- Horizon Bulletin (Vol. 7 No. 4, Jan. 28, 2026) (Figure 1)
- Organizational email communications
- Display screen's across all major facilities in New Brunswick (Saint John, Fredericton, Moncton, and Miramichi)
- Internal Notice Boards
- Event poster distribution (Figure 2)
- Internal registration platform

The theme, *"Honouring the Sacred: Understanding, Respecting, and Celebrating Spiritual Diversity,"* clearly communicated the event's alignment with Horizon's DEI commitments.

Figure 1: The Bulletin from Horizon

Horizon Bulletin

| Horizon Bulletin | Vol. 7 No. 4 | Jan. 28, 2026 |

You're invited! Spiritual Diversity Education Day

The following is shared by Frances Onuora, Regional Manager, DEI

The Culture and Wellbeing team, in collaboration with the Spiritual Care Department, is delighted to invite you to our first-ever **Spiritual Diversity Education Event** to recognize UN World Interfaith Harmony Week (Feb. 1 to 7, 2026).

This year's theme, *Honouring the Sacred: Understanding, Respecting, and Celebrating Spiritual Diversity*, highlights our team's commitment to creating a compassionate environment where the spiritual, religious, and secular identities of all staff, patients, and families are acknowledged, appreciated, and valued.

Whether you're hoping to deepen your understanding or simply show your support, this event is for you. Let's come together to learn, connect, and celebrate the rich diversity that strengthens our Horizon community.

What's in the program?

- **Inspiring speakers:** Hear from members of diverse religious, spiritual, and secular traditions as they share insights on the significance of spiritual understanding in health care.
- **Interactive panel discussion:** An interfaith panel of eight diverse religions. Each panellist will share how their spirituality is a form of medicine that helps them get through difficult times.
- **Cultural and spiritual displays:** Experience artifacts, symbols, and resources that reflect a wide range of faith and non-faith traditions.

Everyone is welcome at Horizon, and this event is open to all staff, physicians, learners, and volunteers.

Join us on Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at The Moncton Hospital Amphitheatre to learn, connect, and gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual diversity and practices represented within our community.

Click here to register.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Click here for a poster you can print and share.

Figure 2: Spiritual Diversity Education Day poster that was distributed across Horizon Health

RÉSEAU DE SANTÉ Horizon HEALTH NETWORK

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK
The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February

Spiritual Diversity

Education Day

February 4, 2026 | 10 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
The Moncton Hospital Amphitheatre

In recognition of *UN World Interfaith Harmony Week*, join us for guest speakers, panel discussions, interactive learning, and spiritual and cultural displays representing diverse beliefs and worldviews.

Keynote Speaker:

Hugh Kirkegaard

- Regional Chaplain for Correctional Service of Canada in the Atlantic Region
- Engaged in interfaith dialogue with diverse religious faiths
- Educated at Mount Allison University, Regent College (Vancouver), and Acadia Divinity College, Hugh taught in the Restorative Justice Program at Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario and in Durban, South Africa
- He was a founding member of CoSA Canada

Learn, connect, and celebrate the spiritual diversity that strengthens our community.

Register to attend in-person or virtually

CULTURE & WELLBEING

For Horizon employees, physicians, students and volunteers only

A Milestone in Horizon's Journey

As Horizon's **first-ever Interfaith and Spiritual Diversity Education Day**, this event represents both a milestone and a beginning.

It signals a shift from simply acknowledging diversity to actively engaging it. It affirms that spiritual care is not an optional enhancement to clinical excellence, but an essential component of whole-person care.

Spiritual Diversity Education Day 2026 reflects Horizon Health Network's commitment to equity, dignity, and respect in action. It demonstrates our understanding that policies alone do not create inclusive environments — people do.

When we listen with humility, approach differences with curiosity, and honor the sacred dimensions of one another's lives, we cultivate trust. When trust is present, healing deepens.

This inaugural gathering laid a strong foundation for continued growth. It strengthened relationships between departments and community partners. It empowered staff with knowledge and confidence. Most importantly, it reaffirmed our shared commitment to ensuring that every patient, every family member, and every colleague feels seen, valued, and supported in the fullness of who they are.

Spiritual Diversity Education Day 2026 was our first step, and it will not be our last.

The photos below capture meaningful moments from the day, along with selected community social media posts that reflect the engagement, collaboration, and positive impact of this important initiative.

LinkedIn:
Link

https://fr.linkedin.com/posts/horizon-health-network_in-recognition-of-un-world-interfaith-harmony-activity-7430388276118695936-q9u2

LinkedIn

Articles Personnes Learning Emplois Jeux Télécharger l'

Post de Horizon Health Network

Horizon Health Network
22 127 abonnés
1 sem.

In recognition of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week (February 1-7), Horizon hosted its very first Spiritual Diversity Education Day for health care staff and volunteers. The day focused on deepening understanding of spiritual and religious diversity, and its essential role in compassionate, patient-centered care.

The day began with a Land Acknowledgement, followed by keynote speaker Hugh Kirkegaard, who spoke about the region's changing spiritual landscape and the importance of moving beyond tolerance, and towards genuine respect and inclusion.

Through an interactive multi-faithed quiz and a panel discussion featuring representatives from eight spiritual traditions, the day offered meaningful opportunities for learning, reflection, and dialogue for how spirituality supports well-being and resilience.

To learn more about World Interfaith Harmony Week, visit https://lnkd.in/gWxsNRBj.

Afin de souligner la Semaine mondiale de l'harmonie interconfessionnelle, qui a lieu du 1er au 7 février, Horizon a organisé sa toute première journée d'éducation sur la diversité spirituelle à l'intention des membres de son personnel soignant et de ses bénévoles. La journée visait à améliorer la compréhension des participants à l'égard de la diversité spirituelle et religieuse, une compréhension essentielle à la prestation de soins axés sur le patient et empreints de compassion.

La journée a commencé par une reconnaissance territoriale qui a été suivie d'une présentation du conférencier invité Hugh Kirkegaard. Ce dernier a parlé des changements au paysage spirituel de la région et de l'importance de ne pas se limiter à la tolérance, mais bien de faire preuve de respect et d'inclusion sincères.

Grâce à un jeu-questionnaire multiconfessionnel interactif et à une table ronde à laquelle ont participé des représentants de huit traditions spirituelles, les participants ont eu l'occasion de se renseigner, de réfléchir et d'échanger sur les manières dont la spiritualité appuie le bien-être et la résilience.

Pour en savoir plus sur la Semaine mondiale de l'harmonie interconfessionnelle, visitez la page des Nations Unies sur le sujet (en anglais seulement).

Facebook:

Link -

https://www.facebook.com/HorizonNB/posts/pfbid028JayzS2fhNNCfxzQZrRMVc9dDTnYYWmmcie73QntJHbHQkoTRQDxabpWQ6S2sy9vl

Horizon Health Network/Réseau de santé Horizon's Post

Horizon Health Network/Réseau de santé Horizon
February 19 at 7:10 PM

In recognition of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week (February 1-7), Horizon hosted its very first Spiritual Diversity Education Day for health care staff and volunteers. The day focused on deepening understanding of spiritual and religious diversity, and its essential role in compassionate, patient-centered care.

The day began with a Land Acknowledgement, followed by keynote speaker Hugh Kirkegaard, who spoke about the region's changing spiritual landscape and the importance of moving beyond tolerance, and towards genuine respect and inclusion.

Through an interactive multi-faithed quiz and a panel discussion featuring representatives from eight spiritual traditions, the day offered meaningful opportunities for learning, reflection, and dialogue for how spirituality supports well-being and resilience.

To learn more about World Interfaith Harmony Week, visit https://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/.

Afin de souligner la Semaine mondiale de l'harmonie interconfessionnelle, qui a lieu du 1er au 7 février, Horizon a organisé sa toute première journée d'éducation sur la diversité spirituelle à l'intention des membres de son personnel soignant et de ses bénévoles. La journée visait à améliorer la compréhension des participants à l'égard de la diversité spirituelle et religieuse, une compréhension essentielle à la prestation de soins axés sur le patient et empreints de compassion.

La journée a commencé par une reconnaissance territoriale qui a été suivie d'une présentation du conférencier invité Hugh Kirkegaard. Ce dernier a parlé des changements au paysage spirituel de la région et de l'importance de ne pas se limiter à la tolérance, mais bien de faire preuve de respect et d'inclusion sincères.

Grâce à un jeu-questionnaire multiconfessionnel interactif et à une table ronde à laquelle ont participé des représentants de huit traditions spirituelles, les participants ont eu l'occasion de se renseigner, de réfléchir et d'échanger sur les manières dont la spiritualité appuie le bien-être et la résilience.

Pour en savoir plus sur la Semaine mondiale de l'harmonie interconfessionnelle, visitez la page des Nations Unies sur le sujet (en anglais seulement).

Instagram:

Link -

https://www.instagram.com/p/DU9RokIFINP/?img_index=6

Swags Distributed at the Event:

Hard Copies of the Multifaith Calendar shared with all employees.

Spiritual Habits:

Spiritual Habits:

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Welcoming the guests

This event was made possible through the thoughtful contributions of our Panelists, Spiritual Care Team, and DEI Team.

Stars of The Event

Swags for all the participants'

Spiritual and Religious Displays

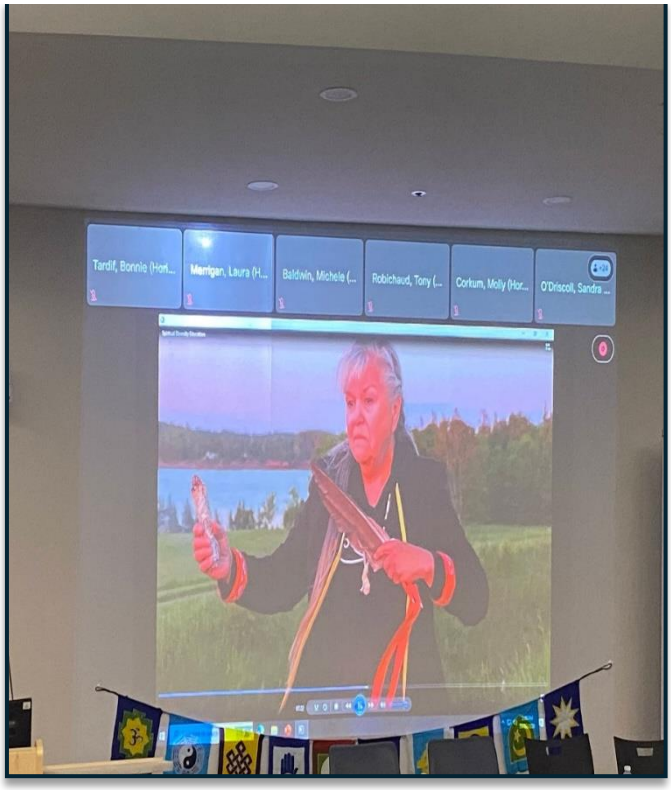
Refreshments

Community engagement

Multi Faith Panelists Discussion

Refreshments:

Video Presentation: Rituals from Different Religions



Horizon
Diversity,
Equity +
Spiritual Care
is Health Care

Horizon
Diversity, Equity + Inclusion
Everyone is welcome here

Horizon
Diversity, Equity + Inclusion
Everyone is welcome here
Spiritual Care is Health Care
Les soins spirituels sont des soins de santé
Horizon
Vitalité