The First Nations Principles of OCAP

What is OCAP?

The First Nations Principles of OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) means that First Nations control data collection processes in their communities. First Nations own, protect and control how their information is used. Access to First Nations data is important and First Nations determine, under appropriate mandates and protocols, how access to external researchers are facilitated and respected.

The right of First Nations communities to own, control, access, and possess information about their peoples is fundamentally tied to self-determination and to the preservation and development of their culture. OCAP allows a community to make decisions regarding why, how and by whom information is collected, used or shared.

The Components of OCAP

- **Ownership** refers to the relationship of First Nations to their cultural knowledge, data, and information. This principle states that a community or group owns information collectively in the same way that an individual owns his or her personal information.

- **Control**. The principle of control affirms that First Nations, their communities and representative bodies are within their rights in seeking to control over all aspects of research and information management processes that impact them. First Nations control of research can include all stages of a particular research project-from start to finish. The principle extends to the control of resources and review processes, the planning process, management of the information and so on.

- **Access.** First Nations must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities, regardless of where it is currently held. The principle also refers to the right of First Nations communities and organizations to manage and make decisions regarding access to their collective information. This may be achieved, in practice, through standardized, formal protocols.

- **Possession.** While ownership identifies the relationship between a people and their information in principle, possession or stewardship is more concrete. It refers to the physical control of data. Possession is a mechanism by which ownership can be asserted and protected.

First Nations need to protect all information concerning themselves, their traditional knowledge and culture, including information resulting from research. The principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) enable self-determination over all research concerning First Nations.

What Lies Ahead for OCAP?

Researchers and governments today are increasingly recognizing that if they want to do research involving First Nations, they have to respect OCAP.

OCAP is here to stay.

The term OCAP is now heard not only in First Nations meetings but also in classrooms, at conferences and within federal, provincial and territorial government offices. Expectations of First Nations are changing quickly and university researchers are updating their ways of doing business. A growing number of academic research centers are beginning to recognize and acknowledge OCAP.

To know more about OCAP, MFN RHS 2002/03 RHS, and the upcoming MFN RHS 2008, please visit http://www.rhs-ers.ca/english/

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It offers a way for First Nations to make decisions regarding what research will be done, for what purpose information or data will be used, where the information will be physically stored and who will have access. This piece of work was sanctioned by the First Nations Information Governance Committee (FNIGC) and the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS).

In First Nations’ world view, the Regional Health Survey (RHS) and its processes and principles of OCAP “come from the people”.

OCAP offers a First Nations approach to research, data and information management. It is a way to say “yes” to beneficial research and “no” to research that may result in harm. It is a way to improve research relevance.

**The Origin of OCAP**

OCAP, as we call it today, was originally expressed as “OCA” in 1998 by the National Steering Committee of the First Nations and Inuit Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS).

As a result of heightened interest in the issue of First Nations ownership of information, the OCAP principles were developed during the inception of the RHS.

The OCAP principles apply to all research, data or information initiatives that involve First Nations.

The RHS is a survey of health in First Nations communities. It is the only national research initiative in Canada under complete First Nations control.

The RHS is recognized not only as OCAP-compliant but also as the primary innovator and driver of emerging OCAP policies, data sharing protocols, research practices and appropriate questionnaire content for use in First Nations communities. Capacity development is also an important outcome of the RHS.

OCAP introduces a new way for First Nations’ research data to be stored, distributed, and accessed. The RHS National Databases are under the jurisdiction of the FNIGC on behalf of all First Nations. The RHS Regional Databases are under the jurisdiction of Regional First Nations.

**How OCAP Can Benefit Your Community**

OCAP can benefit your community by:

- insisting that First Nations rights in the realm of research be recognized (community empowerment);
- rebuilding trust in research;
- creating a more holistic approach to research;
- improving data quality, relevance and value to the community;
- supporting meaningful capacity development and empowerment among First Nations;
- ensuring community consent to and control over the research process (including the interpretation and reporting of results);
- insisting on community ownership of the research results and data;
- supporting appropriate compensation and recognition for all project participants and contributors;
- protecting First Nations and their communities against stigmatization and stereotyping; and,
- protecting traditional knowledge.

To view the MFN RHS 2002/03 Report, visit [http://www.manitobachiefs.com/](http://www.manitobachiefs.com/)