

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

***Peqqissuserput*: A theoretical research model starting from a place of strengths to support *Kalaallit Inuit* communities to thrive**

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Received 30 September 2025 ; Accepted 13 December 2025 ; Published 17 December 2025

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Health research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* (Greenland) has traditionally focused on risk factors and deficits, often without being grounded in *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge systems or led by Indigenous researchers. Such approaches have limited relevance for communities and may undermine ethical engagement. This paper presents *Peqqissuserput* ("Our Health") and the principles we work from at *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* (Centre for Public Health in Greenland) research model starting from a place of strengths to support *Kalaallit Inuit* communities to continue to thrive and ensure that our research is ethical and meaningful.

Methods: The model was developed through an iterative process spanning two decades of community-engaged research conducted at *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* (Centre for Public Health in Greenland). The work draws on long-term partnerships with *Kalaallit Inuit* communities, national population health surveys, qualitative studies, sharing circles, lived experience, and dialogue with Indigenous research centres across the Arctic. The model is informed by key ethical frameworks, including the Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Greenland's National Research Strategy.

Results: *Peqqissuserput* is grounded in the concept of *peqqinneq*, a culturally specific understanding of balance and well-being rooted in relationships with people, land, animals, and *Sila*. At its core is the metaphysical triad of *timi* (body), *tarneq* (mind), and *anersaaq* (spirit), surrounded by eleven interrelated elements. These include both well-established social determinants of health and culturally specific dimensions such as language, family and relationships, joy of community, local values, country food, and connection to nature and animals. Five guiding principles underpin the model, emphasizing respect for Inuit knowledge systems, language, humility, storytelling as evidence, and commitment to the common good.

Conclusion: *Peqqissuserput* represents a shift from deficit-based health research toward a strengths-based, culturally grounded framework rooted in *Kalaallit Inuit* ways of knowing and being. The model offers a practical and ethical pathway for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to work in partnership with communities to understand and promote health and well-being in *Kalaallit Nunaat*.

Keywords: Kalaallit, Inuit, knowledge, systems, strengths-based, Indigenous, ethics, community.

Abstract in Español at the end of the article

INTRODUCTION

Kalaallit Inuit (Inuit Indigenous to Greenland) have a strong cultural pride and a unique knowledge and understanding of their homelands, communities, language, culture and the environment including land, animals and people. These rich knowledge systems and cultural pride are passed down from generation to generation and constitute the foundation for strong and thriving communities in *Kalaallit Nunaat* (Greenland). However, this is often not the starting point for health research, health systems or action to promote health and well-being at the community level.

A large part of the health research that is carried out in *Kalaallit Nunaat* is neither initiated nor led by *Kalaallit Inuit* researchers and researchers often lack a connection to *Kalaallit Inuit* communities and the understanding of community that comes from being raised with *Kalaallit Inuit* traditions and norms. This creates a challenge that must be addressed to ensure that all health research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* is ethical and meaningful to the *Kalaallit Inuit* communities. This paper shares the principles we work from at *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* (Centre for Public Health in Greenland) and our theoretical research model starting from a place of strengths to support *Kalaallit Inuit* communities to continue to thrive and ensure that our research is ethical and meaningful.

As authors we have worked in a close and equal partnership between one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous researcher in *Kalaallit Nunaat* for two decades. As partners we embody the ongoing conversations around integrating knowledge systems and finding new and innovative solutions for the combination of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing with Western sciences in community health research.

Key documents to guide ethical research in *Kalaallit Nunaat*

Although no official ethical guidelines for research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* exist, three key documents outline fundamental recommendations and knowledge that are instrumental for ethical research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* and in the Arctic:

First, The Circumpolar Inuit protocols for equitable and ethical engagement describe in detail the importance of researchers respecting Inuit knowledge, governance systems and values and behave according to them as they come into *Inuit Nunaat* (Inuit Homelands):

"This includes taking responsibility and building their own capacity to recognize and prevailing power dynamics and leave them at the door, take the time to understand, to listen to us, learn and be humble." ([1])

The Circumpolar Inuit protocols call for a paradigm shift where positive examples of meaningful engagement and equitable practices across the Arctic become the norm by using a set of eight proposed protocols. Although the protocols are not written exclusively for

researchers, they address the urgent need for research to be ethical and to move away from a dominantly deficit-based approach towards a strengths-based approach, in order to provide solutions and inform meaningful action that can support strong and thriving communities [1].

Secondly, The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights lays out important ground principles for all researchers to ensure a human rights perspective as research is carried out with Indigenous communities and on Indigenous homelands. We would like to highlight article 23 as one example which stresses the importance of why research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* should be led or co-led through ethical and equitable partnerships with *Kalaallit Inuit* researchers and communities to make sure that the research is meaningful (grounded in Inuit knowledge) and supports communities to thrive.

"Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions." ([2])

Thirdly, *Kalaallit Nunaat's* National Research Strategy (2022-2030) outlines *Naalakkersuisut's* vision for research (Government of *Kalaallit Nunaat*):

"Research in and about Greenland must primarily be of benefit to Greenland. This is the case, for instance, when it stems from or involves the Greenlandic research community, or when it is based on Indigenous and local knowledge. It is also essential that new knowledge be accessible and can be used by the business community, policy makers and the general public to address social challenges, including the overall state of public health, both in physical and mental terms." (Ministry for Education, 2022; p. 17)

Based on this vision four goals are put forward in the strategy: 1) Research must be anchored in *Kalaallit Nunaat*; 2) Research must foster sustainable social development; 3) Research results must be easily accessible for all; 4) Research efforts must be at an international level [3].

Our principles and the development of our theoretical model also build on a deep learning relationship with the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre in Nunavut, Canada [4]. Through meaningful engagement and building personal relationships through visits we have learned from their research model [5] as well as the educational and pedagogical innovations led by The Nunavut NEIHR (Network Environments in Indigenous Health Research) [6]. Collaborative workshops, research training, participating in conferences and gatherings together and several exchanges in both Greenland and

Nunavut have given us many insights and helped develop our thinking in this paper [7]. This collaboration has also introduced us to *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* which has inspired and influenced our thinking [8].

Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik

Inspired by these key documents as well as our deep learning relationships and based on two decades of experience as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in *Kalaallit Nunaat* we present the principles from which we work in both qualitative and quantitative research projects and our theoretical research model for *Kalaallit Inuit* community health and well-being. The principles and the research model outline the foundation for our work at *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* across epidemiological surveys, register-based research as well as qualitative research projects [9, 10].

Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik, with offices in both Nuuk and Copenhagen, has conducted research on health and morbidity in *Kalaallit Nunaat* since the 1990s. This work is primarily based on nationwide population health surveys carried on a regular basis since 1993, mandated by *Naalakkersuisut* (Government of *Kalaallit Nunaat*) [11]. These surveys have provided a robust evidence base for the development of three national public health programs, with a particular focus on the prevention of smoking, obesity, and harmful alcohol consumption [12-14].

The Centre collaborates closely with both *Naalakkersuisut* and local governments in the five municipalities to ensure that public health strategies are culturally relevant and responsive to the unique possibilities and challenges faced by the 72 communities of different sizes. In recent years, the Centre has increasingly engaged in strategic partnerships at international, national, and local levels to promote a community-based participatory approach to public health research [15, 16]. This approach emphasizes the strengths and core values of *Kalaallit Inuit* culture in the development of health promotion initiatives and interventions.

Our Centre's presence at *Ilisimatusarfik* (University of Greenland) in Nuuk is also instrumental in building research capacity within public health and population surveys at the university [17].

Ethical considerations

The research model builds on knowledge from research projects over two decades. All projects carried out by *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* have been approved by the Science Ethics Committee for health research in *Kalaallit Nunaat*. We are also deeply engaged in developing ethical guidelines for research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* in general through the *Ileqqussaasut* Project where we have both taken part in the leadership team. Finally we have been guided by the Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement in our work [1].

A SET OF PRINCIPLES FROM WHICH WE WORK

Principle 1: *Sila isumaanik tunngaviusumik paasininneq ataqqillugu sulineq* (Working in respect of *Kalaallit Inuits'* understanding of *Sila*)

Kalaallit Inuit believe that *Sila* defines the entire universe, with stars, galaxies, and energy. *Sila* also defines everyone's own unique universe, which is the foundation for how we collectively and individually understand and navigate in the world [18-20].

Kalaallit Inuit knowledge systems are fundamentally based on *Sila*. As a researcher, you must understand that *Sila* is more than climate and surroundings. In everyday life this is expressed as "*Sila* is the boss" or "*Sila* knows everything". In consequence, the respect for *Sila* is a deep understanding and acceptance of not being in control of everything.

Sila is described in the Arctic literature as "everything" including the universe, nature, a place, or the sky [21]. Moreover, *Sila* gives air to all living beings and things. With every breath people and animals take, air is transformed into life to be used for intelligence. There is no life without air and without life there is no intelligence [18, 19, 22]. According to Inuit philosopher Rachel Qitsualik, *Sila* refers not only to the intellectual but also to the biological, psychological, spiritual, as well as to the environment, the geographical, and the universe [23]. In other words, *Sila* is the foundation of Inuit knowledge systems. Understanding *Sila* therefore cannot simply be translated or understood as climate and weather as it is often done in a scientific context. According to Qitsualik, *Sila* is a force that is both enduring, a part of something else, but also something we do not control or can influence [23].

As a researcher, you must be humble and mindful that your understanding of the universe might not be the same as that of *Kalaallit Inuit*. Remember, we all operate from a mindset that stems from our own *Sila*.

Principle 2: *Kinguaariinni ilisimasavut oqaativullu ataqqillugit sulineq* (Working from a place of respect for *Kalaallit Inuit's* language and intergenerational knowledge systems)

In everything we do, we work as researchers from a place of respect for language and the intergenerational knowledge systems that have been passed on from generation to generation. Our thinking and understanding of this principle are grounded in the concept of *oqaaqqissaarineq*. *Oqaaqqissaarineq* can be understood in general terms as the art of shaping a human being based on *Kalaallit Inuit* traditions, norms and knowledge".

The concept of *oqaaqqissaarineq* is about passing on *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge systems, memories and lived experiences from generation to generation, because this knowledge is fundamental to be able to navigate in life. *Oqaaqqissaarineq* shapes *Kalaallit Inuit* identity and belongingness and how to act based on Inuit knowledge systems and in respect of and in harmony with your

community. *Oqaaqqissaarineq* also teaches *Kalaallit Inuit* how to act and live in good relationship with the land (*Nuna*) and the environment. Access to *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge systems shape the ability to act and adapt in different situations.

Oqaaqqissaarineq is closely connected to *Kalaallisut* (the language of *Kalaallit Inuit*) because words and concepts are instrumental in the intergenerational knowledge transmission and teachings from parents, grandparents, or close relatives/family members to children and youth.

"If even a single day passes without oqaaqqissaarineq, the child loses something." (Kalaaleq Inuk Elder)

Just as important as the spoken transmission, is the non-verbal transmission of knowledge, experience, values and skills by doing things together. Giving children and youth access to learn by showing them how to hunt, fish or prepare sealskin for example. Or how to navigate and behave in different situations in everyday life.

The importance of working in Kalaallisut

Kalaallisut is fundamental and important for *Kalaallit Inuit*. As researchers, we must understand and respect the importance of speaking from the heart through your mother tongue.

In our respect for *Kalaallisut* we have developed ways of working together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers (or as speakers of *Kalaallisut* and non-speakers) in equal partnerships where we combine our knowledge and skills in the interview process to make sure the research is conducted in the language that the participants and researcher feel comfortable expressing themselves in. This is a partnership where everyone plays a role in all steps of the process.

We have learned that interviews and workshops should always be available in people's mother tongue. If you as a researcher do not speak *Kalaallisut* then it is important to recognize this and make sure that professional interpretation is present. We have also learned to be mindful of not putting our colleagues who speak *Kalaallisut* in a position as interpreters. Our respect for *Kalaallisut* means that we respect the professionalism of interpretation as a skill.

Principle 3: Inuit tunuanni – mainguunneq ataqqinninnerlu aallaavigaluguit sulineq (Taking a step back to work from a place of humility and respect)

As researchers we strive to work from a place of humility and respect. This means realizing that we cannot always know if the research questions we ask are relevant and meaningful. As researchers we must therefore engage with communities and ask what is meaningful and of importance to them. Sometimes this can happen at a very local level and at other times this happens at the more general level with perspectives relevant at a regional level or for *Kalaallit Nunaat* in general. In order

to do so, it is important to take the time to build relationships at the relevant community level and to listen to understand what kind of research is needed.

Inuit tunuanni means "behind the people" and translates into the concept of "taking a step back". Our thinking and understanding of this principle are grounded in the concept of honor, respect, and humility which are values that are fundamental for *Kalaallit Inuits'* relationships with people, land and animals. As *Kalaallit Inuit* you learn and understand that you are a part of a collective that is bigger than you as an individual.

As researchers we are often guests in other communities than where we live and come from. We therefore work from the concept of *Inuit tunuanni* to ensure that we conduct research with respect and humility both as Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to behave in an ethical way and to respect and understand local knowledge systems, values and strengths. At the low practical level this requires that we as non-Indigenous researchers always partner with Indigenous research partners. And that we as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers partner with community members and representatives to be a part of all phases of the research to ensure a deep understanding of the questions being investigated, the data collection, the analyses and the discussion of results.

Indigenous researchers play a key role in the understanding and dissemination of data in studies that include Indigenous voices. Indigenous peoples, both as researchers and participants, hold the keys to collecting, analyzing, and reporting 'good data' in qualitative and ethnographic studies examining their lived experiences [24].

Acknowledge and respect dual position as a unique strength

As *Kalaaleq Inuk* researcher you bear a dual position as both community member and researcher. This dual position is often portrayed in health science as a problem for objectivity because the ideal is to find a truth that goes beyond the individual perspective [25]. At the other end of the spectrum the concept of objectivity is challenged by the social sciences as such a truth is not acknowledged to exist [26, 27]. Our epistemological position is somewhere in between these opposite points of view in Western Sciences. We see this dual position as a unique strength that can enable you to understand connections and capture nuances in the lived life that would not be visible to researchers without Inuit background or researchers that do not live in Arctic communities. This has been described in literature both as two eyed seeing [28] and by an *Inupiaq* Elder as living in one world with two spirits (personal communication).

The dual position allows you, as a researcher, to look from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. It also holds you accountable. This is both a privilege and a great responsibility to bear as a researcher in your own context, and you always carry this with you as part of the dual position.

Principle 4: *Nunap inuisa ilisimasaat ataqqillugit al-lallu ilisimatuussutsikkut suliaat assigiimmik naleqar-tillugit sulineq* (Acknowledge and integrate Kalaallit Inuit's stories as evidence-based knowledge)

Kalaallit Inuit believe that experiences, memories, and stories are based on knowledge that can fully measure up to Western defined scientific evidence. Our knowledge systems include the past and the present and lead us to the future. This knowledge has always been shared as stories from generation to generation. As researchers, we are mindful that stories have been passed down from Kalaallit Inuits' ancestors for thousands of years. So, these stories are unique knowledge based on observations of and a deep understanding and respect for people, animals and the land in Kalaallit Nunaat. Kalaallit Inuit are proud of their culture, nature and land. Make room for stories, listen, and be open-minded.

Sharing circles as methodology

As researchers, we work with sharing circles as a methodological approach to honor story and Kalaallit Inuit knowledge systems, which are founded on an oral tradition of passing down knowledge from generation to generation by sharing lived experiences. We practice sharing circles as a respectful form of communication where everyone has an equal opportunity to listen and share their knowledge and experiences with each other. Sharing Circles as a method of conversation allows our collective and individual knowledge to unfold in respect for everyone and everyone's right to be heard [29, 30].

Principle 5: *Ilisimasaniq tunniusseqatigiinnissaq ajungitsussarlu aallaavigalugit sulineq* (Always work to contribute to the common good and share knowledge, resources and skills)

This principle is important for us, because it speaks to the challenge that academia often does not focus on the benefit and capacity that research brings or could bring to Kalaallit Inuit communities. Instead, the primary focus is on individual merit and academic achievement.

We believe that health research should always be conducted in partnership with Kalaallit Inuit communities at the relevant level. We strive to share our knowledge and plans and ask questions, advice and guidance from communities. Partnering with communities on health research is crucial to understand the unique context that the research is happening in. Which benefits both the quality and the relevance of the research.

As researchers we must always remember that communities know their own context and environment best, including the land, animals and people. When we are working in communities where we do not live, we come back to visit and share our results with the communities involved before sharing them with others. If physical visits are not possible, we use online platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom to share and discuss our results with the communities we collaborate with [31].

OUR THEORETICAL RESEARCH MODEL PEQQISSUSERPUT

The need for developing a strengths-based research approach

Health research in Kalaallit Nunaat has up until now primarily focused on risk factors for health and the major public health challenges such as obesity, smoking, and the use of alcohol and substances and has mainly been of epidemiological character [11]. This methodological approach, with its main focus on deficits, has not proved meaningful in developing and implementing health promoting strategies and interventions to overcome the public health challenges and to promote health and well-being in Kalaallit Inuit communities. Further, this research does not reflect the strengths and capacities of Kalaallit Inuit communities as it often does not include in-depth knowledge about knowledge systems and Kalaallit Inuit well-being [32].

Based on Kalaallit Inuits' knowledge systems to support health and well-being in communities we have developed a theoretical research model to guide our research at Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik. The model has been developed in partnerships and dialogue with Kalaallit Inuit communities and to inform the development of meaningful health promoting initiatives and projects at the community level. The model is grounded in a strengths-based approach that builds on our knowledge from working with communities to understand, monitor and promote health and well-being for more than two decades. This includes listening to stories, being on the land with youth and Elders, spending time in communities, living with our families, raising children and grandchildren in Kalaallit Nunaat, collecting survey data, digital stories, facilitating sharing circles, engaging in informal conversation, observing, sharing food, listening and paying attention. The model is in other words grounded in Kalaallit Inuit knowledge systems of health and well-being that has been shared with us.

The body of research about protective factors and strength-based approaches to enhance Indigenous health and well-being is growing [30, 32-38]. Research advocates that strengths-based approaches can be used by communities as pathways on which to build successful health and wellness programs, as strengths-based approaches offer a different perspective by promoting a set of values that recognize the capacities and capabilities of Indigenous peoples corresponding core values of many Arctic Indigenous communities [32].

In an Indigenous setting strength-based approaches have been defined as:

"Strength-based approaches promote a set of values and practices that foregrounds Indigenous self-determination and celebrates and attends to the resources and capacities of Indigenous people, seeking to support and build on these resources to minimise problems." ([39])

In an iterative process over the past two decades, we have developed the model asking: What are strengths-based values and perspectives to promote health and well-being at the community level among *Kalaallit Inuit* in *Kalaallit Nunaat*? What keeps us healthy and makes us thrive? And what does a meaningful model for health and well-being look like?

The model further integrates *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge systems shared with us through the numerous research projects we have carried out and the community involvement and collaborations across the *Kalaallit Nunaat* we have been a part of as both researchers and community members living in the Arctic. This means that we understand narratives, stories and lived experiences among community members and community representatives as data that is equally valid and important as other types of scientific data, such as epidemiological data.

All of the above also builds on knowledge and insights from the published literature and stories shared with us about Arctic Peoples health and Well-being.

Peqqinneq

Our thinking and understanding of our research model are grounded in *peqqinneq*. *Peqqinneq* refers to something or someone being in the right place and indicates a delinquent balance in life and fitting in; finding one's connection to land, people and animals. This balance is understood as a natural balance in the way of life as *Kalaallit Inuit*. *Peqqinneq* in its original meaning refers to accepting people's powerlessness in forces greater than themselves. *Peqqinneq* can be expressed as a state of mind where you understand that you live in relationship with the environment including people, land and animals surrounding you. And that you have to adapt to the power of *Sila* (cf. Principle 1). *Peqqinneq* is a highly advanced terminology building on *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge systems and therefore *peqqinneq* cannot simply be translated into being healthy or the opposite of *peqqinneq* as illness [40].

Peqqissuserput

We argue that health research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* must start from this culturally grounded understanding of health and well-being. We have named the research model *peqqissuserput* which translates into "Our Health"

At the core of the model are the foundation of *Kalaallit Inuit* health and wellbeing, i.e. *timi* (body), *tarneq* (mind), *anersaq* (spirit). These elements are the triad of *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge systems. Surrounding these, the model has 11 elements (Figure 1). The first five components include well-known determinants of health: Lifestyle, Biology and Genetics, Access to Health Services, Childhood conditions, Education, Income, Work and Living Conditions [41-43].

Components 6-11 of the model are what we define as key elements of *Kalaallit Inuit* health and well-being that go beyond the well-documented determinants described above. These elements include: Local values, *Kalaallit*

Inuit Language, Family and Relationships, Community and Feeling Joyful Together, Country food, Connection to nature and animals (44).

Elements 6-11 and the core of the model will be presented in-depth below.

Timi, tarneq, anersaaq

Anersaaq is described by *Kalaallit Inuit* Elders as part of their belief in God. *Anersaaq* is grounded in the way of being or thinking that characterizes *Kalaallit Inuit* ways of knowing and doing. Both at the individual level and collectively. The *Kalaallit Inuit* understanding of *timi* (body), *tarneq* (mind), and *anersaaq* (spirit) should, according to Williamson [18], be seen as a metaphysical triad that forms the framework of Inuit knowledge and understanding of their life world. This triad of metaphysical concepts should be seen both as a whole, but they are also separated so that *timikkut* is seen as something that goes through the body, *tarnikkut* as something that happens with the help of the individual's mind, and finally *anersaakkut*, which is characterized by the life force through *pinngortitaaq* (the creation of the environment including land, animals and humans) [18].

A *Kalaaleq Inuk* Elder describes her own understanding of the triad of body, mind, and spirit as a positive understanding of the *Kalaallit Inuit* way of being and doing, which defines the cultural identity where the three components, body, mind, and spirit cannot be separated

The triad *timi* (body), *tarneq* (mind), and *anersaaq* (spirit) constitutes the metaphysical foundation of all elements in the model that combined leads to balance.

"To think of timi (body) and tarneq (mind) without anersaaq (spirit), is like a person without a head. Anersaaq, kalaallit anersaavat (the spirit of Kalaallit Inuit), it is the spirit that defines who we are – our culture." (Kalaaleq Inuk Elder)

The description of *timi*, *tarneq*, and *anersaaq* as interconnected and as the foundation for the individual's experience of well-being is echoed by the citizens. Health and balance in body, mind, and spirit are considered the fundamental basis for being able to cope and master being a whole person in well-being.

"It is probably most important to be spiritually healthy, it should be understood that if a person is healthy in body, mind, and spirit, then it is possible to work on any task and complete it." (Kalaaleq Inuk Mother)

Local values (element 6)

Kalaallit Nunaat is a very large country with 56,000 inhabitants and around 70 smaller and larger communities. *Kalaallit Inuit* have as many different local strengths and values as there are communities (Figure 2).

These strengths and values are connected to the local environment and include hunting and fishing grounds, the vegetation and seasons for hunting, harvest and preparation of food.

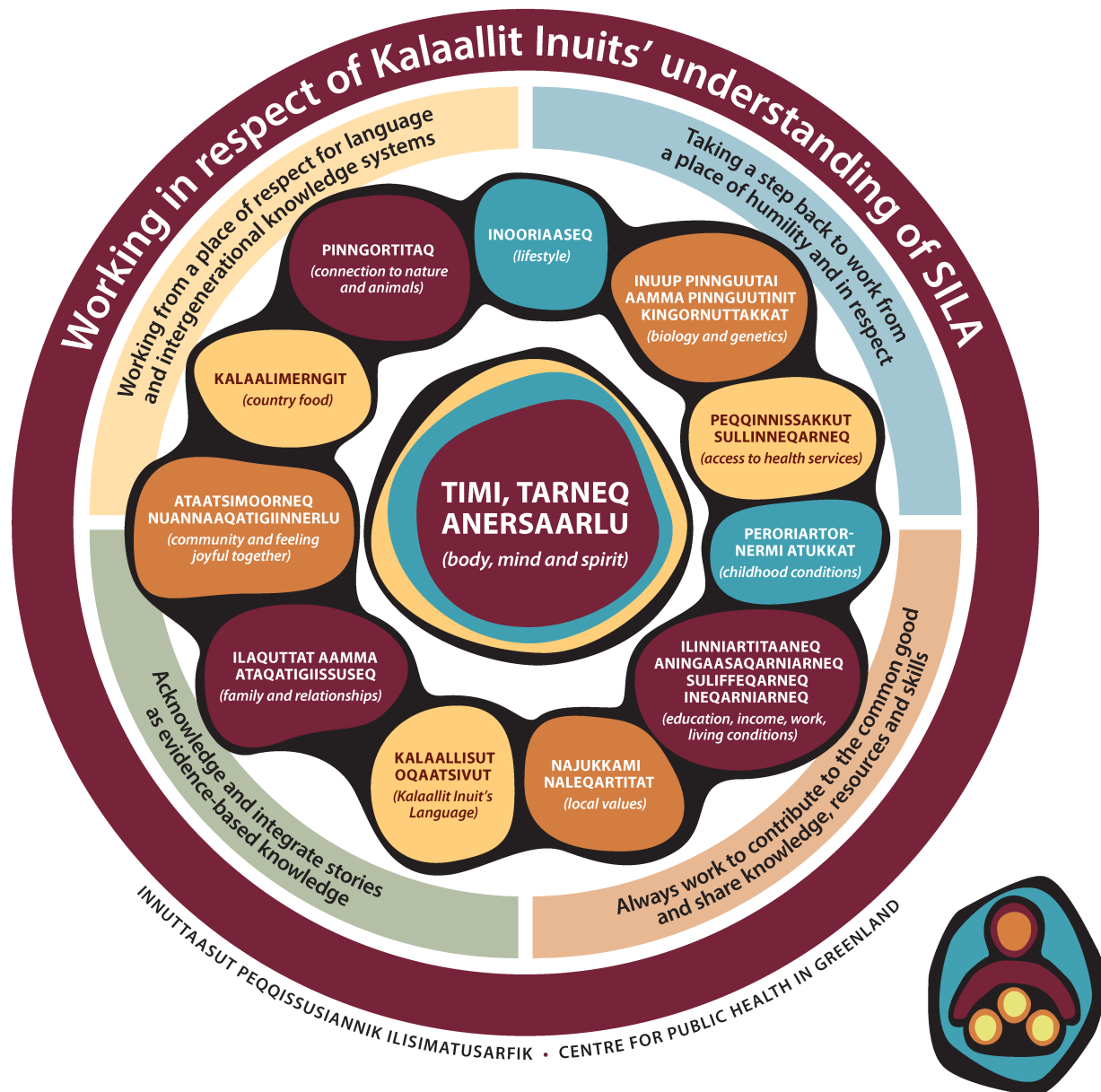


Figure 1. Peqqissuserput.

“Being on the land, “pilineq”, that’s probably something most of us Kalaallit can do. (...), we have always used and learned to be on the land since we were small, and now I am passing on what I know - hunting, being on the land with my family.” (Kalaaleq Inuk Father)

Local values are also an experience of connection and belonging to place. To be someone from here *maanimioq* means that you are connected to your community, the land, the animals and your shared identity related to *nuna* (the land). This also happens through preparing country food that is locally harvested.

Kalaallit Inuit language (element 7)

Kalaallit Inuit values, norms, and traditions are connected to Kalaallisut. The ability to speak Kalaallisut significantly impacts people’s experience of well-being and their ability to articulate both symptoms of illness and feelings of joy and well-being. Culture is embedded in language because people’s values and identity are intertwined with their language. It is through language that traditions and knowledge are shared across generations. Cultural pride is reflected in language.

Family and relationships (element 8)

Family and relationships have for generations been an important foundation for *Kalaallit Inuits'* experience of health and well-being. The family is who we share joys and sorrows with. The family is a flexible, inclusive, and extended system. The close family can thus also include an aunt, an uncle, siblings, a cousin, or one or more other caregivers [45, 46]. It is also with the family that we share the joy of a newborn child in the family and the sorrow when we lose a family member.

It is through family and other relationships that the most important cultural transmission of knowledge occurs, knowledge that will give the next generation their cultural ballast. Family, relationships, and community are central values for health in *Kalaallit Nunaat* (cf. Principle 2). Close family ties can be an emotional shield against depression, and the family as well as close relationships constitute a strength in society and a resource for the individual citizen.

"Family, togetherness is the most important thing. I grew up in a large close-knit family where we stuck together a lot, it gave so much strength. Especially when you get older and your relatives become fewer, it is hard, you become alone."
(Kalaaleq Inuk Elder)



Figure 2. Kalaallit Nunaat.

Community and feeling joyful together (element 9)

Community and feeling joyful together are fundamental for *Kalaallit Inuit* well-being. Community and social interaction with others are considered by *Kalaallit Inuit* as a sign of health, while loneliness and isolation are seen as unhealthy. Being able to share joyful events with family and others is essential to thrive.

"I understand health in our community as being happy, singing together, and being active together." (Kalaaleq Inuk Youth)

Being together in your community is an important foundation for being healthy. For many families, it has been essential for generations to see each other every day.

"Togetherness in the family is important to me. I am with my family every day." (Kalaaleq Inuk Youth)

"For me, it is the relationship with my family, the connection we have, and the love for each other in our family that is the most valuable to me."
(Kalaaleq Inuk Elder)

Sharing and giving back to the community provides strength and promotes health and well-being for *Kalaallit Inuit*.

"Doing something together, giving and sharing with each other, it gives strength. We live in the same community, so it is nice when we do something together, it is so important - community and mutual support." (Kalaaleq Inuk Elder)

Country food (element 10)

Kalaalimerngit (country food) is more than just energy and vitamins. *Kalaalimerngit*, land, animals and people are closely connected. Eating *kalaalimerngit* is considered as the healthy choice. *Kalaalimerngit* is associated with many emotions and contributes to a sense of shared identity. It is linked to the joy, independence and freedom of hunting/fishing, preparing, enjoying, and sharing the food together. *Kalaalimerngit* has been the foundation for survival for millennia, but also for enjoyment, happiness, and well-being. Having access to *kalaalimerngit* is described by an Elder as a wealth that is not related to money.

"Seal... we worked with the meat and prepared the blubber. We let the seal lie for a few days before cutting it so it could become really good. We worked with both meat and blubber in barrels. I miss it so much, I love processing our food, we were so rich not in money, but in the feeling of making our own food." (Kalaaleq Inuk Elder)

Kalaalimerngit is served at the most important family and life events.

Pinngortitaq (element 11)

Pinngortitaq translates into the creation of the environment including land, animals and humans. It is described by many people as a kind of epicenter for *Kalaallit Inuit* life [47]. *Pinngortitaq* is where one can provide food through hunting and where you prepare your catch. *Pinngortitaq* is also where many *Kalaallit Inuit* find strength, peace, and renewed energy. Summer is the main season for gathering supplies for the long winter.

“It is important to get out of the city to go hunting, to clear my mind – Pinngortitaq is also about eating kalaalimerngit and using your body through hunting.” (Kalaaleq Inuk Youth)

CONCLUSION

This article has presented the theoretical research model *Peqqissuserput* as a culturally sensitive framework for health research in *Kalaallit Nunaat*. The model has been developed in close dialogue with communities over two decades of research and experience in understanding, monitoring, and promoting health and well-being among *Kalaallit Inuit*. We argue that the model represents a shift from traditional risk-based approaches to a strength-based and culturally grounded understanding of health and well-being.

The model is rooted in the concept of *peqqinneq*, which describes a balanced state of being in connection with people, land, and animals and guided by five core principles for ethical and meaningful research: respect for *Sila*, respect for language and intergenerational knowledge, humility and collaboration (Inuit *tunuanni*), recognition of stories as evidence-based knowledge, and a commitment to contributing to the common good. These principles ensure that research is not only relevant and ethical but also strengthens communities' own visions for well-being and development. In conclusion, *Peqqissuserput* offers a new pathway for health research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* – one that is built on respect, relationships, and local knowledge.

By sharing our model, we hope to inspire fellow researchers, policymakers, and partners to reflect on their approaches and work in close partnership with *Kalaallit Inuit* communities to understand and promote health and well-being.

It is our hope that researchers who conduct research in *Kalaallit Nunaat* will do so with respect and humility by behaving in an ethical way. This includes having a deep respect of local knowledge systems, values and

strengths as well as the *Kalaallit Inuit* language and understanding the importance of speaking from the heart.

It is our sincere hope that experiences, memories, and stories based on *Kalaallit Inuit* knowledge will be respected as evidence that fully measures up to scientific evidence as defined in the Western Science traditions. And finally, that *Kalaallit Inuit* voices will be acknowledged as instrumental in the collection, analyses, understanding and dissemination of data in studies that includes *Kalaallit Inuit*.

DECLARATIONS

AI utilization

M365 Copilot was used to translate an early version of the manuscript from Danish to English.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Funding

Not applicable.

Author contributions

IO and CVLL jointly conceived and designed the theoretical model and the ethical principles behind the model. Both authors contributed equally to the drafting of the manuscript, and critical revisions. They approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

Data availability


Not applicable.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deep gratitude to all the community members from different communities across all of *Kalaallit Nunaat* that we have been so lucky to work with and who have taught us about health and well-being. We would also like to acknowledge the various sources of both private and public funding that have made our research possible for the past two decades. Special thanks to Else Johanne Louise E. Jensen for her tireless support in our discussion around terminology and translation into *Kalaallisut* and to Ivalu Risager for her ability to translate our thoughts about the model into a brilliant graphic design.

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ABSTRACT IN SPANISH

***Peqqissuserput*: Un modelo teórico de investigación que parte de las fortalezas para apoyar a las comunidades Inuit Kalaallit a prosperar**

Introducción: La investigación en salud en *Kalaallit Nunaat* (Groenlandia) se ha centrado tradicionalmente en factores de riesgo y déficits, a menudo sin estar fundamentada en los sistemas de conocimiento *Inuit Kalaallit* ni ser liderada por investigadores Indígenas. Estos enfoques han tenido una relevancia limitada para las comunidades y pueden socavar una participación ética. Este artículo presenta *Peqqissuserput* ("Nuestra Salud") y los principios que guían el modelo de investigación del *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* (Centro de Salud Pública de Groenlandia), que parte de las fortalezas para apoyar a las comunidades *Inuit Kalaallit* a seguir prosperando y garantizar que la investigación sea ética y significativa.

Métodos: El modelo se desarrolló mediante un proceso iterativo a lo largo de dos décadas de investigación participativa con comunidades, realizada en el *Innuttaasut Peqqissusiannik Ilisimatusarfik* (Centro de Salud Pública de Groenlandia). El trabajo se basa en asociaciones a largo plazo con comunidades *Inuit Kalaallit*, encuestas nacionales de salud poblacional, estudios cualitativos, círculos de intercambio, experiencias vividas y el diálogo con centros de investigación indígena de todo el Ártico. El modelo está informado por marcos éticos clave, incluidos los Protocolos Inuit Circumpolares para una Participación Equitativa y Ética, la Declaración de las Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas y la Estrategia Nacional de Investigación de Groenlandia.

Resultados: *Peqqissuserput* se fundamenta en el concepto de *peqqinneq*, una comprensión culturalmente específica del equilibrio y el bienestar, arraigada en las relaciones con las personas, la tierra, los animales y *Sila*. En su núcleo se encuentra la tríada metafísica de *timi* (cuerpo), *tarneq* (mente) y *anersaaq* (espíritu), rodeada por once elementos interrelacionados. Estos incluyen tanto determinantes sociales de la salud bien establecidos como dimensiones culturalmente específicas, tales como el idioma, la familia y las relaciones, la alegría de la comunidad, los valores locales, los alimentos del territorio y la conexión con la naturaleza y los animales. Cinco principios rectores sustentan el modelo, y enfatizan el respeto por los sistemas de conocimiento inuit, el lenguaje, la humildad, la narración de historias como evidencia y el compromiso con el bien común.

Conclusión: *Peqqissuserput* representa un cambio desde la investigación en salud basada en déficits hacia un marco basado en fortalezas y culturalmente arraigado en las formas *Inuit Kalaallit* de conocer y de ser. El modelo ofrece una vía práctica y ética para que investigadores, responsables de políticas y profesionales trabajen en alianza con las comunidades para comprender y promover la salud y el bienestar en *Kalaallit Nunaat*.

Palabras clave: Kalaallit, Inuit, conocimiento, sistemas, basado en fortalezas, Indígena, ética, comunidad.

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