



NORTHERN HEALTH REGION

Indigenous Health Strategy
June 2017

Healthy People, Healthy North.

Introduction:

The Northern Health Region's Indigenous Health Strategy was developed to address the significant health disparities between the Indigenous population of the Northern Health Region (NHR) and the non-Indigenous population in the province of Manitoba and reflects the NHR's commitment to closing this gap and improving health outcomes.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, contains a number of health related Calls to Action (Appendix A); while we acknowledge we are not a level of government, nonetheless, the NHR is committed to incorporating the spirit of these Calls to Action as they relate to the culture, programs and services provided by the Region. To that end, they are foundational to the NHR Indigenous Health Strategy. The NHR realizes the need to change the way we view Indigenous health within the region and understands the resiliency of this population as a key foundation on which to improve Indigenous health outcomes. The purpose of the Indigenous Health Strategy is to guide the Northern Health Region and potential Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners in the region toward a shared understanding that addressing health inequities cannot occur in isolation of one another but rather in a shared belief that working together our impact will be greater. To accomplish this, the Northern Health Region has identified four strategic directions to move the region and partners toward achieving our vision of Healthy People, Healthy North, with strong, healthy Indigenous populations who gain a level of health equity that enables good health and overall wellbeing at the community and individual level. These strategic directions are:

- **Strengthening partnerships & connections** with Indigenous partners within the Northern Health Region;
- Ensuring our capacity in **providing a culturally safe environment** in our programs and services throughout the Northern Health Region;
- Ensuring that we as the Northern Health Region move toward **addressing health inequity** in relation to the Indigenous people in the region.
- **Improving Mental Wellness; within a recovery oriented approach;**

Background:

Indigenous people have unique health and service needs due to challenges with socioeconomic status, language, cultural differences and lifestyle choices. Indigenous people have historically had poorer health status than other Canadians. Health status data for indigenous people is incomplete but there is national, provincial and regional data that provide a sense of the health disparities.

The data that we have make it clear that in many health and social indicators, Indigenous people have poorer health status outcomes for lifestyle indicators, infectious diseases, injuries, suicide, chronic diseases and child and infant health.

The health disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada is particularly important for the Northern Health Region given the high proportion of residents who are Indigenous.

70% of people living in the Northern Health Region self-identified as Indigenous in the 2011 census, an increase from the 2006 census (64.4%). Slightly over half of all residents in the Northern Health Region live on-reserve. The Indigenous population is younger compared to the Northern Health Region overall.

The Northern Health Region's findings are consistent with national findings based on information from our last Community Health Assessment. While some improvements were noted, there is far more work needed. One of the major issues for our region continues to be the segregation of health care delivery which is often exacerbated by our jurisdictional challenges. Working in partnership with stakeholders is key (Health Canada, Indigenous groups).

Strategic direction 1: Strengthening Partnerships & Connections

Background and Context:

Within the Northern Health Region there are many people and organizations who are working hard to address the disparities that exist for the Indigenous population. Many people within diverse communities are working toward a shared vision of good health and wellness for all. However, in many instances existing programs and services operate in isolation of one another and we often miss opportunities for potential partnerships and collaboration is unrealized. The Community Health Assessment (CHA) findings clearly point to the complexity of needs, service gaps, challenges and opportunities that face the Northern Health Region pursuing an effective Indigenous Health Strategy. In order for this direction to be realized, we must work together with Indigenous organizations to become partners in Indigenous health and healing. As a region, we will continue to move forward with key strategies that focus on the development of enhanced partnerships based on the significant strengths and capacities of Indigenous people to improve services, address inequities in health outcomes and achieve excellence.

Goal:

To build strong relationships with partners and other stakeholders who will work with the Region to achieve a healthier Indigenous population.

Objectives:

- To facilitate strong partnerships and connections with our Indigenous stakeholders at all levels in the Northern Health Region organization in the development of Indigenous specific health care strategies and plans

- To ensure our Indigenous partners have pathways and access to the Northern Health Region leadership through community engagement opportunities and forums to foster relationships and build trust.
- To build on the work and frameworks of existing partnerships through memorandums of understanding and move toward a sustainable and standardized approach to collaboration.
- To develop an Indigenous specific process for Northern Health region leadership and staff to ensure inclusion of Indigenous people in the planning and implementation of programs and services.
- To enhance the Northern Health Region's communication strategy to increase and include Indigenous-specific messaging and promoting an Indigenous presence within the Northern Health Region.
- To ensure partners are consulted and involved in the health care planning, programs and services specific to the Indigenous population through a collaborative and respectful processes.

Anticipated Outcomes:

To have more collaborative health planning, including improved service delivery for the Indigenous people of the Northern Health Region. This will, in turn, result in positive incremental improvements toward the overall goal of improving the health status of our Indigenous population.

Strategic Direction 2: Providing a Culturally Safe Environment

Background and Context:

It is well documented and evidenced through research that the cultural competency of health care staff is essential to patient centered care, addressing health inequity and providing a culturally safe environment for those who utilize our programs and services. The Northern Health Region has made a commitment to continue moving forward and becoming a more culturally competent organization for the Indigenous people we serve in this vast region. This is an important step in providing culturally safe, competent and relevant programs and services.

Goal:

To achieve a high level of organizational cultural competence leading to the consistent provision of culturally safe and relevant health care delivery for the Indigenous population of the region.

Objectives:

- To achieve 100% participation in the Culture Competence training for the identified priority areas by the end of the fiscal year.
- To ensure that our training includes: Aboriginal health issues, the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teachings and practices; as recommended in the TRC Calls to Action.

- To create an evaluation process or framework of the Region's organizational cultural competence and turn those results into actionable recommendations before the end of this fiscal year.
- To create and implement a comprehensive strategy and operational plan building on the results and learnings of the evaluation process.
- To increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the Region and ensure the retention of Aboriginal health-care providers in Aboriginal communities as part of the Northern Health Region's Human Resource Plan this fiscal year; as recommended in the TRC Calls to Action.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of current practices to gather Indigenous patient feedback and make recommendations on ways to enhance or improve them before the end of the fiscal year.
- To create new or enhanced processes to gather feedback from Indigenous patients and their families and turn that feedback into recommendation from improving the Region's culturally safe environment moving forward.

Anticipated Outcomes:

Indigenous people will receive culturally safe and relevant services within the Northern Health Region delivered by staff demonstrating a high degree of overall cultural competency.

Strategic Direction 3: Addressing Health Inequity

Background and Context:

Health equity means that all individuals and communities have a fair and equitable chance to reach their fullest possible health potential. This requires focused and ongoing efforts by society to address avoidable and unfair health differences and to safeguard full and equal access to opportunities for leading healthy lives. The Indigenous people of the Northern Health Region have many unique strengths and resiliencies. Despite this, there are large health status differences between Indigenous and other northern Manitobans, the rest of the province, and even within each community. These health differences exist on a continuum and affect all individuals, groups, and communities.

Indigenous people in general have unique health and service needs due to challenges with socioeconomic status, language, cultural differences and lifestyle choices and have historically had poorer health status than other Canadians. Although health status data for Indigenous people is incomplete, there is national, provincial and regional data that provide a sense of the health disparities. The data that we have make it clear that in many health and social indicators, Indigenous people have poorer health status outcomes for lifestyle indicators, infectious diseases, injuries, suicide, chronic diseases and child and infant and child health. The health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada are particularly important for the Northern Health Region given the high proportion of residents who are Indigenous. 70% of people living in the

Northern Health Region self-identify as Indigenous in a 2011 census, an increase from the 2006 census (64.4%) with slightly over half of all residents in the Northern Health living on-reserve. The Indigenous population is younger compared to the Northern Health Region overall and is one of the fastest growing in the region and nationally.

Goal:

To improve the health status of the Region's Indigenous population by making incremental improvements in the reduction of health inequity among our population.

Objectives:

- To establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to publish annual progress reports and assess long term trends; as recommended in the TRC Calls to Action.
- To demonstrate our recognition of the value of Aboriginal healing practices by utilizing them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients; as recommended in the TRC Calls to Action.
- To integrate equity frameworks throughout our healthcare system as tools to move health equity forward.
- To identify and analyze health inequities impacting the Indigenous people in the Northern Health Region and establish action plans to address those priority areas in our ongoing planning.
- To evaluate health inequities as they impact the Indigenous people through the CHA process and use these learnings to inform ongoing planning for the Indigenous together with our partners.
- To engage and partner with other organizations to advocate with key stakeholders on policies, funding and best practices to influence health equity,

Anticipated Outcome:

Knowing the complexity of this area, we understand that change will take time to see significant and meaningful change. Nonetheless, we expect work in this area will show modest results in addressing health inequities within the Northern Health Region.

Strategic direction 4: Improving Mental Wellness

Background and Context:

It is clear that the Indigenous population in our region and we as the Northern Health Region continue to struggle with addressing mental wellness in a meaningful and sustainable way. To improve mental wellness we as the Northern Health Region need to acknowledge and commit to making mental wellness a priority. As we proceed to demonstrate mental wellness as a priority we need to acknowledge a shift from an “illness” model to a “wellness” model by integrating Indigenous traditional approaches to enhance our current practices. There still exists a fundamental distrust of care models derived from the western belief system and a belief that these practices can cause more harm rather than heal. Effectively enhancing mental wellness to meet the specific needs of the Indigenous people can help to promote and sustain healthy living and lifestyles.

Goal:

To demonstrate significant improvements to the mental wellness of the Indigenous people within the Northern Health Region.

Objectives:

- To Identify needs specific to the Indigenous population, priority areas and gaps in service designed to inform the strategy including documenting current patient journeys in our current system as well as a scan of current mental health programs and services.
- To demonstrate our recognition of the value of Aboriginal healing practices by utilizing them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients; as recommended in the TRC Calls to Action. To include the creation of indicators to measure the impact of the Indigenous mental health strategy.
- To improve and enhance the cultural competency of our community health resources throughout the region which could include specific cultural competency related to mental wellness, region specific cultural training and trauma-informed practice training.
- To align the Indigenous mental health strategy with existing or emerging regional, provincial, and national strategies, programs and/or collaborations.
- To utilize existing data within current systems to provide a baseline of mental wellness programs and services specific to the Indigenous people within the Northern Health Region to support further planning.

Anticipated Outcome:

Improved and relevant utilization and access to mental wellness services that are culturally appropriate and designed and informed through collaboration with our Indigenous leaders and care providers that result in accessible services and improved mental wellness for the Indigenous people of the Northern Health Region.

Conclusion:

The Northern Health Region's Indigenous Health Strategy is an acknowledgement that we as an organization are committed to working with our partners and communities to improve the overall health status of the Indigenous people in the region. We acknowledge that we need to take actions and have identified four strategic areas to guide this process. The next steps in this living strategy will be to develop more detailed work plans for each of these areas and develop an implementation process that includes a robust evaluation of our results to gauge our effectiveness and adapt the strategy to meet our goals of a Healthy People in a Healthy North that includes all of our citizens.

APPENDIX A

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

Health

18. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.
19. We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to publish annual progress reports and assess long term trends. Such efforts would focus on indicators such as: infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.
20. In order to address the jurisdictional disputes concerning Aboriginal people who do not reside on reserves, we call upon the federal government to recognize, respect, and address the distinct health needs of the Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples.
21. We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.
22. We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.
23. We call upon all levels of government to:
 - i. Increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field.
 - ii. Ensure the retention of Aboriginal health-care providers in Aboriginal communities.
 - iii. Provide cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals.
24. We call upon medical and nursing schools in Canada to require all students to take a course dealing with Aboriginal health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teachings and practices. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights and anti-racism.

Appendix B

Northern Health Region Indigenous Health Strategic Directions

Visual depiction of the strategy TBD