

Neqotkuk Elder Advisory Program

Summary

- Neqotkuk Health Programs and Services (NHPS) provides essential health services to the Tobique First Nation community in New Brunswick (NB); the largest Wolastoqey community in NB. NHSP aims to provide high-quality care, raise awareness of health issues, and promote overall health and safety for the Neqotkuk community.
- It was identified that Elders should have an increased role in decision-making and planning so that programs in the community can better meet their needs. This project aimed to help Elders contribute their knowledge and experience to Neqotkuk policies and management. To achieve this, Neqotkuk formed an Elder Advisory group to assess the community's current state (2020 baseline), pinpoint gaps in community services, and create recommendations for the Chief and Council.
- This project, focused on two goals: (1) decreasing Elders' social isolation, and (2) reducing health inequalities.
- The project involved two phases: In **Phase I**, eight focus groups were conducted with 64 Wolastoqey Elders (30 women, 34 men). The purpose of the discussions was for Elders to tell stories to share with youth, to help them imagine what daily life was like for their family and community in the past. The discussions were video recorded (in Wolastoqey) and re-enacted in English by young community members. In addition to knowledge sharing, this phase of the project aimed to increase Elders' socialization by planning lunches, activities and events.
- In **Phase II**, five focus groups were held with 30 Elders (12 women, 18 men) to identify indicators of how Elders' concerns are being incorporated into policies and services in the community. A survey was later conducted with community Elders (n = 62; 39 women, 23 men) to determine their satisfaction with the implemented programs, policies, and services that were intended to address their concerns.

HSPF Focus Area	Social and Built Environments
Project Start & End Date	December 1, 2019- September 1, 2023
Organization/Agency	Tobique First Nation
Location	Tobique First Nation
Principal Investigator(s)	Deana Sappier; deana.sappier@gmail.com

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result
Social Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with youth to create community knowledge sharing products enabled dialogue between Elders and the Youth centre. This resulted in Elders feeling proud telling their stories in their native language and connecting with both the youth and other Elders in their community. This helped to reduce the feeling social isolation and increase feelings of belonging. • The Elder Coordinator ensured that social activities were occurring regularly (ceremony, food/lunches, language ceremonies). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lunches were increased to bi-weekly due to demand. ○ Transportation was a barrier for some people attending the social activities. To address this, the Elder Coordinator and Personal Support Workers provided rides to Elders for lunches and other activities. Additionally, the Band administration donated a van to support this effort. • At the end of the pilot project 62 Elders completed a survey and it was found that 73% attended the lunches more than half of the time. Socialization was the #1 reason why elders enjoyed the lunches. 65% said they get out at least once a week, however 35% socialized less than once a week.

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result
Health services inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, there has been increased Elder involvement/representation in several programs, committees, and departments. This has had an important impact on policy, by ensuring Elders' voices are being incorporated. • Tangible ways in which Elders were included, and able to share their voices were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As Director of Education. ○ As the Elder in Residence at the Youth Centre. ○ Within multiple roles with Child and Family Services (cultural programming). ○ As part of the Housing Committee (which allows for both male and female representation). ○ As part of additional cultural programming with Employment and Training. ○ An Elder seat on council and more involvement with Band management. • Additionally, the Elder Coordinator/Elder Advisory committee worked on the following to help reduce health inequalities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coordinating community food bag delivery to Elders' homes. ○ Checking on Elders during a heat wave to ensure safety; purchasing AC units for low-income Elders. ○ Working with NHPS Health and Capital department to install ramps and make bathroom modifications for those with reduced mobility. ○ Helping Elders with technological assistance as needed (e.g. filling out Indian Day School applications). ○ Coordinating bi-weekly lunches and events ○ At the end of the pilot project, many Elders indicated that their concerns were sufficiently being met.

Methods and Comparison

Two sets of focus groups and a survey were used to understand the involvement of Elders in the community, identify their concerns, and assess their satisfaction with community programs and socialization efforts that were implemented to address their concerns.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

- The Neqotkuk Elder Advisory committee has been important in advising about Elders' needs. Directors are promoting and encouraging Elder participation in all NHPS departments.
- To date, there has been an increase in Elders' socialization and program/committee involvement.
- NHPS has committed to providing an Elder Coordinator to maintain/increase Elder participation in the community. The importance of an Elder Coordinator was found to be important for liaising between Elders and departments/leadership, coordinating activities and volunteers, and being a consistent face for Elders to rely on for support.
- Overall, this project found that Elders are critical to cultural revitalization within First Nation communities and provide valuable insight into policies.
- The project highlighted that collaboration between departments is beneficial to Elders being able to socialize and live in their homes longer (e.g. investing in lunches, adding Elders to committees, providing home modifications).

Recommendations

This project recommends continuing support for the Elders Advisory Group, including the Elder Coordinator position. Based on the findings, implementing similar models in other First Nation committees could help improve holistic wellness of Elders, youth, and community.

Next Steps

The Elder Coordinator position has continued to be funded by Band Funding. However, moving forward, other sources of funding will be sought (e.g. formal funding, fundraising efforts). Additionally, a plan to engage younger volunteers has been presented, as some volunteers are aging out of being able to help with these social events.

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