



Inuvik Community Wellness Plan

2024-2029

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Inuvik

Inuvik is considered the gateway to the Beaufort Delta and is the largest NWT town north of the Arctic Circle. During the summer, Inuvik is transformed into the Land of the Midnight Sun with 56 days of 24-hour sunlight. It's a place filled with culture, bush life and community pride. Inuvik is the first planned community in the North with intentions of it being the administrative centre. It was also used as a place to relocate some community members of Aklavik NT, which often experienced flooding.

It is the homeland of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit and it's name translates to "Place of Man" in Inuvialuktun however, it is often referred to by locals as "Nooovik". It sets itself apart from other communities with distinct 'smarty box' colored row houses, the Igloo church, 16,000 square foot community greenhouse and Muskrat Jamboree.

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Self Determination

Several comments indicating the need for self-determination were expressed throughout the gathering. This includes aspects of self-governance, sovereignty and the inherent right of self-determination. This allows the people to decide, determine and action their futures and supports community, territorial and individual recognition. For planning purposes, this includes the inclusion of culture, values, land and methods that are inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing.

This approach aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which asserts Indigenous Nations in the protection and preservation of their land, language, culture, and way of life. Work is being done in Indigenous communities, Governments and organizations throughout the NWT to implement the principles of UNDRIP. Indigenous communities are at an advantage in this process because they have always ensured that these core principles show up in community polices, programs and initiatives.

Communities are developing innovative culturally relevant forms of governing themselves. They are moving beyond Canadian legislation where they are often encouraged to self-administer and self-manage Government policies and programs to a place of policy making, and program development that supports Indigenous values. This has been demonstrated through stories and practices of resistance that involve the inclusion of Indigenous voices in this plan. Through the development and implementation of this plan it is hoped that all levels of government will engage and contribute to community wellness.

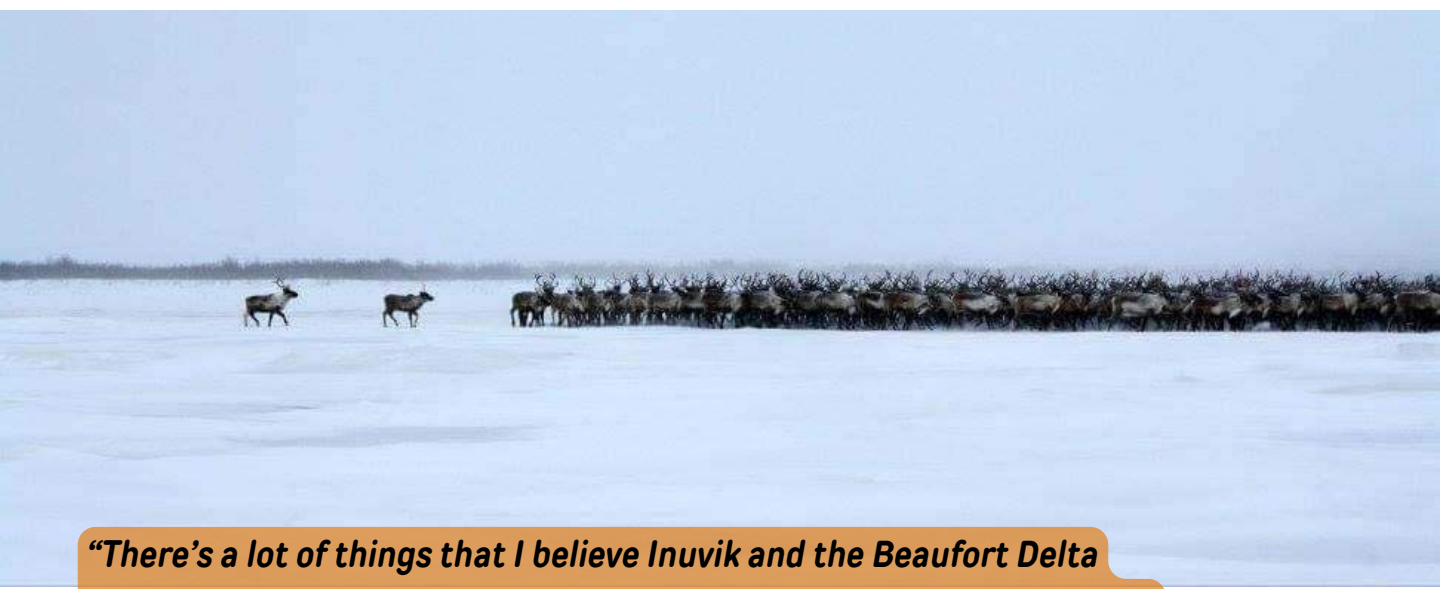


Governance

Community wellness is a community responsibility, no one organization is responsible for the success of this plan. Wellness initiatives will happen through strong partnerships, open communication and a willingness for change. Wellness can be experienced from both an individual and community perspective. However, individual and community wellness do not exist in isolation of each other. None of us can reach our full potential without a supportive community. A supportive community, at the same time, is built by supportive individuals coming together for the wellness of the whole.

The Community Wellness Coordinator identified the Mental Health Awareness Working Group (MHAWG). This group meets monthly to communicate, motivate and support community wellness initiatives. The community wellness plan will be presented as a tool to guide, encourage and align future work relating to community wellness.

The community wellness goals and key activities will be presented to the MHAWG. The group will determine how to assign timelines, determine scope of work, partners needed and resources required.



“There’s a lot of things that I believe Inuvik and the Beaufort Delta could teach the world. First and foremost is about respect. We needed to live up here...we’ve learned to live on one of the harshest areas of this planet by working together.”

– Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik, Gwich’in Tribal Council

photo from Nikki Wright

Building on Past Programming

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of life. During this time individual and community mental health was a concern. Wellness planning and program decisions were held up by restrictions, uncertainty and lack of support and resources. The community wellness division organized soup kitchens, outdoor tea and bannock visits in the cultural area, Elder trips to the surrounding communities along with support through self-care kits, food hampers, free memberships, and kicksled and snowshoe rentals to get people out and active. Past programming also focused on sharing traditional skills, arts and crafts and events to get families socializing.

There were a few collaborative projects such as working with fur, bringing in guests to teach new skills, digitizing Hay River's Yamoza Kue Society cassettes, community caribou harvest, Dene Games and the Northern Games Summit.

There was a noted increase in program participation and appreciation from the community. The need for building collaborative partnerships to deliver community wellness programs was amplified during the Covid pandemic. The community wellness team saw this as an opportunity to strengthen community relations. This is a continued theme that was apparent during community engagement.



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Engagement Process

Indigenous communities have been planning for the health and wellness of their communities since time immemorial, which is and always has been grounded in culture and tradition. The Inuvik Native Band hosted a public engagement session on the evening of June 28th, 2023 at the community recreation centre. We also attended an Elders gathering on June 29, 2023 in the afternoon, where we met and had conversations with Elders about what Community Wellness looks like to them. In total we had 69 participants sharing knowledge. An online survey was created for those individuals that felt more comfortable contributing individually or for those that had more to share. Community members had the option of completing the survey online or attending a meeting with the Wellness Coordinator to fill out the survey on paper. There were no surveys completed.

A separate youth gathering was held on August 5, 2023 at the Inuvik Native Band office. A total of 13 youth participated. The questions asked were:



The engagement strategy was developed by the community, the GNWT (Community, Culture and Innovation division) with help from professional facilitators and researchers to ensure the community values were incorporated into the process following the OCAP (ownership, control, access and protection) principles. OCAP aligns Indigenous interests with data by ensuring priorities, values, culture and worldview are considered.





Systems mapping was used as a starting point to get people together, this method helped the community make sense of the confusion of how to tackle community wellness. We used the mapping process to provide a visual of the complex relationships that exists in the community. It helped the community identify partnerships and showed how collaborative efforts create a more holistic approach to community wellness.

Community input centered around three broad questions:



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Next, potential drivers were considered and discussion around the relationship between the key issues and the key drivers occurred. An example of this is addiction which takes away from community wellness. The drivers of addiction range from trauma, lack of support and mental health. The relationship between these factors are interconnected and it is complicated to talk about one without the other. In order to tackle a problem like addiction it needs to be a holistic approach. Not one organization can address addiction, it's multidimensional and requires a systems approach. This allowed the community to see the importance of collaboration, connection and partnerships.

Next, we explored questions directly related to moving forward with wellness :



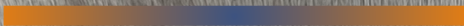
What are the biggest problems facing your community ?

What types of programs and services does the community need to address these problems ?



What are the opportunities & barriers ?

What past efforts can save time and build on what we have done?



Pathway of Change Moving from Scarcity to Abundance

The impacts of community partnerships, whether formal or informal, are positive and result in networking, sharing of information and resources along with streamlining efforts. The pathway of change that was heard during engagement is driven at the grassroots level. Whether it was taking it upon themselves to provide services or putting pressure on decision makers to change policy.

The pathway to change model of moving from a scarcity mindset, where you are feeling overwhelmed, isolated and needing more to an abundance mindset, where you are excited, encouraged and 'ready for action' was emphasized. One participant shared that *"when we accept that not everyone is competing for the same limited resources our program efforts will become less stressful, we need to work together and empower each other through change and effort"*. Realizing that changing the way we approach programs will inevitably change how opportunity and change are handled. The challenges the community is faced with are interconnected and efforts to overcome these obstacles need to be interconnected as well.



photo from Nikki Wright

Direction for Wellness

The dynamic values that Inuvik demonstrates are not considered activities but are “ways of life” that respect community traditions, place-based knowledge and unique strengths. This way of life has required the community to be self-reliant, possess survival skills and navigate through systems with minimal support. Engaging community members in the planning process is an important part of community healing. This allows the community to get to the root cause of problems. This was a process of talking about how we can change habits and behaviour to lead to better outcomes.



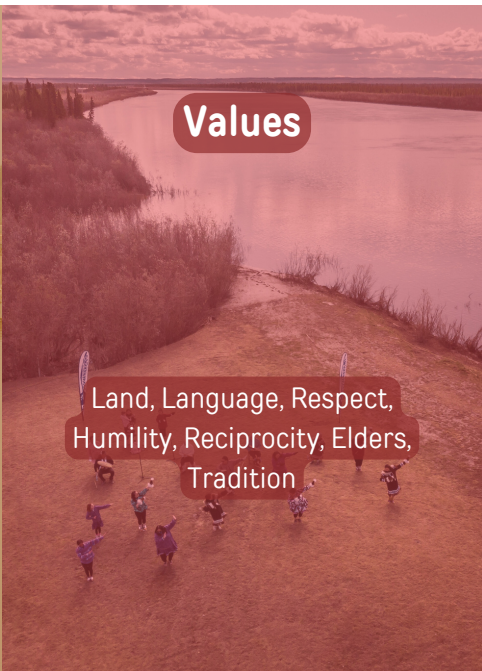
Vision

Build on the strengths of the community to ensure that programs are innovative, collaborative and grounded in community values



Mission

Our mission is to empower community members to live healthy lives through programs and services that are unique to the needs of Inuvik



Values

Land, Language, Respect, Humility, Reciprocity, Elders, Tradition

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Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

The information from the in-person engagement informed the SWOT analysis. This tool helps with strategic planning and helped determine the communities' internal strengths and weaknesses, threats from the outside and opportunities to expand on. It also directed the conversation to explore how the communities' weaknesses could easily be changed to opportunities and identify where change was possible.

The strength of the community lies in their ability, determination and passion for change; participants shared examples of how the community often came together in times of need, this partnership and collaboration is an area of opportunity that needs to be expanded on. The community shared the example of spring graduation. This is a time when community comes together to celebrate the success of students.

The land was discussed as an opportunity for healing, knowledge transfer and economic development. The community is excited for economic opportunities and wants to instill an entrepreneurial mindset with Youth. The community sees the value in building up the next generation to be self-sufficient and successful.

The community identified having a dependency mindset as a weakness that needed to be solved.

“There is a generation of people that want all their problems solved but they are not willing to put in the work” (Engagement, 2023)

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan supports the SWOT analysis by identifying the scope and control of areas that may impact community planning. The scan includes political, economical, social, cultural, technological and environmental factors impacting community wellness.

The community expressed the desire to advance economic opportunities. There was also the need to ensure reliable and up to date technology was available.

Questions to consider when executing plans are:

What trends are continuing to be experienced positively or negatively?

What developments in technology can be used to advance programming?

What political impacts need to be acknowledged before the execution of programming?

Building Community Capacity

Inuvik was talked about as the land of opportunity with an abundance of natural resources. Inuvik has a “boom and bust” history with impacts that are still felt today. Oil and gas exploration and development in the Mackenzie River Valley are still important for the community. There is a limited amount of control community members have in relation to resource exploration and there is a desire to advocate for change. Community members want to fully participate and benefit from resource development.

Participants shared the desire to build and invest in sustainable services. Community development is interrelated to wellness and has a direct impact on the day to day lives and experiences of community members.

Business development is an area that the community would like to improve.

There are some local businesses accessing supports but most feel intimidated. Finding creative ways to empower Indigenous entrepreneurs to build sustainable businesses and livelihoods is a priority.

Part of building a healthy community requires ownership and a sense of pride. The community identified the need to come together to advocate for clean neighbourhoods. Ideas presented during this discussion were: creating incentives for home owners to improve the appearance of their homes and yards, create more greens spaces for gatherings, bring back seating and meeting areas, encourage local businesses to adopt a spot and care for it and have cleaning crews along with incentives.

Past programming was shared and there was a desire to revitalize the Inuvik Works initiative. This program encouraged unemployed community members to commit to short term projects including odd jobs and transportation to participate in the workforce. This was not only about completing work but also about getting people together so they felt proud, productive and confident to move forward.

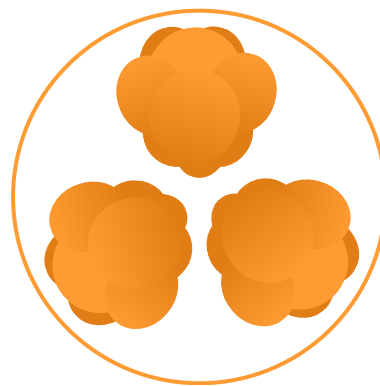
Adequate funding was a concern. To address restrictive funding policies and reduce barriers to accessing funding initiatives, communities need the internal capacity to write grants, applications and proposals. This would provide the internal capacity to look beyond what is provided and request support through other means.

photo from Eighty-One Images



In the past poor communication contributed to weak partnerships. It's important for the community of Inuvik to commit to a process that is open, transparent and fast. The aim is to create a standardized process for flow of information between stakeholders. Some suggestions were to use social media to share messages and utilize the MHAWG to share information with stakeholders.

Inadequate medical and dental services in the community, region and the North as a whole, was a strong concern. The community feels as if they are not getting their basic health care needs. Frustration around wait times, inaccessible medical and dental services has created immense challenges for families. Participants expressed concern that they had been waiting several months and in some cases years. Creating change through advocacy was considered one way of improving the system.



Participants shared concerns about the unreasonable hiring policies they experience with the GNWT. One story included the recent graduates of the Rhodes University program that was initiated through Dene Wellness. This program intended to fill the gap of providing care close to home and employing Indigenous counsellors. Graduates of this program can receive certification from Professional Counsellors Association of Canada, and intended to give the students a wide array of job opportunities. However, this is not the reality that is being experienced. They are not eligible for most GNWT positions and do not qualify to work with the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program.

The ability to respond effectively to crises is dependent on effective planning and timely access to necessary resources, supports, and services. At the community level, this may involve access to external supports to help communities respond to the immediate needs of individual clients and families. The establishment emergency plans was identified. The community reflected on the uncertainties around covid and recent flooding that had occurred up river. This turned into addressing all forms of crisis that the community experiences. There are often no plans to address suicide, serious violence, substance or prescription drug issues, or other issues that have a community-wide impact. There is a need to have emergency response plans which address formal and informal information systems and levels of support.



photo from Gailann Raddi

Building Community Capacity:

1.1: Increase economic development opportunities

Key Activities:

- Partner with EntrepreNorth to have business development training
- Work with governments to encourage business development supports
- Streamline funding opportunities
- Encourage opportunities with outside developers to create employment programs
- Mobilize local resources
- Provide supports and services for equitable employment opportunities
- Create training that empowers young entrepreneurs
- Create sustainable opportunities that value climate change
- Create place-based learning initiatives
- Work on a community-controlled project
- Revitalize Inuvik Works
- Programming to support adequate pricing
- Workshops that build the skills for people to sell their products online

1.2: Create opportunities for cultural awareness and sensitivity experiences

Key Activities:

- Promote mandatory cultural awareness training (GNWT Living Well Together)
- Promote integrated service approach
- Create a welcoming event – orientation program for new people to the community
- Encourage new community members to attend community events

1.3: Revitalize the face of the community

Key Activities:

- Initiatives that will revitalize the face of our town
- Clean streets programs
- Supporting non-profit organizations
- Adopt neighbourhoods
- Provide seating options for people to visit
- Create and support gathering areas
- Create opportunities to display art in community

1.4: Build internal capacity

Key Activities:

- Develop training that promotes community and individual self determination
- Develop specific training and access current training on land Claims
- Utilize the current *Indigenous Community Capacity Building Program*
- Grant and funding application training
- Develop communication strategy
- Advocate for basic health care needs

1.5: Work with community agencies to create emergency housing and emergency plans

Key Activities:

- Create partnerships to work toward providing affordable housing alternatives
- Approach housing as a coordinated approach (all levels of government)
- Connect with *Dene Nation Emergency Preparedness* division to have a coordinated approach

photo from Community Wellness Team member, Billie Lennie



photo from Gailann Raddi



photo from Gailann Raddi



photo from Community Wellness Team member, Billie Lennie

Innovative Community Programming

Having gender specific programming is an opportunity to individualize programs to meet people where they are. In 2019, the Calls for Justice challenged jurisdictions across Canada to acknowledge that colonialism is not a discrete event in the past but that it built systems, institutions, practices and ways of thinking that are still around today. The community wants to ensure that support and programs are in place to address the unique challenges that women face.

There is a need to move away from a damage centred approach of wellness to looking at ways we can heal by recognizing our history, culture and resilience as a people. There is a stigma around seeking help. There is also a need to raise awareness and understanding around family violence. Finding creative ways for men to come together to end violence and understand the importance of their roles and responsibilities for a healthy community is essential.

Colonization has impacted the use of traditional practices surrounding pregnancy and raising children. The community needs support to address the discourse, societal assumptions and narratives pertaining to young mothers and teen pregnancies that can be damaging and shameful rather than supportive and healing. It was decided that culturally relevant parenting programs is a good starting point.

Mental health programming needs to target all age levels. One participant shared *“I fought to keep my children away from drugs and now I am doing the same thing for my grandchildren, this is exhausting, the community needs help”*. There is a particular interest in seeing more land-based programming including wellness camps, with traditional and practical teachings about mental health and wellness. There are unique needs that need to be met that are reflective of culture, history and language. Culture must be respected, included and valued when developing new programs and accessing existing programs.

Traumatic events have become all too common in our lives, intergenerational trauma is a real thing in our communities, we need to pivot this conversation to discuss the intergenerational resilience that has been passed down to us. One participant shared *“we have survived in one of the harshest environments and we are still here, we are strong and we need to embrace this strength”*. When it comes to these



serious issues, our conversations are a necessity, it is important to understand and work through things that may feel unexplainable. Our stories are crucial and a vital step to gaining perspective and processing emotions. The community wants to create programming focusing on Northern resilience, traditional skills and preserving the oral stories of Elders.

photo from Communitiy Wellness Team



photo from Denise McDonald

Lateral violence is described as displaced anger. It often occurs when individuals direct negative feelings of anger towards someone instead of recognizing that the anger roots from oppressive experiences, colonialism and internalized racism. The community discussed the reality of people pulling each other down. This takes on a number of different toxic behaviours. It is any action that is meant to discourage or make a person feel bad about their successes. The need to include these tough conversations in programming is critical.

Our social connections are integral to our health and well-being. A connected community is a place where everyone feels like they belong. People who are connected

are happier and enjoy better health and use fewer health services. They are more resilient in the face of adversity, and live longer. Participants reminisced about dances, talent shows, traditional games, and community contests. Identity and community unity through social and cultural influence were said to make the community stronger. Understanding these identities is essential to be able to communicate with and understand others. One participant shared *“this is why people come here and never leave, I moved here 45 years ago and have never felt like I belonged anywhere else...this is my home”*. One of the strategies moving forward will be building on past successes and finding ways to bring the community together.

photos from Community Wellness Team member, Billie Lennie



The Hope House was created as a drop-in space where people can stop by, have a cup of coffee, develop new skills, and get help with paperwork if they need it. It's open to anyone in the community and there is always programming or community support at hand. This is a great space for people to learn, connect and request support. One of the participants described this as “an adult youth centre”. Continuing to provide safe spaces to meet is important for successful programming.

Identity is a core aspect of Indigenous cultures, it builds our understanding of relationships to people and place. Key elements of wellness include elements such as language, land, and history. Having a strong sense of identity is important, but how identity is expressed is unique across communities. Engagement revealed that a significant priority was continuing programs that helped people develop their family trees. Past participants shared how rewarding the process was for them. It gave them a chance to understand how they were connected to the community and surrounding areas, and sparked conversations with family and instilled a sense of pride. For some it allowed them to work through past grief.

Innovative Community Programming:

2.1 Develop innovative programs that target Elder knowledge transfer

Key Activities:

- Develop Elder specific programming and integration of Elders into all programming
- Encourage trauma informed training and care through programming
- Develop a set of “wise practices” to guide programs and approach
- Bring children and youth together with Elders
- Have more social gatherings: dances, talent shows
- Create arts based programming: sewing, beading, parka making
- Target men’s programming to enhance skills and health through mentorship with Elders

2.2 Support Indigenous partners in leading the design of culturally relevant programs and services. Include interventions that will focus on individual readiness to change

Key Activities:

- Develop a course on understanding lateral violence
- Campaign to normalize sobriety
- Create programs that empower women
- Encourage emotional intelligence training
- Course to understanding bias through programming
- Develop men’s group
- Anger management training
- Trauma informed healing
- Provide aftercare support
- Promote healing circles
- Suicide awareness training

2.3 Develop programs that are desire based and not damage centered

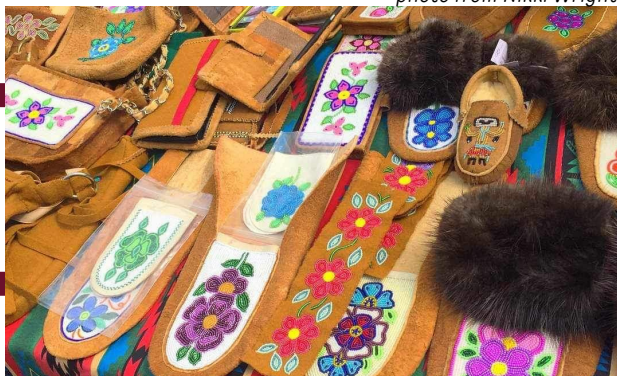
Key Activities:

- Develop language that moves away from seeking help to language that focuses on building on strengths
- Focus on the strengths of community
- Target mental health and awareness
- Move from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational resilience
- Lateral violence to lateral kindness

photo from Gailann Raddi



photo from Nikki Wright



Traditional Knowledge & Healing

Traditional Knowledge is often referred to as Indigenous knowledge which grounds knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the context of their learning and knowing from the places where they have lived, hunted, explored, migrated, raised families, built communities, and survived for centuries. Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders are assets within communities and have the experience and skills to teach and pass this knowledge.

The process of tanning hides, sewing, tufting, hunting and harvesting involves restoring the value of traditional practices through sharing knowledge and stories which involves remembering, restoring and reclaiming Indigenous wisdom. Program development that ensures the passing on of these unique skills is vitally important to community wellness.

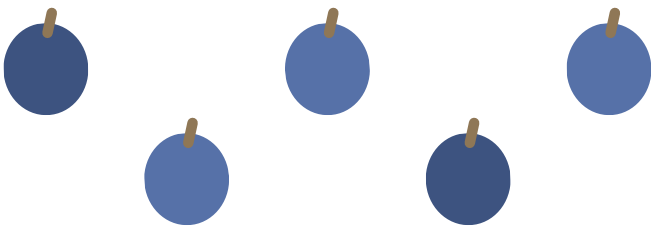
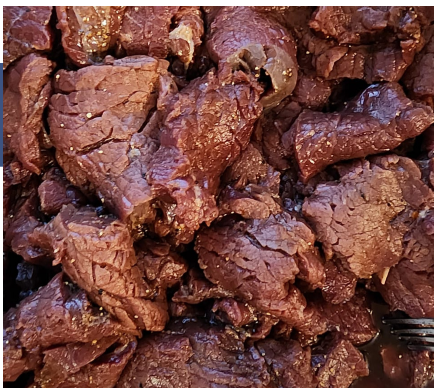
One participant shared that *“when I was a kid my grandparents use to use everything from the caribou, everything...right down to the feet. There use to be a strong connection, we need those teachings”* (Engagement, 2023)

Other land-based learning concerns were around safety and usable skills. Training in the following areas was brought up: gun safety, boat safety, first aid and on the land survival skills. There is the desire to develop and enhance programming that will build knowledge, skills and opportunities. The idea of creating a small engines course was considered a priority. Individuals rely on snowmobiles and quads for transportation and getting out on the land. This course would enhance the overall success of land-based learning initiatives.

Language revitalization refers to the efforts of community to create language-learning programs and services to keep their language alive and flourishing. The community hopes to utilize internal strengths of Elders and fluent language speakers to find innovative ways of passing on this gift. Language revitalization depends on commitment and dedication from everyone. For this to be realized there needs to be a multidimensional approach to language revitalization.



photos from Gailann Raddi



Culture and tradition are integral as the community develops programming and service delivery. Restoring roles of traditional practices and protocols is a goal of the community wellness plan. Inuvik is committed to traditional wellness along with culture specific interventions that target spirit, mind and body, simultaneously. Treatment programs need to take this approach including aspects of healing trauma, coping strategies, healthy families, suicide awareness and intervention. There is an opportunity to increase capacity and efficiency in healing services to improve access and bring care closer to home.

One project which was discussed was initiated by the IRC. Project Jewel is an on-the-land wellness program that focuses on after care. Services are geared towards individual participants and grounded in culturally relevant programming. The camp uses a variety of techniques including Elder support, knowledge holders, external facilitators, clinical support, body movement and cognitive based work to deal with unresolved trauma.



photo from Denise McDonald

This is similar to programming that was offered by the GTC. The Gwich'in Wellness Camp announced that the camp is reopening and will focus on the cycle of addictions and trauma with space and resources to connect to the land.

photo from Community Wellness Billie Lennie



"I have heard people say that it's hard to get drugs into the North, for me I see that it's harder to get help" (Engagement, 2023)

These services are an important first step in a long-term recovery process in which timely access to culturally appropriate services is necessary. Programming that supports initiatives like these are critical to a community approach that targets addiction.

3.1: Increase land-based healing initiatives

Key Activities:

- Loss and grief training paired with support services
- After care programming
- Trauma informed programming

3.2: Incorporate language revitalization channels into programming

Key Activities:

- Incorporate language into daily practices
- Find creative ways to use language in all programming
- Have language champions in community for support
- Identify language mentors
- Help community members access GNWT language mentorship program
- Use language on radio and social media
- Create videos and resources that can be shared online
- Advocate for the presence and visibility of language in public services

3.3: Create land-based learning options in collaboration with other organizations

Key Activities:

- Encourage program developers to adopt an integrated approach to programs
- Ensure a decolonization lens is used for healing initiatives
- Look at ways to use seasonal changes in programming
- Create innovative programming targeting men, women and families on their healing journey
- Create space for circles and storytelling
- Ensures treatment content is culturally relevant and close to home
- Support the work and enhance capacity of community Elders to fulfill their roles as experts in the community

3.4: Increase food security through programming and teaching of traditional skills

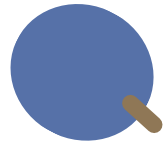
Key Activities:

- Promote healthy eating and food production through provision of cooking classes, gardening classes, harvesting skills and hunting programs
- Encourage community hunting program
- Create a hunting mentorship program
- Create a harvesting program
- Continue with food preparation workshops
- Develop fish program (dry fish, smoked fish)

3.5: Develop land safety resources and measures

Key Activities:

- Safety courses/services: water & ice safety, boat safety and skills, first aid, gun safety and certification
- Promote use of helmets
- On the land emergency courses
- Survival skills workshop
- Small motors course



photos from Gailann Raddi



Implementation Strategy

This community approach creates an environment to draw on the expertise and knowledge of community members and organizations. The Community Wellness Coordinator is committed to regular updates through written reports on the structure and success of programming. This approach ensures that wellness initiatives are tailored to the needs and concerns of community members and provides a space for feedback. Using the action plan as a guide during the MHAWG meetings will provide direction in the area of implementation. The development of a reporting and accountability structure for ongoing monitoring of the plan is essential to determine if changes described in the focus areas have had positive impacts for community wellness.

Everyone involved in implementation has a responsibility to work creatively within available mechanisms to: raise awareness and gather information on areas of need; work strategically with a wide range of partners at all levels to enhance programs; advocate for the resources required to make the community wellness vision come to life; and track and communicate progress.



photo from Nikki Wright

Evaluation

Program evaluation is used to provide insight into program goals, target groups and activities. It allows you to see the strength, weaknesses and cost-effectiveness of the initiative. Essentially, it's about asking those hard questions of whether or not the program is working. There are many dimensions to program evaluations and finding the right assessment that aligns with community and cultural values is important.

Some things to consider are:

How to ensure the evaluation is grounded in cultural values specific to community?

How to ensure Indigenous methodologies are upheld, valued and respected?

How will community protocols be included?

What does success look like from a community perspective?

Having community values as a starting point of measuring success ensures you are measuring what communities care about. Quite often indicators of wellness measure from a deficit-based lens, rather than the presence of something positive. Inuvik is committed to changing the narrative from damage to desire and this includes how success is measured.

The engagement groups both identified that there needs to be accountability in the community wellness plan, and it will create less political conflict. It was also expressed that there is a strong relationship between people, place, history and health which are all fundamental to our quality of life, therefore these components need to be considered when evaluating success.

Acknowledgments



The process of creating the Community Wellness Plan 2024–2029 for the community of Inuvik was made possible because of the passion, commitment and thoughtfulness of members of the community who participated in engagement and continue to advance programs that meet the needs of the community.