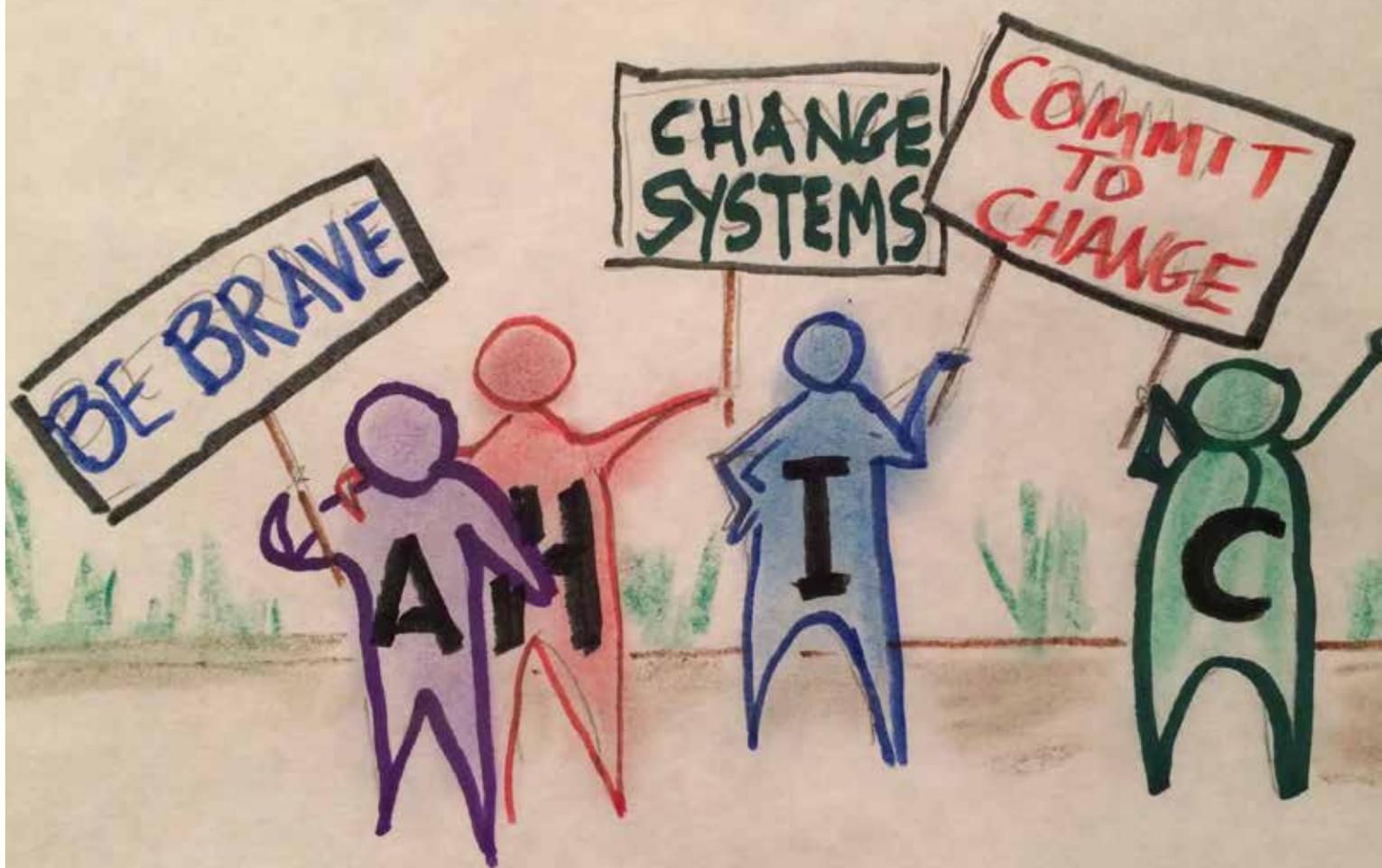


ABORIGINAL HEALTH

All AHIC Gathering 2015

ABORIGINAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEES

SEPTEMBER 22-23, 2015



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Margo Greenwood, Vice President Aboriginal Health with Northern Health, on behalf of the entire Aboriginal Health Team extends a heartfelt thank-you to everyone whose time, energy, knowledge, wisdom, experience and perseverance has contributed to the achievements of the Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees which were celebrated at this gathering. Each person who took part in the gathering, who traveled to attend, who took time to think and work together for the well-being of our communities in northern BC, meegwetch.

We gratefully acknowledge the Lheidli T'enneh, upon whose traditional territory we gathered, for their welcome and for being the stewards and protectors of this land where two rivers meet.

SUMMARY

Representatives and members of Northern Health Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees from across northern BC gathered in Prince George on September 22nd and 23rd, 2015. The Second Annual All AHIC Gathering also brought representatives of Northern Health Executive, Northern Health Regional Services, the Northern Health Regional Aboriginal Health Team, and representatives of the First Nations Health Authority to share knowledge and experiences, and support one another in ongoing work and planning

future work of the AHICs. This gathering was held to provide opportunities for AHIC members to:

- celebrate AHIC accomplishments in the past year,
- explore innovative solutions for addressing local challenges,
- enhance networking and team building skills and abilities,
- plan for next year, and
- strengthen relationships and partnerships.

Members and representatives for each AHIC shared their successes, experiences, new ideas and strategies to address complex challenges in their communities. The 2014-2015 Mapping and Cultural Resource Development initiatives saw incredibly rich resources produced to respond to challenges identified through mapping processes. They answered the question posed by Margo Greenwood at the 2014 All AHIC Gathering: "If I were a new health practitioner in your community, what would you want me to know?" A

"Thank you for making this opportunity available to us. It's great to see this group of people with such passion for the work. It's also validating to know that other areas have common issues and strength." - participant



Theresa Healy provided graphic recording for the gathering. She is the Regional Lead Community Development – Aboriginal Communities with the Centre for Healthy Living.



A Friendship Dance lead by musical guest Kym Gouchie was enjoyed by participants during the evening celebration of cultural resources.

total of 22 maps and more than 18 cultural resources were created during these initiatives, many of which will be multiplied through ongoing collaborative work within and between AHICs.

AHICs worked together to map out the allies, relationships and resources in their networks that they can rely on to work toward making their vision a reality in their regions. Knowing “we are not alone” in this integral work is important to sustain energy and momentum in our groups and communities. A session to build Critical Action Planning skills and capacities facilitated practical planning work that is rooted in knowing that strong, supportive networks will help us in moving forward.

To build on these incredible successes, a new funding initiative was announced for 2015-2016, with resources committed to implementing strategies and tools to address immediate, short and medium-term challenges identified by AHICs using their maps and resulting action plans. These are local strategies for local issues, building on the strengths of local communities, organizations and health teams.

Margo Greenwood, VP Aboriginal Health, Northern Health, announced dedicated financial support for each AHIC for this work extending to March 31, 2016.

OVERVIEW

Northern Health’s Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees (AHICs) are collaborative groups that bring Northern Health frontline workers and administrators together with First Nations and Aboriginal health leaders to share information and work in partnership on local health care priorities.

There are eight AHICs that meet regularly across Northern Health: three in the Northwest, four in the Northern Interior, and one in the Northeast. AHIC members include health representatives from First Nations and Aboriginal communities and organizations, First Nations Health Authority, and local Northern Health leadership. AHICs meet to review and discuss local issues and concerns, and work together towards practical solutions at local and sub-regional levels to provide Northern Health with insights and advice on a wide range of issues.

Each Northern Health AHIC was represented at this gathering:

- Lakes District
- Northeast
- North Coast
- Northwest East (Smithers and Area)
- Omineca
- Prince George and Area
- Quesnel and Area
- Terrace/Kitimat and Area

The overarching goals of this gathering were to provide members of the Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees with opportunities to:

- celebrate AHIC accomplishments in the past year,
- explore innovative solutions for addressing local challenges,
- enhance networking and team building skills and abilities,
- plan for next year, and
- strengthen relationships and partnerships.

This two-day gathering was held at the Coast Inn of the North in Prince George. A Traditional Welcome to Lheidli T'enneh Territory and opening prayer was provided by Elder Violet Bozoki, and opening songs by Jennifer Pighin and Anne Bozoki. The gathering was facilitated by Dr. Sarah de Leeuw (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, UNBC Health Arts Research Centre), with sessions

facilitated by Aboriginal Health Team members: Kendra Mitchell-Foster, Lead Community Engagement and Development; Jessie King, Lead Research and Community Engagement; Victoria Carter, Lead Community Engagement and Integration; and David Loewen, Lead Community Engagement, Education and Evaluation. Facilitation and logistical support was provided by guest facilitator Anne Syme, Regional Director Human Resources Design and Education; graphic recorder Theresa Healy, Regional Lead Community Development – Aboriginal Communities with the Centre for Healthy Living; and Aboriginal Health Team members Hilary McGregor, Lead Knowledge Translation and Community Engagement, and Delaney Gull, Executive Assistant to the Vice President Aboriginal Health. The gathering was closed with summative remarks from Dr. Sarah de Leeuw and words from Cathy Ulrich, Chief Executive Officer Northern Health.

CELEBRATING AHIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Michael McMillan, Chief Operating Officer for the Northern Interior Sub-region for Northern Health (NH), welcomed everyone to the gathering on behalf of the Northern Health Board and CEO Cathy Ulrich, with remarks, personal stories and reflections on the achievements of the AHICs over the past year. Cathy Ulrich, Chief Executive Officer of Northern Health, sent her regrets for not being able to attend in person.

“Bringing joy back to our communities is important to us. We need to activate, innovate, have laughter, mobilization and mentoring.” - participant



Cormac Hikisch, Health Services Administrator, shares the Northwest East (Smithers and area) AHIC map during the “Around the World - Mapping Our Journeys” session.

- Communication featured strongly in all of the maps from all AHICs. This includes working in partnership with communities, NH and FNHA to clarify and improve information sharing between health care teams and facilities. This also includes ensuring that communication between health care providers and patients is appropriate, complete and culturally safe. Patients, families and providers who have clear communication strategies and share important information with one another may improve patient experiences and outcomes.
- Community needs for services closer to home continue to be an issue for patients who must travel to access care. Many communities do not have services, supports, or resources available to meet the health and wellness needs of the people and families who live there. Aging populations, complex health needs such as mental wellness and substance use, and the large geography of northern BC are all noted elements of this multi-faceted challenge. We must come together to build capacity and to support communities that have fewer resources and services available. Travel arrangements and communication can be difficult, and partnered work is needed to streamline these processes and make it more accessible.
- Recruitment and retention of committed health practitioners affects all of the above issues. Dedicated staff that are familiar with communities, protocols, processes and communication

dynamics make a significant difference in improving access to care and in helping navigate a patient journey from wellness to health issue to diagnosis, admission, care, discharge and finally after-care in the home.



The full *Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees Mapping Summary Report* can be accessed through the Aboriginal Health website.

Margo Greenwood, Vice President Aboriginal Health NH, also highlighted and applauded the remarkable successes of each AHIC over the 2014-2015 year. At the 2014 All AHIC Gathering, Margo posed the question: “If I were a new health practitioner coming to your community, what would you want me to know?” In her presentation, Margo revisited the insights and inspiring work in each community through the mapping initiatives, and showcased the impressive cultural resources developed by each AHIC to answer to this question. These resources, more than 18 in total, ranged in diversity from patient information wallet

“This made me realize how important culture is and how fast we are losing it. We have to shine a light on this topic.” - participant



Quesnel and area AHIC display of the cultural resources they developed.



Marie Hunter, Health Services Administrator, discusses the cultural resources developed by the Lakes District AHIC displaying the cultural resources they developed.

cards to help bridge communication gaps, to beautiful art exhibits, to button blankets, to culture and protocol reports, to videos on protocols and sacred cultural practices around birth, death and dying. These provide a precious body of work to further progress toward the goals of cultural safety, access to care, improving communication, recruitment and retention of health care practitioners, along with many other priorities in our efforts to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal people in northern BC.

An evening in celebration of these cultural resources was hosted by Jessie King, Lead Research and Community Engagement for Aboriginal Health NH. A cultural resource passport encouraged participants to explore each AHIC's exhibit that showcased the cultural resources they had developed. Musical guest Kym Gouchie provided entertainment for the evening, with a high point being a friendship dance shared by all who were there.

A booklet featuring the cultural resources developed by the AHICs can be accessed through the Aboriginal Health website.



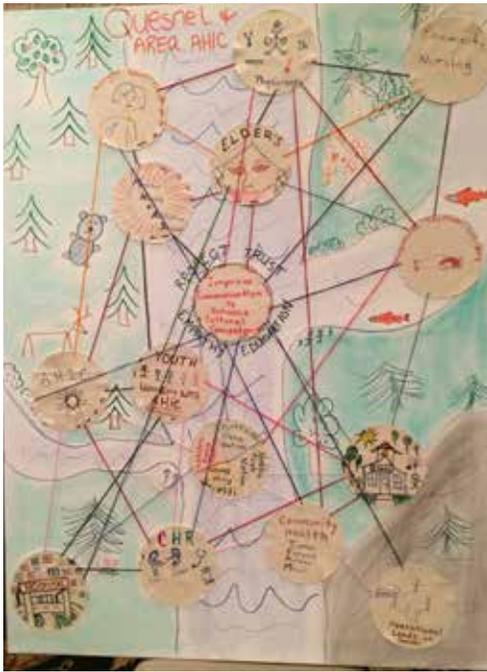
EXPLORING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR ADDRESSING LOCAL CHALLENGES

A Critical Action Planning Education Session held on the second day of the gathering built on the seeds of inspiration planted during the sharing sessions on the first day. Using the “What? So What? Now What?” question-model, AHICs worked to examine recurring patterns in their work and the work of others to identify:

- The nature of complex issues and challenges faced in health journeys and delivering health services in their areas
- The root causes of these persistent issues and challenges
- Planning strategies to put resources and champions in place to move work forward.

Importantly, this action planning session focused on prioritizing immediate, short, medium and long-term goals for AHICs and thinking through the steps and supports needed to achieve them. Many of the immediate actions that were pledged focused on connections made during resource sharing sessions and pursuing adaptation of developed AHIC resources.

Celebrating AHIC accomplishments through both the “Mapping Our Journeys” session and the Celebration of Cultural Resources evening had an added



Quesnel and area AHIC Spiderweb of Networks



Making a patch to represent a connection for the Spiderweb of Networks.

these committees are places of support, creativity and developing practical solutions.

Amid an atmosphere of high energy and laughter, AHICs constructed creative “Spiderwebs” illustrating the support and connections they rely on. In the centre of each spiderweb, a circle described the purpose or central direction each AHIC will work on for the 2015-2016 year, around that central circle were 4 to

5 values or strengths that will guide the AHIC in that work.

Fabric circles were placed around this central purpose to represent allies, collaborators, resources and strengths. These were then connected by threads that knit together each web of support. The underlying canvas illustrates the context within which the AHICs do their work. AHICs presented their webs to the



Omineca AHIC Spiderweb of Networks



Making a patch to represent a connection for the Spiderweb of Networks.

gathering to share their insights and inspiration. These webs were also an exercise in creativity and diversity of voices from across the northern region.

A team building activity on the second day of the gathering expanded on the importance of balancing creativity and network supports in collaborative work. The “Marshmallow Challenge”, facilitated by David Loewen, had small AHIC teams racing against the clock to build the tallest tower out of raw spaghetti, masking tape, string, and a paper bag, all with a marshmallow at the top. This fun exercise had a deeper lesson, the marshmallow is assumed to be light and is often not considered until the tower is built; in fact, the marshmallow is heavier than the spaghetti, paper or string and often causes the towers to fall. Assumptions about issues, challenges, communication or resources can frustrate otherwise great collaborations and well-developed plans. Reflections offered by the groups related this experience to AHIC processes and work:

- Humour and compassion is important in the work we do
- Everyone has different skill sets, it is important to work together and listen to everyone’s ideas
- Knowing your team’s strengths and resources is important for planning and collaboration
- Instead of building a solid foundation, we aimed for the tallest tower without planning

The question was posed to the gathering “What are the marshmallows you are facing for the next year?”

PLANNING FOR THE NEXT YEAR

Both the Critical Action Planning Session and describing limitations (eg. “marshmallows”) for the upcoming year resulted in each AHIC establishing concrete actions for immediate, short, medium and long-term strategies over the 2015-2016 year. As part of the words she shared with the gathering on the first day, Margo Greenwood also announced funding for each AHIC to support their visions and progress over the coming year. This new funding initiative will build on both the Mapping Initiative and the Cultural Resource Development Initiative of 2014-2015, supporting continued momentum, capacity building and further development of innovative solutions to local challenges. Some of the common opportunities for improvement identified by AHICs were:

- Improving discharge planning processes for better outcomes
- Improving communication to enhance cultural competency
- Focusing on improving prevention programs and wellness promotion
- Addressing poverty and food security issues in communities
- Addressing lack of housing and working with housing as a social determinant of health



Verna Howard, Lillian Lewis and Angie Combs share laughter as they try to build a freestanding structure from raw spaghetti, masking tape, string, and a paper bag, all with a marshmallow at the top.



The winning team of the Marshmallow Challenge pose with their tallest freestanding structure: Bev Lambert, Margaret Davis, Sandra Garbitt and Kym Brenton.

- Care planning and access to services
- Improving communication and signage in Northern Health facilities to improve patient experience and cultural safety of care
- Developing education for Northern Health staff and communities around alternate streams of care to alleviate ER congestion and improve patient experience; and
- Improving consistency in AHIC attendance to support smoother and more responsive AHIC processes

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Theresa Healy, Regional Lead, Healthy Community Development - Aboriginal Communities for Northern Health, provided graphic facilitation over both days of the gathering. She reflected that this gathering started grounded in the land, with an honoring of culture, kindness and each other as central values. The practices of storytelling, deep listening and being true partners are at the front of people's minds and

experiences, and that we are all heartily engaged with the processes of setting AHIC tables and sitting down together to do good work. Through AHIC work, we are adding treasures to our basket: skills, knowledge, wisdom, gratitude. We are all engaged in the work of teaching in the moments and spaces where racism is encountered and we are all actively working to disengage from systems and practices that feed racism. Margo Greenwood brought us the image of her mother's dining room table and the significance of being asked to set it and to join in a meal. Nicole Cross reiterated that "We need to be tough on issues and gentle with each other".

The Gathering of Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees is an important event for ensuring that AHICs are supported, connected and well resourced. For many, this yearly gathering is the only time that people and groups doing similar work in geographically distant places have the opportunity to see one another, share stories, share strength and ideas, and to connect with fresh perspectives on persistent and complex challenges. With attendance and participation from a wide range of AHIC membership, people from many different communities, organizations and sectors, as well as a strong investment in participation from Northern Health Executive and departments, and from the First Nations Health Authority's Regional Director, Regional Teams and Community Engagement Coordinators, this was a time of building, of mutual benefit, and of encouragement for one another.

MOVING FORWARD

The financial commitment made by Margo Greenwood pledges \$10,000 to each AHIC for 2015-2016 to support continued work building on the past year's initiatives. This commitment from Aboriginal Health also includes human resources and facilitation support of the Aboriginal Health Leads.

This gathering was a time of celebration, relationship and learning. Exploring and honouring our connections to one another, and our own unique connections to the places we live and work, and to the people we live and work with day-to-day. These elements remind us that we are stronger together and that we are rich beyond measure. With continued momentum and progress we can build on the strong foundations of work already done and already underway to pursue the vision of improved care, well-being and wellness for all.



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