

A photograph of a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light blue hospital gown, sitting at a table in a hospital room. He is eating a meal from a white tray. The meal includes a bowl of soup, a small container of purple jam, and a blue cup. A black pitcher and a glass are also on the table. The background shows a hospital bed with white pillows and a window with curtains. The text "Traditional Food as Medicine at Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre" is overlaid on the bottom of the image in a white box with a black border.

Traditional Food as Medicine at Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre

Executive Summary:

Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre (SLMHC) (Sioux Lookout, Ontario)

Aim:

To provide holistic, culturally responsive and appropriate care (minoyawin) through programming and healing practices informed by Indigenous wisdom. Because “food is medicine,” a crucial part of this programming is serving Traditional foods (Miichim).

Introduction:

The health inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada are staggering and persistent, including a ten year Indigenous health gap. In healthcare settings, Indigenous people should have access to the Traditional foods that are part of Indigenous culture and identity, and which support healing. Access to such foods is also a pathway to reconciliation—a way to build relationships and trust.

Intervention:

Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre (SLMHC), which serves patients from 28 First Nations communities in Northwestern Ontario, has emerged from a racist and colonialist past as a hospital that embraces Western and Indigenous approaches to healing. A unique legislative exemption has permitted the hospital to serve uninspected wild meat and fish to patients and visitors for over 10 years, and Traditional foods have become an integral part of the holistic care patients receive.

Intervention (continued):

Recipes are developed and adapted in consultation with Elders and Kookums (grandmothers) and hunted meat and fish are donated by local community members, organizations, and associations. The hospital carefully traces and tracks Traditional foods to ensure quality and safety.

Outcomes:

- **Patients can easily and regularly enjoy Traditional foods.**
 - Fresh Traditional meals are available twice per week
 - Frozen premade Traditional meals are available throughout the week
 - Interpreters are available 24/7 to guide patients through menu options
- **The SLMHC's step-by-step process and rigorous standards for sourcing and serving Traditional foods can guide and inspire other healthcare institutions seeking to improve access to Traditional foods for patients.**
- **Growing awareness around the Miichim program** is an opportunity to raise awareness of the medicine wheel model of holistic care—both its benefits and the barriers to its implementation.

Conclusion:

SLMHC embodies all that is possible when hospitals put culture at the centre of care. They continually demonstrate how to leverage community partnerships to respect and value local Indigenous culture as a pathway toward healing and reconciliation.

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