

Indigenous Food Responses to COVID-19 in Health Care

Meetings: June 11 and June 25, 2020

Nourish hosted two informal exchanges (on June 11 and June 25, 2020) about health care food responses by/for Indigenous communities during COVID-19. The need for this conversation emerged from discussions within the Nourish Indigenous & Allies Advisory and from checking in with others leading efforts in this vein in the grassroots and in philanthropy.

The purpose of the calls was to share learning focused on health care led interventions and document ongoing activities across the country responding to the particular needs in Indigenous communities. The hope is to identify strategies working well and document gaps that exist.

This documentation of the various efforts for Indigenous communities can be accessed [here](#), and the notes and insights from the calls are below. We hope that these resources can inform the on-going work, and encourage leadership around the particular needs of Indigenous communities during COVID-19. **You can submit any additional efforts and interventions with this survey [here](#) until July 5.**

In terms of next steps, Nourish and its Indigenous & Allies Advisory will consider the request to continue these calls if they are valuable for folks, as interest is described or direction is provided about what would be most useful to get from subsequent calls. You can email **Kelly Gordon** or **Hayley Lapalme** with your feedback, agenda ideas, or to express the desire to co-host a subsequent call.

Contacts:

Kelly Gordon, Nourish Innovator (Six Nations Health Services) and Co-Chair, Nourish Indigenous & Allies Advisor; kgordon@sixnations.ca

Hayley Lapalme, Nourish Associate Director, McConnell Foundation;
hlapalme@mccconnellfoundation.ca

Indigenous COVID-19 Food Responses: Patterns and Insights

These patterns and insights are synthesized from conversations from the first call, and initiatives shared and tracked [here](#).

Grants around Indigenous food access are available but need support around access

There are many COVID-19 grants around emergency food access that have been made available, but they can still feel difficult to access for many Indigenous communities because they don't have the capacity (time and human resources) to apply. Some communities and funders are setting up additional supports, for example, access to grad students and lawyers, to support them to write proposals.

(Examples of grants accessed include the Breakfast Club of Canada; Peavey Mart Grants; Community Food Centres; Indigenous Services Canada Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative Funding; Loblaws; Good Food Access Fund; United Way and other local funds).

Emergency food support is useful in the short-term but not sustainable

Many communities have been able to get people food immediately through emergency food support programs such as free and/or subsidized food boxes and hampers, grocery gift cards and hot meal programs. However, they are very expensive and relying on donations and grants not sustainable in the long-term.

Impactful education and capacity-building around gardening

Capacity-building initiatives around community gardening have been useful, such as offering gardening kits, increasing indoor and outdoor garden beds, building smoke houses and greenhouses and equipping families with gardening/ fishing/hunting equipment. Investments into education and capacity-building around traditional hunting and harvesting practices connect communities to their agricultural roots and are more sustainable in the long-term.

The opportunity to address systemic issues

There is a desire to find resourcing opportunities beyond emergency food and move towards systemic change around food security and sovereignty. Advocating at a policy level is needed to challenge colonial paradigms around funding flows and resource allocation.

Finding ways to integrate traditional food sourcing

There is interest in finding ways to bring more traditional and country foods to the food programming. Haida Gwaii is a good example of how COVID-19 can be an opportunity to build new relationships and invest in traditional and local sourcing of food.

Challenges around sufficient volunteers and staffing

A struggle is around finding the volunteers and personnel to run the emergency good and gardening programs. Larger nations in particular face the transportation limitations where it takes a lot of staff and time to get food delivered.

Looking forward and Next steps

In the second call, the group reflected through breakout groups on **where they want to go from pre-to-post COVID-19, and how the pandemic might present an opportunity for positive change**. Some themes that came up are below:

- **The conversation around building Indigenous food sovereignty is becoming louder due to COVID-19.** In many instances, the pandemic catalyzed action where before there was mostly talk or not sufficient capacity. For example, there is more interest in developing co-ops, greenhouses, gardens:
 - "Before it was ideas, but now it'll be taken more seriously."
 - "The pandemic really pushed and motivated organizations to do things. So I hope we maintain that commitment to food sovereignty."
- **COVID-19 is amplifying voices and perspectives pre-dated the pandemic:** "my vision for post-pandemic Indigenous food systems and well beings is the same as before; it starts with food sovereignty and water" though the pandemic has highlighted the urgency of this;
- **COVID-19 has presented the opportunity for some health care organizations to think more about local and traditional foods** and how they can use menus to source from Indigenous suppliers; this raises questions about how to respectfully integrate Indigenous recipes and knowledge into colonial institutions.
- **Racism and inequity is now a global conversation** and people are being forced to speak and do something about it -- especially in how it shows up in the food that we eat.
- We need to **better understand how access to funding and resourcing need to be responsive to different contexts and processes**. For example, decision-making processes (e.g. getting agreement as a full community as a process) in diverse communities influence how grants are applied for. There are **considerations for funders** here, in how funds are structured, and that reflect awareness of capacity and connectivity that may (not) exist in communities.
- We have to **elevate the conversation and the work to national-level policy change**: "could we pull in federal Indigenous systems so they can hear the needs?"
- **COVID-19 has also led to challenges and disruptions to traditional food ways**, especially where there is a reliance on donations of traditional foods, or where donations or charitable food does not reflect Indigenous foodways.

- The **increase in capacity-building support** around gardening and agricultural self-sufficiency is a positive trend.
- There is a **desire to capitalize on the opportunity, mobilize stories and share successes addressing Indigenous food insecurity** from different communities. Especially so that communities with limited capacity have access to resources and shared learning, and don't have to be reinventing the wheel.
 - "We've shared pre and post pandemic information on our organizations. Wondering if someone is tracking any new amazing ways of dealing with their current situations and to share back, capitalize on it."