



Impact Report

Nourish Third Anchor Cohort

2023-2025 | Team Newfoundland and Labrador

Our Journey: Integrating
Country Food into Health Care
in Newfoundland and Labrador

Visionary health care leaders dedicated to transforming food and health systems across community, institutional, and policy scales, in the national Nourish cohorts.

Nourish's Anchor Cohort is a two-year national innovation program. The program's goal is to support health care systems across the country to develop anchor leadership and to deepen commitment to food as lever for health and well-being.

Through collaborative learning, innovative projects, and shared resources, cohort members drive change where food and health systems intersect. Cohort members lead projects that weave together sustainability, equity, and well-being to drive systemic change in food and health systems.

"Many of our successes have come from other cohorts' experiences, including both successes and downfalls with their work. We learned we don't need to reinvent it, just adapt proven concepts for our own work."

Cohort team members working together to develop their collaborative projects.

Third Cohort team members at the Food for Health Innovation Retreat at Wasan Island, September 2025.

[Click here to learn more about Nourish's Anchor Cohort program and meet the teams.](#)



Meet Team NL

Food First NL is a provincial non-profit with more than 25 years of experience leading programs and advocacy. Food First NL advances the right to food by advocating, organizing, taking action, and valuing people to create a province where everyone can eat with joy and dignity.

Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation is located in the heart of Nitassinan, the Innu homeland, in present-day Newfoundland and Labrador. The Nation is formally represented by the Innu Nation, comprising over 3,200 people, most of whom live in the two Innu communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

Nunatsiavut Government is the first Inuit region in Canada to achieve self-government, a proud accomplishment for all Labrador Inuit. This distinct level of government oversees key areas, including program operations and management, services and budgets, business and employment.

NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) represents roughly 6,000 Inuit across South and Central Labrador. As the governing body of their people, the Council serves as the collective voice of their territory through leadership grounded in Inuit traditions and a vision for the future.

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS) is responsible for providing health care across Newfoundland and Labrador with a goal to create a health care system that is more integrated, accessible, technologically enhanced, equitable, and sustainable for everyone.

The Team also worked with various staff and departments in the provincial **Government of NL**.

(Left) Panel Discussion at the Labrador Friendship Centre during a community meal of Caribou Soup. (L to R) Joseph Murdoch-Flowers, Co-Executive Director of Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre; Lynn Blackwood, Food Security Programs Manager at Nunatsiavut Government; & Roxanne Notley, Food Security Coordinator at Nunatukavut Community Council.



(Right) Local hunter Denley Jacque partnered with Team NL for a licensed moose hunt. Here he is delivering fresh moose meat.

Our Journey: Integrating Country Food into Health Care in Newfoundland & Labrador

Team NL's Story of Change

Team NL is on a journey to create meaningful systems change by integrating country food into health care spaces. Guided by the principle of Two-Eyed Seeing as shared by elder Albert Marshall, who reminds us that, in most cases, "health care sometimes only looks at the symptoms and cause of the sickness, nothing beyond that", and that's where we aim to shift that lens.

Two-Eyed Seeing allows our team to walk and work in both worlds, incorporating the knowledge of those leading Indigenous food initiatives and those with expertise in Western health practices. Our team works in partnership to place Indigenous patients at the heart of care. By working to integrate culturally relevant foods into health care facilities across Newfoundland and Labrador, we support the social determinants of health that contribute to the overall well-being of Indigenous people - not just physically, but also culturally, spiritually, and holistically.

Our collaborative team came together with Nourish Leadership in 2021 to begin the critical conversations of introducing country food within health care institutions. Our definition of country food stems from the Nunavut food guide: "country food is land and sea animals, fish, birds, berries, edible greens, and seaweed."

In the first two years of the Cohort program, we shaped ideas, built relationships, and laid a foundation. Our team has continued to build on that foundation from 2021 to today with purpose and momentum.

Recognizing our team is essential because understanding who we are will help you appreciate our unique and diverse group of humans who continue to show up and give their all to this journey.



Our team includes representatives from Labrador's Indigenous groups, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut Community Council, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS), the Government of NL, and Food First NL.

Newfoundland and Labrador is a unique province, one rich in culture, community, and connection. For many of us sitting around this table, the work is deeply personal, as we all know or knew someone in long-term and/or acute care. Our wish for them goes beyond that of clinical care. We want people to have access to food that brings joy, dignity, and evokes memories.

Our journey thus far has focused on a long-term care facility in Central Labrador. This site became a natural starting point, thanks to the strength of our partnerships and the willingness of staff in the region to collaborate with our team. Together, we've worked to bring residents a taste of home. We've integrated more country food onto the menu in ways that honour tradition, cultural safety, and identity.

In 2024, we hosted a Country Food Gathering in Central Labrador - a rare and cherished opportunity to bring our team together in-person. With members spread throughout the province, in-person sessions aren't feasible, making this gathering especially valuable.

We welcomed community partners and leaders in Indigenous foodways, including the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre Director in Iqaluit. Their presence inspired rich conversations and knowledge sharing, centred around warm bowls of caribou soup sourced from Scandinavia for the occasion. This was a real treat for those in attendance, as Labrador has been experiencing a ban on Caribou since 2013, and many haven't tasted anything similar since then.

Together, we arranged and served a meal of Caribou Soup, toutons, and local berry desserts to residents and staff at the long-term care facility. The experience was more than a meal; it was a moment of interconnectness and culture. A woman sat with her husband and told us that he "is living with dementia and doesn't eat much anymore, but he's sure eating his caribou soup today." These memories continue to fuel our team's momentum.

Before our collaboration began, the long-term care facility had previously served local fish and local berries. Already, they recognized the importance of local foods. The staff were open and supportive when we added partridges (local game bird), other fish species, and caribou. Our partnership with the NunaKatiget Community Freezer and others made these additions possible.



(Above) Food First NL's Joshua Smee and Dana Marshall help prepare local fish for lunch at Nourish's 2024 Food for Health Innovation retreat on Wasan Island.

Our experiences procuring locally harvested and hunted goods resulted in process improvements. Our team worked with the Department of Fisheries, Forestry, and Agriculture through an interim licensing pathway that wasn't created explicitly for health care. Members of our team adapted and simplified the process, making it more accessible and less time-consuming for both hunters and buyers at Labrador Grenfell Health internally. This likely increases hunters' willingness to sell goods, ensuring the supply of country food.

As our work progressed, it became evident that we needed additional voices to guide and strengthen our efforts. In response, we formed an advisory group of like-minded folks throughout the province to offer insights and lived knowledge. This six-member group includes knowledgeable hunters, local farmers, an abattoir owner, Indigenous representatives from the Island portion of the province, and NLHS cancer care experts. The advisory group is invaluable and continues to meet bi-monthly. With the advisory group's guidance, we have since launched a Country Food Preference Survey and harvested a moose through a charitable hunting licence. Both activities have welcomed communities into our work, reiterated the cultural and emotional significance of country food, and reaffirmed the strong desire to serve country food in health care facilities regularly.

Now, we are focused on transitioning our pilot project into a permanent initiative. Our team is working to instill the importance of integrating country food into the newly unified provincial health authority. This new provincial entity replaces our original partnership with the Labrador Grenfell Health Region. We created a comprehensive discussion paper that outlined key insights from our pilot and offered recommendations to senior officials within NLHS. Conversations have been encouraging, and we have key supporters amongst officials. Although discussions about our initiative have slowed, we expect them to flow again when Indigenous Health positions are filled.

"The joy of dropping something off - whether it's a meal of partridges, whether it's a meal of trout, whether it's a meal of rabbit - to somebody that can't get it anymore...it's such a great feeling. I'm very proud of what I was doing. Everyone was positive about what we were doing. This was something right. This is what we need."

– Denley Jacque, Hunter for Food First NL's charitable moose license. [Read the story here.](#)



(Right) Labrador Regional Food Animator Dana Marshall in Nain, Labrador, leading a hands-on fruit leather making workshop using local berries with helper Cali, who attended the workshop with her Grandma.

As our Nourish Leadership cohort comes to a close, our team recognizes that the work is far from over, and we can't stop now. One of our next steps involves meeting with the Government of NL to discuss legislation and regulations around serving wild game in health care. Currently, there is no specific pathway for using wild meat in health care or institutional settings. Although workarounds exist, this is an opportunity to remove barriers and ensure country food can be served safely and respectfully within Newfoundland and Labrador's health care system.

As we look to the future, our team remains committed to continuing the work we've started. We've come too far to turn back now. Both our core collaborative and advisory groups will continue to meet as needed, ensuring that conversations remain active, relationships stay strong, and momentum is sustained. Together, we will ensure that our shared goal of integrating country food onto patient menus across Newfoundland and Labrador is reached.

This is more than a project; it's a movement rooted in the belief that country food is essential to health and healing.

We invite you to imagine a health care system where food is not just what's on the plate, but is viewed as medicine, memory, and a reflection of one's identity.

Team Newfoundland & Labrador, September 2025



"One of the most significant adjustments in our work came when we realized there was no specific wild meat licensing pathway created explicitly for health care. Rather than halting the process, our team pivoted and worked with the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture to navigate an interim licensing pathway. Members of our team took the initiative to adapt and simplify the process internally, making it more accessible and less time-consuming for both hunters and buyers at Labrador Grenfell Health, thereby likely increasing a hunter's willingness to sell goods and ensuring the supply of country food."

– Team NL

Team Aspirations

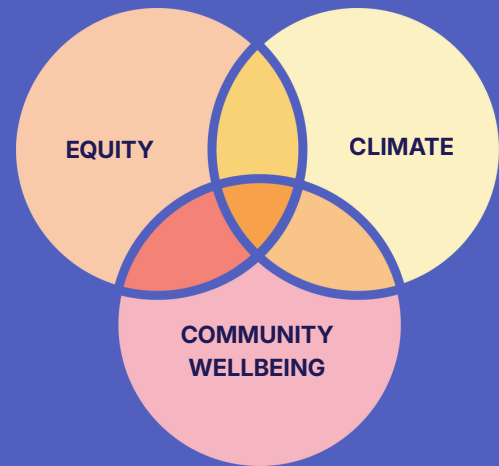
When Team NL joined the Nourish Cohort, their aspiration was clear: to create lasting systems change by integrating country food onto menus in health care settings across Newfoundland and Labrador. The team envisioned a health authority that not only serves culturally relevant meals, but also supports the social determinants of health that contribute to the overall well-being of Indigenous peoples - physically, culturally, spiritually, and holistically.

"The direct impact of our work can be demonstrated by quotes from residents who received country food meals at the long-term care pilot site. One resident, while enjoying partridge soup, said 'feels like home.' Another resident sat with her husband and told us that he 'is living with dementia and doesn't eat much anymore, but he's sure eating his caribou soup today'."



(Above, L-R) Roxanne Notley, Food Security Coordinator at Nunatukavut Community Council; Dana Marshall, Regional Food Animator at Food First NL; Joshua Smee, CEO at Food First NL; and Hannah Buckle, Regional Nutritionist, NLHS

BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOAL



Nourish takes a systems view of food for health transformation, working on leverage points at the intersections of equity, climate, and community well-being. All Cohort teams crafted a problem statement and identified indicators for mission achievement. Teams were also challenged to set a big, hairy, audacious goal - one that would set the course and their focus for the two year program. Teams set this audacious goal, knowing they would be unlikely to achieve it in the program timeframe; rather, their audacity was encouraged to set focus and commitment, knowing that shifting the status quo is a longer-term project.

TEAM NAME: PROBLEM STATEMENT

People in NL don't have adequate access to traditional and country foods, and both the importance of this access and the barriers to it are not well enough understood. Public institutions, especially health care, have a significant impact on food access and are starting to think more about how country and traditional foods (and traditional knowledge around them) fit in.

Mission Achievement:

- Regulatory changes support serving country foods in health care.
- Increasing numbers of people have regular access to country foods while in care.
- There is greater awareness, relationship building, and partnerships on country foods in health care throughout NL.

BHAGs:

The hunter / harvester permit to sell form is streamlined within health care to create a seamless process for all.

Country food meals are planned and served in all health care facilities throughout NL.

Partnerships exist with local food producers interested in connecting with health care.

TEAM NL: KEY OUTCOMES

Put country food on the menu, working with long-term care staff in Happy Valley, Goose Bay.

Created a working relationship with NL Forestry, Agriculture and Lands to explore a **wild meat servicing pathway** specific to health care.

Proved demand for health care menu changes among Indigenous communities with data from a Country Food Preference Survey, Labrador Grenfell Region.

Completed a moose hunt, obtained a not-for-profit moose license and worked with a local hunter to source moose meat for initiatives of the collaborative.

Co-created recommendations for **integrating country foods** into long-term and acute care across NL.

Changing systems means embracing complexity.

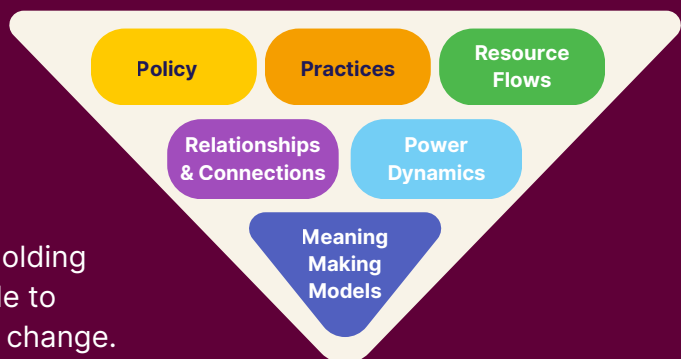
Systems change is a holistic approach to tackling large-scale societal challenges. It refers to the intentional and strategic effort to transform a system, first by building an understanding of how the system works, and then actively working to shift the underlying structures, behaviours, and mindsets that keep that system (the status quo) in place.

Systems change involves intentional effort to understand and address the **root causes** of complex issues, rather than only the symptoms, creating meaningful change and longstanding influence. For food for health systems, this can look like taking the Coolfood Pledge, increasing resources for local food sourcing, and changing how people understand the role of food in health and wellbeing.

Six Signals

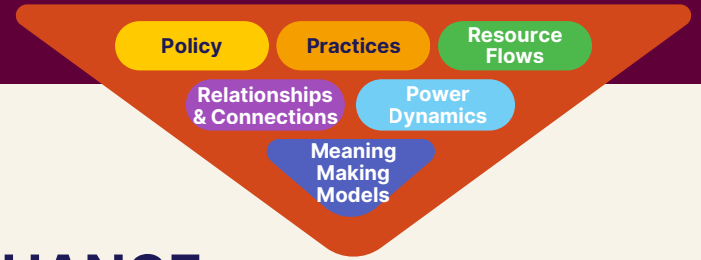
Along with quantitative indicators, **all Cohort teams tracked six signals of systems change**, noticing the influence of their work over time.

When teams better understood what was holding their systems in place, they were better able to determine when, where, and how to create change.



- **Policies:** Rules, regulations, and priorities. *E.g., CoolFood adoption, local food as a strategic priority, etc.*
- **Practices:** Activities, procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits. *E.g., new composting programs, revisions to RFP processes, etc.*
- **Resource Flows:** How money, people/staffing, knowledge, information, and other assets like infrastructure are allocated and distributed. *E.g., new staff roles, increasing funding, etc.*
- **Relationships and Connections:** The quality of connections and communication, especially among those with differing histories and perspectives. *E.g., new relationships with Indigenous elders, etc.*
- **Power Dynamics:** The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence. *E.g., regular meetings with senior leadership, etc.*
- **Meaning Making Models:** Deeply held beliefs, assumptions, ways of thinking, and unconscious behaviours that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk. *E.g., deeper understanding of the role of food in healing, etc.*

For more on signals of systems change, see [The Water of Systems Change](#) (2018) by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge.



TEAM NAME:

SIGNALS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Created a new form to simplify the 'permit to sell' process for the hunter/harvester and buyer.	Applied for and implemented the first nonprofit moose license, setting new precedent for future years.	Delivered a Country Foods discussion paper to NLHS VP of Transformation and Wellness.
Transitioning pilot program activities into regular practice.	Established strong relationships with Long Term Care in Happy Valley, Goose Bay.	The connection and conversations around Indigenous foods have begun in Western NL, specifically in Bay St. George Long Term Care.
Meeting with Forestry, Agriculture and Lands in Newfoundland and Labrador to discuss current legislation and regulations, and to identify what is required to potentially create a future wild meat servicing pathway specific to health care and institutions.	New Advisory Group of knowledgeable hunters, local farmers, an abattoir owner, Indigenous representatives from the Island portion of the province, and NLHS cancer care experts meets regularly.	Growing awareness of the benefits of country foods to health and well-being and support for including country foods in health care settings.



"As a result of the work done with the Labrador Anchor Collaborative we've since been able to get partridge, moose, and even some caribou from our partners. We would never have been able to obtain these foods or serve them to our residents without the work of the Collaborative. We've also received locally picked berries and bake apples, which were a real treat. No permanent menu additions have been made with the wild game since supply is limited, but we've been able to provide periodic special menus for our residents to give them a taste of home."

– Tracey Duder, Regional Director, Food and Environmental Services, Labrador Grenfell Zone, Aramark Canada Ltd.

Looking Ahead

Guided by the Two-Eyed Seeing approach to place Indigenous patients at the heart of care, Team NL has built a strong foundation for scaling the integration of country foods into health care facilities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

A product of their Cohort work, the team created a comprehensive discussion paper outlining key insights and offering recommendations to senior officials within NLHS. The team has built key supporters amongst officials, and aims to continue discussions with Indigenous Health staff within NL Health Services.

The team's newly formed advisory group is building resource flows by bringing together like-minded individuals with strong connections in local procurement. Both the team's core collaborative and advisory groups are continuing to meet, ensuring that conversations remain active, relationships stay strong, and momentum is sustained.

One of the next steps is to meet with the province to discuss wild meat legislation. Currently, there is no specific pathway for using wild meat in health care or institutional settings. Although workarounds exist, this is an opportunity to remove barriers and ensure country food can be served safely and respectfully within Newfoundland and Labrador's health care system. The team also aims to secure ongoing funding to support the Project Lead's activities.

The team remains committed to continuing the work they started: "We have come too far to turn back now."



"I will carry forward a renowned sense of confidence and clarity in my leadership - a deepened knowledge of systems change, lifelong friendships, and partnerships with like-minded people. The journey has reaffirmed my resilience, and I'm confident in my ability to continue working in Indigenous foodways while encouraging others and advocating for those whose voices are often unheard."

- Dana Marshall, Team NL Project Lead & Regional Food Animator (Labrador), Food First NL

(Left) Dana in the community of Hopedale, Labrador in Nunatsiavut.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express deep gratitude to all members of the Collaborative for their countless hours, passion and dedication to the work. All members play a crucial role, bringing unique value and expertise to this work. We also acknowledge that without the partnership and leadership of Indigenous Governments and organizations, this work would not be possible. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all hunters, gatherers, and harvesters whose efforts ensure access to culturally relevant country food. Finally, we offer sincere thanks to Nourish Leadership for the guidance and support throughout the cohort and beyond.

– Team NL

Third Anchor Cohort: Team Leads

Elaine Chu (BC)

Michelle Stranges (London)

Dana Marshall - Team Lead, NL

Avery McCorkell, Kaya Hill, Kendal Garlow, Kyleigh Farmer, and Sara Montour (Six Nations)

Donna Kwan, Heather Goodison, and Shelly Durrant (Toronto)

Nourish

Roya Damabi
Amy Ford

Hayley Lapalme
Ngaire Leaf

Jennifer Reynolds

“Throughout our work, we've sourced local wild meat, fish, and berries, as well as lower-emission meats. By using locally sourced country food, we also minimize the need for long-distance transportation, reducing carbon emissions associated with delivering and storing goods in the province. Additionally, establishing an advisory group composed of individuals with keen knowledge of local food procurement will be invaluable as the work continues.”

– Team NL



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