



NOURISH  
ANCHOR COHORT

2021 -  
2023

# CHANGING THE FUTURE OF HEALTH ACROSS THE NORTH

**Northern Ontario Anchor Team  
Impact Report**



Addressing Indigenous Food  
Sovereignty by Strengthening  
Public Health, Improving Food  
Procurement, and Integrating  
Food into the Medical Curriculum

---

Published Summer 2023

# NORTHERN ONTARIO ANCHOR TEAM

The Northern Ontario Anchor Team's work is situated within the context of the Nourish Anchor Cohort, a two-year national innovation program that ran from 2021 - 2023. The goal of the Anchor Cohort was to support health systems across Canada to develop anchor leadership, signalling their commitment to harness the long-term presence, mission, and resources of health care institutions to anchor wellbeing in their communities through food. The Cohort brought together seven multidisciplinary place-based teams to work on 'portfolios of systems interventions' that activated community assets and explored innovative food for health solutions. The accomplishments outlined in this report reflect their efforts to nudge local and regional health systems toward meaningful transformation in order to promote better health for people and the planet.

NOSM University and Gaagige Zaagibigaa, an Indigenous, grassroots-led organization working to support Indigenous Sovereignty, aim to improve peoples' health outcomes and wellbeing by addressing the twin challenges of a lack of Indigenous food sovereignty and access to traditional foods and food insecurity. The team operates in Northern Ontario, a vast geographic area that includes urban, rural, and remote communities, serving a population of ~800,000 residents. This includes 106 First Nations communities.

The Northern Ontario Anchor Team's strategy is decidedly upstream, Indigenous-led, and participatory. It focuses on two objectives. The first is to train medical students with a food systems approach, highlighting the importance of food as a social determinant of health to have a real-world impact on people in the region. The second is to increase the procurement of traditional foods, which builds on earlier success in the region around innovative local procurement models and policies.



The Northern Ontario Anchor Team welcomes Mair Greenfield from Nourish to Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre to discuss Indigenous food policy in their kitchen. Summer 2021.

# TACKLING WICKED PROBLEMS THROUGH FOOD FOR HEALTH LEVERS

Each team in the Anchor Cohort named a 'Wicked Problem' that they looked to address during their time in the Cohort. Wicked problems were identified through a process of problem space mapping, stakeholder engagement, and surfacing the historical roots of how problems came to be.

## Northern Ontario Anchor Team's Wicked Problem

Across the region of Northern Ontario there is a lack of Indigenous food sovereignty and access to traditional foods, compounded by food insecurity.

The Northern Ontario Anchor Team identified 10 priority Food for Health Levers to action in their work. The Food for Health Levers were developed by Nourish to frame powerful ways of impacting climate, equity, and community wellbeing through food in health care. These leverage points help us make connections between our food, health, social, and ecological systems and reach their greatest potential when working in concert.



# INNOVATION IN ACTION

During the Anchor Cohort, the team employed a collaborative, experimental approach to developing and testing smaller scale ideas at the program and policy levels in two key areas:

1. Developing a food sovereignty book for medical learners, which includes a collection of case studies and research as a tool for advocacy
2. Convening champions and disruptors to build coalitions via strategic gatherings on the following topics:
  - Public Health
  - Education
  - Procurement



Dan Munshaw from the Northern Ontario Anchor Team joins a traditional cooking workshop in Thunder Bay, along with representatives from the Saskatchewan and Montréal Cohort teams. Summer 2022.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The **Northern Ontario Anchor Team** established a diverse portfolio of **9 mutually reinforcing interventions** that emerged from **28 initial ideas** identified during the planning phase. These include:

### Two policy-related innovations:

- They influenced changes to a national dietetic competency document to **incorporate Indigenous food systems**, which increases the probability that dietitians become informed **advocates for integrating Indigenous perspectives and foods in their practice** across Ontario's North.
- They established an **Indigenous Nutrition Curriculum Committee** within the Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program (located at NOSM University) and are creating a **book on Indigenous Food Sovereignty** that will be used to train medical learners such as physicians, dietitians, and other allied health professionals.



Members of the Anchor Cohort, including the Northern Ontario Anchor Team, cook bannock together around a fire in Thunder Bay. Summer 2022.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The team's education, awareness, and relationship-building efforts have also created a stronger **network of change-makers** prepared to take action individually and collectively. This is illustrated by the development of a **shared proposal** to study, develop, and test local production and procurement options for the region by the following organizations:

- The Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance
- The Rural Agri-Innovation Network
- The Greater Sudbury Food Policy Council
- The Thunder Bay & Area Food Strategy, and
- College Boreal

The willingness of these 'cornerstone' organizations and networks to work together is an indicator of how important the topics of local procurement and Indigenous food sovereignty have become in the region - thanks in part to the efforts of the Northern Ontario Anchor Team. It also helps to create momentum on the issues for additional local and regional actors.

As with all ecosystem-building efforts, the impacts on increased local procurement and Indigenous food sovereignty practices in the region are not immediate. However, unlike change strategies that employ pilot projects to kickstart a process of social innovation and systems change in order to achieve some 'early wins' that make a difference in the short term, The Northern Ontario Anchor Team aims to create the conditions for a more ambitious, longer-term process of change that generates deeper, and durable, impact in the long run.



# LOOKING FORWARD

In the next phase of its work, the Northern Ontario Anchor Team will share solutions to providing 'good food' to people in the North in a way that addresses health, Indigenous food sovereignty, and food insecurity. The fundamental premise of this effort is that sharing good work will create more good work. For instance, the book will act as a resource that will be shared and used to train health professionals in order to allow these learners to deepen their understanding of relevant issues and provide creative solutions that can be implemented as they begin their clinical practice in Ontario's Northern communities.

In late summer 2023 it was announced that the Northern Ontario Anchor Team were successful in securing a grant to continue supporting networks for health equity, including Nourish for Health (Northern Ontario Cohort). The team plans to expand their focus into food prescriptions and public food in its various forms. They are also continuing in the education work through the creation of micro credentials, and will continue their convening role in Northern Ontario as a primary focus.

**Want to learn more? Reach out to the Northern Ontario Anchor Team about their work, or contact Nourish if you're inspired to lead change in your own community.**

**Joseph LeBlanc**, Associate Dean, Equity and Inclusion & Assistant Professor,  
Indigenous Health, NOSM University  
Email: [joseph.leblanc@nosm.ca](mailto:joseph.leblanc@nosm.ca)

**Cassandra Whymark**, Executive Assistant, Equity and Inclusion,  
NOSM University  
Email: [cwhymark@nosm.ca](mailto:cwhymark@nosm.ca)

**Kim McGibbon**, Public Health Nutritionist, Healthy Living Program,  
Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
Email: [kim.mcgibbon@tbdhu.com](mailto:kim.mcgibbon@tbdhu.com)

**Jessica Love**, Registered Dietitian, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit  
Email: [jessica.love@healthunit.ca](mailto:jessica.love@healthunit.ca)

**Robin Speedie**, Program Director, Nourish  
Email: [RSpeedie@nourishleadership.ca](mailto:RSpeedie@nourishleadership.ca)



# NORTHERN ONTARIO ANCHOR TEAM SNAPSHOT

## NOSM University

NOSM University is a 'made-in-the-North' solution to regional health care inequalities. Although its main campuses are located in Sudbury and Thunder Bay, Ontario, they provide training in more than 90 communities across an expanse of 800,000 square km. NOSM University was established with an explicit social accountability mandate - to improve the health of people of the region. They have developed novel education strategies to meet the needs of Northern Ontarians.

## Gaagige Zaagibigaa

An Indigenous, grassroots-led organization working to support Indigenous Sovereignty, aim to improve peoples' health outcomes and wellbeing by addressing the twin challenges of a lack of Indigenous food sovereignty and access to traditional foods and food insecurity.

## Other Organizations Involved:

- Thunder Bay District Health Unit
- North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit
- Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority



**NOSM University provides training in more than 90 communities across an expanse of 800,000 square km.**



The catering budget between Lakehead & Laurentian, as well as catering for offsite events such as hotels, Indigenous caterers, and hospitals totals approximately \$200,000/year. As a result of a cultural shift related to purchasing of local food within the Corporation of the City of Thunder Bay, this team was not directly influencing food budgets but rather building capacity and fostering culture change through their work.





**NOURISH**

**Nourish believes food is a powerful way to build health for both people and the planet, in addition to providing comfort and healing to patients, creating more resilient communities, and addressing climate change.**

**Starting from a community of practice, we have grown to a network of leaders, organizations, and communities, shifting the focus upstream to work preventatively through food in health care.**

**Through our work with cohorts of leaders and action learning programs, we equip innovative individuals and teams with the skills and momentum to empower bold leadership in climate action and health equity. We work across community, institutional, and policy scales to steward food for health innovation.**

**Join us!**

**[NourishLeadership.ca](https://NourishLeadership.ca)**