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OVERVIEW OF YOUTH AND ELDERS GATHERING

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) brought youth and Elders together at the NAN Youth and Elders Gathering on Health Transformation to gain their perspectives and guidance on moving forward with NAN Health Transformation.

The gathering began with a plenary session in which Deputy Grand Chief Derek Fox provided opening remarks. This was followed by a presentation by Ovide Mercredi (Health Transformation Lead & Negotiator) and Sol Mamakwa (Health Transformation Internal Lead) where they provided an overview of the NAN Health Transformation process and a background on the events leading up to it.

The participants were then divided into groups with the Elders being in one group and the Youth being in another. They engaged in in-depth dialogue regarding the issues impacting health and wellness in their communities and the ways in which they should be addressed.

YOUTH DIALOGUE

The youth session was facilitated by Brent Edwards who posed the following questions to the youth:

- 1) What is your understanding of the current state of health services and wellness?
- 2) What are the issues impacting health services and wellness in your community?
- 3) What changes would you like to see in health and wellness services in your community?
- 4) How do you want to fix those issues impacting health in your community?
- 5) What would you like to say to the Elders?

The session started with a discussion on the concept of change and fear of change. F.E.A.R. has two meanings:

- 1) **F**orget **E**verything **A**nd **R**un
OR
- 2) **F**ace **E**verything **A**nd **R**ise

The second meaning is how we change our world and our communities which is the first step to health transformation.

The group broke out into five small groups to discuss the questions below. They then reported back to the larger group. Discussions on each of the questions were intertwined and are therefore summarized as:

- What does 'Health' mean to you?
- What does 'Wellness' mean to you?
- Health Challenges
- Solutions

What does health mean to you?

Small groups discussed "what does health mean to you?" and reported back to the large group. The following concepts were provided:

- Balance
- Support
- Guidance
- Connection
- Success
- Motivation
- Confidence
- Proactive
- Exercise
- Strength
- Empowerment
- Hope
- Faith

- Eating healthy
- Self care
- Better lifestyles

The concepts of healing, community and health care were then further broken down.

Healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Wholistic healing: Mental, Physical, Emotional, Spiritual ➤ All types of healing ➤ Increased knowledge of how to heal ➤ Healing as a priority ➤ Healing inter-generational trauma ➤ Land as a way of healing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to land • Returning to land-based activities
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Happy community ➤ Healthy babies ➤ Healthy waters ➤ Good communication ➤ All areas are related and connected in the community: health, education, history, spirituality, etc. ➤ Money management ➤ Better education ➤ Increased training for First Nation peoples ➤ Jobs within the community ➤ Elders' knowledge
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Preventive measures ➤ Diabetes prevention ➤ CPR & First Response qualifications ➤ Accessibility to services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialysis machines in communities • Services in community (important to be with family members and be in home community) • Adequate in-community facilities and equipment • Increased dental visits • Increased doctor days in community • Families to visit for long term care out of community ➤ Traditional plants and medicines to be implemented into the health care system

When I think of “health” I think of healthcare and the healthcare system in our country. I feel that people seem to be not in the ‘health’ business, but the ‘sick’ business. Doctors don’t make money without patients. [...] I feel that it is unfair to see our people still sick and having to travel so far to get better. I feel that people should be trying hard for our health especially if there is no hospital around. We have to take matters into our own hands.

Health means to me the well-being of your physical and mental body, because when people only think physical health is important, they forget what mental health and depression can do to the physical body.

What does wellness mean to you?

Small groups discussed “what does wellness mean to you?” and reported back to the large group. The following concepts were provided:

- Healing within yourself and community
- Healthy and active living; a healthy you
- Self-care and putting You! First. Quiet time. Love yourself
- Community driven
- Safety
- Self-awareness, strength, confidence, self-expression, resiliency
- Putting up a fight, standing up, being there
- Communication
- Identity
- Connection
- Healthy outlets (creative writing, positive use of technology, etc.)
- Forgiveness
- Respect
- Humour
- Acknowledgement, traditional activities/practices, 7 grandfather teachings
- Relationship, consistent support, family and friend
- Vision, future

The concept of wellness and being balanced were then broken down into mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learning medicines ➤ Ceremonies – practicing and bringing them back ➤ Keeping in touch with Elders ➤ Praying ➤ Connecting with the land and animals
EMOTIONAL WELLNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dealing with issues, coping with trauma ➤ Accepting things, you cannot change ➤ Being at peace with yourself ➤ Talking with others, communicating feelings
MENTAL WELLNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Being content, doing things that make you happy ➤ Positive environment, surrounding yourself with good energy ➤ Learning to deal with stress, coping skills ➤ Meditating ➤ Abstain from substances ➤ Thinking positive thoughts ➤ Get help with mental issues
PHYSICAL WELLNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Being fit, exercising ➤ Taking care of your body ➤ Treating your illness, helping your immune system ➤ Healthy environment, adequate homes ➤ A clean home, mould free ➤ Exercising, healthy eating habits

Wellness is the ability to take proper care of yourself.

Wellness is the ability to recognize something is “not right” and to work on getting back on the right path.

HEALTH CHALLENGES

Small groups reported back on the health challenges and issues that are faced by their community and that are seen throughout the system. The discussions are summarised into the following:

Mental Health & Addictions

- Drugs and alcohol
 - Lack of aftercare in communities
 - Drug use starting as young as 10 years of age
 - Youth exposed to substance devices (i.e. needles) without proper disposal
 - People have been on suboxone for years
- Violence and Bullying
 - Kids yelling, shouting and fighting
 - Cyber-bullying
 - Lateral violence
 - Peer pressure
 - Emotional abuse
 - Elder abuse
- Suicide, high risk youth and self-harm
- Intergenerational trauma (residential schools, abuses, etc.)
- Sexual Abuse
 - Cycle of sexual abuse resulting from residential schools
 - Dangerous to approach issues such as sexual abuse
- Mental Illness
 - Lack of support in communities
 - Inadequate counselling services
 - Lack of assessments and diagnosis (suicide, schizophrenia, PTSD, autism, etc.)
 - Often, people with mental illness are incarcerated rather than receiving supports
- High rates of depression and anxiety
- Supports for residential school survivors
 - Counsellors (non-First Nations people) do not understand the survivors
- Family Break-Up and Foster Care
 - Kids are very impacted by family break-ups
 - Foster care system affects child
 - Domestic Violence

Services & Health Care Delivery

- Challenges with Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB)
 - Policies create barriers
 - Transportation issues
- Bad outcomes and denial of proper care
 - Late diagnosis
 - Misdiagnosis
 - Falling through cracks
 - Lack of compassionate care

- Lack of trust in health care
- Confidentiality
 - Lack of confidentiality in our communities
 - Confidentiality requirements also create barriers to addressing problems as a community
- Doctors and nurses
 - Doctors wearing many hats
 - Shortage of nurses and doctors
 - Nurses are over-worked and tired
 - Nurses that get to communities have little experience working with First Nations and sometimes lack overall nursing experience
- Inadequate medical supplies (and delays in replacing supplies)
- Government health structure does not provide us with adequate assistance (they make money from us being sick)
- Government policies do not meet the community needs
- NIHB transportation issues
- Language barriers
 - People given medication they do not understand
 - Elders that travel on their own
- Medicinal allergies and adverse reactions to medications cause more illness
- Lack of emergency supports (i.e. Ambulance, First Responders)
- Isolation and loneliness from being sent away from home to access care

Nutrition and Food Security

- Child obesity
- High cost of food
 - E.g. chips cheaper than lettuce
 - E.g. pop cheaper than milk
- Poor nutrition / malnutrition
- Store bought foods are resulting in diabetes and other illnesses.
- Diabetes

Community Challenges

- Dependency
 - People no longer live off the land – now people are growing up expecting to get things from others and have things done for them
 - Drug use impacting our livelihood

- Traditional lives were disrupted when new laws came into communities (churches, schools, etc.)
- Loss of language and traditional lifestyle
- Lack of employment
- Lack of communication and leadership
- Inadequate funding

Poverty, Water, Housing

- Lack of basic necessities (warm clothing, shoes, etc.)
- Poor housing
 - Elders living in poor houses
 - Newborns and children living in substandard conditions
 - Overcrowding
 - Poorly built houses
 - Mould
 - Lack fire safety (poor wiring, etc.)
- No clean water
- Poor industrial hygiene (improper care to equipment, exposed to our health, breathing in fumes)
- High cost of fuel and reliance on diesel generators

SOLUTIONS

Small groups talked about solutions and ways in which they would like to fix the challenges mentioned above. They are summarized into the following points.

SOLUTIONS

MENTAL WELLNESS

- Increased mental health services
 - More mental health workers in communities
 - Psychiatrists
- Suicide prevention
- Getting to the root of problems (healing and breaking cycles)
- Education and awareness (bullying, suicide prevention)
- Safe, nurturing environments
- Organize campaigns
 - Raise money for mental illness
 - Raise money for land-based initiatives
 - Posters to raise awareness and where to ask for help
- Family at front lines, especially regarding suicide
- Continued help with addictions – not just one-time programming

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use land for healing and self-identity ➤ We need to fix the way we see each other (diverse beliefs and practices) ➤ Healing circles ➤ Mental health supports for people dealing with illness ➤ Treatment centres on reserve
<p>INCREASED SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Foster strong spirit with ourselves, our children and others ➤ Use land to help kids dealing with family break-ups ➤ Youth need more supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elders need to teach and do more ceremony • Mental health programming • We are all created with special tasks – we need to foster this and encourage it • Development of leadership qualities • Students supports while in school • Youth need support to speak the language and learn our culture • Need to have a belief in something and to have faith • Youth exchanges between communities • Motivational speakers and positive role models ➤ Our own resource centre in Thunder Bay to access recreational activities ➤ Sharing circles with kids (encourages bonding, decreased misbehaviour) ➤ New school books and school supplies ➤ Increase number of youth centres and resources ➤ Drop in centre with supports available ➤ Sports programs (hockey, floor hockey, baseball, soccer, volley ball, broom ball, etc.)
<p>COMMUNITY WELLNESS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teach the impacts of colonization ➤ Teach about importance of culture ➤ Communities need to work together ➤ Spring and fall feasts to celebrate good life stories ➤ Should not see ourselves as strangers – we need to work together ➤ Know our history – know why we are suffering ➤ Address what is happening in our communities ➤ People should find and learn the working lifestyle ➤ Teachers from the community are needed ➤ Children should be encouraged to become doctors and nurses, etc. ➤ Bring back traditional activities to make our communities well again ➤ Be open-minded on diverse beliefs ➤ Community envisioning (gathering community members regularly, talking about pressing issues, economic and community developments) ➤ Starts with individual change (lifestyle, getting involved, fighting for your rights) – “be the change you want to be” ➤ Address mould issues ➤ Build multi-plex houses ➤ Gardening workshops ➤ Greenhouses ➤ Food drives and clothing drives ➤ Get parents involved in kid’s activities ➤ Increase volunteerism ➤ Community programs and events:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water is Life Project • Choose Life Programs (land-based activities such as trapping and fishing) • Fishing derbies • Day camps • Winter carnivals, festivals and gatherings
HEALTH & WELLNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build a health centre ➤ Exercise machines ➤ Affordable fruits and vegetables ➤ Encourage more physical activity for all ages ➤ Recreational programs (kickboxing) ➤ Sports programs ➤ Family programs ➤ Self-defence
PREVENTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nutrition and prevention to reduce rate of diabetes ➤ Food and medicine from the land heals us ➤ People need to understand more about their diseases (i.e. Diabetes) ➤ Increased awareness of the food we eat and its impacts on our health ➤ Suicide prevention and awareness ➤ Harm reduction – training and educating people about the responsibilities that come with using alcohol and drugs on dry reserves. ➤ Teaching children about healthy sexuality, relationships and consent. ➤ Control and stop presence of drugs and alcohol <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drug and alcohol search and seizure (security checks, bag and body searches, airport security) • Police to monitor drug dealer houses • Neighbourhood watches / peacekeepers ➤ Protect against cyber-bullying (parents monitoring and limiting devices)
SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nurses and Nursing Stations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better quality of services from nurses (avoid misdiagnosis) • Nurses should stay longer in communities to learn about First Nations health, culture, etc. • Nursing stations should provide hospital services • Misdiagnosis – people get sent home based on misdiagnosis – sometimes leading to preventable deaths • Everyone should have annual check-ups in a qualified way • Patient assessment and plans to be done at the nursing stations (with a section on mental health) and referrals to doctors ➤ Need to work together and stop working in isolation ➤ Equipment and Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure proper equipment in nursing stations • Need X-Ray equipment (improves services close to home and cuts down costs) • Dialysis machines in communities • Electronic medical records • Increase use of telehealth ➤ Community Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase qualifications and awareness of health staff • Patient advocates should be at the community level not receiving level (e.g. Thunder Bay)

**CULURE &
TRADITIONAL
HEALING**

- Have our own people working in health jobs in the communities and not have to leave the community to get help in urban centres
- Hospital Services
 - Proper translation services
 - Hospital definition of family means immediate family – to us it means the whole community
 - Hospitals need to see us as people needing help not assuming we are seeking and abusing medications
 - Hospitals to include holistic healing models
 - Increased supports in hospitals including moral supports
- Educate service providers about our past and the colonial system
- Cultural training for service providers going into communities (doctors, nurses, etc.)
- Address racism and discrimination
- Doctors, nurses, dentists
 - Need to be located in community
- Improve connection between healers and doctors
- Seven Grandfather Teachings
- One on one with Elders
- Have an eagle feather for speakers at forums
- Bring native language to the school
- Teach cultural practices (drum making, skirt making, regalia making, drumming and singing, etc.)
- Teach young people about land and medicine and how to harvest from the land.
- Care for the land and the health of the land
- Acknowledge the Creator when using land
- Access grants and funding for traditional activities – get activities going
- Considerations to be addressed
 - How can traditional healers work together?
 - What is required to become a traditional healer?
 - How can they get support (from others, including Health Canada?)?
 - How can NAN support Sundance Lodges and Traditional Healers?
 - What are the restrictions and red tape?
 - How do we ensure credibility of healers?
 - How do traditional healers work with organizations?
 - Traditional healers need training in areas of mental health, psychology, counselling (bridging healing methods)
 - Urban Indigenous people need support from traditional healing too
- Build sweat lodges

**SELF-
DETERMINATION
OVER HEALTH**

- Need to acknowledge all-natural helpers
- Native run health system
- Develop our own policies and procedures that do not restrict our activities
- Need to adapt policies to better service our people
- Jurisdiction and control
 - Develop our own case
 - Assert jurisdiction over land and resources
 - Address liability issues
- We need action – not just talk
- Fiduciary duty on health care exists but we need to make it a right

- Revenue from mining should be used to support a First Nations system
- Solution are not just about money – there is more that we need to do
- Returning to traditional governance (matriarchy, clan system, etc.)
- Community capacity building (training, education, job creation)
- Develop effective policies
- Community based policies (neighbourhood watch, alcohol and substance abuse, etc.)

One youth (a Youth Council Lead in her community) shared the strengths of the Chief in her community and how he stayed with the young people encouraging them and the counselling team, volunteers and youth. He put together a suicide watch. She said any community; any young leader can do that. It can be done, and we can work together as one. She recently went to another community to mentor their youth council and described them as being committed to moving forward.

MESSAGES TO ELDERS

The youth were asked to share messages to the Elders. The question “What would you say to the Elders?” was posed. The following messages and statements were recorded:

Teachings and Guidance from Elders

- Do more traditional teaching for men/women
- Teach the children/youth how to speak our language
- Encourage us to keep our culture and language
- Do not give up on youth
- Thank you for not giving up when times get hard
- Thank you for being strong and not giving up and for your guidance
- Do not be afraid to show your emotions
- It is not too late to late to achieve your dreams too
- I am sorry you went through residential schools
- Pass on the knowledge, wisdom and the 7 Grandfather Teachings
- We would like to see more ceremonies and powwows in our communities . . . have them done openly
- More education of traditional ways to the young kids in school from the Elders
- Bringing traditional medicine into the health care system, need help from people who know the lands and medicines
- Reflect on the past and bringing the old ways back. (Teachings, Matriarchy)
- What are the major values and principles you live your life by?
- Elders need the supports to heal themselves

Youth Voices

- Youth want opportunities to be heard and taken seriously
- Youth want support and openness regarding traditional practices
- Be open minded and open to change
- Youth want to be able build relationships with Elders and have commitment go both ways

Health Transformation

- How can we keep this moving forward?
- Can we help make more opportunities become available to others?
- How or in which ways can we resolve conflicts?
- How are we going to do this transition?
- With the advanced technology, how can we take advantage of it? Can we use it to pass on teachings?
- We want to be involved in making a change by participating in new projects
- More you from our community pushing for different health care
- We would like to see more treatment centres on reserves *Land Based Healing*
- We want to have more youth going to school for health care. Fast track programs for youth who want to come back to work in the community
- Using the medicine wheel in the Ontario health care system as a model for what a patient need (4 colours = physical health, mental health, emotional health, spiritual health)

HOW DO YOU SEE ENGAGEMENT HAPPENING IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?

The youth discussed ways that engagement should happen in their community as summarized below:

- Community communication could be improved
- Improve communication with organizations
- Get information and communications to community members through:
 - Social media (e.g. Facebook)
 - Meetings
 - Updates for the community happen during dinners
 - SWAG – promotional material
 - Youth and Elder conference
 - Bulletins and memos
 - Flyers and posters
 - Summer festival
 - Community activities and events
 - Radio announcements
 - Youth programs
 - Out of town community meetings
 - T.V. Station memos
 - Church
 - Have general meetings and board meetings
 - Youth Council

ELDER DIALOGUE

How would you like engagement with Elders on Health Transformation to happen?

- Do not rush the Elders when they speak. It takes time for them to think. Do not limit them when they want to speak
- Many Elders would like to contribute more to the conversation
- Wawatay radio is an effective tool for communication and should be used on a regular basis. Many Elders don't use computers or social media
- We need to look at everything that was given to us by the Creator and use it
- Health transformation is about thinking about our grandchildren, great-grandchildren and future generations
- Urban First Nations should be involved
- We need awareness and understanding of health transformation and time to think about it before doing community engagement
- We do not need permission to exercise our jurisdiction over health. It is already in ourselves as granted by the Creator. You have the power to do your work
- Gatherings should be inclusive and should include everyone
- An Elder from a Shibogama community suggested that a forum be established in Shibogama to include Elders and youth on how we are going to communicate to people. We need a communication plan; Health Directors need to provide the awareness and the Elders have the knowledge and the history. Not just creating capacity but also create a forum to create awareness
- First Nations concepts of mental health are different from the settlers' view. Settlers view as a "box" while we view as a "cycle"

HEALTH SERVICE CHALLENGES

The Elders spoke of the current challenges in health and the health care system as summarized below:

- People are prescribed too many medications and the doses are too high
- Patients are discharged too soon before they are well enough to go home, particularly given the strain of northern winter travel on patients
- We need more First Nations hired to help navigate people through the medical system. People get lost in the system
- Canada Food Guide should be in syllabics
- Hospitals should be using Elders and they should have the same privileges as doctors
- NAN is doing the right thing with health transformation – but we also need to take responsibility as individuals to look after each other and ourselves. The stress from grief and loss affects our eating and lifestyles. Food and what we ingest develops character
- We have to understand our past. Youth can become leaders – they have the skills to create and have thoughts. Youth need to have a voice and should have the opportunity to speak and make decisions even if it may not be the right decision

- In the past we used traditional medications and foods to get better. We dealt with emergencies ourselves by using traditional methods
- We need to respect all diversity (spirituality, medicines, communities, etc.)
- Lack of confidentiality
- Need to address transportation issues
- Community structure needs better communication
- Change needs to happen at the grassroots level. We need to be active
- We need to honour the people that went to school and work in the communities
- We must redevelop our communities to move towards a better future and to be a role model to other communities
- We want children to learn, to understand, to learn language and train their own people
- We need to develop a pool or list of trained people for communities
- Tear down INAC – use our inherent rights

ELDER STORY

One Elder shared her story of working in health. She first described her residential school experience, explaining that she was very lonely, but she kept it inside. She worked in a nursing station afterwards helping nurses deliver babies. There were no services back then. She got training as a CHR and took over many parts of the nurse's job. She experienced many things and became heavy with all that she experienced and saw. She was also still impacted by her negative experiences with residential school. Rather than looking for help from someone else, she had to look to herself and find her spirit and the negative experiences of her inner child. She also described the heaviness and grief she experienced from losing her sons to a plane crash and another to suicide. It takes a long time to heal and began to heal through the ceremony of the sacred fire. She found peace afterwards and continues to help herself every day. She described the youth of today using drugs and alcohol to deal with their pain. We need to help and teach the youth now and help them to find themselves to get better.

ELDER STORY

One Elder spoke of his story. He did not go to residential school as his parents made sure he did not go. He worked 24 years in leadership and spiritual work and learned from his parents. He described being sober for 30 years and that he was able to get his own help from his own beliefs. He described seeing a lot over his lifetime and wanting to pass down his own teachings that he learned from his parents and share them with those that were taken away to residential school. He is passing down his own beliefs in spirituality to his children. The youth of today are conflicted with what they want to believe. The youth need to know that there are many choices as to what they want to believe.

MESSAGES AND ADVICE TO YOUTH

Connection to Land

- Youth need to be connected to the land
- We need to help youth with their addictions. We need to take them somewhere in the land to be able to help them think while they are away from their problems and addictions
- Youth are impacted by modern technology. They are not involved in outdoors and learning because of technology
- The land is where you get your identity

Keeping Families Together

- Youth problems stem from parents breaking up and seeing their parents with other people

Spirituality & Teachings

- Belief in spirituality and hope helps with pain and grief
- Youth need to know that there are many choices in beliefs. Many children are conflicted with beliefs in spirituality. Youth are conflicted with teachings and don't know what to believe
- Youth need to be open and listen more. Instead they are doing what they want to (drugs and having babies early)

Self-Care & Responsibility for own Health and Wellness

- Youth need to take care of themselves – to take care of their bodies (what they eat and do exercises that challenge body, mind and abilities)
- Youth need to look for options to solve problems
- Be kind, passionate and understand other people. Do not judge and be a good human being. You need to get along with people from other backgrounds
- If you need help – find it. There is lots of help out there
- Be creative – find something you like to do
- Shine and be happy and laugh a lot
- Work hard, persevere and do not give up

Youth Addictions

- We need to help youth with their addictions – to take them somewhere in the land to help them, to be able to help them think while they are away from their problems