



DUDES CLUB SOCIETY NORTHERN REGIONAL REPORT 2024

Partnership with
FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AUTHORITY
Northern Region

Abstract

Partnership that enhances men's wellness in Indigenous communities through culturally tailored, community-driven strategies, showcasing resiliency and reclamation

Grant Barton, Executive Director
Grant@dudesclub.ca

Executive Summary

The Knowledge Exchange, conceptualized as a "Train the Trainers", plays a crucial role in advancing men's wellness across Indigenous communities. Anchored in the success and methodologies derived since the Vancouver DCS's inception in 2010, this initiative leverages the leadership and expertise of community champions, elders, and liaisons to foster supportive environments for men's wellness groups. The initiative's curriculum is meticulously designed to cover foundational aspects critical to the development and sustainability of these groups, including logistical planning, understanding the roles of community figures, financial management, and the integration of health services.

A notable feature of the initiative is its adaptability to various Indigenous perspectives and engagement methods, ensuring that the strategies developed are culturally sensitive and community-specific. This is achieved through a series of structured sessions that focus on peer-led support, collaborative learning, and the promotion of autonomy and shared values among participants. These sessions emphasize practical application over theoretical learning, advocating for a peer-led model that encourages men to lead their wellness paths based on collective values and a departure from predefined expectations.

Community engagements are integral to the Knowledge Exchange initiative, highlighting its comprehensive approach and impact on promoting men's wellness. These engagements, ranging from wellness fairs and workshops to virtual sessions and sporting events, illustrate the initiative's commitment to reaching men across diverse Indigenous communities. The variety and depth of these engagements underscore the initiative's flexibility and dedication to addressing the unique needs and cultural practices of each community.

The report further discusses future considerations, including the need for improved education on funding allocation for health directors and band offices, and a more streamlined support system from liaisons. Feedback from communities suggests a preference for centralizing resources through a single organization to facilitate a more efficient and equitable distribution of funds dedicated to men's health initiatives. Additionally, the establishment of robust community agreements is proposed to ensure a unified commitment to wellness, enhancing the initiative's effectiveness and alignment with community needs and aspirations.

The Knowledge Exchanges have been instrumental in advancing men's wellness within Indigenous communities through a broad spectrum of activities conducted from 2023 into 2024. This comprehensive effort included a diverse range of engagements, such as in-person wellness fairs, on-the-land gatherings, discussions, virtual knowledge exchange sessions, and sports events, all designed to meet the unique wellness needs of various Indigenous communities. Spanning at least 15 different communities, the initiative effectively catered to a wide geographical and cultural audience, drawing hundreds of participants with attendance at individual events ranging from 10 to 100. These activities not only highlighted community-specific wellness strategies but also promoted solidarity, cultural sensitivity, and mutual support among Indigenous men. The initiative thus stands as a pivotal movement towards enhancing wellness at both the individual and community levels, driven by a commitment to

cultural tailoring, community engagement, and peer-led support, all aimed at empowering Indigenous men through education, collaboration, and shared experiences.



Historical Context of our Relationship

Since 2017, DCS Society (DCS) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) Northern Region have forged a collaborative partnership to support the wellness of Indigenous men in reserve communities across Northern BC. This partnership began with a pilot program in six communities, where DCS provided foundational support to establish new men's wellness groups. Working closely with FNHA, DCS helped each community launch local gatherings, offering guidance, resources, and mentorship to establish these spaces effectively.

From the outset, DCS and FNHA implemented a Train the Trainers model, ensuring that local leaders received essential training to confidently facilitate wellness sessions. This included developing culturally aligned support networks that brought together community men, champions, and Elders. Meanwhile, FNHA conducted environmental scans, gathering critical data to understand the scope of mental health and wellness needs in these communities. These insights confirmed the significant demand and potential impact of such initiatives, guiding our approach to expanding the program.

As the success of the pilot sites became evident, FNHA committed to broadening the reach of DCS into additional communities, hiring a dedicated coordinator and providing initial funding to help new sites get established. This expansion was not only a response to the communities' needs but also a commitment to sustainable, grassroots-driven support for Indigenous men's wellness.

In tandem with these local efforts, FNHA and DCS also launched the Northern Indigenous Guys' Gathering in 2017, a biennial event that brings together men, local champions, Elders, Knowledge Holders, and healthcare professionals from across Northern BC. This gathering serves as an opportunity for communities to connect, share, and celebrate their wellness journeys. These gatherings are a testament to our shared vision of fostering brotherhood and wellness across the region.

The ongoing partnership between DCS and FNHA exemplifies our mutual dedication to improving Indigenous men's health by combining FNHA's regional insights and resources with DCS's grassroots experience and culturally relevant approaches. Through this collaboration, we are building networks that support healing, accountability, and resilience across Northern BC, with the goal of empowering Indigenous men to lead healthier, more connected lives.

Initiative Overview

The Knowledge Exchange is founded on the principles of peer-led support, collaboration, and adaptation to local Indigenous perspectives and engagement methods. Through a series of sessions, the initiative covers essential topics such as logistical planning, role importance (champions, elders, knowledge holders), and the incorporation of wellness services. A significant focus is placed on creating a supportive environment that moves beyond traditional programming to foster shared values and autonomy among participants.

Knowledge Exchange offers a unique platform for current and prospective trailblazers in the community, such as champions and elders to acquire the necessary resources for encouraging

men's wellness initiatives within their communities. This initiative facilitates a collaborative environment, bringing together diverse community initiators to share and develop effective strategies for wellness. Given the varied Indigenous perspectives and engagement methods across communities, the initiative is tailored to highlight logistical and facilitation techniques that have shown tangible success since the inception of the Vancouver DUDES Club in 2010.

The curriculum of these sessions includes foundational topics like identifying appropriate meeting venues (typically hosted by clubs), understanding the crucial roles of community champions, liaisons, elders, knowledge holders, health practitioners, and understanding the dimensions of operating a men's group.

Additionally, the initiative delves into strategies for propelling the group's dynamics forward, employing 'think tanks' to foster innovation and growth. With a solid base established, helpers dissect the typical structure of a meeting, including how to ceremonially open and close meetings with the guidance of a Knowledge Holder or Elder, orchestrating activities, communal cooking, and encouraging volunteerism.



A significant emphasis is placed on the integration of health practitioners and or guest and services into group meetings, emphasizing the transition from theoretical health education to its practical application, thus ensuring beneficial health outcomes. Facilitators advocate for a peer-led model over traditional programming, aiming to inspire men to chart their own paths based on communal values and a collective departure from predefined expectations. Self-determination is a focal point of each community.

Moreover, the sessions explore the potential for partnerships with organizations like the DCS and/or the First Nations Health Authority or provide essential feedback on areas of need and or growth within each community. Such collaborations could enhance a group's viability through financial support, resources, advocacy, and more, ensuring the sustainability and growth of men's wellness clubs.

Partnerships and Collaborations: Enhancing Program Capacity through Strategic Alliances

One of the Knowledge Exchange initiative's most significant strengths lies in its strategic partnerships, particularly with the DCS and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA). These collaborations are not just supportive; they are transformative, fundamentally enhancing the initiative's ability to meet its objectives. Below is an in-depth look at how these partnerships work and their impact on the initiative.

Partnership with the DCS:

- **Nature of Collaboration:** The DCS, with its established reputation and network within Indigenous communities, brings invaluable experience and resources to the Knowledge Exchange initiative. This partnership facilitates the sharing of best practices, mentorship opportunities, and access to a broader participant base. By leveraging the DCS's expertise in engaging men in wellness activities, the initiative has been able to refine its engagement strategies and outreach efforts, making them more appealing and accessible to the target demographic.
- **Outcomes and Impact:** A tangible outcome of this collaboration has been the successful implementation of the "On the Land" initiative, which combines traditional knowledge with physical activity to promote wellness. The DCS's experience in organizing such events has ensured their success, drawing larger participation numbers and achieving more profound impacts on participants' wellness journeys. Additionally, this partnership has facilitated the expansion of the initiative into more remote communities, where the DCS's presence and credibility have opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed.

Collaboration with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA):

- **Nature of Collaboration:** The FNHA's collaboration with the Knowledge Exchange initiative offers a structural and financial backbone to the initiative. This partnership ensures that the initiative has access to critical health services, funding, and logistical support. It also enables a seamless integration of health practitioners and services into the initiative's activities, enhancing the quality and comprehensiveness of wellness support provided to participants.
- **Outcomes and Impact:** One of the most significant impacts of this collaboration has been the development of a streamlined process for integrating traditional healing practices with modern health services within the initiative. This integration has led to more holistic health outcomes for participants, addressing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, the FNHA's support has been crucial in facilitating the initiative's adaptation and response to COVID-19, allowing for the swift transition to virtual platforms when necessary and ensuring the initiative's continuity during challenging times.

Through these partnerships, the Knowledge Exchange initiative has not only increased its capacity to deliver impactful wellness initiatives but has also strengthened its foundation for sustainable growth. These strategic alliances exemplify how collaboration between grassroots organizations and institutional bodies can amplify the reach and effectiveness of community-driven health initiatives, setting a precedent for future collaborations within the sphere of Indigenous men's wellness.

Two-Eyed Seeing and the FNHA Hub Model at DCS

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) utilizes the **hub model**, a proven approach that effectively gathers communities and creates accessible, impactful workshops. This model centers on the idea of bringing people together to share resources, knowledge, and support in a structured environment, making it easier for communities to engage with health services and wellness initiatives. FNHA has demonstrated that the hub model works because it encourages collaboration and allows communities to leverage each other's strengths.

DCS has adopted this same model because of its success in fostering connection and engagement across communities. By integrating the FNHA hub model with the **Two-Eyed Seeing** approach, DCS combines the strengths of Western organizational practices with Indigenous values of brotherhood and knowledge sharing. The hub model allows DCS to bring men together from various nations, providing a space where they can see what other groups are doing, share experiences, and learn from each other.



Through this model, men who may not have men's groups in their own communities can gain insights on how to start their own. They learn not only how to build a group but also how to access FNHA funding and work with health directors to sustain their initiatives. The proven success of the FNHA hub model, combined with DCS's commitment to Indigenous-led wellness, ensures that these gatherings foster brotherhood, resilience, and a deeper understanding of how to create lasting community wellness programs.

Community Engagements

The community engagement aspect of the Knowledge Exchange initiative is a vital component, illustrating the initiative's expansive reach and impact on men's wellness across various Indigenous communities. Here's a detailed breakdown of the events and activities that have been part of this engagement effort:

2023 Engagements

1. **Kitimaat Men's Wellness Fair (April 18-21, 2023):** This event targeted communities in Kitimat Village and Prince George, drawing an average of 20 participants. The fair focused on promoting wellness activities and sharing resources relevant to men's health within these communities.
2. **Prince George Treasure Cove, Grand Trunk Hall (July 25, 2023):** Held in Prince George, this event also saw an average attendance of 20 participants. It provided a platform for men to engage in discussions about wellness and to learn from health practitioners.

3. Bella Coola (August 7-10, 2023): With a smaller gathering of around 10 participants, this event focused on the specific needs and wellness strategies pertinent to the Bella Coola community, fostering a more intimate and focused discussion on men's health.
4. Git'gaat (Hartley Bay) and K5T Club House Terrace (September 7 and 25, 2023): These sessions attracted an average of 20 participants each, highlighting the initiative's reach into more remote communities. Activities included workshops and group discussions designed to foster a sense of brotherhood and mutual support.
5. K5T Club House Terrace (On the Land, September 26, 2023): An extension of the previous Terrace event, this "on the land" gathering for the Kitselas and Gitlaxdax communities focused on connecting with nature as a component of wellness, also with around 20 participants.
6. Lake Babine (October 22-24, 2023): This was one of the largest gatherings, with an average of 45 participants from various communities, including Lake Babine Nation and others. The event was a comprehensive engagement effort aimed at discussing and implementing wellness strategies across multiple communities.

2024 Engagements

1. Virtual Knowledge Exchange Sessions (January 24 and February 7, 2024): These sessions were designed to reach communities more widely, with participation averages of 30 and 25, respectively. They allowed for sharing and discussion of wellness strategies in a virtual format, making the initiative accessible to those unable to attend in person.
2. All Native Basketball Tournament (February 11-18, 2024): Averaging 50 participants, this event combined sports and wellness, promoting physical health as a key component of men's wellness.
3. Prince Rupert DCS Knowledge Exchange (February 17, 2024): Targeting communities attending the All Native Basketball Tournament, this exchange focused on sharing successful strategies and resources among 15 participants.
4. 2nd Annual Strength in Solidarity Men's Only Event (March 6-7, 2024): This significant event, hosted by Carrier Sekani Family Services, saw an impressive turnout of 60 participants from various communities, emphasizing the solidarity and shared goals within the initiative.
5. Fort Saint John Nenan Dane zaa Deh Zona Family Services Society (March 6-8, 2024): With 50 participants, this event targeted communities in the Fort Saint John area, focusing on family services and support systems for men's wellness.

6. Skidegate Men's Group GaaGagaay (March 15-17, 2024): The largest of the engagements, this gathering brought together 100 participants from various nations, showcasing the wide-reaching impact and interest in men's wellness initiatives.
7. K5T/ Nexup Tabling at Youth Expo Fair (March 26, 2024): Aiming at a younger demographic, this event saw an average of 35 participants from surrounding communities, highlighting the initiative's efforts to engage youth in wellness conversations.
8. Gitlaxdax Terrace and Nisga'a Gitlaxdamix Men's Gathering (March 26, 2024): Focused on the Nisga'a community, this gathering of 15 participants emphasized the importance of cultural and community-specific strategies in promoting wellness.

These engagements demonstrate the initiative's comprehensive approach to fostering wellness among Indigenous men, with a focus on community-specific needs, cultural sensitivity, and the promotion of self-determination and peer support. The variety of events—ranging from sports tournaments to virtual exchanges and on-the-land gatherings—illustrates the initiative's versatility and commitment to reaching men in diverse communities.

Supports Established

In each participating community, the Knowledge Exchange meticulously implemented a comprehensive support system designed to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of men's wellness initiatives. This multifaceted support framework encompassed several key areas:

- **Champion and Facilitator Development:** A critical step involved community identifying individuals within their community who exhibited leadership qualities, passion for men's wellness, and a commitment to the cause. These individuals were then offered specialized training with our Knowledge Bundles aimed at equipping them with the understanding how to effectively hold space for men's gatherings.
- **Health Services Integration:** The initiative actively assists communities in identifying and accessing a range of possible health services and practitioners who can be invited as guests to their gatherings. This assistance is designed to facilitate the incorporation of holistic wellness activities, enabling men to benefit from comprehensive health support. By connecting communities with resources such as physical health experts, mental health professionals, and traditional healers, the initiative ensures that each gathering can address the full spectrum of health needs — physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. This strategic approach empowers men to enhance their wellness activities by bringing in specialists tailored to their community's specific needs and interests.
- **Financial and Logistical Support:** To address the operational challenges encountered by men's groups, the initiative offers comprehensive guidance on securing financial and logistical support through health directors or band offices. Special attention was given to the unique financial challenges of growing groups and those with consistent participants, with strategies and recommendations offered to overcome these hurdles.

The overarching goal of these supports was to lay down a robust and sustainable foundation for men's wellness initiatives. By focusing on building internal leadership, integrating essential health services, and ensuring operational viability through financial and logistical guidance, the Knowledge Exchange is aimed to empower communities to take ownership of men's wellness. This comprehensive approach ensured that the wellness initiatives were not only well-supported in the present but also positioned for continued growth and success in the future, fostering a healthier and more resilient community fabric.

Highlight: Knowledge Exchange in Haida Gwaii

The Knowledge Exchange in Haida Gwaii stood out as a particularly successful event within the broader initiative, drawing over a hundred men from the surrounding communities, significantly surpassing expectations. This event not only reached but amplified the DCS foundational goals:

- **Extensive Participation:** The remarkable attendance underscored a deep-rooted interest and commitment to men's wellness within the community, surpassing the organizers' expectations. It highlighted a widespread recognition of the importance of men's health and wellness, serving as a powerful testament to the community's readiness to engage in meaningful change.
- **Comprehensive Engagement:** The event offered a diverse array of activities, ranging from wellness workshops that addressed physical health, mental resilience, and preventive care, to cultural and spiritual sessions that sought to reconnect participants with their heritage and traditional healing practices. This broad spectrum of engagements ensured that every aspect of wellness was touched upon, fostering a holistic understanding of health that integrates physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.
- **Community Support:** The involvement of local leaders, health practitioners, and members of the Skidegate Men's Group GaaGagaay was instrumental in the event's success. This collaboration underscored the strength of community ties and the value of a united approach to health promotion. It also highlighted the crucial role of local wisdom and leadership in guiding wellness initiatives, ensuring that the efforts were deeply rooted in the community's specific needs and cultural practices.
- **Outcomes:** The gathering's impact was both immediate and enduring, with participants leaving not only with a renewed sense of connection to their community and culture but also with tangible knowledge and plans to further men's wellness in their locales. The dissemination of health information, sharing of successful strategies, and formulation of actionable plans for establishing or enhancing local men's wellness groups equipped attendees with the tools needed for sustained action and improvement in men's health initiatives.

- **Sustained Impact:** Beyond the immediate benefits, the event in Haida Gwaii set a precedent for future gatherings and initiatives within the Knowledge Exchange and beyond. It served as a model of how deeply engaged and well-supported community events can lead to meaningful, lasting impacts on men's health and wellness. The success of this event has become a cornerstone example within the initiative, illustrating the powerful outcomes that are possible when communities come together to focus on men's wellness.

This standout event in Haida Gwaii thus encapsulated the essence of the Knowledge Exchange initiative's goals—extensive community participation, a comprehensive approach to engagement, robust community support, and tangible, actionable outcomes—all of which contribute to the ongoing effort to enhance men's wellness across Indigenous communities.

Community Feedback

A pivotal aspect of our initiative's strategy is addressing the feedback received from community members regarding the need for a knowledge exchange for health directors and band offices on the nuances of funding allocation dedicated to men's wellness. A recurring theme from our consultations highlighted a noticeable inconsistency in support and coordination from liaisons, underscoring a gap in our approach to facilitating wellness initiatives. To address this, there is a collective call for a more streamlined and efficient funding mechanism. The community has voiced a strong preference for funneling resources through a single, centralized organization for at least a year. This approach is anticipated not only to simplify the administrative process but also to ensure a more equitable and effective distribution of funds dedicated to men's health initiatives.

Furthermore, the initiative recognizes the critical need for establishing robust community agreements that involve health directors, band offices, and the men's groups within their respective communities. These agreements are envisaged to lay down a framework of collaboration and commitment towards the shared goal of promoting men's wellness. By fostering a unified front, the initiative aims to enhance the efficacy of wellness initiatives and ensure they are deeply rooted in the community's needs and aspirations.

Additionally, feedback from community members has highlighted concerns regarding the current levels of financial support provided to men's wellness groups. Specifically, it has been pointed out that the funding allocated per group does not meet the needs of those that are experiencing growth and sustaining regular attendance. This situation has led to calls from men within these communities for an increase in funding. Such an adjustment is seen as a crucial step to address financial shortfalls, enabling these groups to better support their expanding membership and enhance the quality and range of their activities, thus fostering a more robust and impactful men's wellness initiative.

Recommendations

The Knowledge Exchange findings and community feedback reflect a shared momentum to strengthen men's wellness supports across Northern communities. Building on the success of the DUDES Club Society (DCS) and FNHA-Northern Region partnership, the following recommendations aim to enhance coordination, sustainability, and community leadership in ways that align with FNHA's vision for holistic health and DCS's grassroots experience in peer-led wellness.

1. Strengthen Coordination through Collaborative Support

To sustain growth and ensure continuity across communities, it is recommended that FNHA-NR and DCS continue exploring a coordinated approach to men's wellness support. This may include establishing a joint point of contact or shared coordination role to enhance communication, mentorship, and follow-through between communities, health directors, and local champions.

2. Expand and Stabilize Community Funding for Men's Groups

As men's groups continue to expand, there is an opportunity to introduce a scalable funding model that recognizes participation levels, community engagement, and regional impact. Flexible, multi-year funding will help communities plan, grow, and sustain their gatherings while maintaining cultural integrity and accountability.

3. Develop a Centralized Learning and Resource Network

Building on the success of the Knowledge Exchange model, a regional "Men's Wellness Network" could centralize resources, share templates and success stories, and connect facilitators across Nations. This approach would strengthen peer learning, support local autonomy, and ensure that knowledge continues to circulate across the North.

4. Support Community Agreements and Local Leadership Pathways

Encouraging formal agreements between men's groups, health directors, and local leadership would help embed men's wellness into community health strategies. Clear pathways for mentorship and leadership development will ensure that local champions are supported, recognized, and prepared to sustain these initiatives for years to come.

5. Continue Integrating Culture as the Foundation of Health

Ongoing success depends on ensuring that every initiative remains guided by Indigenous knowledge, ceremony, and local cultural teachings. The partnership between FNHA-NR and DCS has shown that when men gather in culturally grounded spaces, they build not only wellness but belonging, responsibility, and community connection. Continued investment in culture-based programming will keep this momentum strong.

.

Conclusion:

The 2023-2024 Knowledge Exchange has reaffirmed the strength of partnership between the First Nations Health Authority - Northern Region and DUDES Club Society. Together, we continue to see the powerful impact of Indigenous-led, community-driven approaches that bring men together in spaces of belonging, healing, and leadership.

Across every gathering - from on-the-land sessions to virtual exchanges - men are reclaiming their roles as protectors, caregivers, and community leaders. The teachings shared, the laughter exchanged, and the commitments made reflect not only improved wellness outcomes but also a deep resurgence of cultural pride and connection.



As we move forward, this collaboration stands as a model for how Indigenous and organizational partnerships can walk together in balance - blending community wisdom with system-level support to reach men where they are. Guided by the Two-Eyed Seeing approach and the proven FNHA hub model, we will continue to strengthen networks, develop champions, and ensure that every man in every Nation has access to the tools, resources, and cultural grounding he needs to thrive.

This work is not only about wellness - it is about reclamation, resilience, and rebuilding the spirit of community from the inside out. Together, FNHA-NR and DUDES Club Society are lighting the path for generations of men to come, walking forward with unity, strength, and purpose.