Towards Health Equity for Inuit

A presentation on the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy

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www.itk.ca
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)

• National representational voice/organization for Inuit in Canada

• Democratically elected governance model with all Canadian Inuit at its base

• The counterpoint for the Government of Canada for national-level interactions with Inuit
Inuit Nunangat

• In Canada, the majority of Inuit live in Inuit Nunangat
  • 53 communities
  • 4 land claim regions
  • 60,000 Canadian Inuit
Inuit Communities

- Remote coastal communities
- Many communities created in the middle of the 20th century
- Most Inuit communities lack adequate infrastructure such as roads, ports, Internet, health facilities, education facilities, and housing
- Can only be reached by air and sea
Access to Health Services

Location of National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs (NNADAP)

56 NNADAP Programs
- 13 British Columbia
- 6 Alberta
- 10 Saskatchewan
- 5 Manitoba
- 10 Ontario
- 6 Quebec
- 6 Atlantic

0 in Inuit communities

Information from: Health Canada – NNADAP Treatment Centre Directory
## Social and Economic Inequity in Inuit Nunangat

### Inuit Nunangat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>29% of Inuit aged 25 to 64 in Inuit Nunangat have earned a high school diploma</td>
<td>4% of non-Indigenous people in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>70% of Inuit households in Nunavut do not have enough to eat</td>
<td>85% of all Canadians aged 25 to 64 have earned a high school diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>$17,778 the median individual income for Inuit in Inuit Nunangat</td>
<td>$77,683 the median individual income for non-Indigenous people in Inuit Nunangat</td>
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<td>30 the number of physicians per 100,000 population in Nunavut</td>
<td>119 the mean number of physicians per 100,000 population in Urban Health Authorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>45.6% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat are employed</td>
<td>60.9% of all Canadians are employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.8 the average life expectancy for residents of Inuit Nunangat</td>
<td>80.6 the average life expectancy for all Canadians</td>
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### All Canadians

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* Average life expectancy for Inuit Nunangat includes non-Inuit.
Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse in Nunavut

Information from:
Inuit Health Survey 2007-2008
Suicide from a Canadian Inuit Context

- Suicide is the most urgent challenge facing Inuit
- Regional rates range from 5 – 25 times higher than the national rate
- Inuit youth and children, particularly Inuit males aged 15-29 are at increasing risk
- Suicide rate has changed very little over time
Suicide Rates

Suicide Among Inuit by Region in Canada

Information from: National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy
Inuit Social Determinants of Health

- Underlying social determinants of health
- The determinants of health are highly interconnected
- Mental wellness is a key determinant
The Need for a Canadian Inuit Strategy

- Identified a need to address social inequities and incorporate a holistic approach to suicide prevention
- Develop a shared, evidence-based understanding of the known risk and protective factors
- Build on the suicide prevention work of other regions and countries
- Foster a unified Inuit-led approach specific to our history and context
Who Was Involved in the Strategy

- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)
  - Board of Directors
  - National Inuit Committee on Health (NICoH)
  - Alianait Inuit-Specific Mental Wellness Advisory Committee
  - National Inuit Youth Council (NIYC)

- Health Canada

- Mental Health Commission of Canada

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

- Other experts in suicide prevention
Development of the NISPS

2014
- Recommendation from NICoH to develop NISPS
- Development of a NISPS Discussion Paper
- Development of NISPS in collaboration with NICoH, Alianait, the National Inuit Youth Council and experts in suicide prevention
- Review of NISPS by NICoH and Alianait
- ITK Board of Directors approval and endorsement
- Strategy launch in Kuujjuaq, Nunavik and Hebron, Nunatsiavut

2016
- Announcement of $9 million in NISPS implementation funding
Risk Factors

• NISPS identified numerous suicide risk factors for Inuit in Canada

• Risk factors are the experiences, events, or conditions that research has linked to suicidal behaviour within a population

• Effective suicide prevention reduces suicide risk
How Risk Multiplies

• Some people begin life with adversity, such as being affected by acute stress while in the womb

• This base level of risk can multiply through stress factors related to social inequality
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- Personal experiences, including abuse, can further multiply a person’s overall risk for suicide
- Exposure to suicide is a risk factor for suicide
- Having high rates of suicide in our communities means that suicide touches everyone, creating an underlying risk for suicide that affects all Inuit
- As a result, many Inuit face individual risk factors for suicide in addition to being at risk by living in a high suicide society
Protective Factors

• Effective suicide prevention increases protective factors

• Protective factors contribute to overall wellbeing and decrease likelihood of self-harm or suicidal behaviour
NISPS Priority Areas

• NISPS outlines 6 priority areas for action and investment to guide regional and community suicide prevention efforts:

1. Create Social Equity
2. Create Cultural Continuity
3. Nurture Healthy Inuit Children
4. Ensure Access to a Continuum of Mental Wellness Services
5. Heal Unresolved Trauma and Grief
6. Mobilize Inuit Knowledge for Resilience and Suicide Prevention
1. Create Social Equity

- Social inequity is linked to higher rates of suicide

- **Objectives**: connect suicide to social determinants of health and address underlying causes

- **Actions**: work with governments to address social determinants, share knowledge amongst regions and conduct research on improved social determinants of health
2. Create Cultural Continuity

• Language and culture is a cornerstone of Inuit health and wellness

• **Objectives:** connect Inuit youth to language, culture and history, and incorporate them into mental health programming

• **Actions:** support access to activities, create of an Inuit-specific resource, reduce stigma
3. Nurture Healthy Inuit Children

- Every Canadian Inuit child deserves the best possible early start to life
- Create world-class interventions for children and their care givers to unlock their potential and stop the transmission of intergenerational trauma
- Importance of data and information regarding children in care
- Support Inuit culture and language
3. Nurture Healthy Inuit Children (continued)

- Investing in the safety and wellness of children is the most impactful way to prevent suicide

- Objectives: support parents, prevent childhood maltreatment, promote resilience and healthy relationships

- Actions: advocate for safe shelters, early childhood education and protection
4. Ensure Access to a Continuum of Mental Wellness Services for Inuit

• A continuum of mental wellness services reduces the risk of suicide

• Objectives: ensuring access to Inuit-specific services and education for frontline workers

• Actions: creation of Inuit helplines, coordination of mental health programs, and training for workers
5. Heal Unresolved Trauma and Grief

• Ongoing trauma and grief add to the hardships that Inuit families experience

• Objectives: address impacts of trauma, provide services for first responders, develop and provide Inuit-specific approaches and interventions

• Actions: education on trauma and create community resources and media guidelines
6. Mobilize Inuit Knowledge for Resilience and Suicide Prevention

- Local knowledge and expertise can help suicide prevention efforts be successful

- **Objectives:** promote public awareness, reduce stigma, evaluate programs and prioritize suicide data

- **Actions:** share best practices, gather data, create a fund for projects, address knowledge gaps in research
Federal Investments into NISPS

• June 2016: Prime Minister announced $69 million over three years to support various mental wellness measures

• July 2016: Minister Philpott announced $9 million over three years for implementation of the NISPS
Creating Change with the Strategy

- ITK’s National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy (NISPS) promotes a shared understanding of known risk and protective factors
- Guides policy at regional and national levels on evidence-based approaches
- Identifies stakeholders and their roles
- Outlines how different stakeholders can coordinate more effectively
A Path Forward

- Work to reduce suicide rates among Inuit
- Addressing underlying social and economic inequities through a holistic approach is necessary
- Coordinate suicide prevention efforts at the community, regional, national and international levels through partnerships
- Comprehensive measures to address the high rates of Inuit children in care
Thank You
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