

# LEARNING, ENGAGING AND COMMUNICATING

## PROJECT ACTIVITY UPDATE

### Healthy Aging in Place: Improving rural and northern Aboriginal seniors' health through policy and community-level interventions

As the current three-year project winds down, the Healthy Aging in Place research team has been working closely with the people of Wolseley, Watrous, Young and Île-à-la-Crosse to look for policy, community and kin-level interventions that promote healthy aging in place for seniors in rural communities.

Partnerships have been established with the Métis people of Île-à-la-Crosse, where the Sakitawak Elders' Council, a community advocacy group for seniors, has been created. A five-year research proposal, *Wuskiwiw-tan! (Let's Move!) Aging Well in a Northern Saskatchewan Métis Community* was submitted to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) in March 2014.

The team has published articles in journals including the online *Journal of Rural Nursing and Healthcare and Educational Gerontology* and



presented at Aging in America Conferences in San Diego and Chicago, the Canadian Rural Health Research Society Conferences in Levis, Quebec and Prince George, B.C., and the Canadian Association of

Gerontology Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting in Vancouver.

While the first phase of work is coming to an end, it is leading into SPHERU's next multi-phase team grant project with our partner communities of Watrous, Wolseley and Young. The Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation is continuing to fund SPHERU's research program, *Healthy Aging in Place: Improving rural and northern Aboriginal seniors' health through policy and community-level Interventions*. Over the next three years, our team will

complete three projects: 1. Improving rural seniors' mobility and social interaction through intervention research; 2. Supporting healthy aging through walkable built environment; and 3. Addressing rural seniors' access to information.

### Understanding the Implementation and Uptake of AS!BC and YETE

Dr. Sarah Oosman leads the SPHERU team evaluating the implementation of two provincial programs designed to promote physical activity among young First Nations people.



Both the Actions School!BC (AS!BC) and Youth Empower Through Exercise (YETE) are part of the Health Canada Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (SK Region) and focus on creating strength of body, mind and spirit among the participating children and youth.

YETE encourages Grade 8 and 9 students to take part in 20 minutes of vigorous exercise each morning using equipment such as treadmills or elliptical trainers, which are provided as part of the program. Currently, 60 First Nations schools in the province are taking part. AS!BC is aimed at younger children in elementary school and promotes exercise and movement supported by items in an activity kit. Fifty-seven First Nations schools have adopted the program.

For the project, SPHERU has created an evaluation framework. More recently, the team has been meeting with communities in Saskatchewan where the programs have been implemented in schools. The goal is to learn about implementing these programs through key informant interviews and focus groups. As outcomes, the team will produce an evaluation report of the programs as well as pamphlet material focusing on lessons learned for the communities and stakeholders.

### WHO WE ARE

SPHERU is an interdisciplinary team of population health researchers from the Universities of Regina and Saskatchewan with sites in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. Established in 1999 and funded by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, with additional project-specific funding from other provincial and national health research funding agencies, SPHERU is the first bi-university research unit of its kind in Saskatchewan. While much population health research describes health inequities, ours focuses on population health interventions and how to address inequities on the social determinants of health. Much of our work falls within the themes of Northern and Aboriginal Health, Healthy Children, Rural Health, the History of Health Inequities and Intervention Research.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

### SPHERU and SPOR

The goal of Canada's Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) is to ensure that the right patient receives the right intervention at the right time. It is a cross-country initiative from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research with the objective of fostering evidence-informed health care by bringing innovative diagnostic and therapeutic approaches to the point of care, so as to ensure greater quality, accountability and accessibility.

It will function as a coalition of federal, provincial and territorial partners – all dedicated to the integration of research into care – and can include patients and caregivers, researchers, health practitioners, policy makers, provincial/territorial health authorities, academic institutions, charities and the pharmaceutical sector.

One of the specific research initiatives launched recently by CIHR under the SPOR umbrella is the SPOR Network in

Primary and Integrated Health Care (PIHC) Innovations.

"This is an important opportunity for SPHERU to participate in and contribute to an agenda of research in Saskatchewan that lines up quite well with its mission and mandate," says Dr. Nazeem Muhjarine, SPHERU Director.



The aim is to establish a Pan-Canadian Network that will conduct coordinated and specific research projects led by member networks. The application from Saskatchewan has been approved in the first stage. Among the leaders nominated were three researchers from SPHERU: Dr. Cory Neudorf, Dr. Shanthi Johnson and Dr. Muhjarine. The process is now in the second stage, and will culminate in an application to be a member network (Saskatchewan) in the Pan-Canadian SPOR Network in PIHC.

## MEET OUR RESEARCHERS

*Dr. James Daschuk's book Clearing The Plains (University of Regina Press) looks at how Old World diseases, climate and politics conspired to cause the deaths and subjugation of thousands of Aboriginal people, victims of the realization of Sir John A. Macdonald's "National Dream."*

**Q: What was the most surprising thing you learned during your years of research?**

The pattern that emerged regarding Canada's response to the food crisis after 1878 when the bison disappeared and the Macdonald government was re-elected on the platform of building a railway to the Pacific as quickly

as possible. Despite promises of a humanitarian response, authorities used food as a means to control and subjugate thousands of people, moving them to reserves hundreds of kilometres away.



**Q: What is it about treaties that many Canadians misunderstand?**

Many of us in the mainstream population forget that the legal foundation of Saskatchewan society are the treaties, and that the land and resources made available to our ancestors allowed them to establish one of the most successful and affluent societies. At the same time, these indigenous communities that allowed our ancestors into the region through the treaties have undergone almost a

century and a half of suffering as a result.

**Q: How does this story relate to work of SPHERU?**

I hope that shedding light on the role of the state in the purposeful undermining of indigenous health a century ago will provide a context for the inequity in health outcomes between mainstream and indigenous citizens. On another level, by getting the message out to a wide audience, I hope that the book will increase our collective understanding of what was done on our behalf.

**Q: What sense do you have that the book is generating the kind of discussion that could effect change?**

We have a national myth, a collective identity that we are a fundamentally good, even "nice" people. If the foundation of a society that saw itself as the breadbasket of the world is founded on a state-supervised famine, the purposeful malnutrition of thousands of indigenous people followed by a century or more of residential schools, we should all reconsider who we are as a nation.

**Q: Why do you think this book has struck a chord?**

I hope that shedding daylight on the most repugnant issues in our past, the residential schools, the experimentation on hungry children exposed by Dr. Ian Mosby, the issues discussed in my work, will contribute to a shift in how the mainstream population relates to issues many of us compartmentalize as "aboriginal." To borrow the cliché, maybe we, as a collective, have reached the tipping point.