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Interior Health

Interior Region Indigenous Food Forum: Summary Report

November 8-9, 2022

Osoyoos | Syilx (Okanagan) Territory





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Acknowledgements

It is with great respect that the Steering Committee acknowledges the Syilx Nation and the traditional territory on which the Food Forum event was held. We specifically acknowledge the Osoyoos Indian Band and want to thank Chief Clarence Louie for welcoming us to his community.

Thank you to the community-led Advisory Committee, and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and Interior Health (IH) who made the Interior Region Indigenous Food Forum (Food Forum) possible.

We are humbled and grateful to the keynote speakers, presenters and panelists who provided their time, knowledge, expertise and thoughts on a variety of topics. The wisdom shared over the two days of the Food Forum was incomparable.

Steering Committee

- Kris Murray, Interior Health – Corporate Director, Aboriginal Health & Wellness
- Nicole Taylor-Sterritt, Interior Health – Lead, Aboriginal Partnerships
- Casey Neathway, FNHA – Director, HEM & EPHS
- Kathleen Yung, FNHA – Food Security and Healthy Eating Specialist
- Jill Worboys, Interior Health – Public Health Dietitian
- Bronwyn Coyne, Interior Health – Public Health Dietitian
- Seamus Damstrom, Interior Health – Public Health Dietitian
- Amanda Atkin, Interior Health – Administrative Assistant
- Carnation Zhuwaki, Interior Health – Knowledge Facilitator
- Michael Wesley, Indigenous Health and Nutrition Consulting (IHNC) – Dietitian





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Advisory Committee

- Dawn Morrison, Secwépemc
- Fred Fortier, Secwépemc
- Byron Louis, Syilx
- Pamela Barnes, Syilx
- Dave Mutch, Ktunaxa
- George Casimir, Secwépemc

Elder Support

Elder Leon Louis, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Syilx
Elder Grouse Barnes, Westbank First Nation, Syilx

Sponsorship

Thank you to United Way BC for their generous contribution to support the Food Forum.



United Way
British Columbia

Working with communities in BC's
Interior, Lower Mainland, Central
& Northern Vancouver Island

Background: Where We Started

Traditional foods and the activities that surround planting, harvesting, gathering, cooking, preserving, and ceremony are integral in all the diverse Indigenous cultures in the Interior region. Interior Health (IH) and First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) continuously seek to be guided in this space by First Nation partners to improve access to traditional foods and healing medicines while receiving health care in publicly funded facilities. Interior Health and FNHA support First Nations communities with various programs related to healthy eating, food security and food sovereignty. Many First Nations have Nation-level or community-level food programs that support their specific culture, community members and needs.

The 2022 Interior Region Indigenous Food Forum intended to build on the previous work surrounding food sovereignty within the Interior region, including the 2006 and 2007 [Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conferences](#) (IFSC).

The *Community Food Action Initiative* (CFAI) funding program initiated an environmental scan in 2021 which highlighted the need and desire by community members to have gatherings in which the aforementioned could be achieved. Based on the results from the environmental scan, a Steering Committee was formed to design an event that could meet the needs of communities and help Health Authorities better understand the diverse perspectives, cultures, and practices of the Interior region First Nations related to traditional foods and wellbeing. It was important for IH and FNHA to be clear that there was no intention of extracting knowledge from First Nation participants, but rather for the Health Authorities to listen and learn from Nations and communities.



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Forum Goals: What We Hoped to Achieve

- Bring together community members and partner organization staff from across the Interior region to share ideas, best practices, and knowledge on Indigenous food security and sovereignty.
- Maintain a safe space for First Nation leaders, staff, and community members to share significant cultural knowledge, issues impacting their communities, and best practices and ceremony around traditional foods and medicines.
- Create an opportunity for government and non-Indigenous partners to listen and learn from Indigenous peoples.
- Better understand how Health Authorities can support the goals and objectives of First Nation communities in this space.
- Lay a foundation for a sustainable community of practice, including future events, for Interior region partners.

Attendance: Who Participated

The majority of the attendees were First Nation community members from throughout the Interior region. This included individuals working in health and wellness, food security, gardening and agriculture, and food sovereignty within their respective communities. We were fortunate to be able to come together with members from Syilx, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'at'imc, Ktunaxa, Tsilhqot'in, and Däkelh Dené Nations. Additionally, participants represented Gitxsan and Cree Nations, and organizations such as Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation Council (ISPARC).

Non-Indigenous government partners and organizations were welcomed to attend in a 'listening' capacity and multiple representatives from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ministry of Agriculture, Interior Health, First Nations Health Authority, and United Way attended.



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Speakers and Presentations: What Was Shared



Opening

Chief Clarence Louie from the Osoyoos Indian Band opened the event. He opened with powerful statements and the staff appreciated his willingness to participate, as it is priority to follow community protocols.

Elder Leon Louis provided a traditional opening for the Forum. Elder Louis shared the beginning of the Syilx Creation Story, the story of the coyote.

Keynote Speakers

Dawn Morrison provided her expertise as a keynote presenter, in addition to participating in the Advisory Committee to help shape the Forum. Dawn is well-known for her work within food sovereignty and is the founder and curator of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, which was formed after the 2006 Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference.

In Dawn's presentation, she highlighted the need to address food sovereignty issues through means of changing the systems set in place through western policies and practices that continue to be problematic for Indigenous peoples. A key takeaway from Dawn's presentation is that change will come from dismantling colonial systems and rebuilding with Indigenous perspectives at the heart. Dawn also spoke to the contradictions that exist within the work to change these systems, and reassured participants that these do not need to be solved for change to happen. Instead, by naming the contradictions and sitting in the discomfort, we can move forward towards new systems.

Chief Byron Louis from Okanagan Indian Band also provided his expertise as a keynote speaker. Byron Louis' keynote focused on the health issues of Indigenous communities and was incredibly impactful. Chief Louis described the costs associated with health disparities within Indigenous communities. Overall, the keynote highlighted the correlation between the loss of customary diet and modern illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease for First Nations peoples. Chief Louis also highlighted the need to speak the language of the colonial government and made the economic case for salmon as part of the traditional First Nation diet.



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Panel Presentations

Fred Fortier from Simpcw is well known for his work and tremendous knowledge on food security and presented on his work in agriculture, gardening, and farming. Fred shared his knowledge on growing and farming crops, gained through a lifetime of experience. Fred made connections between food sovereignty, food security, and growing your own food.

Dixon Terbasket, from Syilx Nation, participated on a panel discussion. Dixon shared insights on food security and farming gained through 50 years of experience. He expanded on growing/maintaining crops as well as providing insight on getting younger generations involved and playing a role in passing on the knowledge to youth within his community.

Michael Wesley, RD, from Gitxsan Nation, provided insight on colonization, nutrition, and community health. Michael spoke on the health disparities seen throughout Indigenous communities. His knowledge and expertise come from both personal experience and scientific evidence. He highlighted the connection between colonization and health disparities within community and explored identifying health benefits of traditional food systems.

Jordan Coble, from Westbank First Nation, shared his insight how he integrates his culture into his work as a leader in his community. Starting with an interactive demonstration using nsyilxcən, Jordan highlights the role of language in culture and sovereignty for Indigenous people. He made direct connections to language, food, and food sovereignty using his own personal experiences as a Syilx man.

Dawn Morrison, the key note speaker participated on a panel presentation. Dawn dove deeper into the principles that drive Indigenous Food Sovereignty including the interconnectedness of food, land and culture; activating holistic health, healing and wellness, gender and generational perspectives, Indigenous food economies and policy, planning and governance.

Justen Peters, from Okanagan Indian Band provided insights on food sovereignty from an Indigenous youth perspective. Justen provided a raw, passionate and fresh perspective to what food sovereignty means for the future of many Indigenous youth coming up in the region. He acknowledged the importance and value of Indigenous knowledge.





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Presenters

Pamela Barnes and **Elder Grouse Barnes** presented the Syilx story of the Four Food Chiefs. Through a wonderful video, Pamela and Elder Grouse share the story, as well as the significant role and meaning of the Four Food Chiefs and the fly to Syilx culture.

Jasmine Peone and **Dennis Barnes** provided their expertise on Indigenous plants in Syilx territory. Jasmine and Dennis shared not only the various Indigenous plants found within the territory, but also their traditional uses. They also challenged current norms around market based food acquirement throughout their presentation.

Elder and Wellness Support: How We Stayed Well

The Steering Committee and Advisory Committee together saw importance in making sure that key wellness support (e.g. smudging, brushing off and a safe space to debrief with an Elder) as well as traditional practices and protocols (e.g. prayer before meals) were available throughout the Forum. Initially, Elders Grouse Barnes and Leon Louis were asked to provide these supports. Unfortunately, Elder Grouse Barnes was unable to attend the event in-person due to illness. Elder (*in training*) Leon was provided wellness support and prayer before meals.

Summary: What We Heard

Participants were able to share their thoughts through conversations, posting ideas and answers on flip-charts, and through an event evaluation form.

Key Themes

Network and collaborate: Desire to network and collaborate from community-level, across Nations, sectors and with allies, while honouring diversity of experiences and perspectives.

Importance of the land: safe access to land, decolonizing land management systems, self determination, and passing on knowledge of the land to the next generations.

Planning for future generations: Sustainable planning for children and future generations, including connecting Elders and youth, and ensuring traditional knowledge is passed down.

Funding: Consistent, low barrier funding that allows for qualitative results for individuals and groups in food security and food sovereignty.

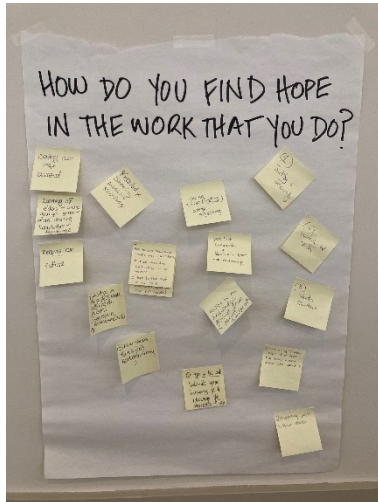
Traditional Food in Facilities: Strong desire to see traditional foods in facilities from child care centres, to hospitals, to long term care. However, there are challenges and barriers including licensing and policies that hinder the approval of sourcing traditional foods and the need to balance with community's access to traditional food.



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What gives you hope: People!

Along with themes, the evaluations and feedback provided key actions to be considered for future events. One of the most prominent themes of the participant feedback was the desire for more time to connect, network and share. While the agenda originally held space for smaller group discussions, technical difficulties, and lengthy presentations altered the agenda, and therefore the times set for group discussions were lost.

Purposeful efforts will be made in all future events to dedicate time to networking, relationship building, and sharing of projects and initiatives across communities and Nations.

Moving Forward and Commitments

The Steering Committee is taking action on the themes and feedback received. The next step will be to host a more intimate virtual networking event in March 2023. This event will provide time for informal conversations on topics related to food security and food sovereignty work through hosted breakout rooms. Secondly, the Steering Committee is already building on the 2022 Food Forum and planning a second in-person event in September 2023. Thirdly, IH partners who have key food roles in the organization's facilities are meeting to discuss what was heard at this event, and begin to move forward with actions to improve access to traditional foods. Lastly, the Community Food Action Initiative is continuing to work on improving the equity and access of the funding model to improve the support of food work in First Nations communities. All of these actions are in early stages, and will be completed in partnership with Aboriginal partners across the Interior Region.