JUNE 2ND – 4TH, 2025
TEAM GATHERING

CIHR IRSC
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FOOD AS MEDICINE
NEWSLETTER

Food as Medicine: Enhancing food sovereignty and promoting healthy aging for Indigenous older adults through culturally informed food programming in long-term care homes.
Aim: To promote Indigenous food sovereignty in long-term care homes by working towards food sourcing, preparation, and delivery aligned with Indigenous cultures and promoting the self-determination of Indigenous communities over their food practices and aging process.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **A Sharing Circle is a space that promotes equality, trust, honesty, and a sense of community where people come together to share.**
- **Based on group discussion and feedback, the policy analysis framework was updated.**
- **Insightful presentations by the team members to help us with the project's next steps.**





Sharing Circle Teachings by Dionne Nolan

Dionne Nolan provided teachings on Sharing Circles. We learned that Sharing Circles should be safe, comforting, and ceremonial spaces where the participants and facilitator(s) co-develop a set of agreements before engaging in the Circle. These agreements may encompass topics such as note-taking and audio recording, using a talking stick or item, the direction of the Circle, and so on. Sharing Circle practices and traditions are not a one-size-fits-all approach; they are entirely dependent on the community in which they take place and the established agreements that must be followed before entering each specific Circle.



Our Team Sharing Circle In-Practice

We devoted the first portion of the afternoon to establishing our Sharing Circle agreements. This critical aspect of Sharing Circles gave everyone an equal opportunity to voice their perspectives, priorities, and values. Every Sharing Circle will be unique, and that uniqueness is developed through the establishment of agreements.

Round one of our Sharing Circle in-practice asked each team member what drew them to this research project. Round 2 explored the impact that food has on our respective community/family. Everyone spoke freely for the length of time they felt comfortable and shared the experiences and stories they found most resonated with them. This allowed us to better understand the members of the Food as Medicine team.



PRESENTATIONS

On June 3rd, Dr. Krystal Kehoe MacLeod, Dr. Joseph LeBlanc, and Dr. Shannon Freeman shared knowledge with the team on various topics in their areas of expertise.

Dr. Krystal Kehoe MacLeod

Dr. Krystal Kehoe MacLeod led a discussion around team-based fieldwork, sharing insights from her experience and opening the floor to discussion surrounding how this team wishes to move forward and what methods are best for this project.

Dr. Joseph LeBlanc

Dr. Joseph LeBlanc's presentation explored food sovereignty, emphasizing the right to freely participate in healthy, culturally appropriate food systems. LeBlanc distinguished between food security, food justice, and food sovereignty. Central to his message was the importance of Indigenous food systems in reconciliation and decolonization, and the concept of viewing food as a commons rather than as a commodity.

Dr. Shannon Freeman

Dr. Shannon Freeman presented on authentic engagement of older adults in rural, northern, and Indigenous communities. She shared about the value of resident-led initiatives through her experience with the *Nak'azdli Lha'hutit'en Project* and a gardening program in a long-term care facility. She emphasized the importance of meeting residents where they are and addressing their diverse needs with care and respect.

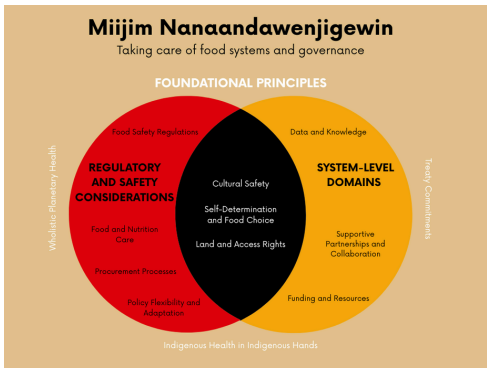
Scan the QR code for more information about the Food as Medicine research project.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Victoria Wicks is facilitating the team's policy analysis for this project, examining how existing policies and literature support or hinder the inclusion of traditional and culturally relevant foods in long-term care. She presented her draft framework on June 3rd, and then we split into breakout groups to discuss and returned with feedback. The key takeaways from the breakout discussions are as follows:

1. Include documents such as UNDRIP, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) to establish the context and background of the policy analysis.
2. Explore how the policy document engages with the domain, rather than simply if it does
3. Identify gaps or silences by asking what perspectives, needs, or issues are missing from the policy.
4. Look for openings within the policy text that allow for negotiation, flexibility, or opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion.

Adjusted framework based on group feedback:



Contact Victoria Wicks at VWicks@bruyere.org for any feedback regarding the framework.

OUR NEXT STEPS

Sharing Circles to take place in the fall:

- Meno Ya Win Health Centre, Sioux Lookout (ON)— **September 2025**
- Millbrook First Nation (NS)— **October 2025**
- Southeast Personal Care Home (MB)—**November 2025**

Other updates:

- Continuing monthly provincial team planning meetings.
- Site visits will take place in Fall 2026, and Olivia will start the REB application for those visits.
- Discuss policy analysis findings collaboratively as a team and then write and publish the policy analysis manuscript. (Victoria)
- Writing and publishing the manuscript on understanding culturally relevant training for Sharing Circles as a research method. (Skyler)
- Ongoing newsletters to share updates and milestones