

‘It’s a Long Way from Here— Health Consumer Experiences of Northern Metis Summary Report—2013

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Why did we do this study?

Until recently, little was known about access to health care services for Metis in northern Manitoba. Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) The Pas Region in particular found that there was a gap in knowledge in this regard. This report was done to understand the experiences of health care consumers in that region. In order to develop helpful programs and policies, information about the access that northern and remote Manitoba Metis communities have to health care is needed. This study is a first look at the issue; it is the result of a team effort by MMF-Health and Wellness Department, MMF The Pas Region, and the University of Manitoba.

What did we want to find out?

The main question we wanted to answer was, “What are the experiences of northern Metis with health services?”

Specifically, we wanted to look at:

- Current relationships with healthcare providers
- Existing networks in the health care system
- Supports and environments required for wellness
- Governance structures needed to support wellness

Who participated in this study?

Metis citizens aged 19+ living in MMF The Pas Region were asked to share their experiences with the health care system. Healthcare providers in the region were interviewed separately and also gave their perspectives.

What did we find?

Metis Citizens

- Metis received more informal than formal support. Often, friends and family help with self-care and healthcare-related travel. More formal supports are needed in the communities
- Metis Locals were felt to give Metis a political voice, helping to enhance Metis culture and community spirit
- Some people reported feeling intimidated when speaking to healthcare providers. For others it was not difficult to speak to providers
- Issues regarding racism were reported
- Perceived differences and actual inequities in health programs and services between Metis and First Nations people have made the impacts of Bill C-31 more complex for Metis communities. Gaining Treaty status provided access to medical and emergency transportation, assistive devices, medications, housing, and other benefits for those who renounced their Metis status and moved to nearby reserves

“This used to be a pretty strong Metis group in the 70’s and 80’s but now they’re all C-31 so the issues are just - it’s a non-issue for them ”

- Availability of healthy and affordable food was a concern for participants in all of the communities
- Participants had mixed feelings about the treatment they received from healthcare providers. Some felt they were treated fairly and equally, while others did not



- Another area where people did not always agree was in the accessibility of healthcare services. Some felt that they had easy access, while others had more difficulty
- Support groups for things like addictions, weight loss, and chronic disease management were needed locally
- Home care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, mental health services, dental therapy, and midwifery were all found to be lacking. As people often wait months to receive the right care These services need to be identified as priorities to allow for increased health and wellness
- Transportation for medical appointments, emergencies, and picking up prescriptions was a problem for many
- The Northern Patient Transportation Program does not provide enough money for travel to medical appointments. There was some confusion about the policies and rules that exist for travel with this program
- Public transportation is largely unavailable
- Distance to services provided a barrier for people because of the cost
- Metis don't have access to emergency and medical travel services offered to First Nations people
- Community safety was also a concern. Power outages, vandalism, theft, arson, heating costs, and the poor conditions of rental/subsidized housing units were identified by providers and consumers as barriers to wellness

Health Care Providers

- Health care providers told us that telehealth is available in two of the communities, but there are not enough people trained to use it

- Healthcare providers generally felt that Metis and First Nations community members were treated fairly and equally although they recognized the discord that exists
- Healthcare providers reported a need for diagnostic machines and a better supply of medications at local nursing stations
- It was suggested that policymakers need a broader understanding of the needs of Metis in northern communities in order to design policies that address their needs and meet their expectations.

Summary

Metis citizens from MMF The Pas Region expressed a need for further information about health care provision in their region. They wanted to find what supports and networks exist as well as what barriers there are for Metis to be healthy in their communities.

Metis health consumers in the region identified many issues that are shared with other rural, remote, and northern residents including access to services, financial impact, and transportation. Participants shared their experiences accessing health services and provided insight into the Metis culture. They shared a number of aspects of their experiences that broadened and deepened our understanding, including the importance of having a political and individual voice, and the impact of Bill C-31 on their families and communities.

The information from this research begins to address the identified knowledge gap, providing information that is current and reliable while privileging Metis voices and experiential knowing.

Where do we go from here?

Our regional Knowledge Networks, made up of MMF and Regional Health Authority members, are working together to make Manitoba Health programs and services better suited for Metis people. Several recommendations came out of this study and will be used to establish priorities for healthcare improvements for Metis in northern Manitoba.

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