

**Improving Nutrition and Health:
The Perspectives of First Nations Youth and Adults**

by

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**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Abstract

The high prevalence of obesity among Canadian First Nations youth and type 2 diabetes among First Nations adults is well documented. However, the perspectives of First Nations people, particularly adolescents, toward improving health and preventing diabetes are not well represented in the research literature. This research explores the perspectives of First Nations youth and adults working with them on the meaning of health as well as their thoughts on opportunities for and barriers to improving health and preventing diabetes. Ten in-depth individual interviews with adults and five focus groups with 26 youth were conducted in Opaskwayak Cree Nation near The Pas, Manitoba in October 2004. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, analytical memos and NVivo 2 software. When talking about what being healthy meant to them, both youth and adults included the four aspects of health depicted in the Medicine Wheel in their descriptions. Participants spoke about the importance of positive adult role models for emotional health, the incorporation of traditional native practices into everyday life for spiritual health, the changes in diet and activity level that could affect physical health, and the significance of making good choices for mental health. Both generations identified diabetes and its complications as a concern in their community. For adults and youth, improving health and preventing diabetes incorporated more than physical health. Other components of emotional, spiritual and mental health were connected to these goals. Opportunities for improving health focused on community and family support. First Nations youth are concerned about factors in their surroundings that present a barrier to health and have constructive and practical ideas for improving health. Inclusion of cultural values in

health promotion activities could encourage participation and foster ownership of these programs.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the youth of Opaskwayak Cree Nation.
You are the future generation.
Soar high.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Dedication	v
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures	x
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	1
<i>The Research Question</i>	7
<i>Overview of the Thesis</i>	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	11
Concepts of Healthful Living	11
<i>Meanings of Health</i>	12
<i>Global Concepts of Health</i>	12
<i>Aboriginal Concepts of Health</i>	13
<i>Weight and Diabetes</i>	15
<i>Supportive and Non-supportive Environments for Healthful Living</i>	21
CHAPTER THREE	28
The Research Process.....	28
<i>The Research Question</i>	28
<i>Methods</i>	28
<i>Design and Analysis</i>	29
<i>Environmental Scan</i>	29
<i>Interviews</i>	30
<i>Sampling Strategy</i>	34
<i>Implementation</i>	36
<i>Environmental Scan</i>	38
<i>Interviews</i>	38
<i>Individual interviews with adults</i>	38
<i>Focus group interviews with youth</i>	39
<i>Describing the Participants</i>	41
<i>Adult participants</i>	41
<i>Youth participants</i>	42
<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	44
<i>Study Strengths and Limitations</i>	45
CHAPTER FOUR	49
Environmental Scan	49
<i>Historical Context of Canadian First Nations</i>	49
<i>Demographics of Canadian First Nations</i>	55
<i>The Research Site: Opaskwayak Cree Nation</i>	57
Discussion	71
CHAPTER FIVE.....	74

Meanings of Health: The Medicine Wheel.....	74
<i>Emotional Health - Parents/Adults as Role Models</i>	78
<i>Spiritual Health - Traditional Practices and Health</i>	80
<i>Physical Health – Diet and Activity</i>	89
<i>Change in Diet/Availability of Foods</i>	89
<i>Change in Physical Activity</i>	92
<i>Technology</i>	94
<i>Mental Health - Making Choices</i>	97
<i>Summary and Discussion</i>	102
CHAPTER SIX	107
Perspectives on Weight and Diabetes	107
<i>Weight Issues</i>	107
<i>Explanations of Diabetes</i>	110
<i>Concepts of Causation</i>	112
<i>Effects of Diabetes</i>	114
<i>Perspectives on Diabetes Prevention</i>	116
<i>Barriers to Diabetes Prevention</i>	116
<i>Suggestions for Diabetes Prevention</i>	117
<i>Summary and Discussion</i>	121
CHAPTER SEVEN	127
Surroundings Important for Health.....	127
<i>Family and Community Support</i>	127
<i>Cultural Values and Health</i>	129
<i>Opportunities for and Barriers to Physical Health</i>	132
<i>Learning about Healthful Choices</i>	139
<i>Summary and Discussion</i>	143
CHAPTER EIGHT	149
Final Summary and Conclusions	149
REFERENCES	159
APPENDICES	180
Appendix A	181
<i>Environmental Scan Questions</i>	181
Appendix B-1	182
<i>Interview Guide for Individual Interviews with Adults</i>	182
Appendix B-2	183
<i>Interview Guide for Focus Group Interviews with Youth</i>	183
Appendix C	185
<i>Record of Research Form</i>	185
Appendix D-1	186
<i>Participant Consent Form</i>	186
Appendix D-2	188
<i>Background Information for Adult Interviews</i>	188
Appendix E-1	189

Information letter to parents written by school administration..... 189

Appendix E-2 190

Sign-in sheet for Focus Group Interviews with Youth 190

Appendix E-3 191

Parent/ Guardian Consent Form for Son or Daughter's Participation..... 191

Appendix F-1 192

Letter of approval from Opaskwayak Cree Nation Chief and Council..... 192

Appendix F-2 193

Letter of approval from Research Ethics Board 193

Appendix F-3 194

Letter to inform the Health and Information Research Committee..... 194

Appendix G 195

Map of Manitoba First Nations Communities..... 195

List of Tables

Table 1	Research Time Line.....	37
Table 2	Demographic Characteristics of Adult Participants.....	42
Table 3	Demographic Characteristics of Youth Participants.....	43
Table 4	Food cost comparison between OCN and Winnipeg stores.....	67

List of Figures

Figure 1	Sketch of physical layout of Opaskwayak Cree Nation	60
Figure 2	Photo of Otineka Mall in OCN.....	61
Figure 3	Photo of Joseph A. Ross School.....	61
Figure 4	Photo of OCN homes near the main town site and school	62
Figure 5	Photo of OCN youth centre	64
Figure 6	Diagram of the Medicine Wheel	103