



Final Report

NHCP Evaluation

Prepared for: Northern Healthy Communities Partnership (NHCP)
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Introduction

The Northern Healthy Communities Partnership (NHCP) is a collaborative partnership that works in northern Saskatchewan to improve health outcomes for individuals and communities. The group, which consists of health professionals, service providers, educators, researchers, and others working in health contexts in the north, aims to support healthier living by cultivating connections and providing tools and resources to its members. The initiative works with organizations and institutions both on- and off-reserve and is led through the work of coordinators, a Core Group, and member-led Action Teams in five areas: Active Communities Team, Babies, Books & Bonding, Building Vibrant Youth, Healthy Eating Team, and Northern Tobacco Strategy.

This report outlines our work in Fall 2019 - Winter 2020 to evaluate the partnership. The remainder of this section describes the purpose of the evaluation and the process used, including data collection through surveys and interviews and analysis of existing program data. The Findings section details the results gathered through the process, with a specific focus on the identified organizational benefits and community outcomes that NHCP contributed to, as well as potential areas for improvement. The final section provides recommendations for NHCP to consider as it continues to meet its mandate.

Evaluation Purpose and Process

Our evaluation process was designed to understand how the Northern Healthy Communities Partnership (NHCP) contributes to organizational and community outcomes and identify opportunities for improving the partnership's effectiveness. Specifically, the project was guided by the following four questions:

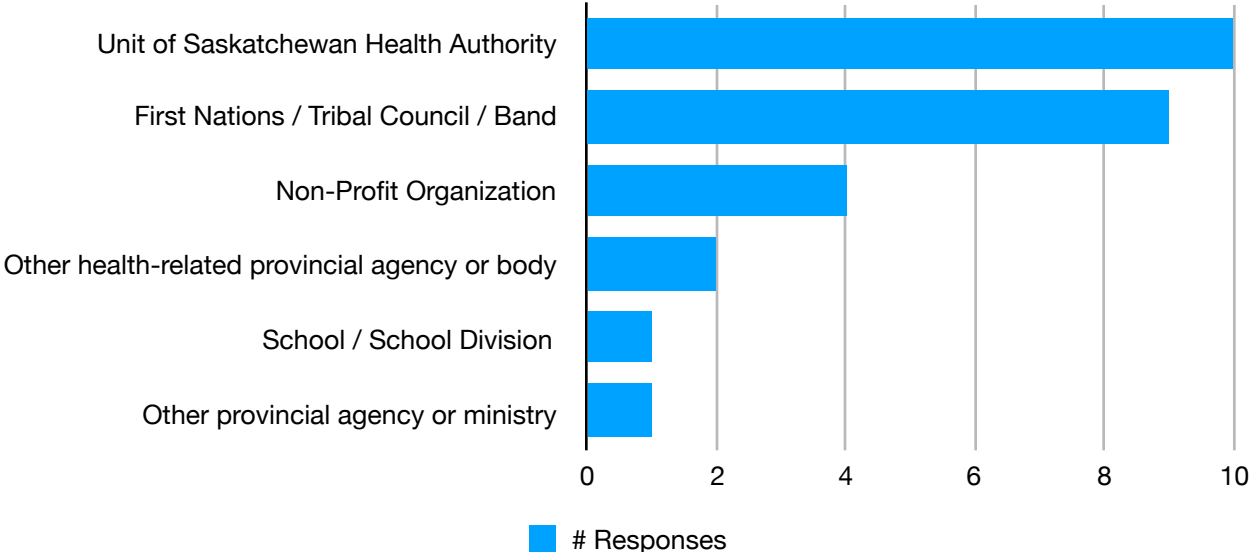
- What value have NHCP partners realized from their participation in the partnership?
- To what degree have NHCP partners developed knowledge and skills, particularly as related to the social determinants of health?
- How effective is the partnership as a collaborative entity?
- What opportunities can be identified to improve how the partnership functions?

To help answer these questions, three key sources of data were utilized. One source was pre-existing survey data previously collected by NHCP from its members, while the other two were collected specifically for this project. The data from these three sources were analyzed in light of the above evaluation questions and are organized by themes and presented in the Findings section of this report.

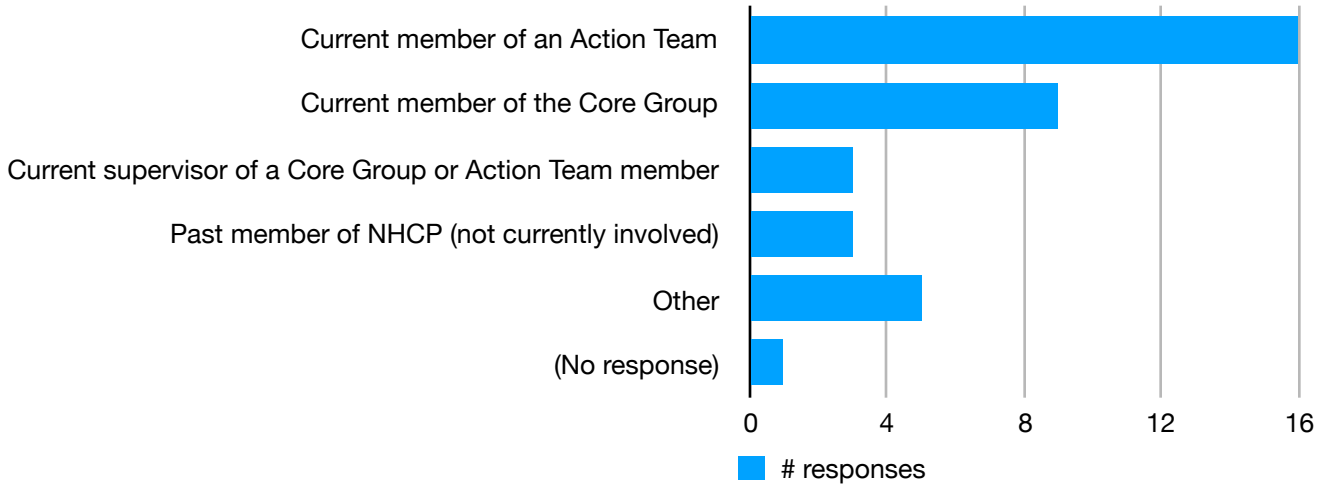
The first source of specifically-collected data was a survey sent out to NHCP members to collect information on their involvement with the partnership, identify what changes they have seen in their organizations and their communities as a result of their participation, and solicit ideas for the future of the partnership. A total of 28 past and current NHCP members provided information through the survey, which was hosted through an online platform (SurveyGizmo) over a two-week period in November 2019. The survey questions were created in consultation with the primary NHCP contact for this project and included items on the use of NHCP resources, benefits realized for organizations and communities as a result of involvement with NHCP, overall satisfaction with the partnership’s work, and open-ended questions to share positive stories and ideas for improving the functioning of NHCP as a partnership.

The following charts and table illustrate who completed the survey. A majority of survey respondents identified as being a current member of the Core Group, an Action Team, or both. In terms of what types of organizations were represented, the two most popular responses were SHA units followed by First Nations, Tribal Councils, and Bands, and non-profit organizations. A plurality of respondents had less than 5 years involvement with NHCP, while the organizations they represented had been involved for longer periods of time (including several since inception). Survey respondents also represented all five Action Teams in similar numbers.

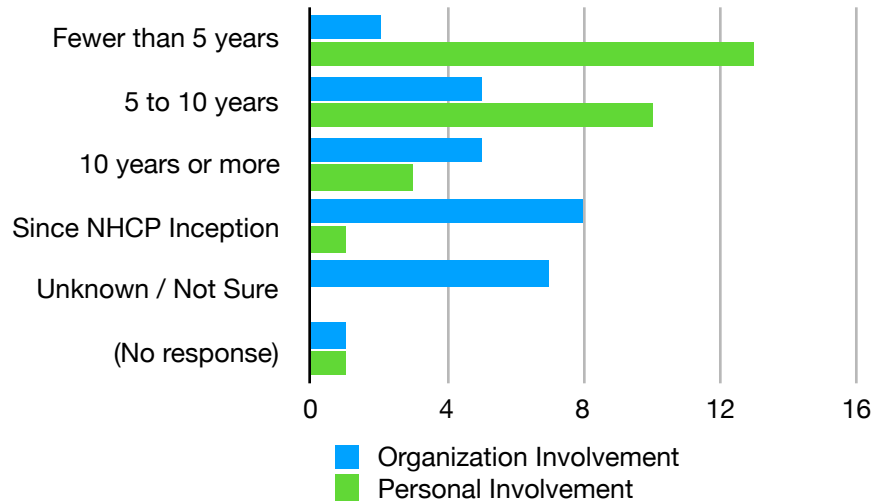
How would you describe your organization?



How are you connected to the NHCP? (Multiple responses allowed)



Length of involvement



Which Action Team or Teams does your organization contribute to? Select all that apply.

Team	Count
Active Communities Team	13
Babies, Books & Bonding	12
Building Vibrant Youth	15
Healthy Eating Team	18
Northern Tobacco Strategy	18

Additionally, interviews were conducted with three NHCP members. The interviews utilized a semi-structured format, with a question guide (Appendix A) that included general questions and probes to ensure that all topics were covered while allowing for the conversations to unfold naturally. Potential interview participants were selected from survey respondents who voluntarily provided their name and contact information, with a focus on including perspectives from different organization types and length of involvement with NHCP. Five individuals were initially contacted, however due to scheduling conflict only three interviews were conducted.

A standard consent process was followed, including a verbal description of the purpose of the project as well as a written consent form (Appendix B) that informed interview participants of how the data will be stored and used for this project. As part of this process, those interviewed were asked for permission to have the conversation recorded for transcription and anonymous sharing of quotes in this report. All interviewees agreed to be recorded and to have their quotes shared.

Findings

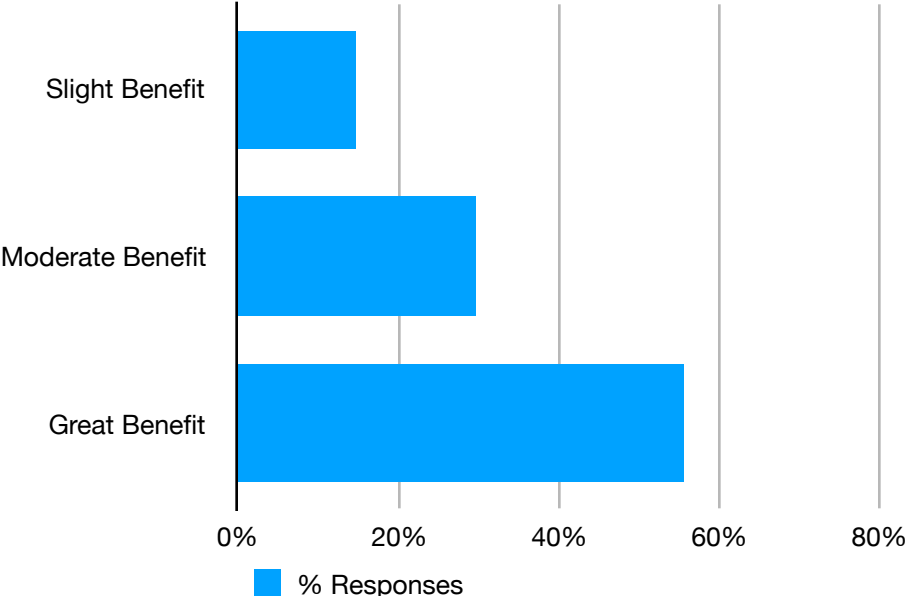
This section aims to answer the question of “What did the evaluation process uncover?”, with data from all three sources (existing organization data, survey results, and interview themes) providing insight on how NHCP is perceived by its members, the key benefits that their organizations and communities realize from participating, and findings related to how the partnership functions. Specific recommendations for NHCP arising from these findings are discussed in the following section, “Recommendations and Conclusions”.

When presenting quotes in this section from the interviews, all personally-identifiable information was removed to protect respondent anonymity. As the survey did not ask permission for the verbatim use of open-ended comments, none of them are included in this report.

Overall Views of NHCP

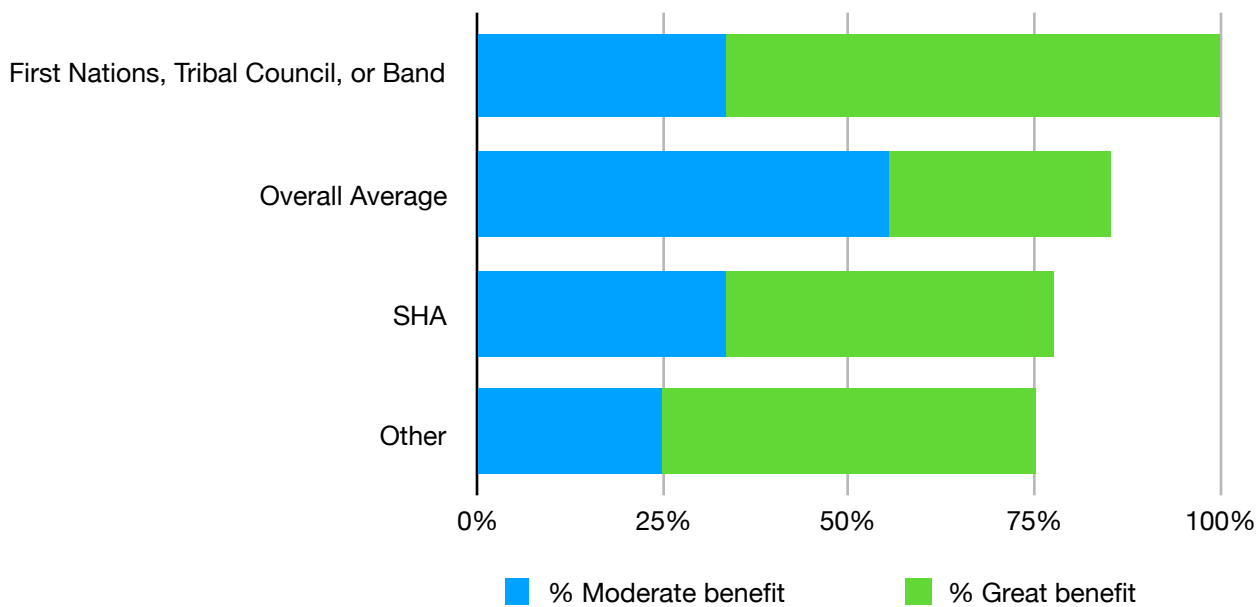
In general, NHCP members felt positively about their involvement with NHCP. When asked how much their organization had benefited from participating in the partnership, slightly over half of survey respondents indicated that they had greatly benefited, with an additional 30% reporting moderate benefits. Notably, the option of “No benefit” was not chosen by any respondent.

Overall, how much has your organization benefited from being a NHCP member?

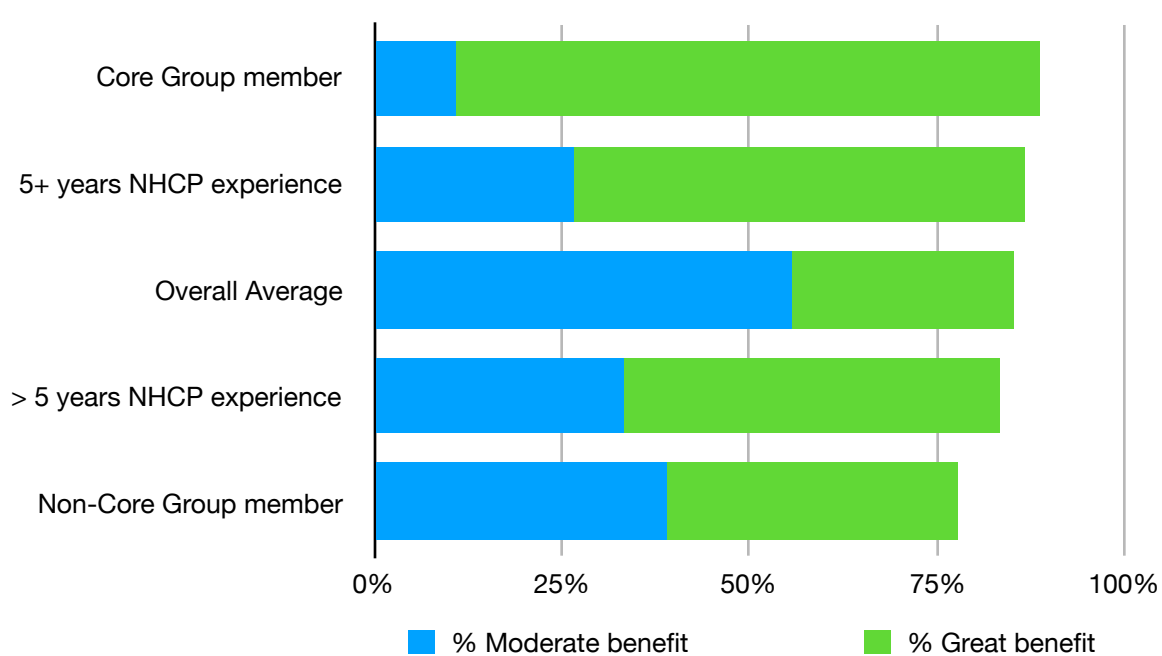


Representatives from First Nations, Tribal Councils, and Bands were more likely than members from other organization types to rate NHCP highly in terms of benefits: in contrast, there were only slight differences in this answer for Core Group and non-Core Group members, and those with differing years of experience with NHCP¹.

Overall Benefit (by organization type)

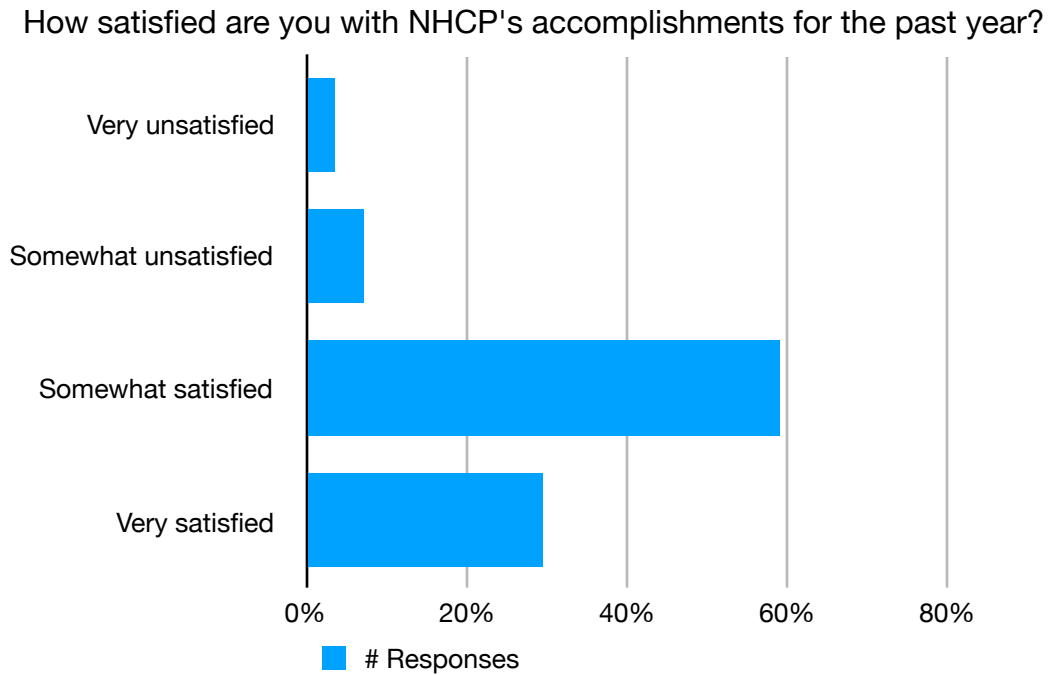


Overall Benefit (by role and experience with NHCP)



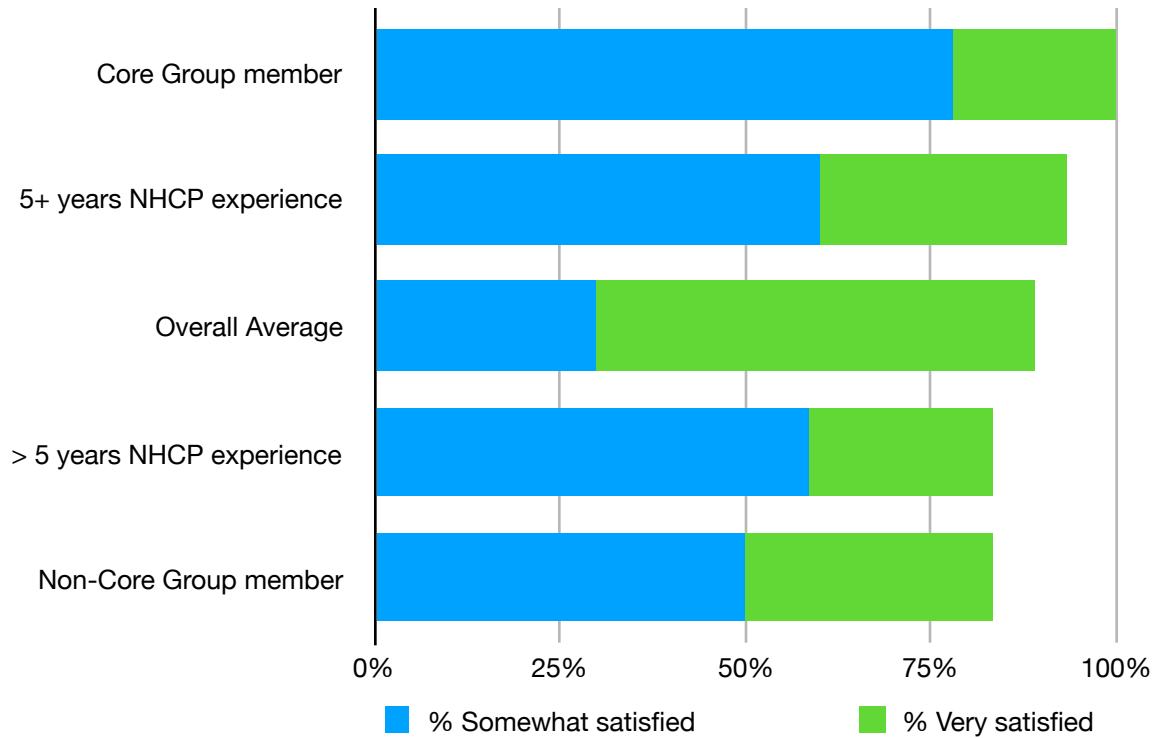
¹ We chose not to run statistical tests to determine whether these differences were statistically significant, as the small sample size would create unreliable results.

Survey respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with NHCP’s accomplishments in the past year. Nearly 60% were somewhat satisfied in this respect, with an additional 30% expressing high satisfaction.

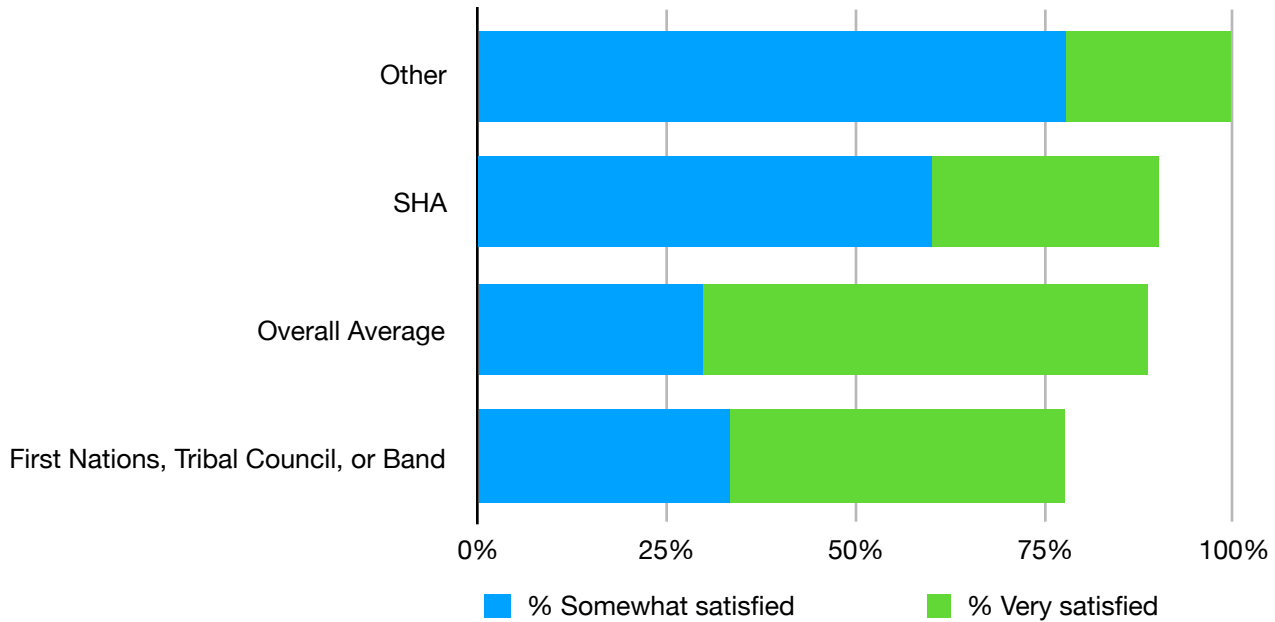


Exploring satisfaction ratings by role and experience with NHCP yielded similar results to the overall benefits question, with Core Group members and those with 5 or more years of experience with NHCP more likely to express satisfaction. Interestingly, although representatives from First Nations, Tribal Councils, and Bands had the highest ratings for overall benefits, they were less likely to express high levels of satisfaction with the NHCP’s recent accomplishments. Unfortunately, there were no clear indications from the open-ended comments in the survey or the interviews to explain this discrepancy.

Satisfaction with accomplishments in past year (by role and experience with NHCP)



Satisfaction with accomplishments in past year (by organization type)



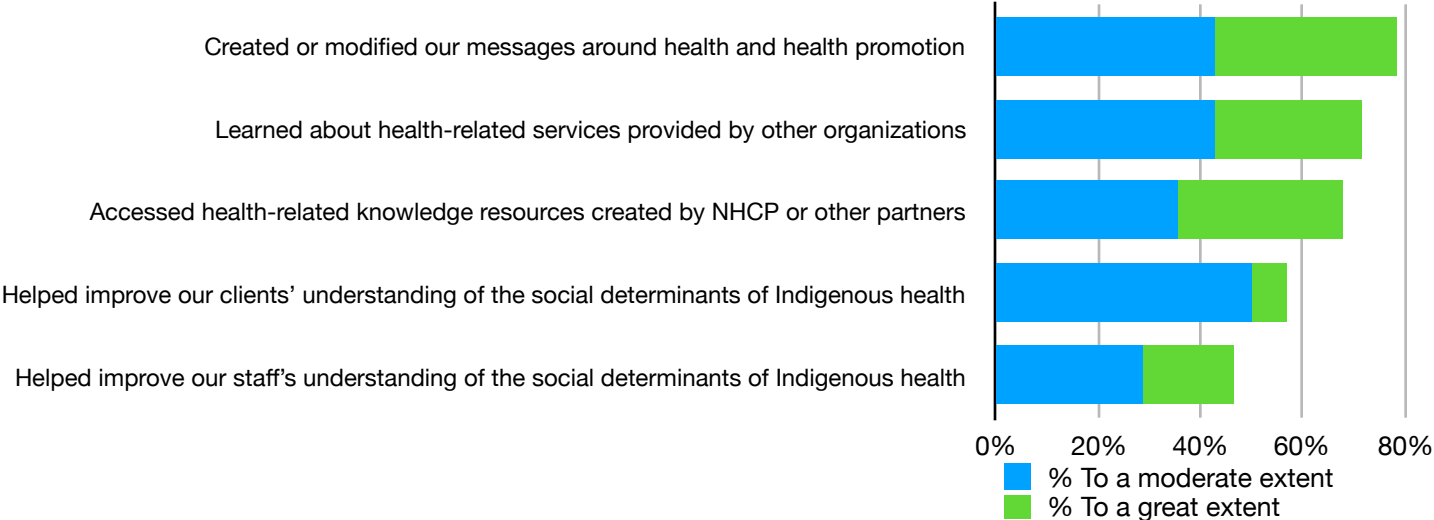
Benefits

In order to understand the value that NHCP provides, the survey and interviews included specific questions related to the benefits of participating in NHCP for members, their organizations, and the communities that they serve. Survey respondents were presented with a list of potential benefits for both their organizations and the communities that they served and asked to indicate the extent to which these benefits had been realized in the past year. Additional questions focused on communications tools and resources provided by NHCP.

Communications Tools and Resources

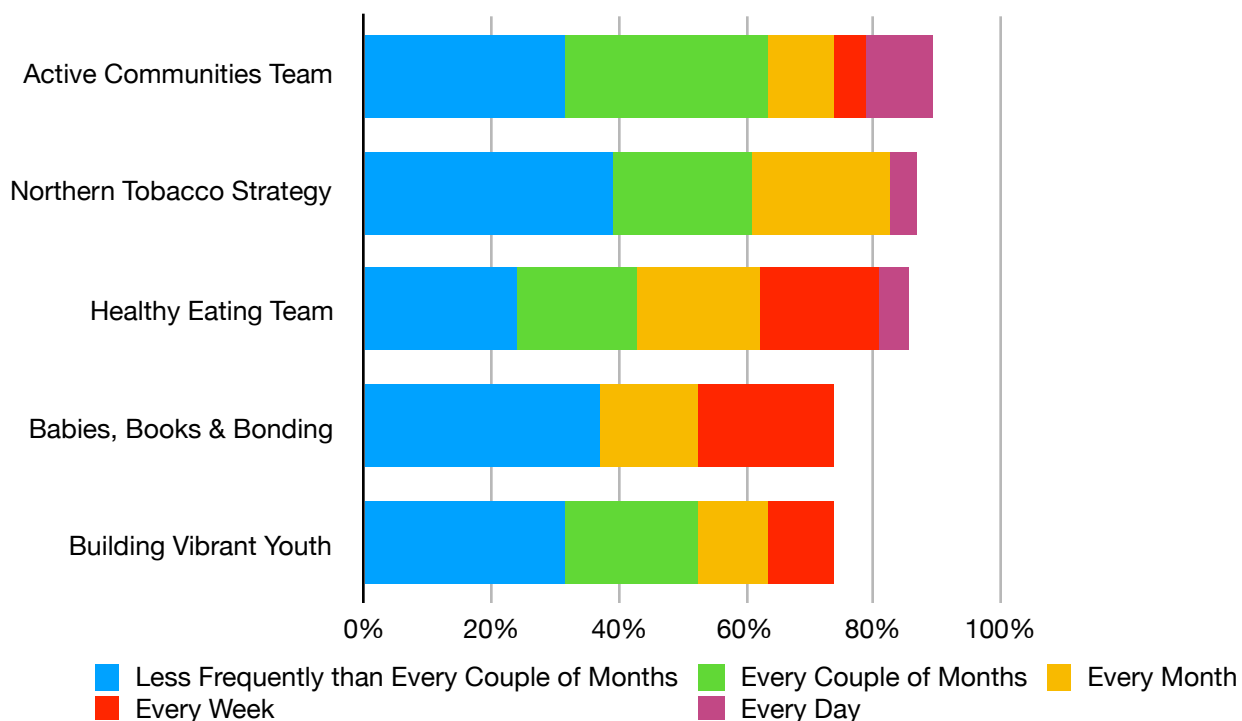
When looking at organizational benefits, the most highly-rated positive outcomes clustered around creating and modifying health messaging, learning about health-related services provided by other organizations, and accessing knowledge resources.

During the past year, as a result of participating in NHCP, my **organization** ...



On aggregate, survey respondents cited using resources produced by all five Action Teams on a regular basis (every week or more frequently): information created by the Active Communities Team, Northern Tobacco Strategy, and Healthy Eating Team were used by some on a daily basis.

How often does your organization or team use resources from NHCP Action Teams?

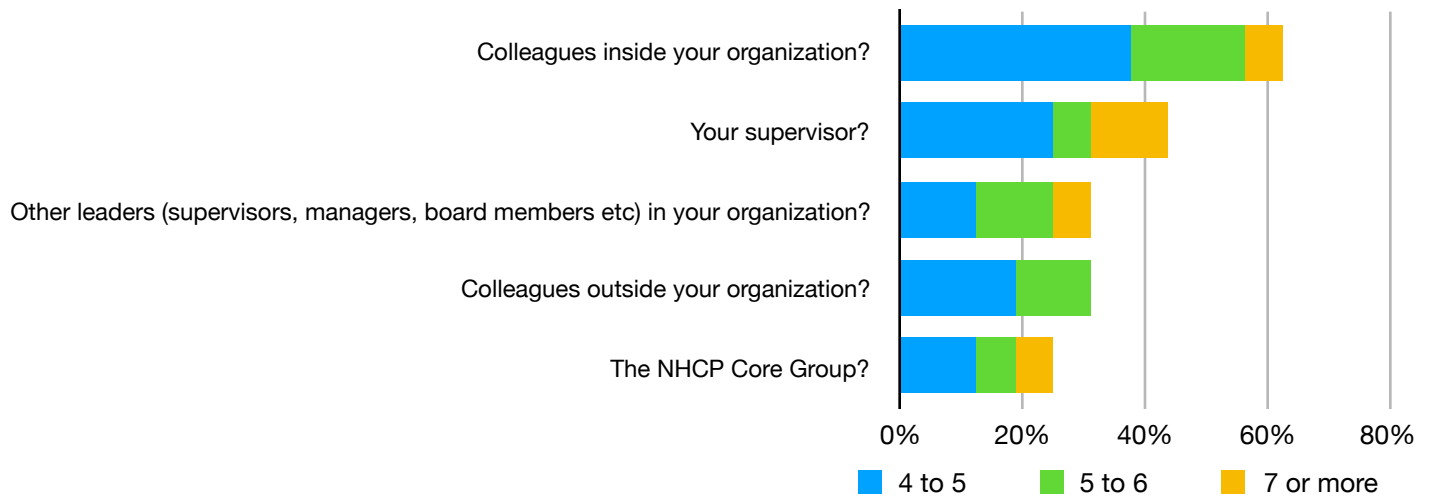


Interview participants and survey respondents likewise spoke to the importance of being able to access these resources for their programs and organizations: *"Like I phone [staff person] and I just [say] 'I need this. I'm out of pamphlets or this resource'. And [staff person] sends it promptly like if someone is coming or if I'm going to [town], then I'll pick them up. So my program has benefited greatly from it."* [interview participant]

Additional comments spoke to the use of such resources in the community and the ability for NHCP members to easily share them with other practitioners and programs: *"People are so busy and because we're able to provide them [resources], they're excited for that ... we have so much high turnover in our nursing staff across the north. If they're all of a sudden expected to just to teach ... classes, they might never have done that before. So they're really thankful to have these resources at their hands."* [interview participant]

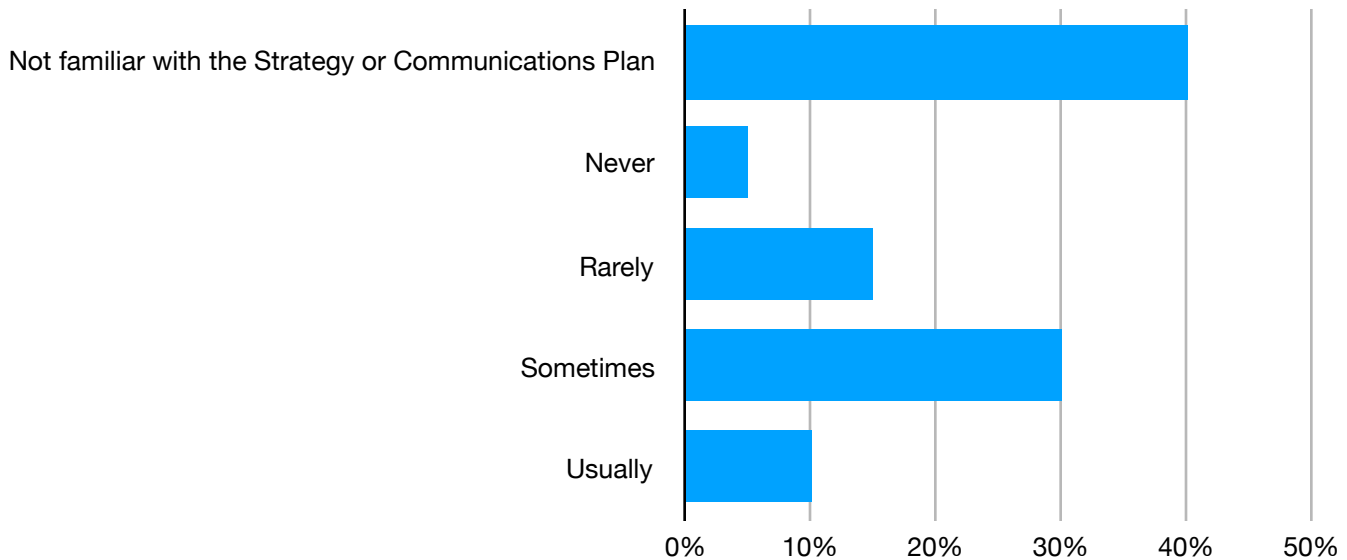
Survey respondents were also asked about how often they shared information about the NHCP work both within their organization and with external colleagues. For Action Team members, colleagues within the respondent’s own organization, as well as their supervisor, were popular recipients of this information, in line with results from the 2017 Action Team Survey survey conducted by NHCP.

In the past year, how many times have you shared information about your NHCP Action Team work with ...



Through these resources and communications plans and strategies, NHCP can also contribute to ensuring standardized messaging around health promotion topics: as expressed by one interview participant, *“We’ve got a lot of different people with the same goal and we’re able to spread the same kind of work across the board so it’s standard, we’re all saying the same thing”*. In contrast to this statement, however, survey respondents indicated that they did not always use key messages from the NHCP Communications Strategy or a project communications plan on a regular basis. Specifically, only 40% of survey respondents used these key messages “sometimes” or “usually”, while an additional 40% indicated that they were not familiar with these documents. This distribution of results is again similar to what was found through the 2017 Action Team Survey.

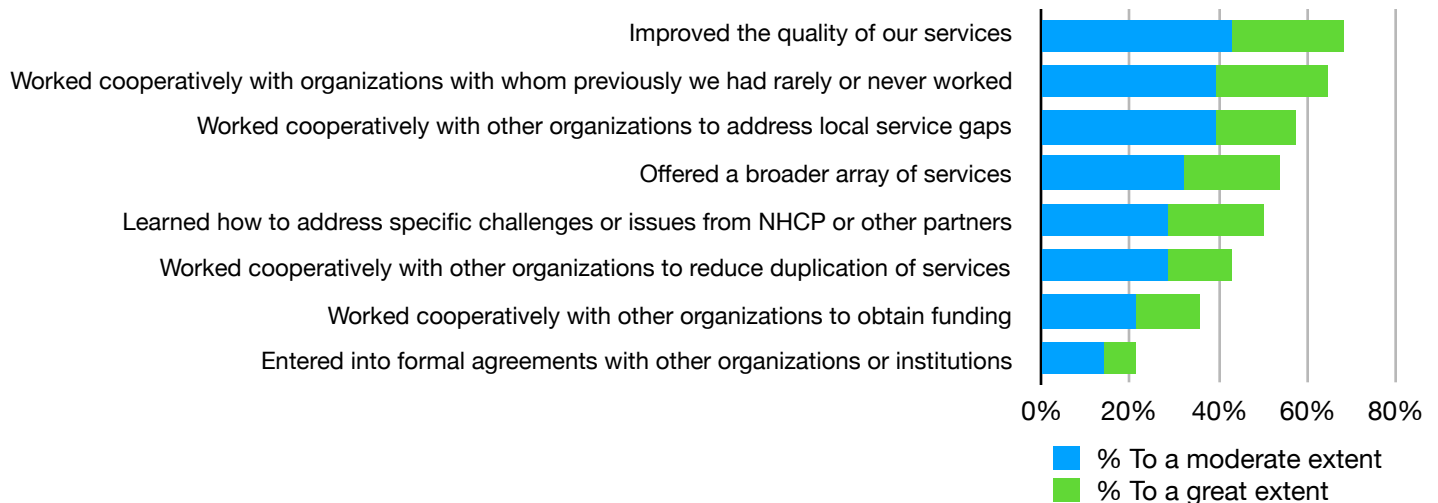
When talking about your work with NHCP with your supervisor or manager, how often do you use key messages from the NHCP Communication Strategy or a NHCP project communication plan?



Other Organizational Benefits

Additional benefits for organizations and staff were also highlighted through the survey and interviews, including improvements to the quality and breadth of services and the opportunity to work cooperatively with other organizations, including new partners. As one interview participant noted, “[Many of us are] solo practitioners, so there’s just one of us doing our job. And so when we get to work together, then we can share that workload. But it’s all for the same purpose. We all have the same goal in mind, but it’s not all on just any one of us”.

During the past year, as a result of participating in NHCP, my **organization** ...



Survey comments and insights from the interviews also raised the importance of professional development offered by NHCP, such as the sessions on motivational interviewing and “train the trainer” for specific topics.

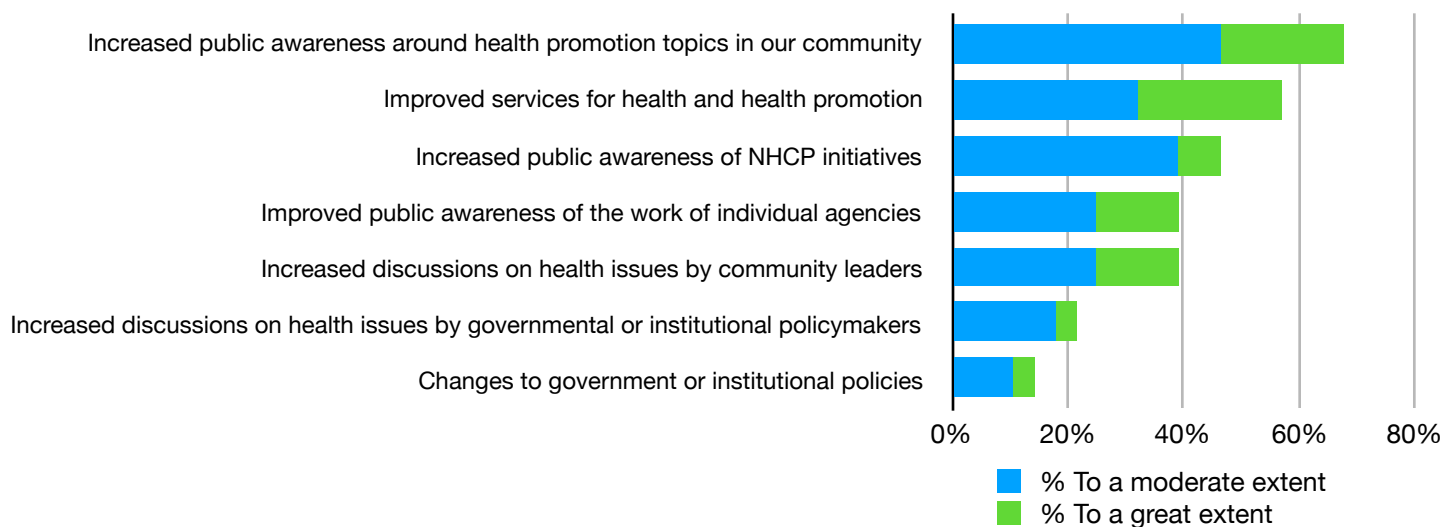
An additional finding that arose from the qualitative data was the importance of NHCP creating and fostering connections between individuals at different organizations and in different communities. These connections were helpful for sharing the workload (as expressed in the above quote), accessing resources and assistance, and also for contributing to broader outcomes.

Community Benefits

“Health care workers specifically, they kind of are aware of NHCP, whereas the community members themselves might not really. They might not know that some workshop is getting put on by NHCP, but they just know that workshops happened or whatever the concept is. But yeah, I think that the communities are seeing the benefits”
[interview participant]

In terms of benefits for their communities, two-thirds of survey respondents reported that public awareness around health promotion had increased to a moderate or a great extent as a result of NHCP’s work. This result is in line with those presented earlier in this section related to Communications Tools and Resources, specifically the qualitative insights suggesting that NHCP members were seeing these resources being used within their communities.

What are some accomplishments that you have seen in the **community** as a result of NHCP?



Comments in the survey also spoke to tangible programs and initiatives in the community, such as the organization of lacrosse clinics and implementation of hydration stations. Although “changes to governmental or institutional policies” received the lowest ranking in the survey, some respondents did share stories of policy implementation that came about as a result of NHCP’s work, including contribution to a national community of practice with federal government representation.

Finally, one benefit mentioned by a few respondents was capacity-building at the community level to enable more meaningful engagement and partnership with communities: *“It’s not only information or participation ... we can provide [the community with] some tools and they are the one who can decide what they can do about it and become more active ... [one] benefit that I can see down the road when we are more successful in engagement in this kind of real partnership with communities when they started to tell us what they really want.”* [interview participant]

Structure and Functioning

To answer the final evaluation question on potential areas for improvement, both survey respondents and interview participants were asked to provide feedback on what they would change or improve in how the partnership was structured and functioned. Some individuals did not have anything negative to share, such as one of the interview participants: *“I don’t really see any issues. I like how it’s structured, I like how it’s ran. They have a very good variety of different professionals, right from nurses to teachers to doctors to program coordinators ... So I think it’s represented well and I like how it is.”*

Other participants spoke to external factors that are generally outside of NHCP’s control, particularly the issue of capacity and funding: *“The challenge that we have ... is the capacity. So we have the limited capacity, in terms of manpower and the turnover is high. We’ve tried to make a difference ... on what we have and our capacity. We can’t do everything ... So we limit our focus to something that we are doing very well.”* [interview participant] Survey respondents also spoke to this concern, including the need for sustainable funding for both projects and staff positions to support ongoing collaborative work.

A related internal issue raised by multiple respondents relates to the degree of participation and engagement by different NHCP members. While recognizing the high demands on NHCP members’ time, these participants noted the lack of regular participation led to frustration and hindered work: *“It’s always the same people. And it’s just, it gets very frustrating when we have certain organizations that routinely don’t come to the table or, and then they don’t know what’s going on.”* [interview participant] In particular, several individuals noted that having more consistent involvement by organizational leaders and managers would be beneficial, so that they would understand the benefits of NHCP’s work and encourage staff involvement in the partnership.

Recommendations and Conclusions

This section builds on the insights described under Findings to answer the question of “Now what should NHCP do in response?”. Based on the overall positive sentiments expressed in the surveys and interviews, we do not provide any recommendations for major change to how the partnership is structured or facilitated. Rather, the focus of the recommendations is on supporting regular engagement, identifying opportunities for further impact, and engaging in ongoing learning and evaluation.

Support Regular Engagement

In order for collaborative initiatives and partnerships to be successful, it is important for their members to be continually engaged in the process. While the main purpose of regular and ongoing involvement is connected to moving specific projects forward, it also contributes to building the informal connections that was identified as a benefit by this evaluation process. However, despite these two positive outcomes that come from regular engagement, such participation often ends up being “side of the desk” work for many members that can be pre-empted by other projects and needs.

While recognizing that anyone’s engagement will naturally shift over time in response to work demands and changes in one’s professional and personal life, NHCP should identify and implement means to support regular engagement, including reducing or eliminating barriers to participation. One area that came up through this evaluation process was that management for some organizations were not always aware of the benefits of participating in NHCP, seeing mostly the costs in terms of staff time for contributing. Engaging with these organizational leaders, such as by connecting with them directly or with the help of “champions” (leaders at other organizations who are connected to NHCP and can speak to the benefits), can help demonstrate how supporting ongoing involvement creates positive outcomes for their staff, their organization, and the communities that they serve.

An additional barrier to engagement that was identified in the data relates to how meetings are held. To ensure that these events are an effective use of time, NHCP should review what items are necessary to present and discuss in-depth and what can be sent in advance to review with a small window at the meeting itself for questions. NHCP should also engage with its members specifically around what they see as the purpose of the meetings and how those aims can be incorporated into regular practice.

Identify Opportunities for Further Impact

A partnership such as NHCP creates positive outcomes on several different levels, including for its individual members, the organizations sending those members, and the communities those organizations serve. While this evaluation process found evidence to support that NHCP has contributed to change across multiple levels, such impact is usually easiest to identify at the more immediate levels of staff members and organizations, as well as the implementation of specific community programs and services. NHCP has also contributed to policy change and conversations with leaders and policymakers both within and outside of Saskatchewan: at the same time, some respondents expressed an interest in expanding these efforts to create broader change in support of healthy living for northern communities.

In this respect, NHCP should identify when and how to collaborate with other partnerships and initiatives focused on the north to bring in the perspective of health promotion, and pursue such opportunities where appropriate. Additionally, the partnership should continue its work advocating with community organizations and institutions, local leadership, and government decision-makers for them to implement policies and practices in line with health promotion approaches, including the social determinants of Indigenous health.

Engage in Ongoing Learning and Evaluation

In order for a partnership like NHCP to continue being relevant to its members and their communities, it must be capable of understanding what is happening in local contexts, incorporating best and effective practices, and evaluating the impact of its work. Discrete evaluations, such as this work on the partnership as a whole or an evaluation of a specific action team or initiative, can provide useful information to funders and partners about the outcomes that NHCP contributes to and help identify opportunities for improving practice. As well, through ongoing engagement and sense-making with its members and other community partners, the partnership can help identify trends and challenges in the communities where NHCP is active, which can inform the creation of new initiatives and the modification of existing ones to better meet local needs.

One limitation of this specific evaluation process is that the data was collected primarily from NHCP members or those closely engaged with NHCP. Future evaluation work should focus on engaging more with external partners and stakeholders, including organizations that are not NHCP members as well as local leaders and community members. While some of these stakeholders may not be familiar with NHCP's work itself, they can speak to the broader outcomes that NHCP's work has contributed to and thus help make the case for both internal and external partners.

Final Conclusions

As a multi-stakeholder partnership, NHCP has demonstrated its ability to support organizations and communities throughout northern Saskatchewan. Returning to the key evaluation questions, this evaluation process has found that NHCP members have realized value from their participation, including the ability to access knowledge and resources, build connections with other practitioners, and contribute to positive outcomes for both their organizations and the communities that they serve. Those who participated in this process expressed overall satisfaction with NHCP's work, while also identifying some opportunities for incremental improvement.

At the time of completing this report, the world is struggling to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the importance of health promotion and prevention efforts are being recognized on a worldwide scale, a trend that will hopefully continue after the current situation has passed. NHCP's role in supporting health promotion work in northern Saskatchewan continues to be vital, and our hope is that this evaluation report will prove useful for enabling the partnership to continue fulfilling its mandate.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

- What is your current role at <organization>?
- How are you connected to NHCP?
 - [Prompt] Current and historic connections
 - [Prompt] Involvement with Core Group and Action Teams
- From your perspective, what is NHCP's primary purpose?
- What are some of the key benefits that you and your organization have seen from participating in NHCP?
 - [Prompt] Resources specific to an area of practice or Action Team
 - [Prompt] General resources (e.g. Communications)
 - [Prompt] Skills development for organization staff
 - [Prompt] Knowledge development for organization staff, particularly around social determinants of health
 - [Prompt] Connections with other individuals and organizations working in this area
- What are some of the key benefits that your community has seen as a result of NHCP's work?
 - [Prompt] Public awareness around health promotion
 - [Prompt] Changes to services offered by non-NHCP entities
 - [Prompt] Engagement with community / governmental leaders and policymakers
- What stands out for you as an important accomplishment of NHCP?
- Earlier in the interview, you mentioned that NHCP's primary purpose is [purpose]. To what extent has NHCP been successful at meeting this purpose?
- What, if anything, would you change about NHCP to make it more effective?
 - [Prompt] Increasing involvement of staff and team members
 - [Prompt] Aligning NHCP's work more closely with partner organizations' work and mandate
- What would you like to see happen more generally to improve health outcomes in northern Saskatchewan?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Description of Evaluation Project and Process

Strong Roots Consulting is working with Northern Healthy Communities Partnership (NHCP) to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership. As a current or past NHCP member, or the supervisor of an individual who is involved with NHCP, we are interested in hearing your perspective to learn more about the value that NHCP provides to your organization and the communities you serve, as well as recommendations to help strengthen the partnership.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed on these topics by Brian Hoessler. The conversation will take place by phone, Skype, or Zoom. The session will be audio-recorded with your permission; written notes may also be taken.

Data Handling and Confidentiality

Strong Roots Consulting follows specific procedures to maintain confidentiality and data security so that interview participants feel comfortable in sharing their opinions. If you agree to have the interview audio-recorded, the audio files will be transcribed through a third-party service and then deleted. The transcripts will be stored securely by Strong Roots Consulting and deleted no later than one year after the completion of this project.

Findings from this process will be combined across participants and presented as general themes. No potentially-identifiable information will be included in reports to NHCP. If you provide permission for use of quotes, such quotes will have any potentially-identifiable information removed. You are free to not answer any question, and can withdraw consent to participate at any time with no repercussions.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this project, please contact:

- Brian Hoessler, Strong Roots Consulting, brian@strongrootsconsulting.ca, 306-715-7670
- Amanda Frain, Saskatchewan Health Authority & Athabasca Health Authority, Amanda.Frain@saskhealthauthority.ca, 306-425-8520
- Kevin Mageto, Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority, kmageto@nitha.com, 306-953-5023

I give permission for this interview to be audio-recorded: YES NO

I give permission to share my quotes from this interview: YES NO

By signing below, I indicate that I have read this form and agree to participate in this interview.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Interviewer