natawihowin First Nations and *mamawiikikayaahk* Métis Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (Saskatchewan NEIHR)

2021-22 ANNUAL REPORT

"I might have not even continued in academia to be honest, if the NEIHR didn't exist... it's been only the people in the NEIHR who have kept up with me and kept me going and followed up with me and encouraged me. I didn't get that from a single colleague in my college or anyone else on campus." –Anonymous researcher's comment from interview [p. 19]

nātawihowin* and *mamawiikikayaahk
Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (Saskatchewan NEIHR)

CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

Saskatchewan Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (SK-NEIHR)
August 2022

Report presented by

natawihowin First Nations and *mamawiikikayaahk* Métis Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (Saskatchewan NEIHR, skneihr.ca)

This report was prepared in August of 2022. It covers Year Two: April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022

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Table of Contents

Introduction to the Saskatchewan NEIHR 2
What is the SK-NEIHR Network? 2
Guiding Principles, Intent, and Objectives 2
What's in this Report? 3
Activity in the Past Year – What Have We Done? 3
The Bigger Picture – Activities 4
Year Two Activities Breakdown 7
Who are we reaching? Social Media Statistics in Year Two 9
What Outcomes Are We Seeing Through Years One and Two? 11
Overall Survey Results 12
Researchers – What's Changed (Survey)? 14
What's Changed (Overall Results from Interviews)? 16
Grants and Projects – Researchers Involved with the SK-NEIHR 17
Additional Outcomes Identified by Interviewees 18
Personal and Professional Growth 18
Project Generation (Connections and Relationships) 20
Increased Confidence & Validation 21
Community-Based Outcomes 22
Racism in Healthcare Webinar Survey Results 23
Building Research Together Webinar Survey Results 25
Feedback – What Worked Well and What Needs Improvement in the SK-NEIHR (Interviews)? 27
What Worked Well about the SK-NEIHR? 27
Internal and External Communication 28
Staff Support (SK-NEIHR Strength) 28
Access to Resources 29
Selecting Future Research Projects 30
Suggested Ways to Improve the SK-NEIHR 30
The Role of the SK-NEIHR in Saskatchewan (Interviews) 31
Advocating for Institutional Change (SK-NEIHR Role) 32
Conclusion: Looking forward to Year Three and Planning for Renewal 33

Introduction to the Saskatchewan NEIHR

What is the SK-NEIHR Network?

The Saskatchewan's NEIHR Network (SK-NEIHR, skneihr.ca), is a Saskatchewan-based consortium of First Nations, Métis, and allied individuals, organizations, communities, and institutions with long-established leadership and working relationships in Indigenous health research, training, and knowledge mobilization. SK-NEIHR serves all of Saskatchewan, which is inclusive of Treaties 2,4,5,6,8 and 10, and is the traditional territory of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, and the target population is First Nations and Métis peoples living in Saskatchewan.

Partway through Year Two, we made the decision to transition to the Cree and Michif names that we were gifted for the First Nations and Métis networks within the SK-NEIHR, such that it is now known as the *nā tawihowin* and *mamawiikikayaahk* Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (SK-NEIHR).

This Network has grown out of the opinions, ideas, and leadership of Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis governments, communities, and other key stakeholders. It facilitates a focused, community-driven approach, so health research dollars flow more effectively into communities, with the SK-NEIHR operating as a matchmaker between communities, researchers, and funding opportunities. At the core of this Network is the foundational belief that it belongs to the First Nations and Métis Peoples of Saskatchewan and can grow and evolve based on what they identify as community needs and priorities. Métis and First Nations people across Saskatchewan are strong leaders in creating positive changes in healthcare delivery and in addressing health and social disparities experienced by their communities. We believe health research is central to their efforts.

Guiding Principles, Intent, and Objectives

Our **vision** is for all First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan to experience optimal health and wellness across their lifespans.

Our consortium represents a Saskatchewan Métis and First Nations NEIHR grounded in our shared values and priorities, inclusive of remote, rural, urban and reserve populations. From our respective traditional knowledge and cultural foundations, First Nations and Métis Peoples are best situated to lead research, training, and knowledge mobilization involving our communities. When ethical partnerships are formed with postsecondary researchers, our knowledge base is enhanced to include a broad spectrum of colonial research methodologies and analytic tools. Given the available avenues that Indigenous Peoples have to mobilize positive change for our people, forming research, training, and knowledge mobilization partnerships between our people and postsecondary researchers and students is a pragmatic strategy to support the transformative changes that we strive for.

The relationship of First Nations and Métis Peoples to this land, and the relationship of our traditional territories to the resilience and spirit of our people, is from where our future is cultivated. We come together in the spirit of working for our young families, for their futures, and the futures of seven generations to come—for all our relations. The Saskatchewan NEIHR network is led by Indigenous

researchers, and non-Indigenous allies, in partnership with Indigenous stakeholders in Saskatchewan. For descriptions of the research leadership, please visit our website, **skneihr.ca**.

What's in this Report?

Included in this report are:

- **A description of activities in Year Two**
- **Information about how our activities were tracked and mapped to evaluation outcomes**
- **Statistics on social media reach**
- **Analysis of findings from our first Annual Survey, covering Years One and Two**
- **Analysis of findings from interviews with research leadership, covering the SK-NEIHR's activities in the first two years**
- **A conclusion, looking forward to Year Three and planning for renewal**

Activity in the Past Year – What Have We Done?

As with our first year, we've been busy in our second year. In 2021-22 we continued to build on the foundational work we did in 2020-21 and started to use that momentum to reach out externally.

Webinars: When our NEIHR launched, early in the COVID-19 pandemic, we focused on building awareness and providing places to interact through webinars and large online meetings. As the COVID-19 pandemic entered its second year, we found that the appetite for webinars had lessened, so we offered fewer in Year Two. We started the year with a webinar on *Racism in Healthcare* on April 15, focusing on systems change, which was a large undertaking. This webinar was evaluated, and we have included detail on the evaluation's findings below. In the fall of 2021, we focused on building research partnerships and grant writing, with a webinar on *Building Research Together*, with information on applying for our 2021 Community Partnership Grants, and a webinar on *Grant Budget Development*, with information on allowable research expenses. The Building Research Together webinar was evaluated, and results of this evaluation are included below. All our webinars are archived on our website, skneihr.ca.

Community Partnership Grants: In the fall of 2021, we put out our Call for Proposals for our third round of Community Partnership Grants—seed funding meant to support researchers and community stakeholders, to develop grant applications to the Tri-Councils and other major research funders, on Indigenous health research. These are planning and development funds, intended to support research

proposal development, not funding to undertake research projects. Applicants are meant to use funds to develop grant applications that will be submitted to major funders in 2022.

In December 2021, a committee of peer reviewers met to review applications, awarding $35,000 in funding to three community partners, and one researcher at the University of Saskatchewan (three grants of $10K, and one of $5K). Projects funded included ones on traditional food medicines, neurodiversity in Indigenous communities, Indigenous language revitalization, and traditional games played by First Nations people. Details of all our funded projects can be found on our website.

Member Database: We also developed a public member database for our website, searchable by research area, and encouraged people to register as members when doing the Annual Survey. This database is online at **skneihr-database.ca**. The goal of this database is to facilitate research relationships in Indigenous health, wellness, and community-based research. People can contact members directly, or SK-NEIHR staff can help make connections if requested.

National Gathering of Graduate Students: In the final part of Year Two, we also began to focus on co-hosting the National Gathering of Graduate Students, in partnership with the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre. We set up a National Gathering organizing committee, with members from each of the nine NEIHRs. With this committee's support, staff from both the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre and the Saskatchewan NEIHR starting planning to host an in-person Gathering in June 2022, at Dakota Dunes Resort, on Whitecap Dakota First Nation, a short distance south of the city of Saskatoon. Planning this Gathering was a major focus of the end of Year Two, and entering Year Three, along with hiring and onboarding new staff after some staff turnover. As will be covered in our Year Three report, NGGS was very successful, with 120 attendees from across Canada enjoying four days together.

The Bigger Picture – Activities

One of the main purposes of the SK-NEIHR is to be a connector between health researchers, community partners, governments, and individuals. This is largely put into practice through meetings, which are one of the things we regularly track using the Kumu.io mapping software. **For the past two years (January 2020 - March 2022), we have been documenting all of our external meetings and mapping them onto the outcomes we believe they are working towards (external meetings are with people outside the SK-NEIHR faculty and staff, such as other academics, community partners and governments).** For easy access to this map, we strongly recommend that you view a short interactive presentation by clicking **here**.

The map is broken up into four main groupings of 'outcomes', including:

- **Network outcomes** (**black** and **grey**) – outcomes that the SK-NEIHR can directly influence and facilitate (e.g., making a research connection)
- **Community-based outcomes** (**red**) – outcomes that the SK-NEIHR is trying to facilitate in First Nations and Métis communities in Saskatchewan through our activities

- **Researcher, Student, & Professional outcomes** (**orange** and **yellow**) – outcomes aimed at health researchers, Indigenous students, and healthcare professionals (e.g., anti-racism training)

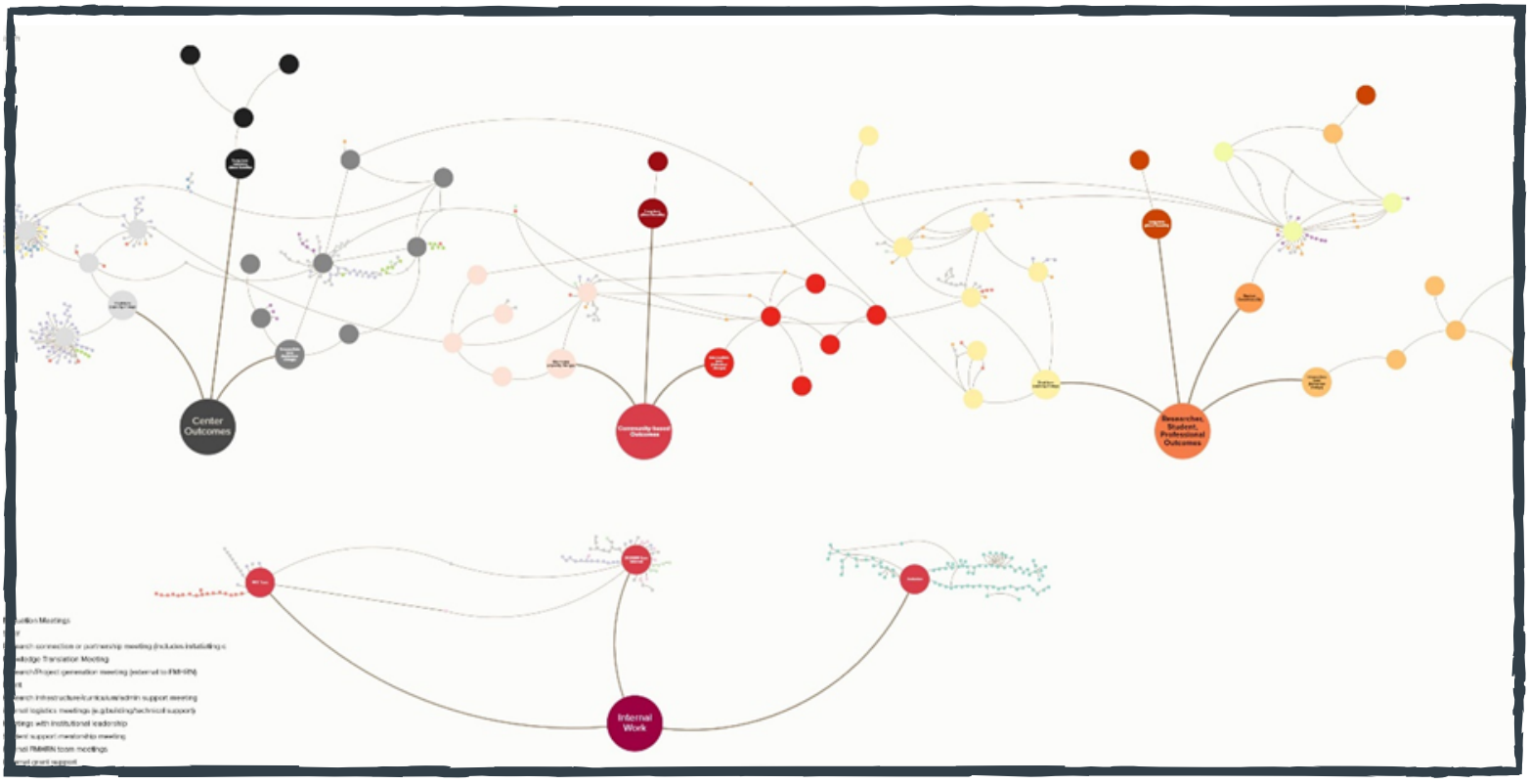
- **Internal work** (**dark red**, bottom) – logistics meetings, evaluation efforts, and our partnership with the NEIHR National Coordinating Center (NCC)

These outcomes represent what we intend to achieve through the SK-NEIHR. They are present in this map because they are our main way of understanding how our activities and meetings are working towards our aspirations.

Finally, outcomes are further categorized by short (capacity changes), intermediate (behavioural changes), and long-term (direct benefits) groupings to create manageable "steps" to achieving our long-term objectives. Each of the smaller circles in this map represents a single meeting or event and is connected to one or more of these outcomes. If there was more than one meeting with the same group, they are connected to one another and form a "meeting chain."

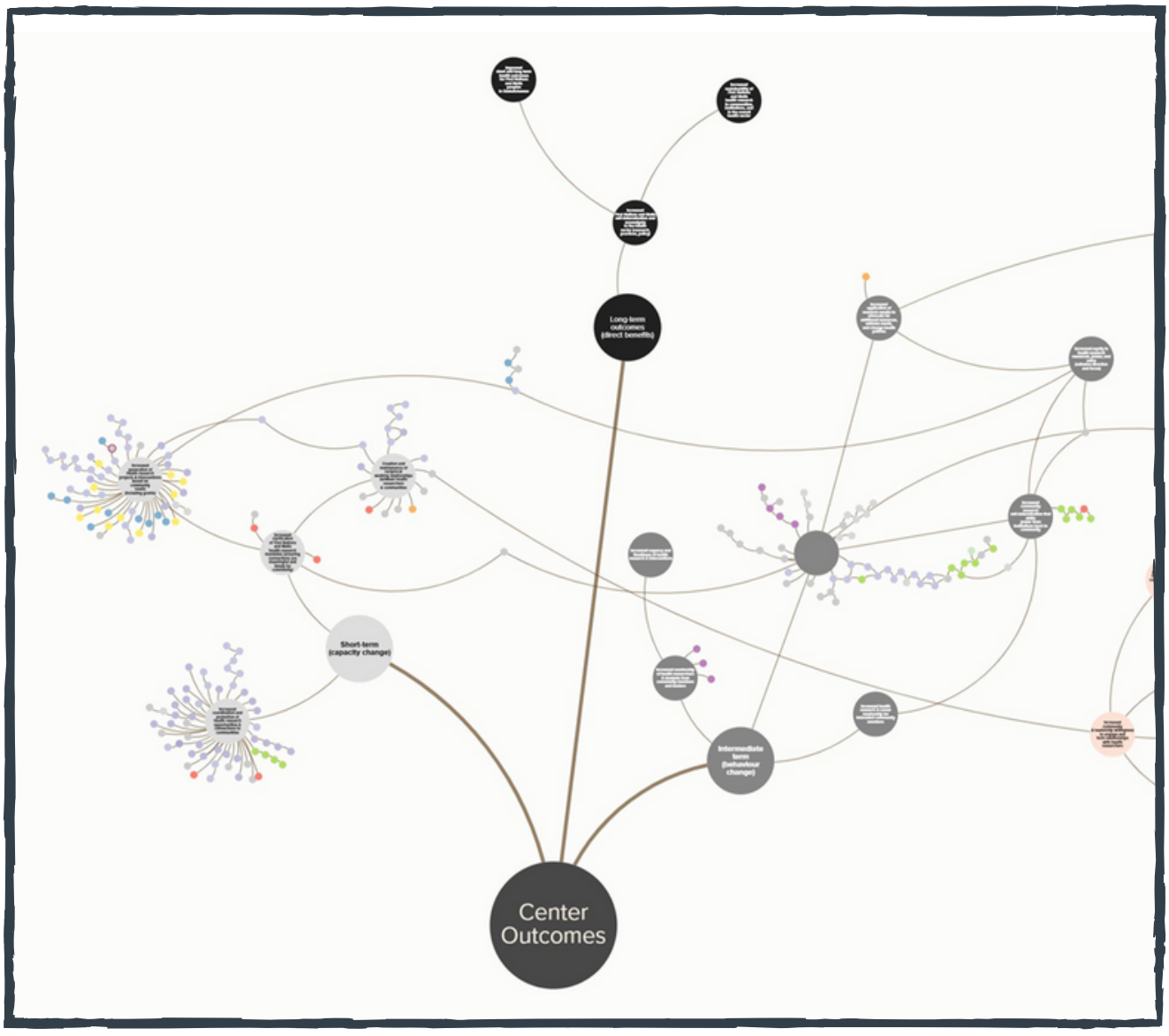
In summary, you can use this map (seen below) to see where our effort has been for the previous two years. Excitingly, we will be able to see how these efforts shift and grow over time by continuing to update this map year after year.

We recognize that the picture below is small and hard to read. We recommend you visit the online version of the map to see all of the detail it offers (click here).



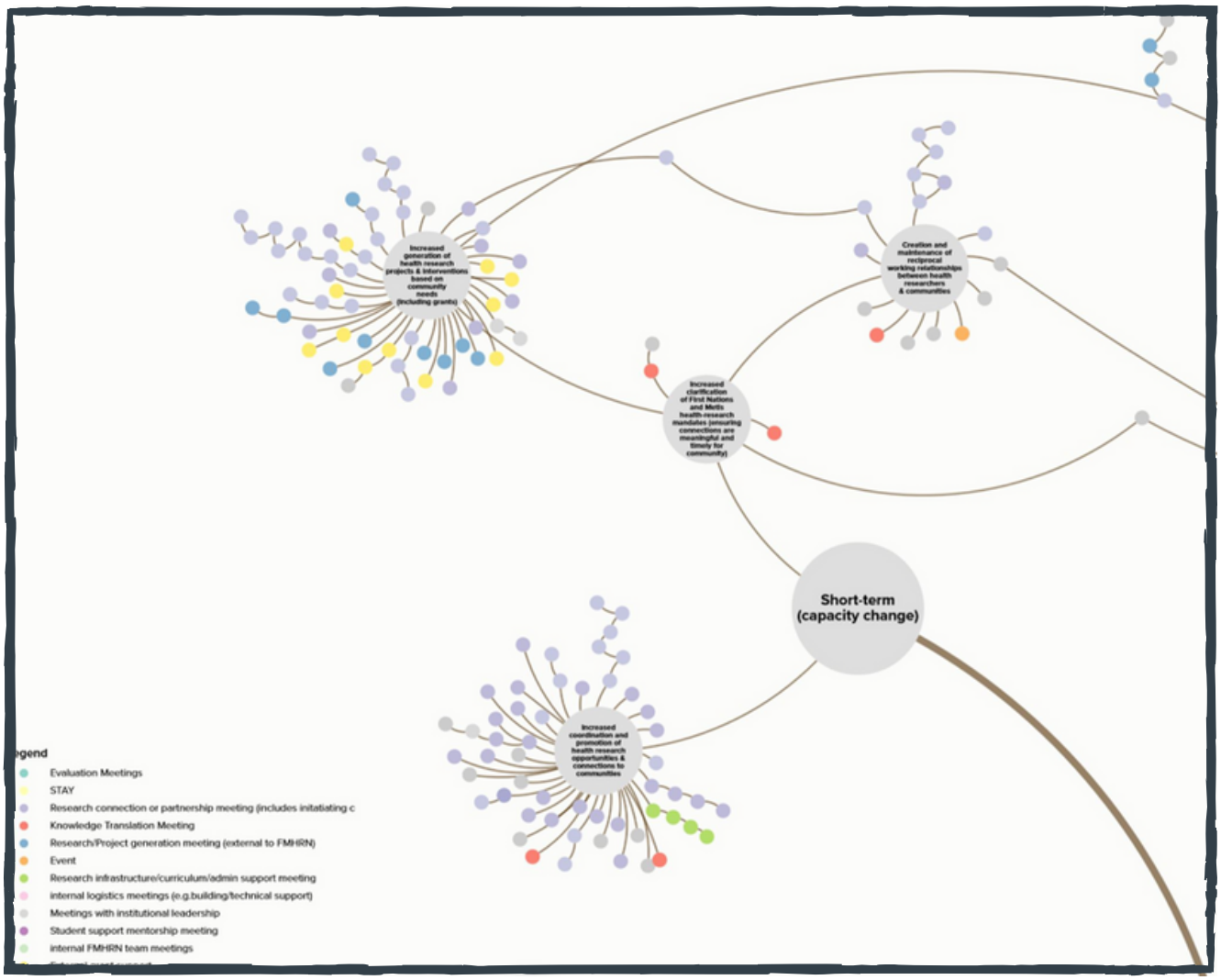
When you compare it to the other two categories, much of our meeting effort has been at the SK-NEIHR network outcome level. Specifically, these meetings have been building research connections, partnerships, and creating health research projects in Saskatchewan (including working on external grants).

We have also spent a significant amount of time working with FSIN, MN-S, and institutions to create additional research infrastructure in Saskatchewan, including policy and data sovereignty development.



Within the Network-level outcomes, many of our meetings have been to increase the generation of health research projects and interventions based on community needs (including obtaining grants) and on increasing the coordination and promotion of health research opportunities (including resources).

As you will notice, many of the individual bubbles are purple, indicating a research connection or partnership meeting (see the legend on the bottom left for more details).

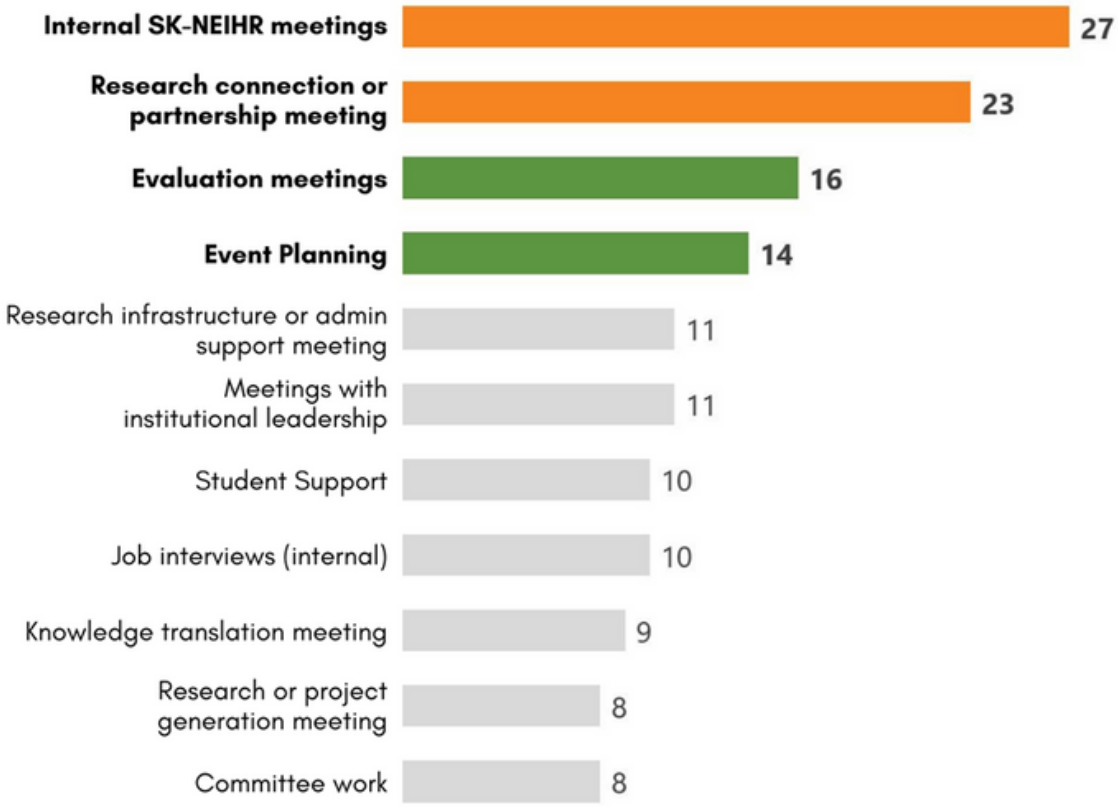


Year Two Activities Breakdown

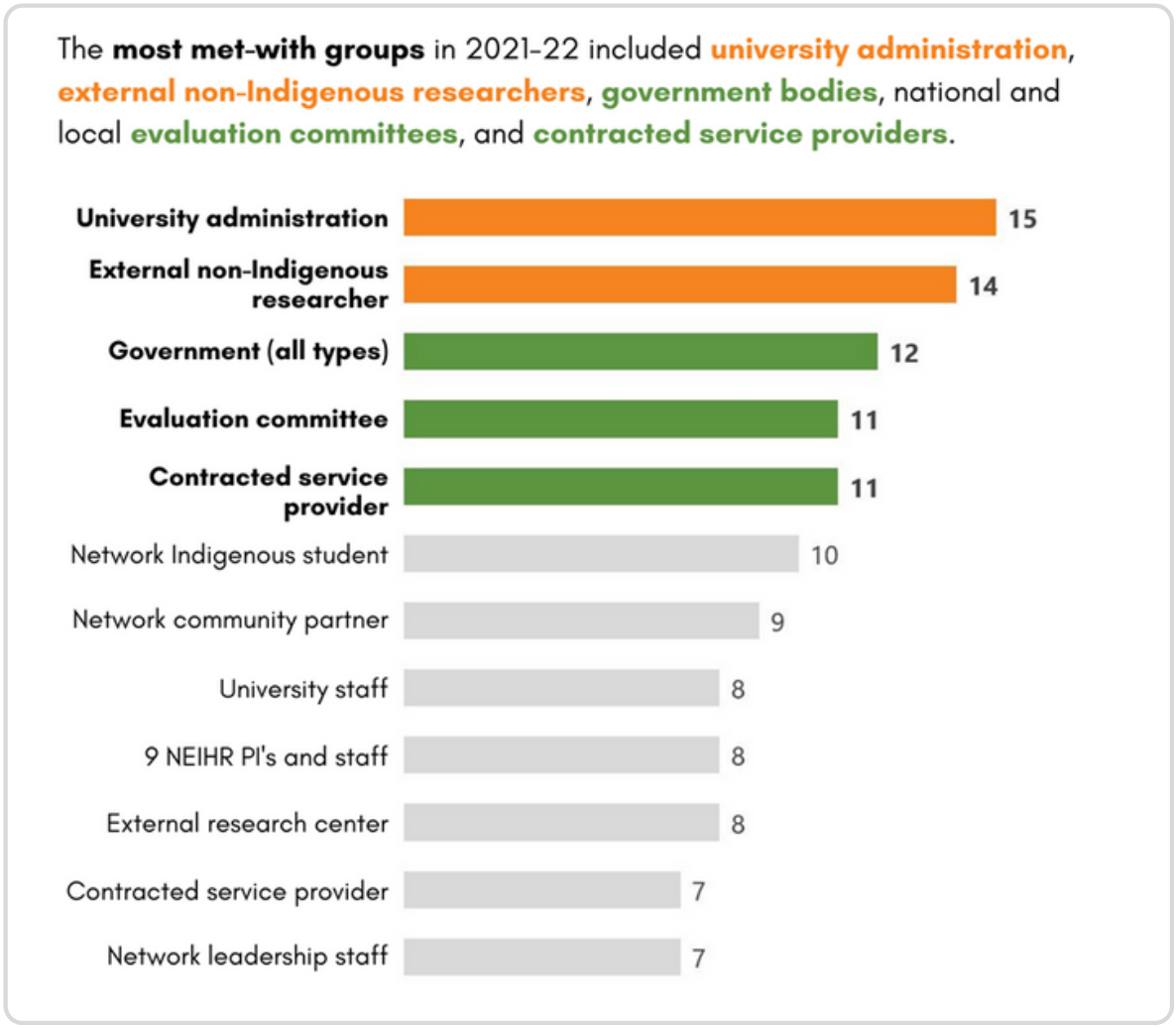
In 2021-22 we had a total of 177 meetings, of which 150 were external meetings, and 27 team meetings. This was down slightly from 268 external meetings in our first year, but we intentionally chose to slow down on meetings so we could sustain our team's capacity. That said, we were still busy making connections, as well as working on our evaluation strategies, both here in Saskatchewan, and nationally with the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre.

With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, we also started to plan in-person events for our members. In particular, the SK-NEIHR and NEIHR National Coordinating Centre co-hosted the National Gathering of Graduate Students in June 2022, a three-day in person gathering at Dakota Dunes Resort outside of Saskatoon. We also continued to meet as a team to refine the delivery of the Saskatchewan NEIHR.

We continued to have a large number of **internal meetings** to refine the delivery of the SK-NEIHR while still making **research connections and partnerships**. Among others, we also focused on **evaluation meetings** and **event planning** in year two.



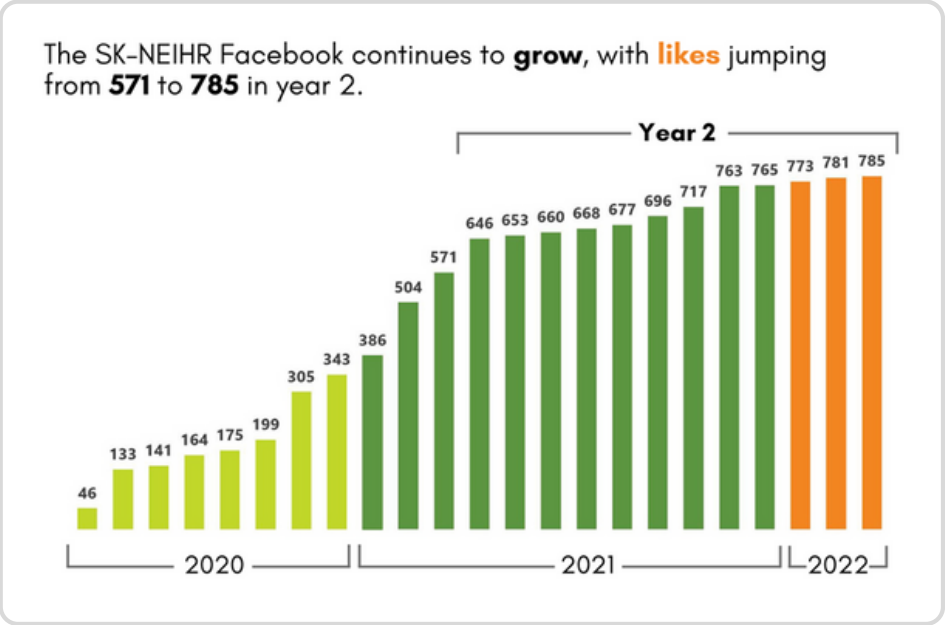
We are also committed to meeting with people to advance sustainable change in health research and improve health and wellness of First Nations and Métis peoples. This was evident in our statistics of **who** we met with last year, with the people we met with most being university administrators, external non-Indigenous researchers, and governments (including the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations [FSIN] and Métis Nation-Saskatchewan [MN-S]). We also continued to implement our activities through evaluators and other contracted service providers (as seen below). These statistics were comparable to those gathered in our first year (January 2020-March 2021), where the people we met with most frequently were the same, with the exception of community partners, which went from 20 meetings in year one, to nine meetings in year two.



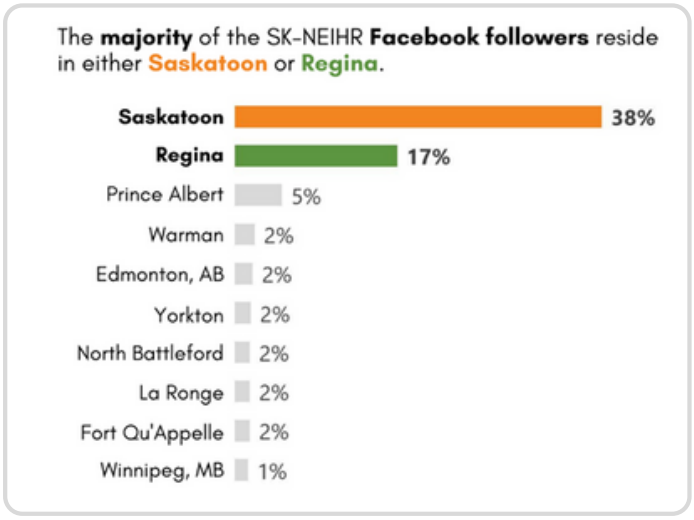
Who are we reaching? Social Media Statistics in Year Two

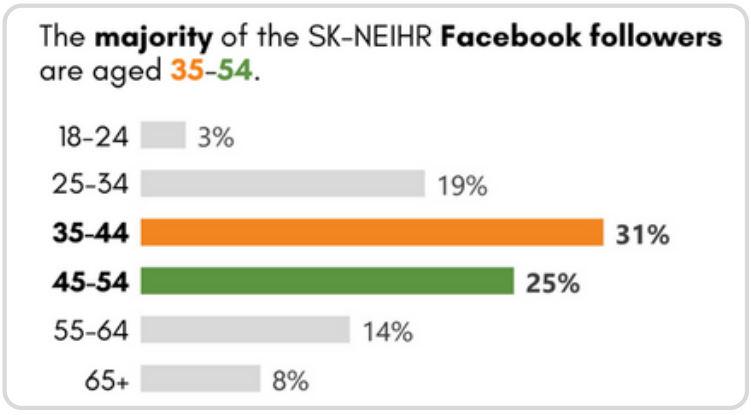
The SK-NEIHR continues to maintain an active Facebook page to ensure we are communicating meaningful information to our members and those interested in learning more about our activities. To this end, we have dedicated resources to ensure that there are regular posts on Facebook about opportunities, advocacy events, and information about how to get involved in Indigenous health research. It appears that this effort continues to pay off, as we have seen continued growth in our Facebook page in year two, measured by the total amount of page "likes." Although it wasn't as rapid of a growth as we saw last year, when we were establishing a Facebook presence, "likes" still went from 571 at the end of year one to 785 at the end of year two, a 38% increase. This engagement resulted in a reach **[1]** number of 26,595 and a total of 1044 unique visits to the SK-NEIHR Facebook page. While the reach of our Facebook page was down last year from 51,419 in year one to 26,595 in year two (48% decrease), this is to be expected as we intentionally slowed down the number of posts we did in Year Two to ensure quality services.

[1] **Note**: reach is measured by the number of people who saw any content from your page or about your page, including posts, stories, ads, social information from people who interact with your page. Reach is different from impressions, which include multiple views of your posts by the same people. This metric is estimated.



We are also able to explore a bit more about our audience using Facebook statistics. Patterns in both years were similar, with the majority of our audience stating that they reside in either Saskatoon or Regina, and that they are between the ages of 35 and 54.





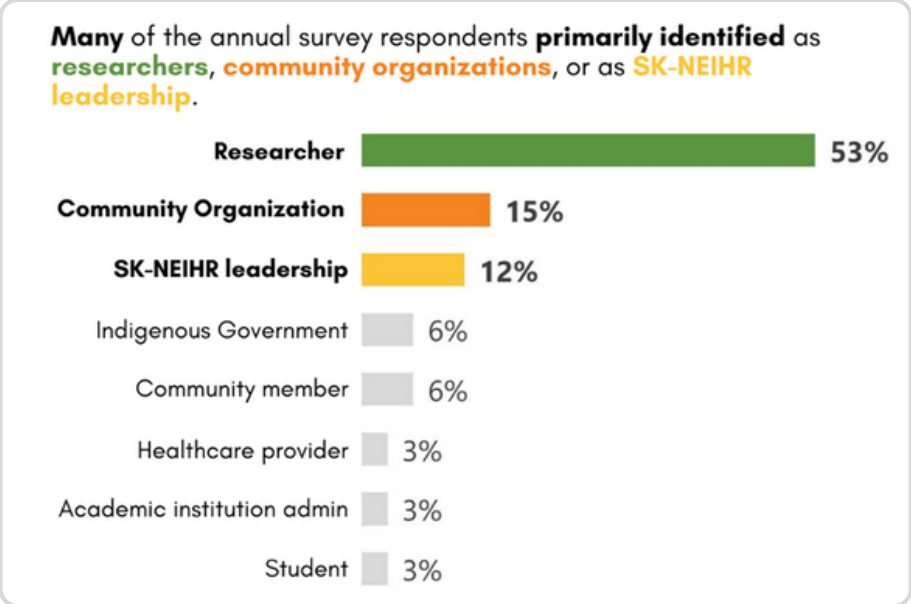
What Outcomes Are We Seeing Through Years One and Two?

As part of our ongoing measurement strategy, we are asking the SK-NEIHR membership to complete an annual survey each year to help determine progress on some key outcomes. This was our first year completing such a survey, meaning the results outlined below cover over two years worth of data (January 2020 to March 2022). Additionally, it is important that not all members and principal investigators responded to this survey meaning that, although we believe the results are encouraging, the true extent of the outcomes we are reporting on are likely greater than what we are able to state here.

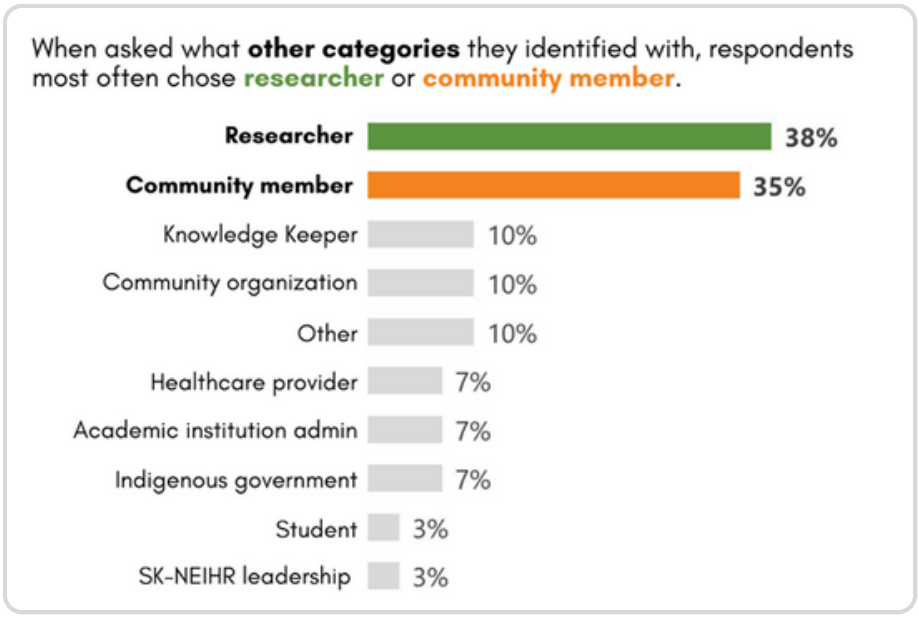
The survey was open in January and February of 2022 and received 38 responses. This was a branching survey, meaning that depending on how a person identified (e.g. researcher, student, community member, senior administrator), it would direct them to targeted questions for their demographic. There was, however, a core set of questions that everyone was asked to respond to, that represent core SK-NEIHR outcomes that extend to each group we work with. For additional details on this survey, including a list of the survey questions, please contact the SK-NEIHR at **skneihr@usask.ca.**

Who answered the survey?

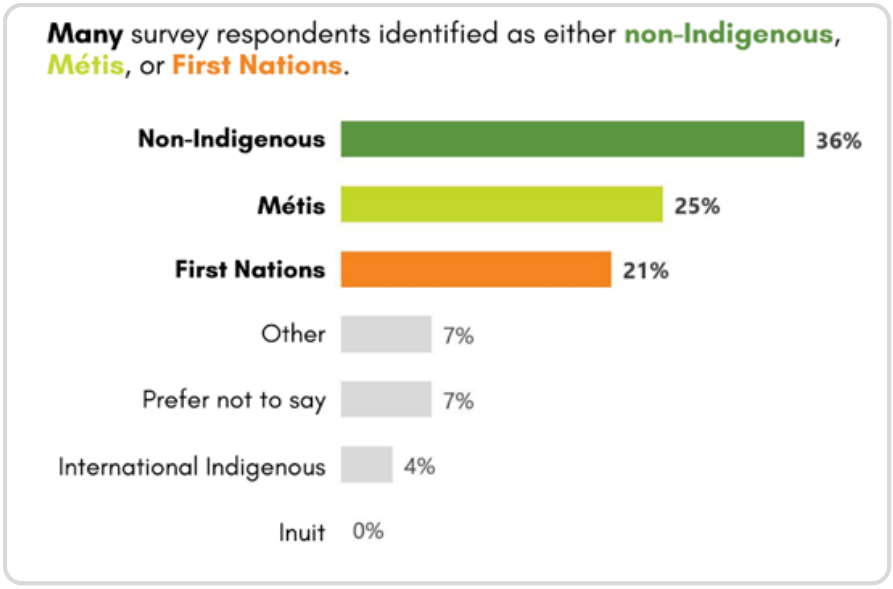
To help us interpret the results, we asked respondents to self-identify which SK-NEIHR membership category they most identified with. As is seen below, over half identified primarily as researchers (53%), with an additional 15% coming from community organizations and 12% being SK-NEIHR leadership.



However, we understand that a SK-NEIHR member has the potential to identify with multiple categories. Knowing this, we asked respondents to select which other categories they identified with. Interestingly, community members was the second most-identified-with category, at 35%. This helps to reinforce the fact that the membership of the SK-NEIHR is suited to lead this type of research because they identify as First Nations and Métis community members, with connections to their communities.



Finally, there was a mix of respondents who identified as non-Indigenous (36%), Métis (25%), and First Nations (21%). We believe this is largely reflective of the SK-NEIHR membership.

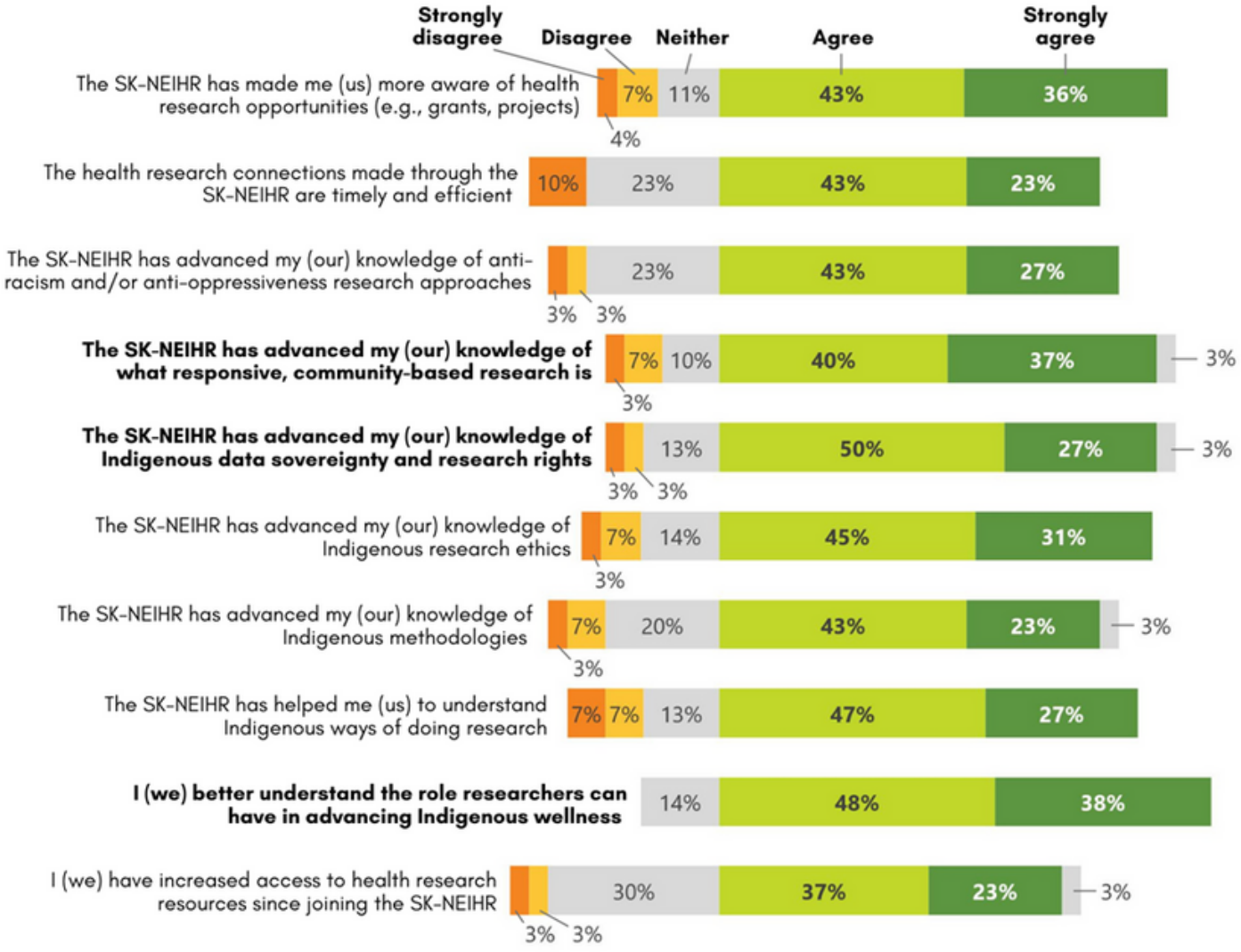


Overall Survey Results

Although each group of respondents were asked to respond to targeted questions, there was a subset of questions that all groups of participants were asked to answer. These were questions around our core objectives, and they will be asked each year to track changes over time (e.g., advancing community-based researchers, data sovereignty and research rights, making connections, etc.). As described more fully below, we received encouraging results that indicated that, over the past two years, respondents have been experiencing the core outcomes we intend to facilitate through the SK-NEIHR. Note that, in the survey these kinds of questions were asked in random order, so that they varied for each respondent (to avoid order effects or survey fatigue).

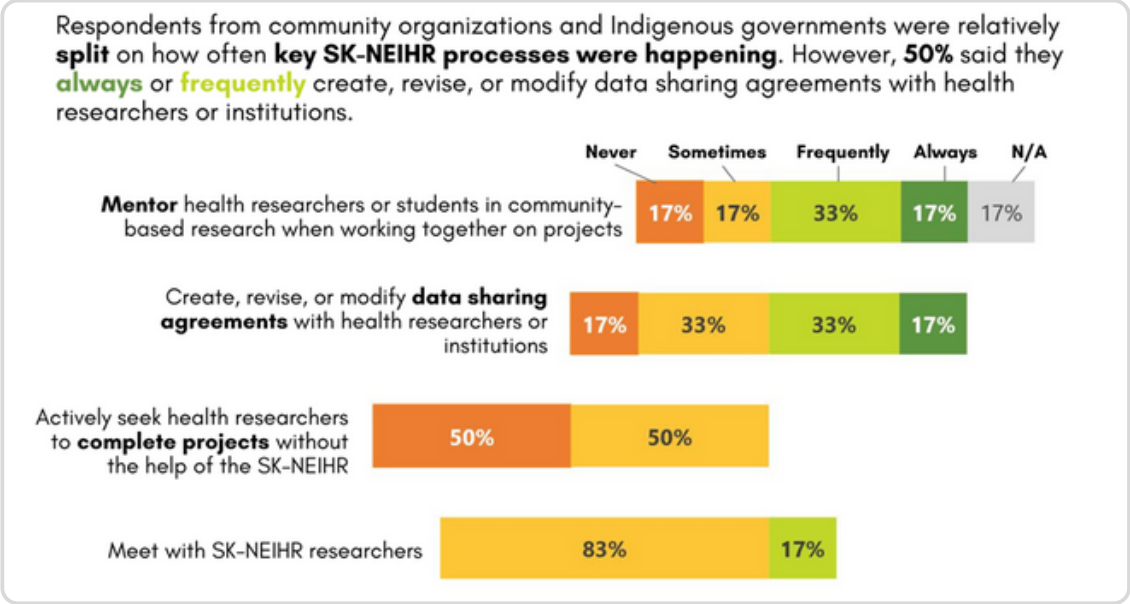
Of note, 77% of all respondents either agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (37%) that the SK-NEIHR has advanced their knowledge of what community-based research is. Similarly, 77% also either agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (27%) that the SK-NEIHR has helped them to advance their knowledge of data sovereignty and research rights. This is encouraging, as it is not only an objective of ours to ensure this knowledge exists in Saskatchewan, but it will also help reinforce the sustainability of good research into the future. Compounding this is evidence suggesting that many respondents have a better understanding of the role researchers can have in advancing Indigenous wellness here in Saskatchewan (48% agreed, 38% strongly agreed).

Many respondents either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** that **they have experienced the core SK-NEIHR outcomes over the past two years**, including advancing understanding of research rights, better understanding of the role of researchers in Indigenous wellness, and increased understanding of what responsive, community-based research is (among many others).



In terms of SK-NEIHR processes, we asked community organization and Indigenous government respondents to answer a few activity-based questions. Once again, we intend to track this over time to determine how well the SK-NEIHR is implementing our activities, and what influence we are having on

outcomes. As noted below, 50% of respondents said that they frequently or always mentor health researchers when doing projects together (including students), and help create, revise, or modify data sharing agreements with health researchers and institutions. However, only 17% of respondents said that they frequently met with SK-NEIHR researchers, and 50% indicated that they actively seek health researchers to complete projects without the help of the SK-NEIHR. Over time, our goal is to shift some of these results from never/sometimes to frequently/always.

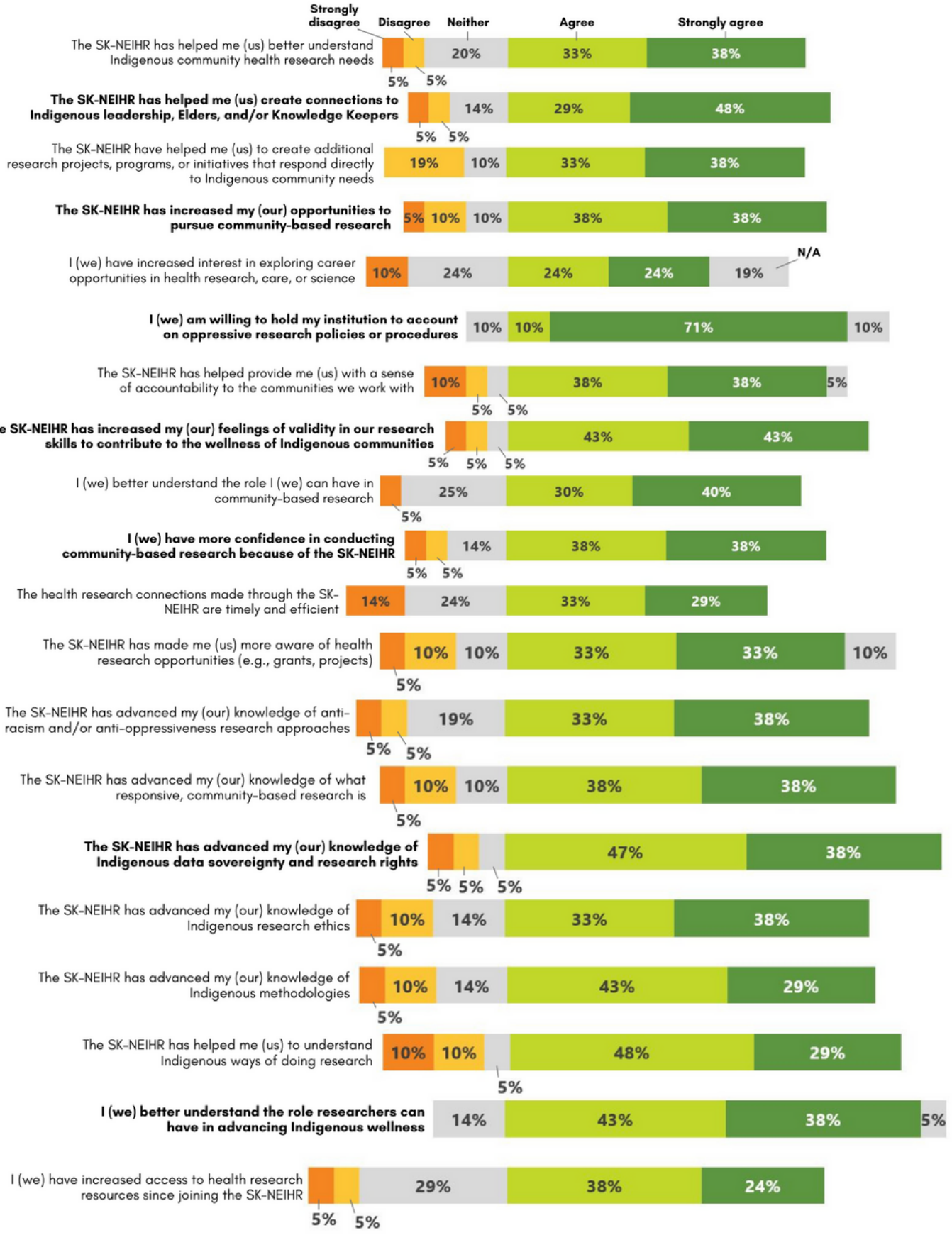


Researchers – What's Changed (Survey)?

As over half of our respondents identified as researchers, we believe it is important to outline some of the specific results from this group. Researchers working with the SK-NEIHR help drive forward some of the work and contribute to the overall Indigenous health research through their projects, grants, funding, and connections. It appears that the SK-NEIHR has helped to develop many of the key areas of Indigenous health and community-based research that we intended as areas to develop when we sought funding for this research network. Namely, among many others, researchers identified these activities to the SK-NEIHR:

- **Helping create connections to Indigenous leadership, Elders, and/or Knowledge Keepers**
- **Increasing the number of opportunities to pursue community-based research**
- **Providing the motivation to help researchers hold their institutions to account on oppressive research policies and procedures**
- **Increasing feelings of validity and researcher skills to contribute to the wellness of Indigenous communities**
- **Increasing confidence to conduct community-based research**
- **Advancing knowledge of Indigenous data sovereignty and research rights**
- **Better understanding the role that researchers can have in advancing Indigenous wellness**

Of those who identified as **researchers**, many either **Strongly agreed** or **agreed** that they have **experienced key SK-NEIHR outcomes**.



What's Changed (Overall Results from Interviews)?

Towards the end of year two, the evaluation team (external evaluators) interviewed several of the researchers leading the SK-NEIHR. This is an annual process where we "check-in" to obtain feedback on how to improve the SK-NEIHR and explore the impacts of the Network. It is also intended to be a companion piece for the annual survey. This year, the evaluation team interviewed six researchers. Interviewees were asked about **program impacts** and offered reflections on **what worked well, what did not work well,** and overall **areas of improvement**.

Overall, respondents indicated that involvement in the SK-NEIHR offered them a strong sense of community, connection, and support amongst Indigenous scholars. Interviewees often pointed out that the sense of community was created through many mentorship activities, partnership building, and research creation opportunities aimed at furthering community engagement to improve health outcomes.

When asked about their experience working within the SK-NEIHR, one junior faculty member shared that the SK-NEIHR (both the people and program) has provided members with a strong sense of community, connection, and support for Indigenous scholars, especially for early career scholars. This support was particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, where mentorship took an integral role in adapting to changes. One respondent shared that they have found the last year "extremely hectic." Many plans had to change because of COVID-19, and they noted that the pandemic is a challenging time to develop a network grounded in community.

> "So right now it's about learning how to build the network, how to build with the different government agencies that we're working with. And then also at the same time, trying to deal with all of the stuff that's been going on, and the directions that it's taken us. The hardest part is navigating those directions." - **Researcher**

They shared that they have benefited greatly because of the mentorship offered by those involved in the SK-NEIHR, which is a main goal of the Network. As noted earlier in the Activity section of this report, the focus of the SK-NEIHR has been on developing the Network and navigating the political and health context.

Another respondent shared their excitement in being able to witness the implementation of the innovative governance model, which includes both First Nations and Métis Peoples and organizations, including FSIN and MN-S during a pandemic. They indicated that they gained significant understanding of the politics and dynamics at play in community-based research.

Others expanded on how meaningful the network has been to them, and that they see a great deal of potential moving forward, particularly over the next few years. One respondent highlighted the importance of regular communications from the Network, requesting feedback, support and input from Network members. This consistency contributed to better supporting Indigenous researchers and students. Another respondent at the early career stage said that they have had a good experience, and especially appreciated gaining understanding of the political environment from senior researchers,

which has been important for conducting Indigenous health research. This kind of learning opportunity is often not available elsewhere and is often difficult to measure. Additionally, they noted that mentorship from faculty and support staff, and initiative activities, like writing support letters for grants, and advising on research projects, were beneficial.

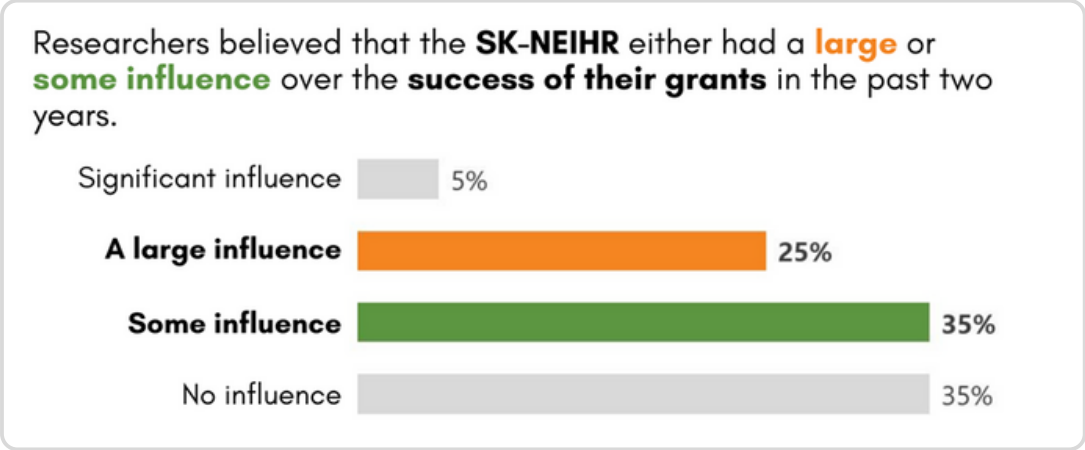
Grants and Projects – Researchers Involved with the SK-NEIHR

To help us determine the level of activity of SK-NEIHR associated researchers, we asked each of them a few questions about their research activity in the past two years (January 2020 to March 2022). Note that these numbers will be an under-representation, as not all researchers involved with the SK-NEIHR responded to the survey. Namely, we asked about the number of community-based projects they've been involved in, how many articles they have published, and how many of those used an anti-oppressive approach. An impressive amount of work is evident through these responses, including:

- **134 total community-based projects, programming, or other initiatives** (average of 7 per researcher; 20 researchers)
- **96 articles published that use a community-based approach** (average of 5 per researcher; 19 researchers)
- **93 community-based projects, programming, or other initiatives** (average of 6 per researcher; 15 researchers)
- **48 articles published that use an anti-oppressive approach** (average of 4 per researcher; 12 researchers)

As one of our goals is to increase the amount of health research dollars in Saskatchewan, we also asked researchers for details of the grants they have received over the past two years. Specifically, SK-NEIHR-associated researchers who responded to the survey applied for a total of 61 grants in the two-year time span (average of three per researcher). Of the 61 grants, 38 were successful (62% success rate; 18 researchers responded to this question), meaning each researcher had an average of two successful grants in the past two years. Finally, evidence suggests that the SK-NEIHR helped provide direct support for 21 of the grants that respondents applied for (34%; 16 researchers responded to this question). Of the successful grants, **a total of $10.5 million was brought into Saskatchewan for health research** (16 researchers answered this question.

We also asked researchers to rate the level of influence that the SK-NEIHR had on the overall success of their grants, independent of whether direct support was provided or not. As seen below, the majority of researchers indicated that the SK-NEIHR had a large (25%) or some influence on the success of their grants (35%). It should be noted, however, that 35% said that the SK-NEIHR had no influence on the success of their grants.



Interview respondents were also asked if SK-NEIHR supported them on any research applications, and most respondents stated they received a broad range of support.

Some led grant applications and others shared that they found there is value in knowing that support is available if needed, but they did not actively access support. Some stated that they are not currently applying for large grants because of other commitments, and are completing small grants without NEIHR support only because they know that the NEIHR staff were busy. Specific support received (according to interviewees) included:

- **Help with developing grant budgets**
- **Reviewing grants**
- **Providing letters of support**
- **Identifying funding streams**
- **Guidance around reimbursements, Elder payments, cash payments**
- **Finding tobacco on short notice**
- **Making recommendations and referrals to other people to connect with for support**
- **Guidance on how to prepare CVs and profiles for community members included in grants**

Additional Outcomes Identified by Interviewees

Personal and Professional Growth

Interviewees were asked about the ways in which the SK-NEIHR has helped them grow, both as an individual and as a professional. The most prominent themes were research mentorship, relationship building, and research support.

Mentorship was a key theme, whereby the importance of "witnessing" was emphasized by some participants. Witnessing through connection and proximity was helpful when navigating through research processes and institutions, such as budgeting, conversations with university administration or a

health authority, identifying research priorities, and insight into First Nations and Métis research. For example, one respondent described the many skills that they have developed because of their experiences with the SK-NEIHR, including mentorship and leadership skills. They spoke about learning to manage different personalities and conflict, and having the opportunity to gain experience beyond what someone in their academic career stage would typically gain.

> "On the value of the program: 'what I have learned is just monumental'" - **Researcher**

One respondent shared that, by being connected to the SK-NEIHR network, they were able to share insight and be a part of integral conversations that helped move the work forward. They also received support and had access to learning opportunities that they would not have had outside the Network in other research areas. Without the SK-NEIHR, some shared that their journey in academia might have even ended:

> "I might have not even continued in academia to be honest, if the NEIHR didn't exist... it's been only the people in the NEIHR who have kept up with me and kept me going and followed up with me and encouraged me. I didn't get that from a single colleague in my college or anyone else on campus." - **Researcher**

Some also shared that, through their involvement with the SK-NEIHR, they have been able to create and maintain relationships and access mentorship in relevant areas, such as discussions on publishing and professional networking. They explained that this is especially important for new investigators, who typically are either the only or one of few Indigenous people in their colleges. The SK-NEIHR creates opportunities for researchers to learn from and collaborate with other researchers, create partnerships, and access needed support, none of which may have existed without the SK-NEIHR. Another shared that relationship building among researchers and students was deeply valued, including having opportunities to meet in person and build relationships in both informal and formal settings. This opens the door for future collaboration and networking, which can support future grants and ability to connect with graduate students:

> "Having that network of people to connect with and how that as a mentorship or a support has been really valuable because we're siloed as the only one or two Indigenous people in your college and you don't really have anyone else to connect with... this area has been really supportive in a way that you don't really measure." - **Researcher**

Another prominent support that helped facilitate growth was the provision of direct and indirect SK-NEIHR funding. This included:

- **Funding for researchers and communities to start projects (grants)**
- **Supporting students to achieve their career aspirations and educational goals (through the Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network)**
- **Initiating research and increasing research capacity at the SK-NEIHR staff level**
- **Providing access to valuable human resources and administration**

Many shared that their growth has been tied directly to the contributions of SK-NEIHR staff members on their grant applications, which strengthened them. Interviewees explained that, with these supports, their writing skills improved, and they received adequate administrative and collegial support. One example given was that a survey respondent received a letter of support from the SK-NEIHR, and that they felt their role with the NEIHR contributed to the grant being successful, particularly because of Indigenous community relationships. In this particular example, the interviewee strongly believed that they would not have been successful without this support from the NEIHR. Additionally, multiple researchers said that being a part of a circle through the SK-NEIHR helps faculty to navigate the political environments of institutions. Interviewees indicated that this is important both for their own understanding, and safety as an Indigenous person, and an academic:

> "I think my understanding of the political environment and the reality of what it's like for Indigenous scholars. I had no... I thought I knew, I had no idea, the more you know the more you realize you don't know." - **Researcher**

Concretely, some faculty commented on how they were able to use SK-NEIHR professional development and networking activities in their classrooms. One example given was the anti-racism modules, which were not only important for personal learning (e.g., increased knowledge of projects and expertise of Indigenous researchers, and increased confidence in teaching and writing about anti-racism and other advocacy) but also received excellent feedback from students.

> "My teaching has changed significantly because I have a lot more knowledge on the environment. I have a lot more knowledge on all of the other projects and expertise of Indigenous researchers that I didn't before, that I [was able to] share with my students. I think my teaching and scholarship in that regard has changed significantly." - **Researcher**

> "No question, my knowledge of anti-racism has benefited my research extraordinarily. That's probably one of my personal and professional highlights." - **Researcher**

One respondent emphasized that they now have a better understanding of what Indigenous scholars face in institutions, including the emotional and spiritual impacts felt within Indigenous research. Some expressed this as "weight" and the need to 'do this [research] right." This understanding helps Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty to be better supporters and allies during these times of strain, and respondents believed they could not gain this experience anywhere but the SK-NEIHR:

> "I have other [Indigenous] pre-tenured assistant professor friends in other colleges that don't actually have any team networks...They really struggle to gain footing in the university and to know where and when they're safe. And I think that the safety of this group has been very critical for me". - **Researcher**

Project Generation (Connections and Relationships)

Researchers shared that they felt the SK-NEIHR has been very effective at creating and maintaining research connections and relationships between researchers and community (including Indigenous

community members, researchers and government officials). In addition, some shared that connections have been streamlined and there has been a relational approach to providing research connections and cross pollination within the SK-NEIHR network. Researchers also said that relationships with external partners are more effective because of some of the principal research leadership team's interpersonal connections with Indigenous organizations.

It appears that when people come to a respondent for support, and they didn't know how to help, they felt that they could reach out to the SK-NEIHR, who could identify people for them to connect with (such as stakeholders in Indigenous organizations or graduate students). Without the NEIHR, people expressed that it was still possible to connect to information or support, but would be much slower, as navigating complex university structures is complex and not always relational.

> "It's amazing what we could achieve when we all are in the same room virtually or otherwise... , it's much more efficient and friendly this way." - **Researcher**

> "The fact that we brought together people, they now are more likely to come together in their own ways and develop and further their own mandates because we were initially the people who brought connection. Kind of like a matchmaker... I think that we've been good in that way." - **Researcher**

Some also shared that creating and maintaining research connections and relationships between researchers and community has been moderately effective. This is due to the limitations in place because of COVID-19, such as communications between researchers and Indigenous partners. Some examples of very effective areas have been webinars, which engaged community representatives, and the racism in healthcare webinar which supported community engagement (results of this webinar can be found later in this report). On this, one participant shared:

> "The good examples, one of the webinars had a number of Northern community representatives join in and ask a ton of questions. As a result of that, suddenly there are people in three communities that I didn't know that I'm going to reach out to, and that probably will be involved. Those are brand new connections that were surprising and fantastic." - **Researcher**

Increased Confidence & Validation

In general, interviewees agreed that participating in the SK-NEIHR increased their personal and professional **confidence** and confirmed the **validity** in community-based and Indigenous research approaches. Some even mentioned that being involved in the SK-NEIHR has helped reduce the imposter syndrome they have felt in the past and created a sense of belonging as an Indigenous scholar. Others expressed gratitude to the SK-NEIHR for helping them to grow personally and professionally with the mentorship provided by SK-NEIHR leaders and principal investigators.

> "It's minimized my imposter syndrome of feeling like, okay, I do belong here, especially in my own unique circumstance where there has never been another Indigenous scholar like me in my field." - **Researcher**

> "The network supports my personal confidence in the work, and reduces imposter syndrome, but they also recognize how far they have to go and how much there is to learn." - **Researcher**

For many, growth was operationalized through the research and collegial relationships that were formed through their time in the SK-NEIHR. One participant shared that, prior to the SK-NEIHR's existence, they did not have relationships with local Indigenous communities when they came to Saskatchewan. With the NEIHR's support, they developed relationships and got the confidence to begin applying for grants with communities. They said that the Network has directly supported their career in this area and helped them further identify the necessary learning, knowledge, and experience that is needed to effectively work with Saskatchewan communities.

> "I have no fear now in the research space... And realizing that it is an international context for the research we do. Even a small project downtown in Saskatoon can have relevance and impact on a large scale, [internationally] or vice versa. It's about seeing the connections of people." - **Researcher**

For others, confidence was instilled through building connections and relationships with peers, feeling validated and supported, and sharing ideas through SK-NEIHR circles. According to interviewees, activities like connecting with other principal investigators or other NEIHRs was immensely beneficial. In particular, some respondents mentioned that a writing retreat was very useful, as they said that they shared research ideas with other researchers, who suggested ideas for possible directions, which they used in future health research proposals.

> "With some of the other investigators, we were just chatting about avenues to go and ideas and what they saw and where it could go. I took those ideas and was able to incorporate that in my proposal going forward." - **Researcher**

Community-Based Outcomes

In year two, we conducted evaluations of two of the webinars we held, gathering evidence of their effectiveness from participants with an online survey. Our intention was to use this data to improve future webinars, and track the impact of events like these over time. Brief results of each webinar are below, but the full reports can be found on the Saskatchewan NEIHR website, skneihr.ca, under Resources.

Racism in Healthcare: Creating Systems Change, held on April 15, 2021, was the first webinar in what might be a several part series, focused on the ways in which Indigenous patients navigate our current health system, what processes and pathways they interact with when faced with a racist encounter, how complaints are managed within the health system and across regulatory bodies, and what response mechanisms exist to redress racism at the systems level.

This session was facilitated by Dr. Holly Graham, RN, BA, BScN, MN, PhD, R.D., Psychologist, Indigenous Research Chair in Nursing, Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan and opened by Knowledge Keeper Judy Pelly. Dr. Veronica McKinney, MD, CCFP, an Indigenous physician and Director of Northern

Medical Services, provides a lay of the land for healthcare in the province.

Panel members from healthcare organizations in Saskatchewan were then invited to respond, situating their responses within their own organizational contexts. The panelists were:

- **Dr. Susan Shaw,** MD, FRCPC, CCPE, Chief Medical Officer, Saskatchewan Health Authority
- **Allan Adam**, BA, Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Health Authority
- **Cindy Smith**, RN, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association
- **Andre Letendre**, Cultural Systems Advisor, First Nations and Métis Health, Saskatchewan Health Authority
- **Dr. James Stempien**, BSc, MD, FCFP, CCFP-EM, CCPE, Provincial Department Head Emergency Medicine, University of Saskatchewan
- **Bonnie Brossart**, Chief Executive Officer, Saskatchewan Medical Association
- **Dr. Karen Shaw**, MD, Registrar and Chief Medical Officer, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan

This was a very successful webinar, with 500 people registering to attend on Zoom. We also streamed it to Facebook Live, once we had reached our registration limit of 500, so that people could watch it on Facebook if they were not able to register for it. Those who registered were sent a recording of the webinar afterwards to watch it if they were not able to join, or if they wanted to watch it again, or share it.

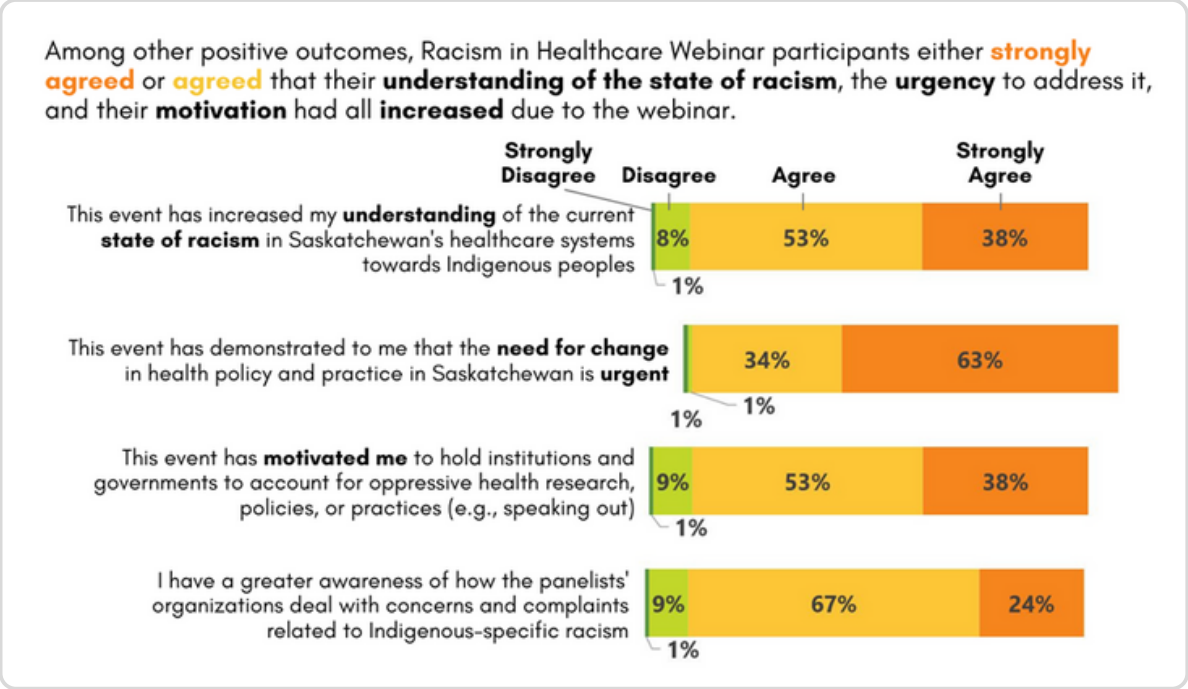
This was the first webinar in the series focused on the ways in which Indigenous patients navigate our current health system, what processes and pathways they interact with when faced with a racist encounter, how complaints are managed within the health system and across regulatory bodies, and what response mechanisms exist to redress racism at the systems level. The *Racism in Healthcare: Creating Systems Change* webinar can be found on the SK-NEIHR website in the Resources section, or on our **Facebook page** under videos.

We also produced a Technical Report summarizing findings from this webinar, which is also found on the SK-NEIHR website under Resources. Discussions around possible webinars in this series focused on further exploring systemic change. Due to capacity issues, no additional webinars were held in Year Two.

Racism in Healthcare Webinar Survey Results

To ensure we understood what, if any, change the webinar facilitated, we asked respondents to agree or disagree with several statements (on a scale of 1 – strongly disagree to 4 – strongly agree). Results were quite positive, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements. Of particular note, 98% of respondents either agreed (34%) or strongly agreed (63%) that the webinar helped demonstrate to them the urgency of the need for change in health policy and practice in Saskatchewan. Additionally, 91% of survey participants either agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (38%) that the webinar

increased their understanding of the current state of racism in Saskatchewan's healthcare systems towards Indigenous peoples. The same percentage (91%) either agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (38%) that the webinar helped to motivate them to hold institutions and government o account on oppressive health research, policies, or practices (including speaking out). Finally, 91% of participants also either agreed (67%) or strongly agreed (24%) that they had a greater awareness of how panelists' organizations deal with concerns and complaints related to Indigenous specific racism.



Many respondents also described how they now have a better awareness and understanding of racism in Saskatchewan's healthcare systems. For example:

> "Helped me to see that racism is alive and real in the healthcare industry. I never experienced it, as I was the healthcare worker, but I did see it and addressed it right away. We all need to listen more and act after" – **Survey Respondent**

> "How deeply embedded racism is in our healthcare system. I was horrified at my own lack of realization of this! This event helped raise my awareness of how diverse racism is in our healthcare system, ranging from microaggressions to the overt, and how much work needs to be done to educate healthcare workers to change racist practices and perceptions, as well as to find safe and culturally-appropriate means for reporting racist interactions" – **Survey Respondent**

> "Obviously racism is a long-standing problem in Saskatchewan. The issue is what to do about it. The forum gave me a better understanding what is being done and what can be done to improve this unfortunate reality." – **Survey Respondent**

Some participants also believed that the event helped them to better understand their own role in addressing racism within their organizations. Specifically, it either helped to provide the motivation to be an advocate for transformation or sparked ideas for things they could be implementing. For example:

> "This brought additional awareness and motivation for the need for change in healthcare. I am a nursing student in my 4th and final year of studies and it impacted me to really put more effort into learning about how as a future nurse I can impact change for the better" – **Survey Respondent**

> "I really did not understand before how prevalent this is and how it is holding back people from accessing healthcare. It has made me rethink my approach" – **Survey Respondent**

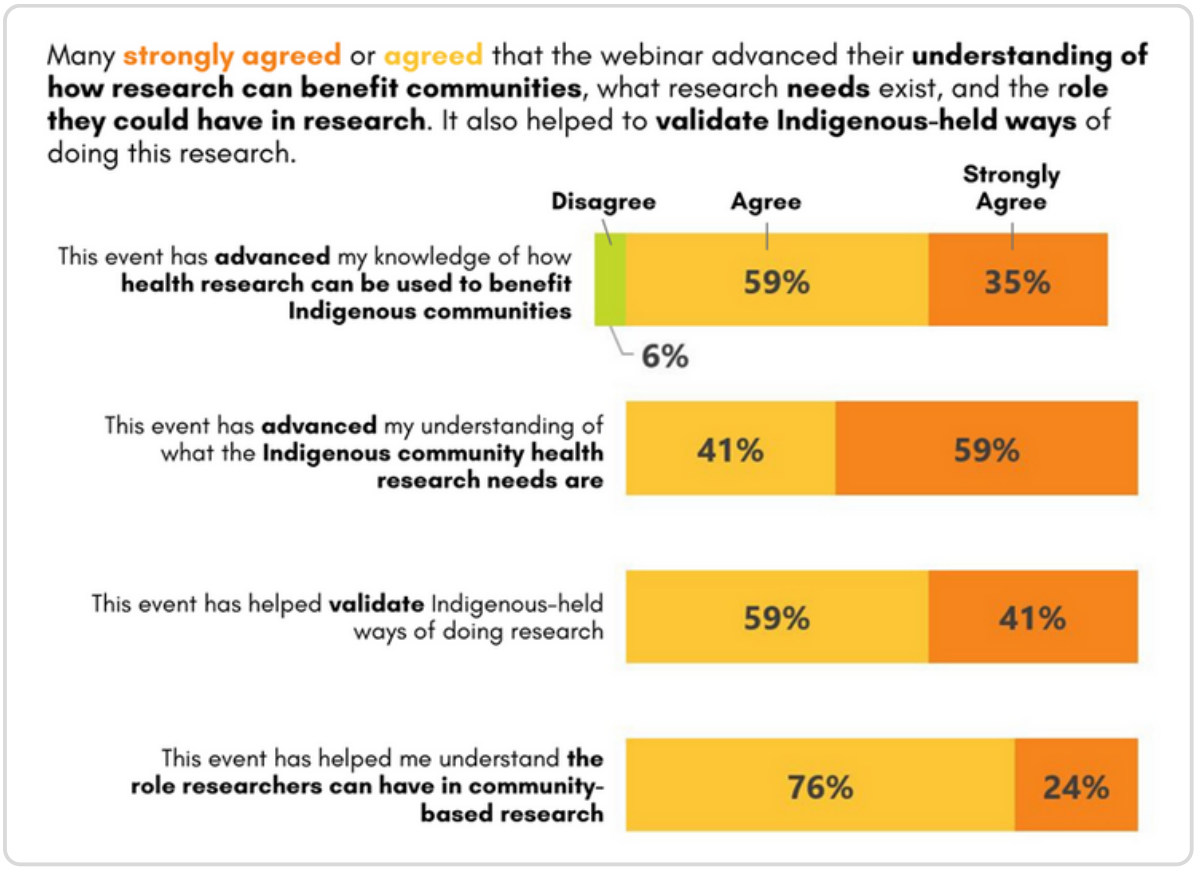
> "I feel the need to advocate for persons facing racism" – **Survey Respondent**

Building Research Together Webinar Survey Results

On November 3, 2021, we held a *Building Research Together* webinar to introduce the SK-NEIHR to new audiences, promote the SK-NEIHR's 2021 round of funding in Community Partnership Grants (up to $10,000 to develop larger research proposals), and to provide additional opportunities for researchers and community stakeholders to connect. Unfortunately, due to technical issues, there isn't a recording of this webinar, but slides from it can be found under Resources on the SK-NEIHR website. The full webinar evaluation report is also hosted on the SK-NEIHR website under Resources. Sixty people registered to attend this webinar.

According to those who attended the event, it was very successful in advancing several key SK-NEIHR outcomes, including:

- 100% of respondents indicated that this webinar helped them to **better understand the role researchers can have in community-based research** (76% agreed; 24% strongly agreed).
- 94% believed that this webinar helped to advance their knowledge of how **health research can be used to benefit Indigenous communities** (35% strongly agreed, 59% agreed).
- Respondents also agreed (59%) or strongly agreed (41%) that the webinar **advanced their understanding of what Indigenous community health research needs are**.
- Respondents also indicated that this webinar helped to **validate Indigenous-held ways of doing research** for them (41% agreed, 59%) strongly agreed.



Respondents stated that from this webinar, they learned more about the SK-NEIHR, community-based research, and/or research funding opportunities. For example:

> "This was a great introduction to the research network for me. It is helpful to know about what others are doing" – **Survey Respondent**

> "An introduction to new research funding opportunities and networking" – **Survey Respondent**

A few individuals also mentioned that they learned more about Indigenous methodologies and research approaches which, once again, matches with what was found earlier in the results:

> "About funding and research - Indigenous focus methodologies should be considered" – **Survey Respondent**

> "I learned that more and more Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people are beginning to understand one another" – **Survey Respondent**

Feedback – What Worked Well and What Needs Improvement in the SK-NEIHR (Interviews)?

To help provide the SK-NEIHR with recommendations on how to make the design and delivery of the network as good as it can be, the evaluation team asked interviewees about what did and didn't work well over Years One and Two.

SK-NEIHR Design & Implementation

What Worked Well about the SK-NEIHR?

When asked what was the one thing that the SK-NEIHR has done well up until now, respondents noted several key themes including building partnerships, connecting people, creating research opportunities, communication, engagement, and relationships.

One respondent noted that the biggest positive was that the network brought people together and provided relevant opportunities for community engagement and research through research grants. Other participants stated that establishing the governance model was the most beneficial, and allowed the network to respond appropriately, ethically, effectively, and efficiently to challenging situations. The way in which the Network was able to respond to challenges, especially related to identity politics and leaders making fraudulent claims of Indigenous identity, contributed to maintaining good reputations with [Indigenous] communities, by maintaining a strong ethical standard and transparency.

> "Relationships were extended and firmed up during COVID, and then particularly with the politics and around funding, and how we tried to, and in many cases did influence discussions on campus by carving out and holding some space and being very clear [with who we are]." – **Researcher**

Participants noted that the Community Partnership Grants grants have been effective in engaging beyond the research team to larger networks in Saskatchewan, and have led to larger grants and outcomes.

> "I think those community development grants have been a good way to get engaged and to connect beyond just the PIs or the Co-Is or connecting with larger networks of people in Saskatchewan... It's leading to the outcomes that we're hoping for." – **Researcher**

Respondents also noted that regular communication through email has been a strength of the initiative. This includes communication on the willingness and availability of the SK-NEIHR team to offer support with grant applications.

> "I felt if I ever needed anything or wanted anything or was moving in any direction, then I could come back to the main team and seek support." – **Researcher**

Internal and External Communication

When asked if there has been proper communication on how the Network works operationally, most respondents shared that there had been **clear communication**. One respondent found communication to be very clear because they felt "in the loop" having received regular emails and been to all the research leadership meetings. They did note that the NEIHR is new and is 'learning as they go', therefore there is always opportunity to do better. Participants also inferred that the extensive grant application process was clear, and that the NEIHR grant application was useful as it outlined what the SK-NEIHR was funded to do. Respondents shared that the lead roles are well articulated, and that communication is clear through activities such as emails, summary documents, and overview documents related to the scope of the SK-NEIHR.

Some shared that information about the SK-NEIHR staff workloads have been communicated clearly (e.g., the SK-NEIHR leads were clear about NEIHR capacity and followed up with principal investigators afterwards to confirm this). Specifically, principal investigators knew that they could reach out for help when needed but also needed to be cautious to not overburden NEIHR staff; some considerations were mentioned related to capacity. However, participants also outlined some areas for improvement around this, including more clarity on what supports are available from the NEIHR (such as budget support), and clarity on which NEIHR staff to contact for which kind of support. There has been some reassignment of staff roles and responsibilities, and some turnover, so it was recommended that staff develop a flow chart of roles and responsibilities, a living document to be shared and revisited as needed.

Another respondent identified that some people like the written format of the communications where they can revisit them easily, while others may prefer audio or video formats for information. One respondent said there was a need to better track metrics and demonstrate NEIHR impacts and value, with the ability to track metrics of how staff time is spent to contribute to an economic evaluation of cost analysis and impact of the SK-NEIHR. For instance, the time spent responding to email, or dealing with routine university administrative tasks, which seem to be increasing, and the utility of those function may not be documented and is not being communicated to university administration.

Staff Support (SK-NEIHR Strength)

When asked about what made the SK-NEIHR team different or unique from other institutional research supporters, the most common response was premised on relationships and connection to community. One respondent summarized their experience with the SK-NEIHR team as:

> "It's almost like going to your auntie for help, versus a stranger." - **Researcher**

Specifically, there was emphasis on relationality and familiarity when accessing support through the Network, compared to other institutional bodies. It was noted that there is comfortability and safety with the SK-NEIHR team, where you do not need to explain yourself and your intentions as an Indigenous researcher. Another respondent stated that the gatherings, both in person and virtual, were important because they included activities like ceremony, writing retreats, regular meetings, and workshops for students. One respondent said that they have developed strong, resilient and loyal relationships which go beyond strictly professional relationships with the SK-NEIHR team. They said that they feel well

supported and know that the SK-NEIHR team would "go the extra mile" if they asked for help. It was stated that the work of the network is "exceptional" due to a variety of reasons, most being:

- **Their ability to multitask, their workload capacity and teamwork**
- **Organizational skills, grit, consistency**
- **Highly productive outputs, such as community engagement grants, logo adoption, launch on social media, communications, report for review, etc.**
- **Incredible space for student mentorship**

> "They're just way beyond anything as a team that I've ever functioned within before." - **Researcher**

With the strides of the Network, it was also shared that the model leaves room for some concerns related to sustainability. One respondent shared that there is the potential for burnout, with the research activity and productivity being so high, suggesting that consideration of workloads of the hardworking team be given, to adequately support their needs.

Access to Resources

When asked about the effectiveness of the Network at coordinating and promoting health research opportunities, respondents shared that they believe the SK-NEIHR has been very effective. There was, however, some desire for improvement. Some viewed the SK-NEIHR as effective in coordinating and promoting health research opportunities, and viewed it as "wonderful and accommodating." For example, if respondents were not able to directly respond to a question or research opportunity, they would connect them with the SK-NEIHR and someone would follow up.

> "I think they've been really wonderful and accommodating for anything that has come our way... I think we've done a really good job." - **Researcher**

Others suggested that the NEIHR would be more effective at promoting health research opportunities through a communication tool like a newsletter. The newsletter could include funding and student/community opportunities and be shared weekly or bi-weekly. This could involve developing a stronger email list to share this information.

Some shared that it was difficult to operationalize access to resources and sharing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as community members were overextended and focused on responding to COVID-19, making it difficult to engage respectfully. Respondents also stated that they were disappointed with the lack of acknowledgement, support, and encouragement from the universities. SK-NEIHR likely missed out on opportunities because of this, and by extension, so did Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan. Some respondents don't fully feel supported by the SK-NEIHR's host institutions. One respondent noted that, in retrospect, it would have been helpful to strategically plan and identify opportunities and decide how to leverage them, but that this was not always possible with the changes and shifts brought on with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other recommendations for **areas of expansion for the SK-NEIHR included**:

- **Consistent social media usage and expansion of platform (e.g., YouTube)**
- **More community outreach**
- **Grassroots community involvement**
- **Advertising within the university and with its partners**

Selecting Future Research Projects

When asked how should NEIHRs respond or approach research priorities and projects, it was suggested that the priority is always to community. Respondents said that SK-NEIHR researchers are first and foremost responsible to community. It was also made clear that the Network can help facilitate conversations, but do not represent those communities. Some suggested that it is important for the SK-NEIHR to have a pulse on community research ambitions and aspirations, so that when requests come in that are not grounded in community, the NEIHR can let researchers know if the request is inappropriate or needs community leadership to be involved. They stressed that good research relationships often take years and must be premised on community guidance and priorities.

> "It's about relationship and asking community: '...What are your health needs in the research space in five years and 10 years? Tell us and then we'll go and target funding.'" - **Researcher**

One respondent shared that it is important to require education and commitment from researchers who want to engage with the SK-NEIHR, specifically for non-Indigenous researchers. This was because they believed it is inappropriate for researchers to expect to access SK-NEIHR support without investing in a genuine and reciprocal relationship.

As an example, some shared that the SK-NEIHR should respond to these requests by inviting researchers to complete the First Nations Information Governance Centre's Fundamentals of OCAP® online training course, and anti-racism training offered by Dr. Holly Graham as part of her Indigenous Chair in Nursing, or other similar training, to demonstrate their commitment to the SK-NEIHR and its partners. This was seen as a practical way to encourage researchers to fully do the work prior to engaging with Indigenous communities. Additionally, this was theorized as an effective approach to retain those with good intentions and "weed out" those who are not genuinely committed to Indigenous research or learning about Indigenous Peoples.

Suggested Ways to Improve the SK-NEIHR

When queried about how the SK-NEIHR can improve, respondents mentioned continuing to build momentum with partnerships and collaborations, increasing mentorship and support for researchers, increasing engagement with First Nation and Métis communities, and ensuring the efficacy of internal structures to be able to support research endeavors, with a focus on sustainability.

Some noted the need for the SK-NEIHR to continue to prioritize partnerships locally, nationally and internationally as a way of continuing to offer mentorship and resources to students, community researchers, and early career researchers. It was also stated there was a need to see an increase in collaborations with local organizations, including with the Saskatchewan Health Authority. This was seen as a better way to collaborate on overlapping work and prevent duplication of efforts across networks.

> "It's time to roll that out and get researchers into community, even if it's not into community. Getting them engaged with community even if it's remotely and doing projects." - **Researcher**

Organizational capacity and sustainability of the SK-NEIHR was stated as a priority, in order to be able to demonstrate the work being done as a Network, to be able to compete with other existing networks, to avoid burnout, and to identify people for high-level administrative roles. Related to this, some respondents recommended focusing on finalizing the SK-NEIHR's internal structure (e.g., roles and responsibilities; explored at the end of this report) so that the SK-NEIHR can build momentum in operationalizing research in alignment with community priorities. One respondent said that they would like more consistent updates on relationships with MN-S, FSIN, and communities, with updates on how these relationships were progressing, what is being discussed and planned. However, there was also acknowledgment of the challenges of dealing with two years of COVID-19, throughout the entirety of the SK-NEIHR's existence, and the complexity of navigating relationships with Indigenous communities with the mounting priorities and strain of the pandemic.

Others noted that the advertising of and momentum for the SK-NEIHR has slowed which, as some explained, has negatively affected the creation and maintenance of relationships. To remedy this, it was suggested that the directors and co-directors should be responsible for the momentum relationships. **However, many stated a need for these to be paid or seconded positions rather than faculty working "off the side of their desk" because the current model isn't as effective as they wished it to be**. This could involve full course release during strategic planning and relationship building, with a role or roles later moving to half course release.

Others shared that, to continue to understand community needs, there is a need to increase the awareness of the SK-NEIHR in Saskatchewan and demonstrate what it can do. In the university context, it was suggested that it's important to visit college and department meetings to inform them of the Network. In the community context, suggestions were made to have a SK-NEIHR booth physically present at events and to build awareness and understanding of the SK-NEIHR and its potential to support communities through specific community visits. This was suggested as some felt that the NEIHR has not been promoted well in community contexts.

The Role of the SK-NEIHR in Saskatchewan (Interviews)

When asked about what the intended purpose of the SK-NEIHR has been and should be in Saskatchewan, many said it should be to support, inform, and uplift Indigenous health research and policy in Saskatchewan. Some shared that COVID highlighted the weaknesses of many systems and exasperated health inequities, including long term care, public health, domestic violence, and preventable deaths. With this, there has been the identification of many areas which need to be

addressed, where networks like the SK-NEIHR can provide policy input and advocacy on how to change or strengthen those systems for Indigenous peoples. Within this, it is important to focus on how things can be improved rather than focusing solely on documenting weaknesses and barriers. Furthermore, it was shared that researchers have a responsibility to proactively impact legislation and policy by influencing provincial and federal health bodies and decision makers.

> "Health research also extends to housing, research and ethics, and community collaborations. There's a whole lot of areas which should look very, very different in 10 years because of what we've done. And so the research has to continue. That's what we build it off. So when we face challenges, we point to the research… It will then start influencing the wider provincial and federal health landscapes." – **Researcher**

Others shared that the role of the SK-NEIHR is to support Indigenous community stakeholders who are interested in engaging in research to identify their research priorities and support them throughout research. The respondent shared an important distinction that the role of the NEIHR is not to connect researchers and communities based on researcher priorities, but rather the other way around (i.e., the research focus must be aligned with community priorities instead). They suggested that the SK-NEIHR could bring together researchers from different places with unique skillsets to collaborate.

> "The role of NEIHR is to enhance Indigenous scholarly work across the province." – **Researcher**

Some shared that another main purpose of the Network is to support community engagement in research to improve health outcomes. In this, respondents explained that it is important to be aware of promising practices around processes and political considerations. As one example of this, respondents pointed to a revised ethics process wherein the community should always provide input to inform university ethics processes so they are based upon community protocols and values (not the other way around). Mentorship and the sharing of information to support this shared goal to improve health outcomes is integral to the role of the Network.

> "The role is to engage [Indigenous] community in research in Saskatchewan to ensure improved health outcomes." – Researcher

Advocating for Institutional Change (SK-NEIHR Role)

When asked about the ways respondents have seen the SK-NEIHR advocate for institutional change as a potential role, a variety of factors were mentioned. There was strong emphasis on using the SK-NEIHR to uphold Indigenous identity processes to prevent identity fraud, which does irrevocable damage to Indigenous Peoples and communities. The SK-NEIHR team, extended partners, and Indigenous communities were deeply impacted by an example of a national leader making fraudulent claims of identity. Some suggested there be an institutional mechanism for addressing academics fraudulently claiming to be Indigenous.

Additionally, it was suggested that the SK-NEIHR develop training and processes for engaging with Indigenous communities in research as an ethics requirement; not large scale systemic change but

creating "checkpoints" that align with community needs.

Other potential areas for institutional change that respondents believed the SK-NEIHR could advocate for included:

- **University level advocacy (policy changes around tenure, research, supporting Indigenous students)**
- **Supporting data sovereignty in Saskatchewan**
- **Advocacy in combination with the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre and other NEIHRs.**

Conclusion: Looking forward to Year Three and Planning for Renewal

The grant application for the Saskatchewan NEIHR was written in 2019, in much different circumstances. Little did we know what was awaiting us in 2020. The onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in March 2020, as the NEIHRs were officially launched, has affected every part of our Network profoundly, impacting our ability to work with Métis and First Nations partners, build partnerships with researchers across the province, travel throughout Saskatchewan and beyond, recruit and train staff, and interact with senior leadership in our institutions.

As we approach the half-way point for the Saskatchewan NEIHR's first round of funding, we are re-evaluating what is possible in these circumstances, and where best to focus our efforts. We are also beginning planning for renewal, the first step of which was transitioning the NEIHR grant to a younger generation of Indigenous leaders. Dr. Robert Henry, a Principal Investigator on the SK-NEIHR, took on the role of Nominated Principal Investigator as of Year Three, with the support of Dr. Caroline Tait, the original Nominated Principal Investigator who submitted the grant application and led the SK-NEIHR for the first two years.

Evaluation will continue to play a critical role in determining our path forward by providing critical insights into our impact. We look forward to continuing to build the *nātawihowin* and *mamawiikikayaahk* Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (SK-NEIHR) to support our vision: for all First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan to experience optimal health and wellness across their lifespans.