



SASKATCHEWAN NEIHR YEAR FOUR REPORT (2020- 2024)



***nātawihowin and
mamawiikikayaahk***

Research, Training, and Mentorship Networks
(Saskatchewan NEIHR, skneihr.ca)

Report presented by

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

This report was prepared in September of 2024.

It covers Years one to four: January 1, 2020 to March 31, 2024



nātawihowin and mamawiikikayaahk

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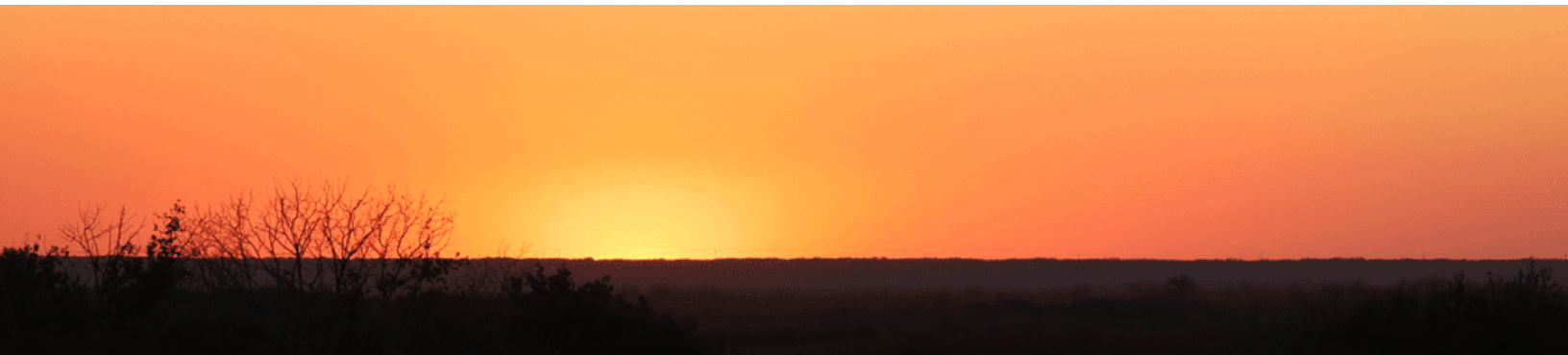
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A MESSAGE FROM KNOWLEDGE KEEPER TERRI HANSEN-GARDINER



Terri is Métis, and she lives in Ile-a-la-Crosse, a Métis village in Northwestern Saskatchewan, the second oldest community in the province, and the site of historic trading posts first established in 1778. She has spent many years working in government, and has worked supporting Indigenous People in the Saskatchewan healthcare system, particularly those going through cancer treatment. Terri is fluent in Cree and Northern Michif. She has been working with researchers in the Saskatchewan NEIHR since it was funded, and joined us as a knowledge keeper in residence in Year Three.

"I first become involved in health research twelve years ago, after noticing how often non-Indigenous people came into our Indigenous communities in Northern Saskatchewan, extracted what they needed, and left, without providing any benefits for our people. When I got involved in research, I wanted to change that. When you work with our people, it is all about trust. We need to see you in person, to develop a trusting relationship. You can't develop that with cold calls, or emails. You need to do it in person, on the ground, in our communities.

As Indigenous People, we know we need to be involved in research, in training, and in knowledge translation to improve the health of our people. We need to support researchers like those in the Saskatchewan NEIHR who are doing this work with us in a good way, be they Métis, First Nations, or allies. None of us can do it alone. I can see that the SK-NEIHR folks agree with this, as the way they invite our input makes it clear. I am proud to be part of this network."

Terri Hansen-Gardiner,
Knowledge Keeper in Residence (Métis)

WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT?

Included in this report are:

- A description of the Saskatchewan NEIHR, and our activities in Years One to Four
- Information about how our activities were tracked and mapped to evaluation outcomes
- Statistics on social media reach
- Analysis of findings from our Year Four Annual Survey
- Analysis of findings from interviews with research leadership, covering the SK-NEIHR's activities in the first four years
- A conclusion, looking forward to our next five years



WHAT IS THE SK-NEIHR NETWORK?

The Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) is a national set of networks funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The NEIHR initiative was developed by CIHR to create and sustain supportive research environments driven by and grounded in Indigenous communities in Canada. There are currently nine networks across Canada, as well as a NEIHR National Coordinating Centre which is also based at the University of Saskatchewan. These networks are intended to be funded for fifteen years, from 2020 to 2035.

The Saskatchewan 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.

The Saskatchewan NEIHR has two intertwined networks: the *nātawihowin* (First Nations) and *mamawiiikayaahk* (Métis) networks. Partway through Year Two, a decision was made to transition to the Cree and Michif names that were gifted for the First Nations and Métis networks that make up the Saskatchewan NEIHR, such that it is now known as the *nātawihowin* and *mamawiiikayaahk* Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (SK-NEIHR). Our networks are made up of researchers, community organizations, community members, and graduate students throughout Saskatchewan nationally and internationally working in First Nations and Métis health and wellness. We facilitate First Nations and Métis health research, training, and knowledge mobilization that is grounded in community and led by Métis and First Nations People. Our work is guided by these foundational beliefs:

- that Saskatchewan Métis and First Nations People are best situated to lead research, training and knowledge mobilization involving our communities;
- that the SK-NEIHR belongs to Métis and First Nations Peoples in Saskatchewan, and that it can grow and evolve based on community-identified needs; and
- that we need to rely on the guidance of our community partners, Elders, knowledge keepers, and other experts for this work.

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 researcher 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 Peoples 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 these efforts.

The SK-NEIHR is grounded in our shared values and priorities, inclusive of remote, rural, urban and reserve populations through a distinctions-based approach, distinguishing between and within Métis and First Nations Peoples, rather than a pan-Indigenous approach.

Guiding Principles, Intent, and Objectives

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

We believe that from our respective traditional knowledges 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 Indigenous and western research methodologies and analytic tools. When provided pragmatic strategies to co-design and co-develop research, Indigenous Peoples are able to mobilize positive change for their people, forming research, training, and knowledge mobilization partnerships between Indigenous communities and postsecondary researchers and students to support the transformative changes that our network strives for.

The relationship of First Nations and Métis Peoples to this land, and the relationship of traditional territories to the resilience, resistance, and spirits are from where our future is cultivated. We come together in the spirit of working for our young families, for their futures, and the future for all our relations. The Saskatchewan NEIHR network is led by Indigenous researchers, and non-Indigenous allies/accomplices, in partnership with Indigenous stakeholders in Saskatchewan. For biographies of the research leadership and staff, please visit our website, skneihr.ca.

Research Leadership and Staff

The Research Leadership Team is made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty working in Indigenous health and wellness. Current members are:

- Dr. Robert (Bobby) Henry (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies, University of Saskatchewan) – current Nominated Principal Investigator
- Dr. Caroline Tait (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Professor, Social Work, University of Calgary) – founding Nominated Principal investigator
- Dr. Leah Ferguson (Principal Investigator, Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Associate Professor, Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. Heather Foulds (Principal Investigator, Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Associate Professor, Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. Holly Graham (Principal Investigator, Cree, Member of Thunderchild First Nation, Associate Professor, Psychiatry, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. Simon Lambert (Principal Investigator, Māori, member of Tūhoe and Ngāti Ruapani tribes from Aotearoa New Zealand, Adjunct Professor, Indigenous Studies, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. Carrie Lavallie (Principal Investigator, settler, VP Academic [Interim]; Program Coordinator Indigenous Health Studies, First Nations University of Canada)
- Dr. Stacey Lovo (Principal Investigator, settler, Assistant Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. Wendie Marks (Principal Investigator, Anishinaabe, Member of Anishinabe of Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation, Assistant Professor, Pediatrics, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. Sarah Oosman (Principal Investigator, settler, Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, University of Saskatchewan)
- Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose (Principal Investigator, Ojibwe, Member of M'Chigeeng First Nation, Associate Professor, Education, University of Regina) [resigned from leadership team February 26, 2024]
- Dr. Jaris Swidrovich (Principal Investigator, Saulteaux, Member of Yellowquill First Nation, Assistant Professor, Pharmacy, University of Toronto)



Front Row L to R: Cory Baumgardner, Dr. Wendi Marks, Tammy Popova, Dr. Holly Graham, Terri Hansen-Gardiner (Knowledge Keeper and Elder), Dr. Caroline Tait, Fleur Macqueen Smith, Dr. Leah Fergusson. Back Row L to R: Dr. Robert Henry, Dr. Heather Foulds, Marissa Desmarais (2023-2024 SK-NEIHR scholarship recipient), Ken Lai, Andrew Hartman (graduate student), Dr. Carrie Lavallie. Taken in September 2023 at the Principal Investigator and Staff Retreat at Dakota Dunes Resort on Whitecap Dakota First Nation.

Current staff members are:

- Fleur Macqueen Smith, MA, Manager (settler)
- Terri Hansen-Gardiner, knowledge keeper in residence (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan)
- Tammy Popova, MA, Research and Administrative Coordinator (Indigenous: member of Yakut/Sakha People from North Siberia, in Northeast Russia)
- Ken Lai, BSc, Community Research Facilitator (Métis, Citizen of Manitoba Métis Federation)
- Susan Shacter, MA candidate, Community Research Facilitator (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan)
- Cory Baumgardner, MA, Communications and Knowledge Translation Officer (settler)



Front Row L to R: Cory Baumgardner, Dr. Robert Henry, Ken Lai
 Back Row L to R: Tammy Popova, Terri Hansen-Gardiner, Fleur Macqueen Smith, Susan Foulds

Key Activities

Research matchmaking: identifying funding opportunities and matching researchers and communities

Funding: community partnership funds for researchers to engage with communities to develop and submit grant proposals to large funding agencies, and knowledge translation funds to share research findings broadly

Writing and research administrative support: assistance with grant and report writing and knowledge translation, and financial management of research funds

Training and professional development: workshops, webinars, and training in community-based research and knowledge translation methods

Mentorship: for graduate students and new investigators

A Note on Challenges in the First Four Years:

In 2019, the *nātawihowin* and *mamawiikikayaahk* Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (SK-NEIHR) was established. During the initial phase of the NEIHR program, and similar to other NEIHRs nationally, the Saskatchewan NEIHR team has had to deal with challenges that were unforeseen at their outset. COVID-19, Indigenous identity fraud, and a lack of stability at the Institute of Indigenous Peoples Health at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (the funding lead for the NEIHR program) have caused disruptions and delays to roll out all aspects of the initial SK-NEIHR network. COVID-19 has had all institutions, governments and communities readjust the meaning of “meaningful engagement” and research protocols.

Indigenous identity fraud has become a primary concern now for communities, universities and CIHR as they understand the impact that it has had and find ways to address it from continuing. The SK-NEIHR was at the epicenter of the issue as it was through the leadership and perseverance of Dr. Tait (former Nominated Principal Investigator of the SK-NEIHR) that led to national and international attention to Indigenous identity fraud, uncovering the impacts that it has had within and across Indigenous communities, academic institutions, and the Tri-Agency.

Finally, through the outing of the former Scientific Director of the Institute of Indigenous Peoples’ Health at CIHR in October 2021, there has been a lack of direction and leadership in Indigenous health nationally. The NEIHRs have had to advocate on their own behalves for increased funding, as they undertake more mentorship and training activities that were funded and led previously by the now defunct Indigenous Mentorship Program. This has been particularly significant in assuming the responsibility for the annual National Gathering of Graduate Students, which has grown considerably, without the funding needed. Despite the challenges SK-NEIHR has pushed forward advancing the goals of the NEIHR program generally and CIHR’s Indigenous priorities overall.

Activities in the Past Four Years – What Have We Done?

This report covers our operations from January 2020 until March 2024 – the network’s first four years. More details from years one to three were also reported in Year One, Year Two, and Year Three annual reports. These reports can be found on our website, skneihr.ca, under the About Us tab.

Year One (January 2020-March 2021)

Saskatchewan's NEIHR Network launched in January 2020 by founding NPI Dr. Caroline Tait, after funding was announced in December 2019, staffed with team members already on Dr. Tait's research team. Many planned operations and activities were very delayed by COVID-19, declared on March 11, both because it was not possible to meet in person or travel to communities once the SK-NEIHR was officially launched, and because First Nations and Métis community leaders were very focused on the pandemic, limiting their capacity to focus on health research more broadly. However, the team adapted and had a productive first year.

The website skneihr.ca launched on April 1, 2020, with a Facebook page following shortly that published 299 unique posts in the first year. By the end of April 2020, SK-NEIHR launched its Community Partnership funding support program: seed funding meant to support researchers and community stakeholders in developing grant applications to the Tri-Agency and other major research funders, on Indigenous health research. SK-NEIHR provided \$58,808 of support funds to nine teams of researchers from University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, and First Nations University of Canada, and two community-based organizations, all of them led by full application team members in recognition of their support for the successful NEIHR proposal. A second round of funding that fall provided \$35,313 to another four teams, two led by researchers, and two by community partners. Funding details are under the Funding tab on skneihr.ca.

The SK-NEIHR hosted six webinars on topics including Indigenous disaster and emergency management, Indigenous communities holding research funds, evaluating Reconciliation in Saskatchewan, and a COVID vaccine Q&A, all posted on skneihr.ca under Webinars. Work was undertaken on developing a course for the Métis Data Governance Principles developed by Drs. Tait and Henry, with support from a committee and contracted curriculum developer. Evaluation commenced with the establishment of the evaluation committee, whose members developed the measurement framework with the external evaluator, and guiding values with the support of Elders and knowledge keepers. Details of all these activities are included in the Year One Annual Report, posted under About Us on skneihr.ca.

Year Two (April 2021-March 2022)

In its second year, the SK-NEIHR transitioned to the Cree and Michif names gifted for the First Nations and Métis networks within the SK-NEIHR, so it is now known as the *nātawihowin* and *mamawiikikayaahk* Research, Training and Mentorship Networks (SK-NEIHR). As the pandemic entered year two, the appetite for webinars had lessened, so fewer were offered. Year Two started with a major webinar, a panel discussion on *Racism in Healthcare* focused on systems change, held April 15, with over 400 attendees online. Two other webinars focused on building research partnerships and grant writing. Four more teams were funded in the third call for Community Partnership proposals: three community partners, and one researcher, totalling \$35,000. The team also developed a Member Database for the website, searchable by research area.

In the winter of 2021, the external evaluator completed the first Annual Survey of members, covering activities in years 1-2. As described in the Year Two Annual Report, respondents said they had experienced the core outcomes intended to be facilitated through the SK-NEIHR. Of note, 77% of all respondents either agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (37%) that the SK-NEIHR has advanced their knowledge of community-based research. Similarly, 77% also either agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (27%) that the SK-NEIHR has helped them advance their knowledge of data sovereignty and research rights. Compounding this is evidence suggesting that many have a better understanding of the role researchers can have in advancing Indigenous wellness in Saskatchewan (48% agreed, 38% strongly agreed). The evaluator conducted interviews with six PIs, with similar positive results.

Year Three (April 2022-March 2023)

In Year Three, the SK-NEIHR focused on co-hosting the National Gathering of (Indigenous) Graduate Students with the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre, resuming in-person events, and developing and hiring staff into new positions for community research facilitation, and communications and knowledge translation. Leadership transitioned from Dr. Tait to Dr. Henry as the Nominated Principal Investigator, and we added two Indigenous Principal Investigators, Drs. Ferguson and Marks. The SK-NEIHR developed a knowledge keeper in residence position, held by Terri Hansen-Gardiner.

The 2022 National Gathering of Graduate Students brought together 120 graduate students, faculty, Elders and staff in person for the first time since 2018, with almost 60 graduate students presenting their research. Respondents to the post-event survey (n=59) said NGGS 2022 helped them understand the role researchers could have in advancing Indigenous wellness (42% agreed; 54% strongly agreed), validate Indigenous ways of doing research (26% agreed; 66% strongly agreed), and provided opportunities to advance community-based research (48% agreed; 22% strongly agreed).

In September 2022, Principal Investigators, staff, graduate students, and the NEIHR knowledge keeper in residence came together at the first annual retreat held in person. A Terms of Reference for Principal Investigators (researchers leading the network) was developed, including an Indigenous Identity policy. We also decided to change the Community Partnership research support funds into a rolling deadline, and add Knowledge Translation support funds. In December 2022, the SK-NEIHR hosted an in-person roundtable discussion on the *Indigenous Identity: the Impact of Pretendians in the Academy*, livestreamed to Facebook. In the post-event survey (n=150), it motivated attendees to hold institutions and governments to account on oppressive health research, policies, or practices (37% agreed, 59% strongly agreed), and help respondents to understand the role researchers could have in advancing Indigenous wellness (42% agreed, 46% strongly agreed). Results from the second annual survey and researcher interviews were again very positive, as described more fully in our Year Three report.

Year Four (April 2023-March 2024)

Staffing

We welcomed three new staff members in March 2023, based on positions discussed and approved at our September 2022 Research Leadership Retreat. We increased our communications and outreach capacity with a new staff position for a Communications and Knowledge Translation Officer, with Cory Baumgardner to our team. We also developed and staffed two new positions for Community Research Facilitators, welcoming Ken Lai and Susan Shacter, both Métis, that month as well. Ken supports the Community Partnership and Knowledge Translation support program, and Susan also supports mentorship with graduate students.

Métis Cancer Survivors: A Digital Storytelling Project

That summer, the SK-NEIHR supported knowledge keeper Terri Hansen-Gardiner to bring together other Métis cancer survivors from Northern Saskatchewan to share their cancer journeys in digital stories. As a knowledge keeper with SK-NEIHR, Terri wanted to create a legacy project to share her experiences as a cancer survivor and advocate living in Northern Saskatchewan, and provide an opportunity for others to share their stories as well.

We spent a few days together on the land at the Back to Batoche Métis Gathering with facilitators from the StoryCentre Canada. People then continued working online after this with the StoryCentre facilitators. That December, we brought everyone together again, so that we could watch all seven of the personal stories people had created and share the impact this project had on their journeys. These stories are all posted on our website

under News, and on our YouTube channel. Lead researchers Dr. Chelsea Gabel and Dr. Robert (Bobby) Henry have begun publishing and presenting on the project—a knowledge translation project that led to research. Additionally, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency has asked to share these stories at cancer clinics across the province.

"Working with people from the Saskatchewan NEIHR over the last few years, I have seen up close how the researchers and staff really value our opinions and welcome our involvement. A good example of this is the time we spent together at the Back to Batoche Festival in July 2023, where NEIHR researchers brought together Métis people who are cancer survivors to create videos to share their stories. That was one of the best weekends I have had since I started doing cancer advocacy and support, and helping with cancer research after my own cancer diagnosis and recovery. Afterwards, I talked to other Métis people who participated, and we all felt the same way. It was a very special few days together." – knowledge keeper in residence Terri Hansen-Gardiner

Pilot testing the Métis Data Governance Principles training course, the Annual Leadership Retreat, and Inaugural Research Engagement Day

The SK-NEIHR was particularly busy in September 2023, with three major activities: the first pilot testing of the Métis Data Governance Principles training; our annual Research Leadership Retreat, and our inaugural First Nations and Métis Research Engagement Day.

We had 18 people participate in the one-day training course on Métis Data Governance, led by Dr. Caroline Tait, who developed these Principles along with Dr. Robert Henry and colleagues, in a grant from the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation with Métis Nation-Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Participants were researchers, research administrators, staff supporting research ethics boards, and staff from Métis governments. People found the training useful, as comments noted:

"Biggest takeaway? That there are differences in the customs, governance structures and history of the Métis as compared to First Nations that have to be understood. It was good to see the origin differences of Métis principles on data governance compared to OCAP.®" – Research Engagement Day Attendee

"There is a need to have distinctions-based outlook on things or risk painting everyone with the same brush. Indigenous people of Canada are three distinct groups of people and research practices and data sovereignty and governance shouldn't be trained as a Pan-Indigenous. To do this would repeat colonialism all over again". – Research Engagement Day Attendee

SK-NEIHR held its first, First Nations and Métis Research Engagement Day at Wanuskewin Heritage Park just north of Saskatoon on September 28, 2023. This day brought together researchers, community members, and students from across the province to hear from Saskatchewan NEIHR researchers, graduate students, and recipients of community partnership funds on the work they were doing in community-based Métis and First Nations health research. Of the 130 people attending, 60% were from the community – demonstrating that we have been able to reach and involve people beyond the universities in our province. In the post-event survey 79% of respondents identified this as the first SK-NEIHR event they had attended, with 92% saying it helped them connect with community partners, and 87% increased their access to health research resources.

Feedback from the post-event survey was very positive:

Biggest takeaway: All the work being done in the province to advise, support and provide Indigenous community-led research. How many people have the same drive to build shared knowledge with communities?

Community Partnership and Knowledge Translation Funding, and other Research Supports

The SK-NEIHR continued awarding funding for community partnerships and knowledge translation – by the end of that year, we had given out \$259,000 in funding for these projects over the four years, with 32 projects funded for community partnership development, and nine funded for knowledge translation. Funding recipients shared the value of this support in their final reports.

Comments included:

"This CP Support Funding was used to establish and support a Community Advisory Committee made up of community Knowledge Keepers and Elders. It laid the groundwork to apply for and be awarded a 4-year CIHR Project Grant of over \$500,000." – funding recipient

"Without NEIHR's KT Support Funding our project would have wrapped up, with final reports produced only for the agencies directly involved in the research. Because we were able to retain our entire project team . . . we were able to connect with more agencies and organizations; and do more to show how our project supported (and helps make a case for) culturally-appropriate services." – funding recipient

We continued to provide advice and support for research projects, letters of support for funding applications, and grant development assistance, particularly to Principal Investigators in our network. We also continued to add members to the public member database on our website.

Graduate Student Support

We supported graduate student travel in Year Four, including funding nine Indigenous graduate students to attend and present at the 2023 National Gathering of Graduate Students in Sydney, Nova Scotia. As part of our matching funding from the University of Saskatchewan, we offer an annual graduate student scholarship of \$20,000. The 2023-24 scholarship recipient, Marissa Desmarais, presented at Research Engagement Day, and participated in our Annual Research Leadership Retreat that September, along with several other graduate students.

Communications

The SK-NEIHR supported Reconciliation Saskatoon in organizing, promoting, and hosting two language revitalization events, one at the University of Saskatchewan, and one at Station 20 West in Saskatoon's core neighbourhood. Not only is this the site of the SK-NEIHR offices, it is also a well known location in the community of Saskatoon, helping to increase the accessibility of the event. SK-NEIHR was also active on social media throughout the year. See pages 17-20.

SK-NEIHR Grant Renewal

The latter half of Year Four was focused on writing a strong proposal to fund the Saskatchewan NEIHR for the next five years, which was submitted on April 3, 2024, just after Year Four was completed. We strengthened our relationships with the University of Regina and First Nations University, welcoming several new Principal Investigators and Principal Decisionmakers to our Research Leadership Team. We more than doubled our matching funding from partner universities from \$500,000 to \$1,201,000 – an increase of \$701,000. Our application went in with a research team of 75 – one Nominated Principal Investigator (Dr. Robert Henry), 13 Principal Investigators, seven Principal Knowledge Users, one Knowledge User, 31 Co-Investigators, and 22 collaborators. It also included 54 letters of support.

To continue advancing the breadth and depth of Indigenous health and wellbeing research provincially, nationally, and internationally, the SK-NEIHR framed its renewal around the concept of Indigenous futurism. Originating from a literary perspective, Indigenous futurism describes “a movement of art, literature, games, and other forms of media which expresses Indigenous perspectives on the future, present, and past,” moving beyond colonialism and recovering ancestral traditions (see G.L. Dillon’s *Walking the clouds: an anthology of Indigenous science fiction*, University of Arizona Press, 2012).

The SK-NEIHR is taking this conceptual thinking into health and wellbeing research, where intergenerational understandings and approaches will frame how research is undertaken and disseminated, embedding mentoring principles that honour the Seven Generation teachings, throughout the research lifecycle. Indigenous futurism shifts the focus from historical points that have caused pain, trauma, or a crisis, to how Indigenous Peoples can envision a healthier future for themselves, family, community and nations. Indigenous futurism positions Indigenous knowledges, experiences, and science as the leading partner within research methods. This is a shift from Two-Eyed Seeing and other research frameworks that look to position Indigenous knowledges within or alongside Western science. Rather, Indigenous futurism in health research looks to embrace technologies not as Western, but as tools that, when used within Indigenous frameworks, can support and improve knowledge about Indigenous health and wellbeing.



EVALUATION OF OUR ACTIVITIES IN YEARS ONE TO FOUR

Methodology (Data Sources Included)

Guided by the SK-NEIHR measurement strategy, an independent evaluator worked with SK-NEIHR staff and principal investigators (PI) to measure the network's impact and activities since our launch in 2020. The intention of doing this was to report to our wider audience on what differences we were able to make. To be able to track change over time, we asked similar questions year-over-year, meaning we could compare, contrast, and combine data to determine our overall impact. As we approach renewal for the SK-NEIHR, we decided that the scope of this section should cover all the combined data from the start of the SK-NEIHR to March of 2024 (i.e., the end of year '4'). Through this, we can demonstrate the concrete differences we influenced for everyone involved in the network. To do this we are drawing on several longitudinal data sources including:

SK-NEIHR Annual Survey (2021-2024)

Starting in March 2021, the SK-NEIHR published an annual survey that was sent to network members including Principal Investigators. The survey was undertaken a total of three times and gathered responses from 203 individuals. It was aimed at gathering evidence for what outcomes the SK-NEIHR had helped facilitate as well as to gather crucial activity data that would allow us to improve in future years. This was a valuable data source that targeted researchers, community members, community organizations, and institutions. It helped provide regular insight into our progress, and because we asked similar questions each year, we are able to combine the results into a single data set. This combined data is the one presented throughout this report and is interwoven with other data sources. To view a list of questions from this survey, please contact us¹.

Interviews with SK-NEIHR Principal Investigators

To supplement and support the annual surveys, an open invitation for interviews was sent to Principal Investigators each year. This process provided much-needed context for the other results we were receiving and provided a rich, reflective outlet for PIs to tell us what they thought.

These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the independent evaluator and the same PIs were often interviewed each year. In total, 14 interviews were completed. As with the annual survey, similar questions were asked each year to assist us with combining the results for this report. Please see our years one, two, and three annual reports to see specific qualitative data from each year.



¹ If you have any more questions about the methodology used to form this report or the SK-NEIHR measurement strategy, please contact Fleur at fleur.macqueensmith@usask.ca.

Event Surveys

After each event the SK-NEIHR hosted, we commonly sent out a feedback survey to all participants. As with all our other methods, the questions on these surveys were designed to assess overall SK-NEIHR outcomes and many of them repeated across events (depending on the topic of each one). Over the course of four years, we gathered a total of 441 responses using these surveys and this report combines that data into a single narrative. Only common questions across all events were combined, so if you are interested in knowing about a specific event's results, please contact us¹. Data sources here included feedback surveys from these events:

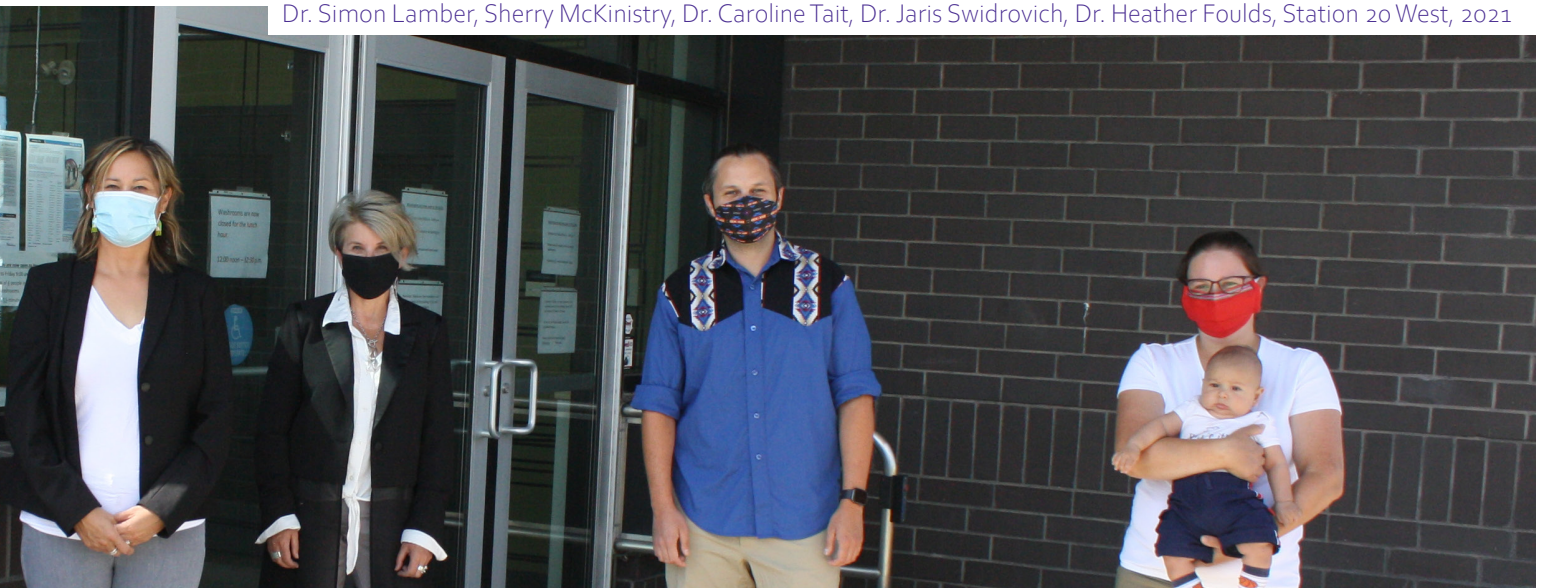
- Racism in healthcare: Creating systems change (April 15, 2021)
- Building research together webinar (November 3, 2021)
- National Gathering of Graduate Students 2022 (June 13 - 16, 2022)
- Indigenous identity: The impact of pretendians in the academy (December 2, 2022)
- Building research together webinar (June 8, 2023)
- Métis data governance training (September 21, 2023)
- First Nations and Métis Research Engagement Day (September 28, 2023)
- Indigenous languages in truth and reconciliation (October 26, 2023)

Combined results from all event surveys are interwoven with the results from the annual survey and interviews. Together, these data sources allowed us to explore the impact we have had for network participants since we started. We will begin by exploring the reach that the SK-NEIHR has had on social media.

Communications

The SK-NEIHR has been active in communications, launching the skneihr.ca website April 1, 2020 and establishing a newsletter in MailChimp that first went out April 8, 2020. Since then there have been 14 issues of the newsletter published. The most recent newsletter in December 2023 was sent to 371 subscribers, with 194 opens and 19 link clicks. The average open rate for SK-NEIHR newsletters is 49.6%, which is significantly higher than the industry average open rate of 34.2%.

Dr. Simon Lamber, Sherry McKinistry, Dr. Caroline Tait, Dr. Jaris Swidrovich, Dr. Heather Foulds, Station 20 West, 2021



¹ If you have any more questions about the methodology used to form this report or the SK-NEIHR measurement strategy, please contact Fleur at fleur.macqueensmith@usask.ca.

In the spring of 2023, we engaged an Indigenous graduate student to assist with outreach and support, and subsequently hired a fulltime Communications and KT Officer in March 2023, to support communications, KT and outreach. We have continued to host webinars and hybrid events, posting recordings on our website, skneihr.ca, YouTube account, and social media. We also participated in a number of events across the province to promote the SK-NEIHR.

Our presence online has grown exponentially with the addition of Cory Baumgartner, who manages communications and KT full-time. The SK-NEIHR's online communications strategy has been adapted to get the most leverage out of social media and Google, adding active accounts on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter (X) in the last year, along with the Facebook and YouTube accounts established earlier.



Sharing circle at NGGS 2022

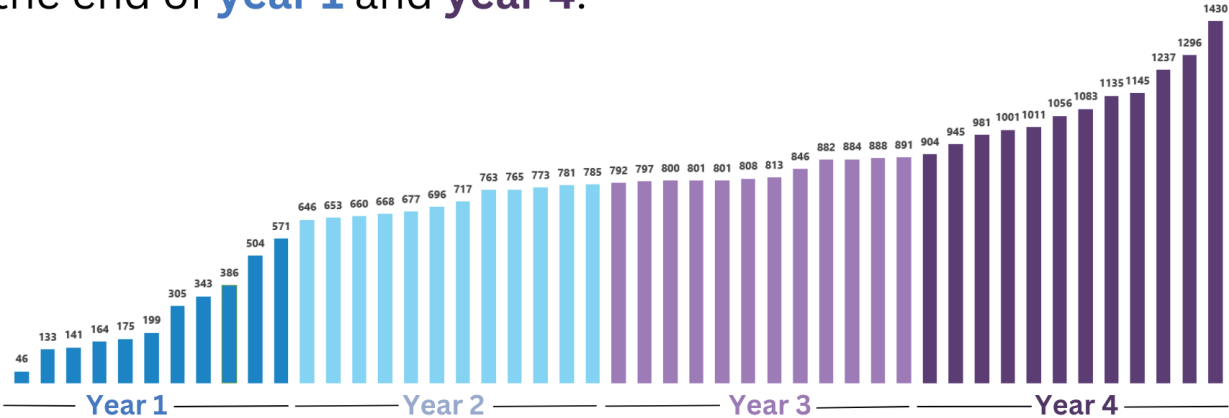
Social Media Reach and Results (2020-2024)

It has been and continues to be an important platform for the SK-NEIHR to spread health research awareness, opportunities, and news to our audience. To help us better understand the reach of our network, we kept track of the number of likes, followers, and audience demographics. This data starts in May of 2020 and is cut off at March of 2024 so we could form this report.

Across all years, the SK-NEIHR Facebook continued to grow and reach more people with First Nations and Métis health research news, opportunities, and events. We measured this growth by the number of “likes” our Facebook page received and, as of March 2024, our page has received 1430 likes (an increase of 539 in 2024 alone). However, when looking at the results over time, a clear pattern of constant growth emerges. This means that we did a good job keeping our Facebook page engaging and interesting for new and existing users. From March 2023 to August 2024 our total post reach has been 416,225, our post engagement has reached 47,537, and our audience has grown to 1800 followers.

As is seen below, there were significant growth periods towards the end of the first and fourth years. We believe that the first growth period (a jump from 199 to 571) was due to some significant events at the end of the first year and establishment of the network. The growth we saw in the fourth year was due to the hiring of a full-time Communications Officer, whose job is to ensure that Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, and YouTube pages (among other duties) are constantly updated with engaging material.

The number of people **liking** the SK NEIHR Network Facebook page **grew significantly** over time, with notable increases at the end of **year 1** and **year 4**.



This contributed to ongoing steady growth across the years and resulted in a large following for the SK-NEIHR, and in Year Four, significant boosts in our reach. This is measured by the number of people who saw any content from our page or about our page, including posts, stories, ads, social information from people who interact with our page (note that Facebook also estimates this metric). However, the year-over-year reach of the SK-NEIHR network Facebook Page was good, with steady declines from years one to three, but with a massive jump in year four. Compounding this, we had 19,311 unique visits to our page across all years (with 14,900 of those being in year four alone) and a total “reach” number of 538,297 – an impressive number of people to engage with our content. Of 538,297 reached, 436,225 of them were reached between March 2023 and August 2024. Additionally, it appears that our following largely self-identify as women (83%) compared to men (16)¹. Over half of our followers are between the ages of 35 and 54 (52%) and over one quarter reside in Saskatoon (29%). The remaining followers are spread throughout the country, which is a good indication that our Facebook page has a wide reach.

The **reach** of the SK-NEIHR Facebook Page was decreasing from year 1 to year 3, but took a **massive jump** in **year 4**.



¹ Unfortunately, Facebook does not offer any additional insights on gender identification other than women and men

Instagram, X, LinkedIn and YouTube: The SK-NEIHR's communications strategy has been adapted to get the most leverage out of social media and Google. We have focused on developing and staying connected with our audience on Facebook and Instagram. We have also added X (Twitter) and LinkedIn to our social media platforms. As a result, our audience online has grown exponentially. Since March 2023 our Instagram following has grown from 94 followers to 1,225 followers and has reached 126,318 people. On one of our most recent social accounts, X (Twitter), we have reached 15,838 people and our followers have been growing steadily. We also have a YouTube channel that in the last 365 days received: 6,324 views (a 74% increase from the previous year), with an average view duration of 10:08, and an increase of 50 subscribers; 27.3% of viewers were in the USA and 19.3% were in Canada.



Search Engine Optimization: Another aspect of our Communications and Knowledge Translation strategy has involved Search Engine Optimization (SEO). On-page optimization of the SK-NEIHR website and associated content, writing blogs and conducting video interviews with Principal Investigators, and utilizing keyword research to support content creation has resulted in the SK-NEIHR continuously being ranked in the top 3 search results for relevant search categories, e.g. "First Nations health research Saskatchewan" and "Métis health research Saskatchewan."



Métis cancer survivors participate in digital storytelling project at Back to Batoche, July 2023



WHAT DIFFERENCES HAVE WE MADE? OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

Who answered our Annual Surveys?

To better understand our results and provide you, the reader, with an idea of who is providing us with feedback, we included demographic questions in all our surveys. The results of this reveal that 35% of our respondents self-identify as First Nations, 24% as Métis, and 29% as non-Indigenous. This is a relatively even split and is encouraging for us because we originally set out to work with all three of those groups (whether through building capacity or advocating for systemic change, as one example). Additionally, many of our respondents self-identified as female (69%), with the remaining being split between males (19%), two-spirit (6%), or preferred not to say (3%).

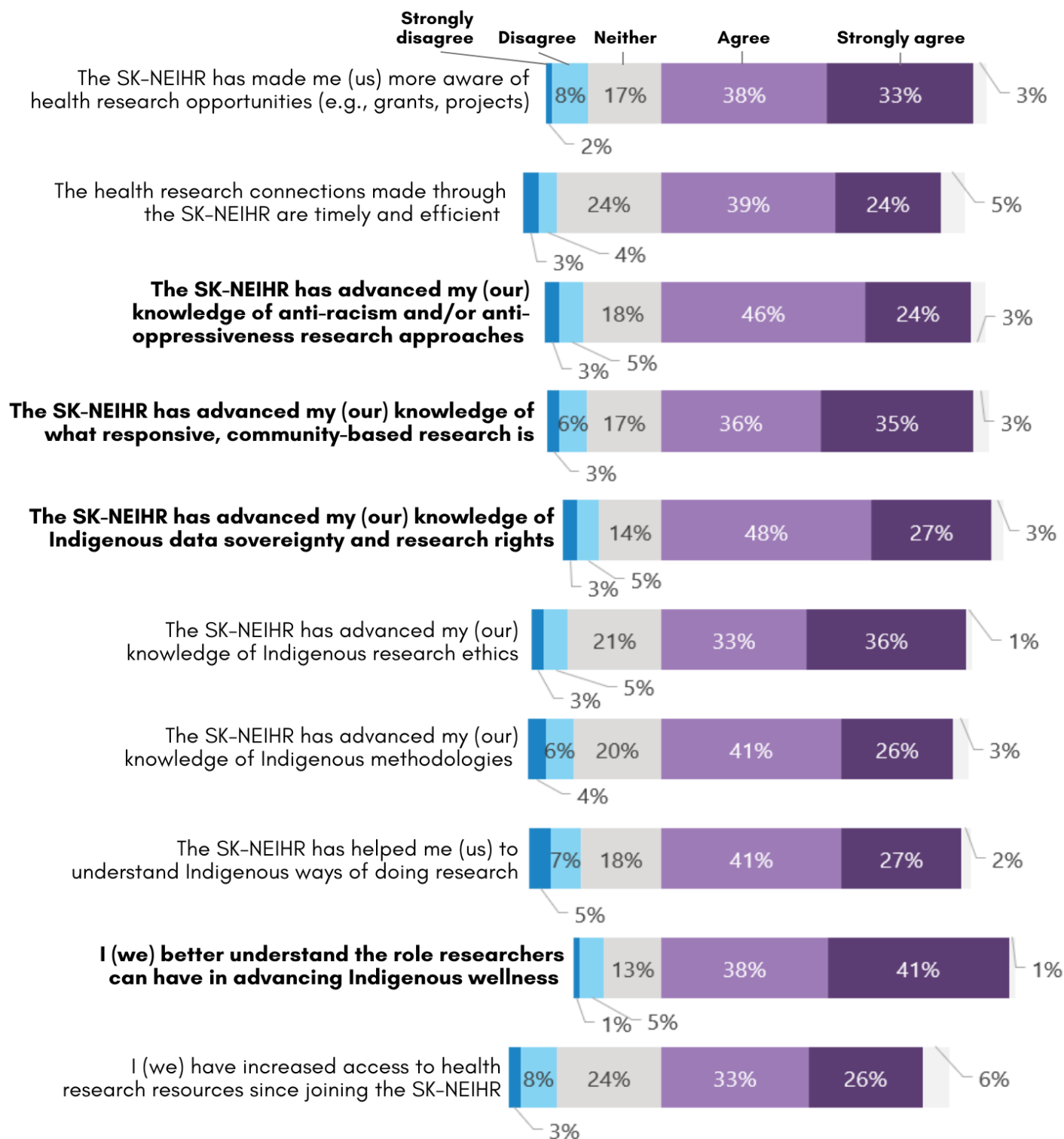
Crucial to understanding our results further, many of our respondents self-identified as researchers or researchers in a SK-NEIHR leadership position (a combined 44%). The next highest category was students (19%), followed closely by community members (15%). These results show that we are largely working within institutions, but that we do have some community reach as well (note that an additional 7% of respondents selected community organization).

Results (Outcomes and Impacts)

The surveys were designed in such a way that the number of questions changed depending on how respondents self-identified (e.g., researchers would answer more questions than community members would). However, there was always a core set of questions that all groups of participants were asked to answer. These were questions around our foundation objectives outlined in our measurement framework (e.g., enabling community-based research, Indigenous methodologies, data sovereignty and research rights, making connections, etc.). Note that, in all surveys, these set of questions were asked in random order so that they varied for each respondent (to avoid order effects).

When we combined the results from all annual surveys an unmistakable pattern emerged. As is seen in the graph below, the vast majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR had facilitated positive outcomes for them – a gratifying result after many years of work.

Many respondents either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** that **they have experienced the core SK-NEIHR outcomes across all years**, regardless of the group they come from (e.g., researchers, community members).



While all of our central goals received positive results, a few stood out as exceptional. For instance, a combined 70% of all respondents either agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (24%) that the SK-NEIHR advanced their understanding of anti-racism and anti-oppressive research approaches. We anticipate the impact of this as huge, with potentially hundreds of people using this newfound knowledge to do research with First Nations and Métis peoples in a better, more responsive way. This is backed by 71% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the SK-NEIHR helped to advance their knowledge of what responsive, community-based research is (36% agreed; 35% strongly agreed). To keep adding to this, 75% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR advanced their knowledge of Indigenous data sovereignty and research rights. When these three outcomes are combined, we believe it has the potential to seriously influence research and policy in a positive direction for the Treaty Territories and Métis homeland in Saskatchewan and beyond.

When combined with evidence that shows advances in and access to health research opportunities, connections, knowledge of Indigenous research ethics and methodologies, the SK-NEIHR has built a foundation for systemic change within health research. The groundswell of relationships (created and furthered), knowledge, and resources will undoubtedly have an impact for many years to come, as is already demonstrated in our results thus far.

These results are also backed by the combined qualitative results from interviews with PIs and our annual surveys. Namely, they show the network's pivotal role in creating a robust sense of community within colonial institutions, deep connections, and uncompromising support among First Nations and Métis scholars. The combined set of results also highlights the SK-NEIHR's contributions to creating an environment focused on relationships, connections, safety, and comfort.

Relationships and Research Connections

Interview and annual survey evidence shows that SK-NEIHR has been successful in cultivating a strong sense of community, connection, and support. This theme is central across all years, underscores the network's unique ability to create and sustain a fundamentally relational and, by extension, uncompromisingly Indigenous environment that stands as a beacon within colonial institutions. For example:

"While you're understanding the great work and contributions that you each bring, you also just get to know the humans, which is what's really impactful. So, you just get to know the people behind the researcher, if that's a way of framing." – Interviewee

"I haven't really named this, but...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." - Interviewee

"But then there's also the human aspect side of it, too, that I think is really, really important for Indigenous researchers, and scholars, and staff, and students to have that community and that sense of belonging and to be able to connect with other Indigenous peoples on campus because we are growing but still far and few between. So, I think it [SK-NEIHR] creates this mighty force." – Interviewee

"I'm very isolated. So having Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars together in this space has just been so wonderful. I've experienced lots of hardships...whether it was NEIHR related or not, the people within it have just been fantastic and wonderful supports even when I was out on a leave, folks would be texting me almost every day like, 'How are you doing?' And it's just been wonderful." - Interviewee

"The SK-NEIHR is an indispensable resource for research involving working with Indigenous communities. The

SK-NEIHR has developed valuable research relationships with Indigenous communities and functions as an incredible financial resource as well as bank of knowledge regarding community-based research. Access to this resource is fundamental to successful research with Indigenous communities.” – Annual Survey Respondent

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the above quotes, our evidence also identifies that the relational design and structure of the SK-NEIHR helped PIs and others feel comfortable, supported, and valued. Interviewees frequently commented on how the network provided a “safe space” for them— one where they could express themselves freely without fear of negative repercussions. This environment was particularly important for First Nations and Métis faculty, who face marginalization and isolation in academic institutions at every level. The evidence suggests that SK-NEIHR has effectively carved out a space within institutions (especially at the University of Saskatchewan) and in the wider community:

“And because you create that foundation for human relationships, it, in my opinion, gives you more psychological safety to say things that you might otherwise not say. And know that even if I say something and it’s like, ‘I disagree,’ or, ‘No, we should be doing this somewhere else,’ whatever the conversation might be, at the end of the day, you’re still human to human, you already have that safe connection to fall back on.” – Interviewee

“I think, or something I’d hope, if it does continue in this trajectory that I’m experiencing it, for myself, in addition to those lifelong relationships that, again, I wouldn’t have if the NEIHR wasn’t there, they’ll continue to be nurtured, which really just says a lot again for safety and support of Indigenous scholars and people in a space that isn’t always safe for them.” - Interviewee

“Creating a community with other health researchers to guide and learn from one another to ensure all research is ethical and has best practices while working with a First Nations community.” – Annual Survey Respondent

“I partnered with the SK-NEIHR to host a Two Spirit Gathering and this would not have been possible without their collaboration and support. I worked closely with SK-NEIHR throughout last spring and the summer to do this and it has facilitated a great deal of support for future research by and with Two Spirit communities on the prairies.”

– Annual Survey Respondent

It was common for interviewees to explain that the relational structure of SK-NEIHR, supported by the SK-NEIHR leadership’s commitment to fostering both personal and professional relationships, has been a key driver of the network’s success. This approach has led to stronger interpersonal and research connections, fast-tracked the development of a cohesive network of First Nations and Métis faculty, and accelerated projects. According to the interviewees, this effect was catapulted in the third year, primarily due to the return of in-person meetings. To many, this approach allowed the network to evolve naturally according to the needs and desires of the PIs, who often represented the views of communities they were working with:

“I think my career trajectory would have slowed down or been slower. I don’t think that institutions like [name] where I am now working for the last two months would have considered me as good...because I just wouldn’t have had all of that extra knowledge and experience in my back pocket. I haven’t had to just navigate the road alone and present with just my own experiences. But like I’ve said, I’ve been on the perimeter of everyone else and we touch base frequently enough that I’ve got all of their stories with me all the time, which is really accelerated growth.” - Interviewee

“We go to the meetings, and everyone gives updates and kind of helping each other out, whether it be, ‘Oh okay, you should talk to this person,’ or they take a lot of different forms.” – Interviewee

"Certainly with the updates, you get a sense of what everyone's interested in working on, which is great for ideas for collaboration, or if someone has a question or a, 'I'm working on this type of project,' someone can chime in, 'Oh, I've got a connection that you should make,' or et cetera. I find that really beneficial." – Interviewee

"There's another person in the leadership who, through one of our non-research-based conversations, was sharing with everyone just something about her health and wellness and that just sparked a follow-up conversation for ideas and suggestions. And I was able to circle back to her and thank her for her ideas and suggestions." – Interviewee

Over the course of our analysis, it was evident that it was important for the PIs to have regular meetings to help them maintain and strengthen research connections within the network. These meetings, where everyone was encouraged to provide short updates on their work, were described as valuable opportunities to exchange ideas, seek advice, and identify potential collaborators. These interactions have led to the formation of stronger relationships, which in turn have increased community awareness of Indigenous scholars and their work:

"Being informed about SK-NEIHR opportunities and events for knowledge dissemination and networking is important. Sharing Indigenous-led research and methodologies is important for creating a shared understanding and standard in health research." – Annual Survey Respondent

"I've really appreciated as a new faculty member and new investigator, the insights that I have received from the confidence of the team meetings and the team setting in general, in terms of the political environment and the nuances in that regard. Those have been very important for me, for my background and for my future progress to understand what is happening on campus and wider. And I don't think that learning could have happened anywhere else. So, the mentorship has been really important from [names]. Their experience is so vast and their political knowledge and ability to communicate are so good." - Interviewee

Evidence also shows that it is likely that all of this has helped the SK-NEIHR streamline the process of establishing connections between researchers and community. This is particularly important for community-based research, where trust, mutual respect, and understanding are essential for success. Interviewees stated:

"And even the NEIHR team, people have their fingers on the pulse of what's coming that I didn't even know about like, 'Oh, well, the Canadian Mental Health Association is going to have something released in the next few months that this will totally fit with.' So yeah, get that groundwork done, get those relationships built now so that you can make the deadline of an application, that was helpful." – Interviewee

"And then went back to the NEIHR, they were able to identify people who they needed to talk to, whether that was individual roles in community, Métis Nation specifically, any other communities. And then even like grad students too, or trying to find grad students, people within the NEIHR are like, 'hey, I have this kind of funding or I still have this start-up funding and I want a grad student, help me out.' And then it just kind of snowballs." – Interviewee

"And I know that people without a place to go to that work would still likely happen. It would just take way longer. And it would be by trial and error. For example, I might have gone to my associate dean research who would guaranteed not know what to do. Then it'd be like, 'Okay, let's go to research services.' And then they'd probably refer me to someone Indigenous engagement and just kind of go everywhere and I'd probably get the answer I need eventually, but far too slow, too complex, not relational. So yeah, it's much more efficient and friendly this way." – Interviewee

Personal and Professional Growth

The SK-NEIHR not only helped facilitate research connections, but our evidence suggests that it has also led to significant personal growth and professional growth. Professionally, this included capacity increases and better ability to navigate institutions (e.g., administration, funding, politics), enhancing the profiles and reach of the PIs, amplifying research and engagement ideas, and generating more research (project generation). Interviewees acknowledged that while some of this might have occurred without SK-NEIHR, the network significantly boosted this process by providing the necessary infrastructure (physical, human and otherwise), resources, and connections that might not have otherwise existed:

"It helps provide access to a community, build my network and partnership, and gives access to high-quality education opportunities to advance my skills." – Annual Survey Respondent

"I still credit the NEIHR for giving me the tools and insight and bravery to navigate it myself. Things like contacting the editor of a journal because my work isn't getting published anywhere and seeing if I can work something out with the editor. So, I never would've considered doing that until I heard from people through the NEIHR who have done stuff like that before." - Interviewee

"The SK-NEIHR is the only Institute that focuses specifically on Métis related Health and mental health research. The researchers are all very respectful, and patient, and open to learn new ways of doing things, based on our world view, values, and impacts." – Annual Survey Respondent



Research Engagement Day, September 28, 2023

Nearly every interviewee also suggested that being involved in the SK-NEIHR has led to increased self-confidence and validation among its members. That is, confidence was instilled through building relationships with colleagues in a comfortable way as well as feeling validated and supported in their ideas and methodologies within SK-NEIHR circles. Others from the annual survey noted that being part of the SK-NEIHR helped them to reduce feelings of being an imposter in the institution and reinforced motivations and feelings that they truly did belong there and have the skills to make a concrete difference. This sense of belonging appears to be a hugely beneficial outcome for SK-NEIHR PIs and survey respondents:

"The other investigators on the NEIHR team are fantastic. Every time we have a meeting, when I can attend meetings, I feel invited, I feel connected, I feel involved. I feel rejuvenated. I feel like I'm meeting peers. I feel like there's mentoring going on, so that's all really nice. I feel like the connection piece is there when I engage in it, and that's been really good. And I feel like there's support. I feel like there's opportunity to do research. I feel like there's opportunity to get support if I need to do research." – Interviewee

"The SK-NEIHR serves as a hub for Indigenous community-based research resources and Indigenous student mentorship in Saskatchewan. Joining this research network is fundamental to successful and efficient Indigenous community-based research." – Annual Survey Respondent

"I'm kind of laughing, because I can think of a metaphor, it's almost like going to your auntie for help, versus a stranger." – Interviewee

"I'm very early in my career and look forward to doing community-based research in the future. SK-NEIHR gives me confidence that the process of organizing and arranging future community-based research will occur more smoothly and in a positive way." – Annual Survey Respondent

This was particularly evident during the exposure of pretendians (individuals falsely claiming Indigenous identity) at the University of Saskatchewan. This event was significant for many in the network, as it helped surface underlying systemic injustices that many had experienced (or and still experience) in their lives. Some credited the SK-NEIHR's response to this event as empowering because it helped them to advocate for policies, practices, and research that genuinely benefitted community. Further, this event has been instrumental to the implementation of policies aimed at ensuring the authenticity of Indigenous identities in academic and government contexts. It also sparked a broader conversation about the negative effects of pretendians on faculty, students, and staff, which has been a valuable education tool that spurred on additional conversations for change. Interviewees stated:

"When we've planned webinars, for example, on Indigenous identity fraud, I learned so much in that regard too. And now that has transcended into my other work of like, okay, we need to have an Indigenous identity policy in my own faculty and at my new university at [location]. And I have the language, and stories to share and terminology, all of that down because I've been privy to it through the NEIHR folks. Otherwise, I would only have what I read in the news kind of, or seek out intentionally seek out on my own." – Interviewee

"When I think about [name] and all the work on the identity piece, it is to push the envelope, even just internally, to ask questions, to speak up when we should be having more of 'an indigenization lens' than we maybe are having. So, it's increased my confidence to feed off of my colleagues' fierceness." – Interviewee

"I think the immediate thing that comes to my mind is Indigenous identity and just the fierce forward-thinking, no-bullshit-allowed mentality about it. I am just here for this for days because I think that is such a great example of advocacy and change within the institution." – Interviewee

This also inevitably contributed to PIs staunchness, as many commented on how they were willing to stand with the network and advocate for change in their own colleges departments. When taken together, it appears that the SK-NEIHR has helped those involved with all sorts of tools that has helped them both personally and professionally, something that will continue to have impact for many years to come:

"You're working on pushing the envelope, wanting change in a good way with a collective of people who, doesn't mean you have to be the exact replication of each other, but have like-minded, going back to the values of wanting the change, what our focus might be on, maybe less of the business structure of an institution and more focused on the people and relationships. So, I'd say for sure, the internal community of the NEIHR has absolutely informed that change. It's like this ripple effect of confidence and just being a bit more edgier and not settling for the status quo." – Interviewee

"And that's why I think [SK-NEIHR leadership] and just people that I see at different events, pushing the senior admin folks on, and I don't mean in an angsty, angry way, but just pushing them to think critically about the Indigenous research signature area like, 'What does that mean? Is that different than the NEIHR? What does that look like? Why do we need it? Who's leading it?' So, I think, I know I'm inside to the NEIHR, so I see it as really good envelope-pushing." – Interviewee

Supporting Research and Grant Applications

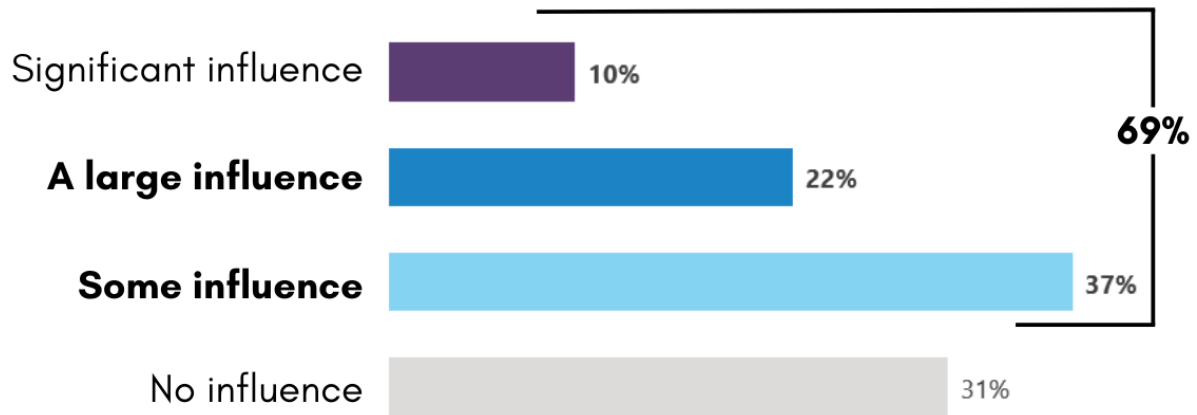
Evidence from many data sources also showed that the SK-NEIHR played a large role in supporting research and grant applications. Especially evidence in the beginning years, interviewees often credited this support as instrumental in helping them navigate grant applications, find necessary connections, and secure funding for Indigenous health research projects. In our annual surveys, we asked researchers to identify how many community-based and anti-oppressive projects/initiatives they had started that year, how many articles they had published using those approaches, as well as how many grants they applied for, received, and to indicate the total amount of those grants. Our goal here was to tie it back to the SK-NEIHR, so we also asked how much influence the SK-NEIHR had on the success of those grants.

The results showed a staggering amount of work over the course of four years. Over this time (January 2020 – March 2024), researchers indicated that they have worked on 409 community-based research projects, programs, or other initiatives rooted in an Indigenous methodology or approach. From those projects, 173 articles were published showcasing the research that went into it. Furthermore, researchers indicated that they worked on 283 separate projects that had anti-oppressive approaches built into them and, of those, published on that work 96 times.

One of the major goals of the SK-NEIHR was to increase the amount of funding for Indigenous health research in Saskatchewan. It appears that we have been successful in that goal, as researchers said they applied for 172 grants over the past four years and indicated that they were successful in 87 of them (a success rate of 51%). Of the 172 grants, researchers noted that the SK-NEIHR was directly involved in 57 of them in the past four years (e.g., letters of support, writing, meetings, consultations, providing connections, etc.). In total, researchers who answered the annual surveys brought in an additional \$28,402,187.00 for Indigenous health research funding.

To determine how much influence the SK-NEIHR has had on those grants, we asked researchers to indicate whether we had none, some, large, or a significant influence on the overall success of their grants. As is seen below, nearly three-quarters of respondents (69%) indicated that the SK-NEIHR had at least some influence on the success of their grants. 32% of respondents indicated that the network had a large or significant influence.

Well over half (69%) of researchers who received grants said that the SK-NEIHR had **at least some influence** in their success.



Qualitative interview and annual survey evidence also emphasized the high level of support provided by SK-NEIHR, which included assistance with grant writing, budgeting, and navigating the submission process. Interviewees explained that this support was crucial in helping researchers strengthen their grant applications, align their projects with community needs, and increase their overall success rate in securing funding. For example:

"For grant applications we were able to secure some great support letters that helped. One application was successful and we are waiting for the result of the other. At the research day, we were also able to chat with another researcher with similar interests and ended up added her to our grant which was a great addition to the team." - Annual Survey Respondent

"I think that the Saskatchewan NEIHR helped me access some of those other institutional applications, or foundational applications, and through them, then I could also apply for other ones. It was like creating a Lego castle. With one block, I got two blocks and two blocks, I got three blocks, and then they all started to feed each other, which was helpful. Instead of relying on one source, one large source, this helped create other little building blocks." – Interviewee

"Support is in when we are filling out proposals, if we're looking for grad students as one of the co-investigators. Filling out proposals, looking for grad students, access to information about grants, initiatives that are coming forward. All that, I feel, has been nicely communicated to us. 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." – Interviewee

"I've never worked in isolation and this [team] is among the best I've ever seen. They're [SK-NEIHR staff] really fine tuned. So those things, their organizational skills, grit, and incredibly, we should all have bad days. Like we should all have times where we go, I'm just done. I've never seen that. They must have them, but somehow they're able, when we come together, like they're always positive. They're always pushing, they're working so hard for every other person that is pretty rare...they're just way beyond anything as a team that I've ever functioned within before. I can't say enough about them honestly." - Interviewee

Institutional Change And Mentorship

Mentorship was a central and prominent theme in nearly every data source. For instance, interviewees described how SK-NEIHR's relational structure facilitates a blend of personal and professional mentorship and often extended beyond formal settings. It encompassed frequent group meetings, one-on-one interactions, and deliberate efforts by the SK-NEIHR to connect PIs with relevant resources and opportunities. Interviewees, particularly those new to the network, expressed how valuable it was to learn from established Indigenous scholars within SK-NEIHR. These connections appear to have fostered higher levels of engagement among members, leading to reciprocal mentorship, where both newer and more experienced researchers benefit from the exchange of ideas and support:

"I lived elsewhere. I trained elsewhere. My home community's not far, but I don't have connections with Indigenous communities when I came here. So, coming here, it took me like...five years of being here before I was able to start putting in research grants with communities, because I just had to start relationships completely new. So, coming into something like this has brought more of that opportunity and I can see like sharing ... being brand new here and connecting with people already that she's in a much better position because she's been able to connect with people in the network right away. It's made me a lot more confident in the work that I'm doing. I think I'm less of the imposter syndrome." – Interviewee

"I achieved 2 SHRF Excellence Awards - both from previous first place grants in 2023, the NEIHR is a supporter and important component of both grants." - Annual Survey Respondent

"There's definitely a sense of confidence in connection and meeting with peers like myself and talking about our research and getting validation and support from each other about it and getting ideas about it. You are bringing forward your ideas at a higher level and instead of it being critiqued or criticized, you're being motivated to do more and here's avenues to do more." - Interviewee

Additionally, interview and annual survey evidence confirmed the SK-NEIHR's commitment to supporting Indigenous students through mentorship and professional development opportunities. Through working with the NEIHR National Coordinating Center (NCC), inclusion of First Nations and Métis students in all activities, providing funding, and mentoring supervisors on good practices, the network has made strides in creating spaces for Indigenous students to engage with experienced researchers and gain valuable insights into the academic and research processes. The interviews also illuminated a particularly compelling example of how SK-NEIHR has supported First Nations and Métis students who may feel isolated or marginalized within colonial institutions. The network's welcoming environment helped reinvigorate the student's passion for their work, highlighting the critical role that SK-NEIHR plays in supporting Indigenous students who may otherwise struggle to find a sense of belonging and purpose within academia. Respondents and interviewees noted:



Left to right: Melony, knowledge keeper Judy Pelly, Tammy Popova, knowledge keeper Terri Hansen-Gardiner and Ken Lai at the Pinehouse Elders' Gathering, June 2024

"As an Indigenous student at the U of S ... accepting a scholarship and being invited to NEIHR events has been life changing. Beforehand, I was severely isolated and was given no real opportunities to meet and work with other Indigenous researchers until 2019 when I became a research assistant to [name], and she made me aware of the NEIHR scholarship. Since then, I have been able to travel to places like Ottawa for the annual gathering and expanding my own research and career network. The NEIHR has also given me the strength and confidence to speak out against racism and oppression within my own departments as I know I have these supports in place. Lastly, because of the NEIHR, my career has had rapid positive change and am now sure in my own path, I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do after grad school but now I know exactly where I'm going and who I want to be surrounded by in the process." – Annual Survey Respondent

"The most significant change for me was in receiving the NEIHR 2022-23 graduate scholarship. It allowed me to devote more time to my master's and work less hours as a research assistant. Also, in receiving this scholarship, I was invited to a few events where I got to meet many other Indigenous scholars and researchers that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to at any other point at the U of S." – Annual Survey Respondent

"I can see what has been passed on to me will be passed on to my students and anyone else who they interact with. So, whether that's appropriate research protocols, tips on publishing, grant writing, it will transcend. Well generations, but also transcend into non-Indigenous folks within my field because there aren't any." – Interviewee

"Yeah, so our national gathering of Indigenous graduate students is huge, really, really awesome and we've even invited students to participate in our retreats as note takers slash organizers slash participants. I think of folks like [name]...she felt so detached from Indigenous happenings on campus, and she was, I think maybe the only Indigenous grad student in her department. And, so being part of our community, it just solidified in her that she had a place." - Interviewee



Research Engagement Day, September 28, 2023 at Wanuskewin Heritage Park

Another significant example of institutional change mentioned in the interviews was the creation of new academic positions as a direct result of SK-NEIHR's influence. One PI described how their institution felt compelled to create a Dean of Research position responsible for fostering research between academics and communities after faculty members joined the SK-NEIHR. While the network was not the sole reason for this, the PI emphasized that SK-NEIHR was a significant factor in pushing the institution to make this change. This, along with institutional conversations about Indigenous identity, is further indication of SK-NEIHR's broader impact on institutional policies and practices, particularly in terms of promoting research that is wellness-based, community-focused, and aligned with the needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples. This and other interview evidence consistently demonstrates that the network's emphasis on community, mentorship, and relationship-building has created the foundations for positive change. Others have said:

"The SK-NEIHR group showcases the breadth of projects that exist on campus using other methods of data collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination - making this more 'normal' and 'accepted'." – Annual Survey Respondent

"A really big thing that the NEIHR has done is supported faculty at FNU in starting research, because we don't have a research pot. A lot of USASK faculty, I believe, when they start, they have like \$15,000 or something like that, that they can do some research with. FNU faculty don't have that opportunity. And so with the NEIHR, they have supported FNU faculty in starting that research, which we wouldn't have had access to...so then our university moved forward with putting in a Dean of research. And so I think the NEIHR helped, definitely that thought was there before, but I think the NEIHR helped push that a little bit harder and bring that in." - Interviewee

"To be part of the change and voice. As an Indigenous person, I believe the work that NEIHR is doing is impactful and I wish it was there while I was studying." – Annual Survey Respondent

"Because First Nation and Métis people need to be able to speak for ourselves to our unique experiences and needs and if no one is asking, who will listen. This research matters!" – Annual Survey Respondent

Overall, the interviews highlight the SK-NEIHR's critical role in facilitating research connections, advocating for institutional change, and supporting First Nations and Métis students and researchers. According to the evidence we gathered, these efforts have not only advanced the careers of Indigenous researchers but have also likely contributed to the broader goal of improving health outcomes for communities. The SK-NEIHR's focus on maintaining strong connections and supporting the development of First Nations and Métis health research appears to have been instrumental in achieving the outcomes listed already. The network's devotion to these principles have helped to ensure that it is an influential force in advancing Indigenous health research. It is clear that the SK-NEIHR's impact extends beyond just colonial institutions, as it has helped to create a network of meaningful research that is based on relationships, trust, and results:

"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." - Interviewee

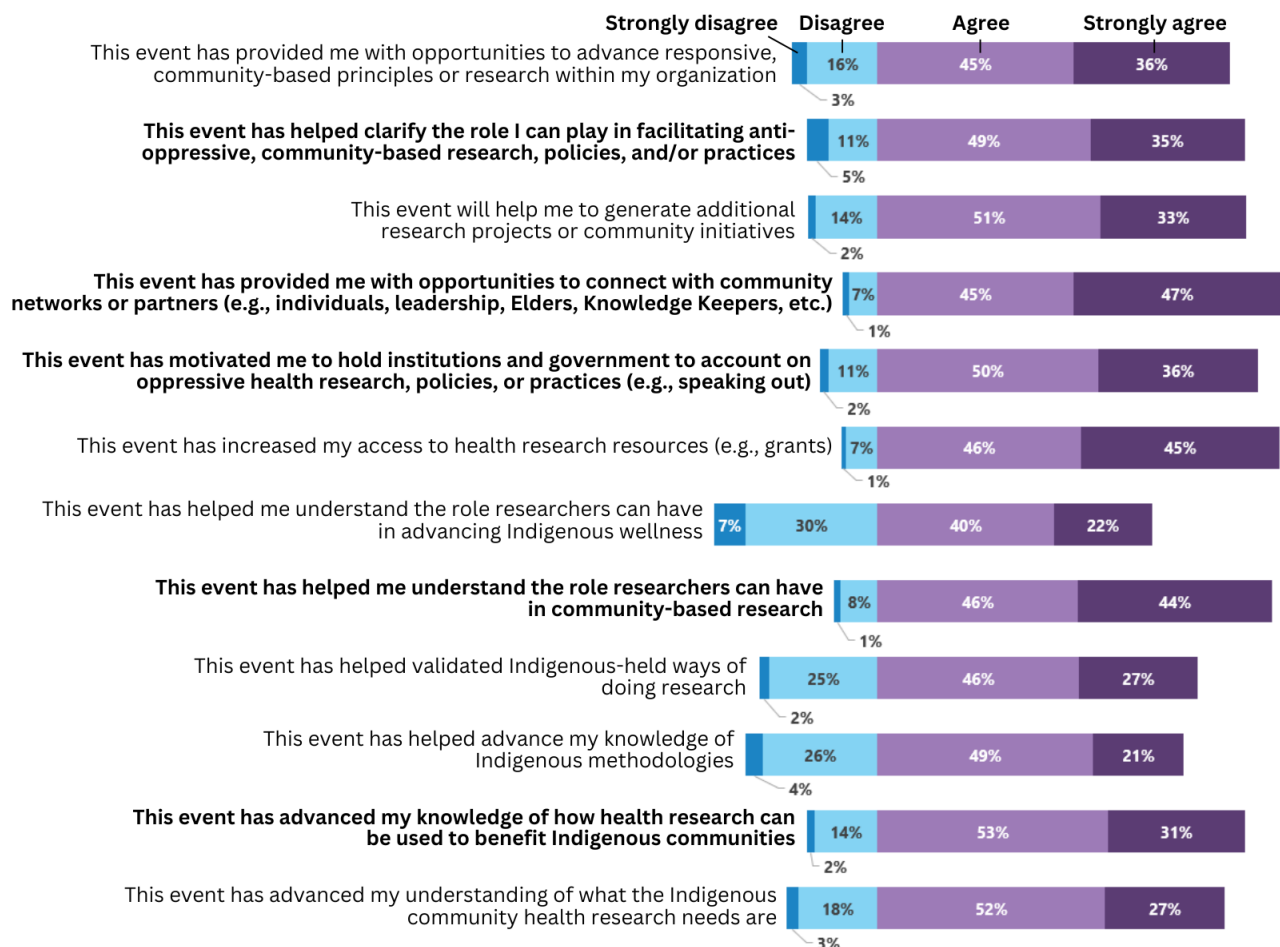
Event Specific Outcome Data (Community-based Outcomes)

To help further support previous findings, we will now turn to the events survey data. As a reminder, we collected data at eight major events in the past four years (a total of 441 people responded to these surveys). While these events covered a wide range of topics and delivery methods, we fundamentally believed that each contributed to a larger set of core outcomes (i.e., those featured throughout this report). Therefore, we re-used many of the questions for each event survey with the plan of combining data sets to get an overall sense of what difference the suite of events made.

The design of these surveys also mirrored the annual survey, meaning they validate one another. When put side-by-side, they both tell a story of success and positive change for participants. To keep this report accessible and short, we have excluded any data that was only collected for a specific event and, instead, opted to only show what was common across all of them. To inquire about results for a specific event, [please contact us](#).

As is seen below, the overwhelming majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that events put on by the SK-NEIHR allowed them access to community-based research opportunities, clarified the roles they could play, generated projects, provided connections, and helped to validate Indigenous approaches in health research.

The **majority** of event participants in SK-NEIHR events either **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that they experienced the targeted **positive outcomes**.



This combined data set is a powerful reminder of how effective SK-NEIHR events are. Although every single common outcome appears to have been experienced (as indicated by the purple bars), there were a few that stood out across events. Namely, 92% of respondents indicated that SK-NEIHR events helped to provide them with opportunities to connect with community networks or partners – a considerable purpose of the network (45% agreed; 47% strongly agreed). Speaking to the institutional change outlined earlier, 86% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that SK-NEIHR events motivated them to hold institutions and governments to account on oppressive health research, policies, or practices. This contributes and further validates comments made by PIs and is an indication that a high number of people are willing to do better and advocate for systemic change.

Additionally, SK-NEIHR events appear to have clarified roles that researchers can have in community, as a combined 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that was the case. Contributing to this, however, a further 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that events helped them to gain knowledge on how health research can be used to benefit Indigenous communities. Taken as a whole, this evidence suggest that events implemented by the SK-NEIHR hugely contributed to a large suite of positive outcomes all aimed at improving health research, delivery, and systems within the Treaty Territories of Saskatchewan. This effect cannot be understated, and its true impact is likely widespread. Encouragingly, the sheer number of people agreeing that the SK-NEIHR has facilitated these outcomes further contributes to the solid base that the network has formed to build upon for the next ten years (and beyond).

Conclusion: Looking Forward to Network Renewal

As demonstrated throughout this report, despite the challenges posed in the first four years, the SK-NEIHR has made a significant impact to date, which we expect to expand greatly with our successful renewal to 2029. As evaluation demonstrated, the work we have done in the past few years establishing this network is starting to really pay off. We have added more Indigenous academics to our research leadership team, strengthened our relationships with the University of Regina and First Nations University, grown our staff team, added a knowledge keeper in residence, and added many members to our larger network. We have also greatly increased our activities in community, now that we are able to travel and meet with people.

As we enter the next five 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 Network (SK-NEIHR) to support our vision: for all First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan to experience optimal health and wellness across their lifespans.

