



SASKATCHEWAN NEIHR 2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



***nātawihowin and
mamawiikikayaahk***

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

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A message from 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 became 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.

And when you are working with our people, you should demonstrate your respect for us by considering how we are involved. If you want people to travel to participate in a project, make sure you provide funds for that ahead of time, so they don't need to cover those costs themselves. When you meet with us, we appreciate it when you make the environment welcoming, making sure there is food, taking care of travel arrangements and accommodations, and helping out in any other way you can.

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.

Since then, SK-NEIHR posted these videos on its website and shared them many times. They are on skneihr.ca under the News tab. I like to share my video every time I speak, and people always come up to me afterwards to tell me how meaningful they found it, and share their own experiences.



“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 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 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 are the Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research?

The Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) is a national network 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 networks intended to be funded for fifteen years, from 2020 to 2035.

CIHR's NEIHR initiative represents Canada's largest federal investment in Indigenous health research, committing over \$105 million nationally from 2020 to 2035. The NEIHRs are the flagship initiative of CIHR's Institute of Indigenous Peoples Health, and the only CIHR initiative supported by all 13 CIHR Institutes.¹

What's in this Report

- a description of the the NEIHR networks, and the Saskatchewan NEIHR
- our activities in Year Six
- how we support graduate students, researchers, and community members
- how our activities are tracked and mapped to evaluation outcomes
- analysis of findings from our post-event surveys and annual survey





What is the SK-NEIHR Network?

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.

This expansive group of individuals, communities, organizations, and agencies strive to understand and improve health and wellbeing for Métis and First Nations Peoples in Saskatchewan through locally driven research. At the same time, SK-NEIHR strives to support the next generation of Indigenous and allied researchers through our mentorship activities and support.



Vision and Foundational Beliefs

The Saskatchewan NEIHR has two intertwined networks: the nāwihowin (First Nations) and mamawiiikayaahk (Métis) networks. These names were gifted by Cree and Michif speakers and mean “the art of self-healing” in Cree, and “healing together” in Michif. Our networks are made up of researchers, community organizations, community members, and graduate students throughout Saskatchewan and nationally working in First Nations and Métis health and wellness. We facilitate Métis and First Nations health research, training, and knowledge mobilization that is grounded in community and led by Métis and First Nations People. Our vision is for all First Nations and Métis Peoples in Saskatchewan to experience optimal health and wellness across their lifespans.

Our work is guided by these foundational beliefs:

- that Saskatchewan Métis and First Nations Peoples 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 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 the network 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.



Framing our work around Indigenous Futurisms

To continue strengthening Indigenous health and wellbeing research in Saskatchewan, across Canada, and internationally, SK-NEIHR has begun framing its work around Indigenous Futurisms. Originating in literature and the arts, Indigenous Futurisms is defined as “a movement of art, literature, games, and other forms of media which expresses Indigenous perspectives on the future, present, and past”² and focuses on moving beyond colonialism while restoring ancestral knowledge and ways of being.

SK-NEIHR brings this concept into health and wellbeing research by emphasizing intergenerational relationships and responsibilities. Research is guided by teachings that honour past, present, and future generations, including concepts such as Seven Generation teachings. Mentorship is woven throughout the network as the SK-NEIHR not only support students, but also early career researchers and those looking to work in a good way with First Nations and Métis peoples and communities in Saskatchewan. It is also built into the governance structure of the SK-NEIHR itself, where succession planning is a part of future thinking and growth.

To challenge positivistic or deficit approaches that have limited Indigenous health research, Indigenous Futurisms shifts attention away from narratives centered on trauma, crisis, or harm, and instead focuses on how Indigenous Peoples imagine and build healthier futures for themselves, their families, their communities, and their Nations. Indigenous knowledges, lived experiences, and Indigenous science lead the research process. Therefore, Indigenous Futurism is a way to conceptualize new relationships of Indigenous and Western science. Indigenous Futurism differs from frameworks like Two-Eyed Seeing³ that often position Indigenous knowledge alongside Western science. Instead, Indigenous Futurisms places Indigenous ways of knowing at the centre. Technologies are not viewed as Western tools, but as resources that—when guided by Indigenous frameworks—can support and strengthen knowledge about Indigenous health and wellbeing.

Research Leadership and Staff

Since 2019, the leadership team—which consists of First Nations, Métis, and settler allies/accomplices—has worked closely with Métis and First Nations partners to implement the SK-NEIHR. As part of the 2024 renewal, SK-NEIHR has looked to strengthen partnerships with the University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada, and local Indigenous community partnerships through community engagement activities, and increasing representation on the SK-NEIHR research leadership team.

As SK-NEIHR moves forward, it is important to maintain a strong, committed, and diverse research leadership team, as this team provides guidance and mentorship to the next generation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers working across the space of Indigenous health and wellbeing. It brings together experts from across the broad scope of health research, including qualitative and quantitative research, laboratory-based work, and clinical studies. Members of the team also lead national and international research networks, hold research chairs in their fields, and include emerging, mid-career, and senior scholars.

Many of the researchers have been involved with earlier programs that led to the creation of the NEIHRs in 2018, with some dating back to the establishment of CIHR in 2000.⁴ Some participated as mentors, while others were mentored themselves and are now mentoring the next generations. This reflects an intergenerational approach that highlights the important role these networks have played in supporting future Indigenous health and wellbeing scholars in Canada over the past 25 years.

The SK-NEIHR team has been designed to be broad and interdisciplinary. This allows the network to support the wide range of Indigenous health and wellbeing research needed to respond to complex and changing health challenges, new technologies, and ongoing advances in Indigenous research methods.

Current Research Leadership team members are:

Dr. Robert (Bobby) Henry, PhD (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies, University of Saskatchewan) – current Nominated Principal Investigator as of 2022; Tier II Canada Research Chair, Indigenous Justice and Well-being; Principal Investigator, Indigenous Engagement Platform - Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Matters (IEP-CRISM)

Dr. Caroline Tait, PhD (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Professor, Social Work, University of Calgary) – founding nominated principal investigator; Tier I Canada Research Chair, Indigenous Health Equity and Inclusion; Member, CIHR Governing Council

Dr. Leah Ferguson, PhD (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Professor, Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan)

Dr. Heather Foulds, PhD (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Associate Professor, Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan) – Tier II Canada Research Chair in Wholistic Health and Well-Being Through Physical Activity for Indigenous Peoples; Heart and Stroke/CIHR Early Career Indigenous Women's Heart and Brain Health Chair (2018-2025)

Dr. Holly Graham, PhD, Registered Doctoral Psychologist, Nurse (Cree, Member of Thunderchild First Nation, Professor, Psychiatry, University of Saskatchewan) – CIHR Indigenous Research Chair in Nursing

Dr. Simon Lambert, PhD (Māori, Adjunct Professor, Indigenous Studies, University of Saskatchewan)

Dr. Carrie Lavallie, PhD (settler, Program Coordinator Indigenous Health Studies, First Nations University of Canada)

Dr. Stacey Lovo (settler, Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, University of Saskatchewan) – Director, Virtual Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, Virtual Health Hub

Dr. Wendie Marks, PhD (Anishinaabe, Member of Anishinaabe of Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation, Assistant Professor, Pediatrics, University of Saskatchewan) – Tier II Canada Research Chair, Developmental Origins of Health and Disease in Indigenous People

Dr. Angela McGinnis, PhD (non-status Ojibwe with Métis roots), Associate Professor, Educational Psychology, University of Regina (joined as PI in October 2024)

Dr. Sarah Oosman, PhD (settler, Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, University of Saskatchewan)

Dr. Cassandra Opikokew Wajuntah, PhD (Cree, Associate Professor, Community Health and Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan) – Lead of Indigenous Healthcare Policies, Virtual Health Hub (joined as PI in October 2024)

Dr. Jaris Swidrovich, PharmD, PhD (Saulteaux, Member of Yellowquill First Nation, Assistant Professor and Indigenous Engagement Lead, Pharmacy, University of Toronto)

And with the renewal, academics who represent each of the partner universities:

- Dr. Veronica McKinney, MD, CCFP, Cree/Métis, Director of Northern Medical Services, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan (previously a co-investigator on the NEIHR grant)
- Lori Campbell, PhD Candidate, (Cree, Member of Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Associate VP of Indigenous Engagement, University of Regina)
- Dr. Edward Doolittle, PhD, (Mohawk, Associate Dean, Research; Faculty member, Faculty of Mathematics, Indigenous Knowledge and Science, First Nations University of Canada)



L to R:

Kneeling: Dr. Leah Ferguson, Dr. Holly Graham and her dog Kai, Dr. Stacey Lovo, Cory Baumgardner

Standing: Tammy Popova, Dr. Bobby Henry, Ken Lai, Dr. Jaris Swidrovich, Sheila Naytowhow (graduate student), Jamie LaFleur (graduate student), Dr. Wendie Marks, Knowledge Keeper Terri Hansen Gardiner, Dr. Sarah Oosman, Dr. Heather Foulds, Susan Shacter, Dr. Carrie Lavallie, Dr. Veronica McKinney, Fleur Macqueen Smith, Jenna Ives, Dr. Angela McGinnis, Dr. Edward Doolittle.

Taken in September 2024 at the Principal Investigator and Staff Retreat at Dakota Dunes Resort on Whitecap Dakota First Nation.

Current staff members are:

- Terri Hansen-Gardiner, knowledge keeper in residence (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan)
 - Fleur Macqueen Smith, MA, Manager (settler)
 - Sugandhi del Canto, PhD, Assistant Manager (settler, second generation immigrant from Sri Lanka) [as of January 2026]
 - Tammy Popova, MA, Research and Administrative Coordinator (Indigenous [member of Yakut/Sakha People from North Siberia, in Northeast Russia]) [until November 2025 when she moved to a similar role with the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre]
- Jennifer Rysavy, BSc, Research Financial Officer (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan) [as of December 2025]
- Ken Lai, BSc, Community Research Facilitator (Métis, Citizen of Manitoba Métis Federation)
 - Susan Shacter, MA candidate, Graduate Student Research Facilitator (Métis, Citizen of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan)
 - Cory Baumgardner, MA, Communications and Knowledge Translation Officer (settler)



L to R
Kneeling: Cory Baumgardner, Dr. Bobby Henry, Ken Lai
Standing: Tammy Popova, Terri Hansen-Gardiner, Fleur Macqueen Smith, Susan Shacter

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



Activities in the Past Year – What Have We Done?

In Year Six, major milestones included the 2024 Research Engagement Day in Regina held in partnership with First Nations University, the first Métis Data Governance Training sessions, and the first Innovation Academy, a summer institute for graduate students. We also presented at a number of conferences, described more in the Communications section.

Research Engagement Day 2024

SK-NEIHR hosts First Nations and Métis Research Engagement Day annually. We bring together student and professional researchers and community members to present and connect over First Nations and Métis health research that we are doing through SK-NEIHR, and have supported through our Community Partnership and Knowledge Translation research support funds.

Our second Research Engagement Day was held November 2024 in Regina, on the campus of First Nations University of Canada in partnership with First Nations University and the University of Regina. It was attended by 110 people, 60% of whom were non-academics. In the post-event survey 65% of respondents identified this as the first SK-NEIHR event they had attended, with 92% saying it helped them advance responsive, community-based research and/or connect with community partners, and 88% saying it increased their understanding of what Indigenous community health research needs are.

Videos from this day are on our website from this and other Research Engagement Days are on our website, skneihr.ca, under webinars.

Quotes from attendees on the post-event survey demonstrated the value of these events:

“I did not know just how much research was being done towards our health and mental health for our people. It was excellent to see.” – respondent

“enjoyed the speakers, hearing about how research is done, and the importance of working with communities as opposed to trying to get them to fit within the Westernized framework [of research].” – respondent

“As a social worker of over 20 years and Independent Mental Health Therapist, I was able to assess the presented topics that were extremely relevant to my practice with not only many Indigenous clients, but also to my work in general. I found it energizing to learn about the many facets of research being focused on and shared in the event. THANK YOU!” – respondent

Métis Data Principles Training

The “Saskatchewan Métis Health Research and Data Governance Principles©” were created through a partnership between Métis Nation-Saskatchewan and Métis citizens Dr. Caroline Tait and Dr Robert Henry for Métis rights holders in their research and data sharing partnerships with researchers and government institutions. They are now held within the SK-NEIHR, and a course was developed to teach these Principles. While they reflect the values and priorities of Métis citizens in Saskatchewan, they are applicable to diverse Métis populations, organizations, and communities. They do not intend to overshadow the rights of each of the Métis governing bodies to develop their own internal ethics processes but act as a framework for undertaking research involving Métis peoples.

More about these Principles can be found in a recent journal article published by Drs. Henry, Tait and others in Health Promotion International.⁵

To date, two one-day training sessions have been held, in September 2023 and December 2024, with 40 people trained. Respondents to post-event surveys found the training very positive, noting:

“That the principles discussed were not just applicable to health research and that they can and ought to guide respectful relationships between Métis communities and researchers/research bodies. And, importantly that a distinctions-based approach is essential for establishing useful research questions/methodologies/data.” – respondent

“A Métis alternative to OCAP® is both a superior model, with cultural relevancy woven in throughout, but one where the Principles can be adapted to other methods of inquiry and even consultation. This is useful in my field as we support consultation with Métis in areas such as Duty to Consult.” – respondent

Student Support

The SK-NEIHR remains committed to supporting Indigenous students, postdoctoral fellows, and new investigators through: student travel funds and research stipends; student gatherings and writing retreats (part of Research Engagement Day, and the Innovation Academy (a graduate student summer institute); and support for up to ten graduate students to present at the annual NEIHR National Gathering of Graduate Students (NGGS).

We also hosted a strategy session in Saskatoon for CIHR’s Institute of Infection and Immunity in May 2024 as they were planning to expand the CIHR Research Excellence, Diversity, and Independence (REDI, pronounced “ready”) Early Career Transition Award. This award, first available to scholars who self-identify as Black (any gender), racialized women or racialized gender-diverse people, added a new stream for scholars who self-identify as First Nations, Inuit, Métis (any gender). Attendees provided feedback on this program, which supports trainees, such as post-doctoral researchers, clinicians, and research associates, from specific underrepresented groups to help them launch their research faculty careers in Canada.

We continue to look for additional opportunities to collaborate with others, and work to create online and in-person opportunities for students to share experiences and provide support for each other. In Years Five and Six we supported a cohort of students to attend conferences together, including: the Turtle Island Indigenous Science Conference in Regina May 2024; the Canadian Public Health Association’s annual conference in Winnipeg in May 2025; the North American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) 2025 conference in Oklahoma in June 2025; and the Saskatchewan Epidemiology Association’s 2025 Symposium in September 2025.



Dr. Charu Kaushic, Scientific Director of the CIHR Institute of Infection and Immunity (III),



National Gathering of Graduate Students

In October 2024, SK-NEIHR supported 10 graduate students, as well as several faculty and staff to attend the National Gathering of Graduate Students, co-hosted by the NEIHR National Coordinating Centre and the BC-NEIHR. Feedback from graduate students attending these events is always very positive, with findings from the post-survey event of all attendees (~130) showing that that NGGS 2024 helped to increase respondents' motivation to continue a research or academic career pathway with the ultimate purpose of serving community.

Many commented on how they left feeling inspired and how that inspiration is driving their work now that they are back in their home institution. Encouragingly, others described how the work they heard about is being applied to their own communities. This is likely going to be a contributing factor in the continuing push for change within institutions and the broader health system to be more responsive towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Comments from students on NGGS included:

“The biggest impact for me was walking into the conference room the first morning and NOT being the only Indigenous person in the entire room. I felt safe and felt like I belonged there. I was so proud to see so many other Indigenous grad students and it filled me with hope that we are going to be doing future research, in our own Indigenous ways and with our own priorities. I’ve been to many conferences in my profession, and I’ve always been the only Indigenous face in the crowd. NGGS made me feel like I wasn’t alone.”

– Respondent

“I love NGGS for the relationships I have developed there over the last few years - I think this networking and relationality is the most valuable part of coming together to share space, knowledge, and resources - and I always get the best advice!”

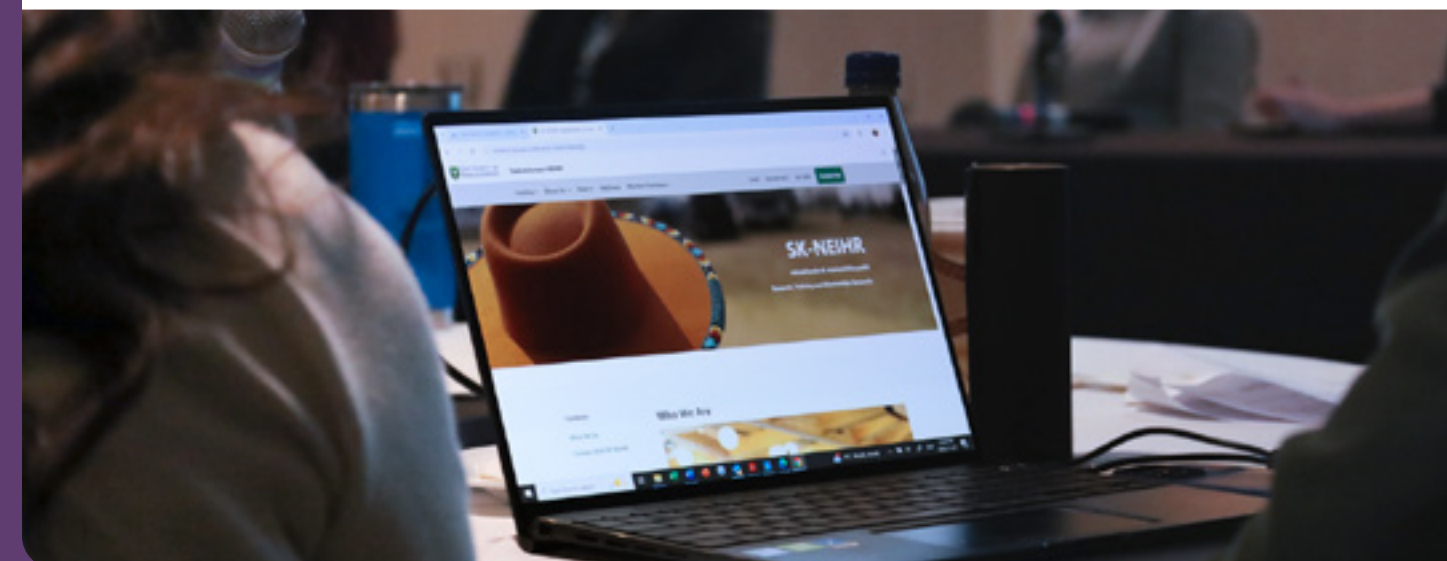
– Respondent

“My biggest takeaway was the opportunity to connect with peers, mentors, and Elders while learning about the amazing work being done in the field. In a program with few Indigenous students, it is always nice to be reminded that you are not alone in academia, there are other’s facing the same challenges as you, and celebrating successes.”

– Respondent

“It is so important for me to meet other students because I do not really feel like I have a cohort of peers in my settler program. And these folks will be my contemporaries in my career, so I feel like I am more connected. It is also helpful to see what others are doing in Indigenous research so I can be inspired and see what is possible. I also really appreciated meeting other students because it created relationships for collaboration. Three students and I are now planning to publish a paper together!”

– Respondent



Graduate Student Innovation Academy

In May 2025, SK-NEIHR held its Inaugural Innovation Academy: a graduate student training week that focused on Indigenous ethics and distinctions-based data principles. Sixteen First Nations, Métis and non-Indigenous graduate students came together for a week to explore data sovereignty and community-based Research in Indigenous health and wellbeing. There was a strong focus on distinctions-based research, treating First Nations, Inuit, and Métis as distinct rights-bearing nations with unique cultures, histories, and health needs, rather than using pan Indigenous approaches.⁶

Students learned from local, national, and international researchers and community leaders. Together they worked in small groups on case studies, to apply what they had learned throughout the week. Students reported very positively on their experiences in the week together, and many have continued to strengthen their connections with SK-NEIHR. Comments from students who attended included:

“My biggest lesson from the Innovation Academy was that Indigenous data sovereignty depends on our duties, relationships, and clear communication and Indigenous data must be managed according to community rules. Hearing directly from Knowledge Keepers and community members showed me how working together can turn research into a true partnership rather than taking information and leaving.”

– Respondent

“I have had experiences where I have not been welcomed into certain rooms of researchers. It may not have been based on the knowledge I gained (which I did), but my biggest takeaway is that this is an organization and group of people who strive to make everyone feel welcome and a productive part of the conversation. I can feel confident about researching in Indigenous communities and know that by conducting myself in a professional, ethical, and culturally-respectful way will lead me to the groups and people that I’m meant to work with.”

– Respondent

By creating a dynamic and supportive student community within SK-NEIHR, with opportunities for professional development, networking, and mentorship, we envision an engaged and empowered cohort of students. Additionally, this will amplify the visibility and impact of SK-NEIHR’s vital work. In turn, this group of students will mentor and support the next generation of undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students, ensuring a continuous cycle of support and growth within SK-NEIHR.

Researcher Support

We continued to provide letters of support and grant development assistance, particularly to Principal Investigators across our network. Additionally, our rapid response funding for community partnerships and knowledge translation increased considerably, as we transitioned to rolling intake, and these funds became better known through our communication efforts – i.e. increased online presence, highlighting different projects, etc.

Community Partnership and Knowledge Translation Rapid Response Funding

SK-NEIHR launched our Community Partnership research support funding in April 2020. These funds are to support seed funding for researchers and community partners to develop research partnerships or conduct small research projects that can be leveraged to apply for larger Tri-Agency grants. In 2023, we expanded this funding to provide Knowledge Translation support funds for similar purposes.

From 2020-25, we have provided \$364,000 in research support seed funds (\$10-15K each): 25 projects to develop Research Partnerships, and 16 Knowledge Translation projects, all of which include researchers and community partners. During this time, funds have gone to support 41 projects at University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina First Nations University of Canada, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT) and community organizations.

Projects supported spans a cross-section of disciplines such as human health (medicine, pharmacy, nursing, nutrition, and kinesiology), community health (School of Public Health), the natural sciences (biology and engineering), and the social sciences (psychology, geography, and Indigenous studies). Community Partnership fund recipients have reported a success rate of 33.3% in receiving Tri-Agency or other major funder awards. More about this funding and descriptions of funded projects can be found on skneihr.ca under the Funding tab.



Communications

Our presence online has grown exponentially with the addition of a full-time person managing communications and Knowledge Translation. 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 and LinkedIn in the last year, along with the Facebook and YouTube accounts established earlier.

Since March 2024 our Instagram following has grown from 760 followers to 2,000 followers and has reached 394,149 people. On Facebook, since March 2024, our outgoing communications have reached a total of 1,017,871 people; our post engagement has garnered 34,866 interactions; and our audience has grown to 2,300 followers. We have also continued to enhance our website, adding recordings from Research Engagement Days and other events to our webinars tab, blog posts on areas we are working in under Articles, and updates on research support funds distributed under the Funding tab.

Through Search Engine Optimization (SEO) of the SK-NEIHR website (skneihr.ca) and associated content, writing blogs and conducting video interviews with PIs, and utilizing keyword research to support content creation has resulted in the SK-NEIHR continuously being ranked in the top three search results for relevant categories.

Another area of outreach has been presenting at and staffing information booths at conferences. Between April 1, 2024 and September 30, 2025 (Years Five and Six), we had SK-NEIHR presentations and information booths at over 20 conferences, all of which are listed in the endnotes.⁷

Further still, our strategy has involved connecting with print and radio media outlets to help raise the profile of the SK-NEIHR amongst communities throughout Saskatchewan. Through these efforts announcements and information about the work that the SK-NEIHR is undertaking or supporting is gaining more engagement and is reaching more people daily.

Fall Principal Investigator and Staff Retreats

Each year, Principal Investigators, staff, graduate students, and the NEIHR Knowledge Keeper gather for two days of strategic planning, networking, and shared meals at an Annual Retreat. Initially held online in years one and two due to COVID-19, these retreats have been held in person in subsequent years every September since 2022.

At the 2024 Retreat, researchers and staff reviewed the first four years of SK NEIHR activities and impact, received staff updates, and discussed the renewed 2024–2029 grant framed around Indigenous Futurism. Sessions explored revised governance structures, new advisory councils, expanded student mentorship and training initiatives, and the Tri-Agency Indigenous Identity Statement. Breakout discussions focused on communications, funding priorities, research readiness toolkits, graduate student support, evaluation, joint publishing, and future training and engagement activities. The retreat concluded with collective reflection, closing remarks, and prayer.

There were similar topics at the 2025 retreat. Following opening prayer, introductions, and orientation, participants engaged in discussions on the SK NEIHR Innovation Academy and the development of a Knowledge Mobilization training course. The retreat included staff updates, mapping SK-NEIHR activities across CIHR Institutes' priorities,



Evaluation of our Activities in Year Six

Measuring our Network

Consistently throughout the year, we take great efforts to measure our impacts and gather feedback to make our Network better. This is done largely through an external evaluator to help provide anonymity for participants and is based on an updated SK-NEIHR measurement strategy⁸ that was created after the SK-NEIHR was renewed in 2024. We see measurement as an essential part of the SK-NEIHR infrastructure as it allows us to learn and improve and to report back on our successes to both the communities we work with and those who fund us. This section of our annual report contains our high-level findings from data we collected on activities conducted from April 2024 to September 2025. For further information on additional outcomes, please contact SK-NEIHR Manager Fleur Macqueen Smith at fleur.macqueensmith@usask.ca.

The Methods We Used

Two primary sources have made up our measurement efforts since the renewal of the SK-NEIHR. First, after each event we completed we sent out a feedback survey where attendees are offered a chance to provide feedback on the event. Surveys also contain questions that correspond to our targeted outcomes, as outlined in our measurement framework. These event feedback surveys are designed in such a way that we can ask the same questions at each event. This consistency means that we can combine and compare outcome data between events and over time. In this report, data from six events⁹ were analyzed and outlined to support other data (primarily the SK-NEIHR Annual Survey results). Data from 361 survey responses were analyzed for this report: 253 responses from six event-specific surveys, and 108 responses from the annual survey.

We have been completing an annual survey since the start of the SK-NEIHR in 2020 and it has been a valuable source of longitudinal impact data. In each iteration, hundreds of respondents fill it out and let us know what outcomes they have or are experiencing as a result of interacting with SK-NEIHR.

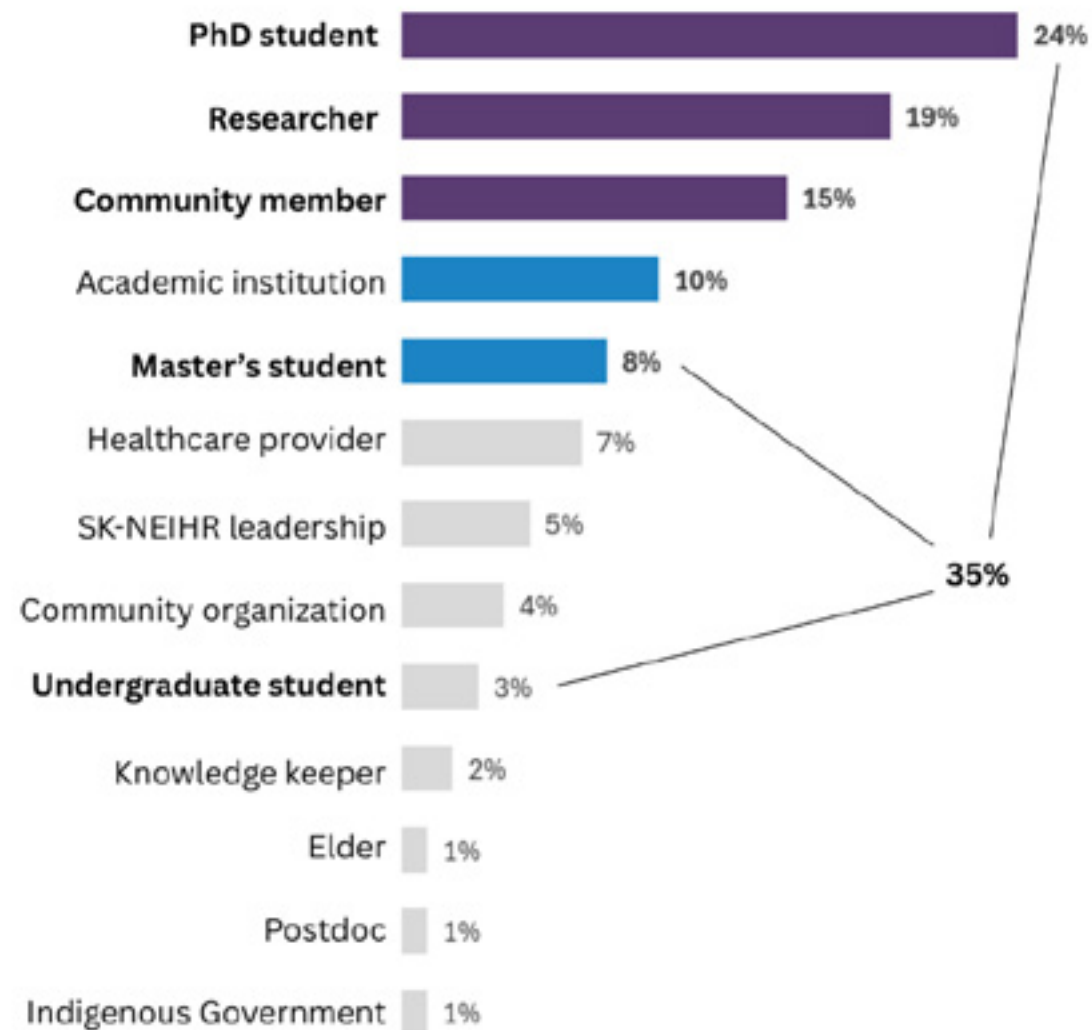
The reporting timeframes with our funder, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, changed in Year Five, after our funding was renewed for another five years, such that we were to report on October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025. As the date of our last reporting was to March 31, 2024, we decided to include reporting on April 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025 (18 months), as otherwise we would not capture activities from April to September 2024. Therefore, the annual survey covers the timeframe of April 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025. The questions were similar to previous years but were updated to reflect the new measurement framework (e.g., more questions on mentorship and capacity building).

This year's annual survey was open from January 10 to February 9, 2026 and received 108 responses. The invitation to participate in this survey was sent by SK-NEIHR leadership and included anyone who regularly interacts with the Network, is part of the member database, or attended SK-NEIHR events. Several reminders were sent out and an incentive for a draw for one of four gift cards was used to help boost participation. We will begin our outcome reporting by outlining the demographics of those who participated this year.

Who Answered the Annual Survey and/or Event-Specific Surveys?

To help gain extra context on the results we report throughout this section, it is important to understand who answered our surveys (either the annual survey, and/or the event-specific surveys on events listed in footnote 2) and how they self-identified in several important categories. First, we asked respondents to indicate how they primarily identify from a set of membership categories outlined in our membership database. As is seen below, nearly a quarter of respondents primarily identified as a PhD student (24%), followed closely by researchers (19%) and community members (15%). This is a slight departure from previous years, as the most selected category is usually researchers (researchers made up 27% and 41% of the sample in the 2024 and 2023 iterations of the Annual Survey, respectively). Furthermore, when considering the number of respondents who identified as a master's or undergraduate student, the percentage jumps to 35% of all respondents. The remainder of respondents were spread out among the categories we listed, meaning we have a reasonable cross-section of membership categories within our dataset.

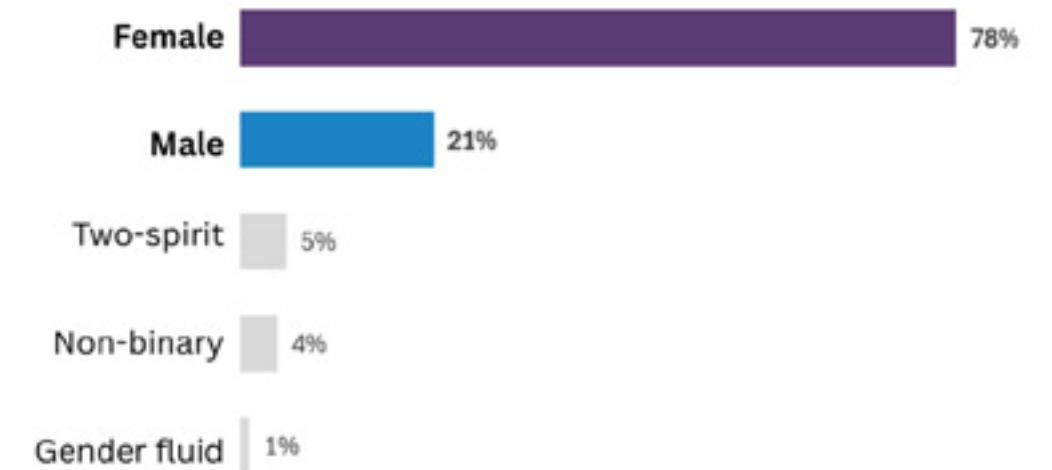
Nearly a **quarter** of respondents were **PhD students**, followed by **researchers** and **community members**. When added together, **students represented 35% of respondents**.



We recognize that respondents may identify with more than one of these categories, so we also ask them to check all the others that they may identify with. In these results, a consistent pattern with previous years emerged, as 42% of respondents identified as a researcher and 32% as a community member. The next most popular choices identified were academic institution administration (13%) and healthcare provider (12%).

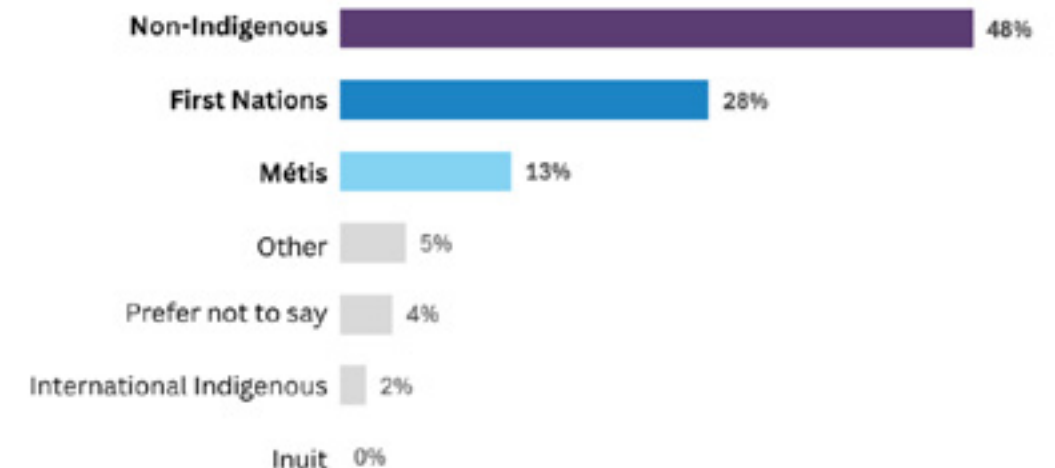
In line with previous findings, nearly all the respondents self-identified as female (78%), followed by male (21%). A further 5% self-identified as two-spirit, 4% as non-binary, and 1% as gender fluid (noting that respondents could check all that apply to them).

Over **three quarters** of respondents self-identified as **female**, followed by **male**.



Additionally, just under half of all respondents self-identified as non-Indigenous (48%), followed by 28% as First Nations and 13% as Métis. As with membership categories, this is a departure from previous years, where the respondents are usually split between non-Indigenous, First Nations, and Métis (e.g., in 2024 the percentages were 32%, 34%, and 25% respectively).

Just under **half** of respondents self-identified as **non-Indigenous**, followed by **First Nations** and **Métis**.



With these considerations in mind, we can now begin looking at what has changed for respondents.

What Differences are we Making (Outcome Data)?

In a network as large and diverse as SK-NEIHR, our activities are expected to lead to many outcomes. Tracking these outcomes can quickly generate a large volume of data that becomes difficult to manage. To make reporting more useful and manageable this year, we chose to split our questioning and reporting so it corresponds better with our targeted short- and long-term outcomes. In other words, we designed our surveys to correspond with outcomes that we expect to occur soon after interacting with the SK-NEIHR and those that may take some time to develop (and are a result of experiencing short-term outcomes). These questions were created based on our measurement framework logic model and represents expected pathways to fulfilling our goals according to our values.

Logically then, we will start with our short-term outcome findings. We asked respondents to rate a series of questions that we created from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree¹⁰). As is seen in the graph below, many respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements. This is a positive result for us, as it is evidence that we are not only achieving what we set out to do, but we also appear to be laying the foundations for longer-term outcomes that will make significant differences for First Nations and Métis health research in Saskatchewan.

Before diving deeper, however, it is important to first outline some qualitative evidence that helps to “set the scene” for many of the following results. While quantitative data reported below comes from all seven surveys (six event surveys and the annual survey), all of the quotes are drawn from responses to the annual survey. This is to ensure that respondents are talking about overall outcomes for the network, as opposed to event-specific ones.

When asked what conditions or factors related to the design of the SK-NEIHR helped facilitate outcomes, many respondents commented that it was simply the opportunities created to network with others. Namely, the SK-NEIHR provided them with the right environment and opportunities to meet other First Nations, Métis, and allied researchers that they may not have gotten elsewhere.

Others pointed to the relational approach embedded in the design of the SK-NEIHR and that this design was fundamental to the strong sense of community that they felt. For example:

“The relational approaches and opportunities to network and meet other Indigenous health researchers were extremely valuable. As the only Indigenous graduate student in my faculty, meeting others who were in the boat felt so validating and reassuring. Most of the National NEIHR leadership is extremely approachable and easy to talk to.” – Survey Respondent

“I think the most significant takeaway is the validation that relationships are integral to the work we do and the integrity we bring to our research (and personal) lives. I have made so many connections that I value for personal and career reasons. I am excited at possible future collaborations, but I am also excited to see my colleagues excel and apply the knowledge we’ve gained from SK-NEIHR.” – Survey Respondent

“The relational and community-centred approach of SK-NEIHR made it possible for me to learn meaningfully alongside others. Events were intentionally designed with space for dialogue, mentorship, and guidance from Indigenous scholars and Knowledge Keepers, creating an environment where I felt supported and able to grow in my understanding of Indigenous health research.” – Survey Respondent



“Each time I attend an event (three in the last seven months or so), I’m able to connect and network with new folks in all areas research, which is immensely helpful given the breadth and impact of the research projects that SK-NEIHR supports.” – Survey Respondent

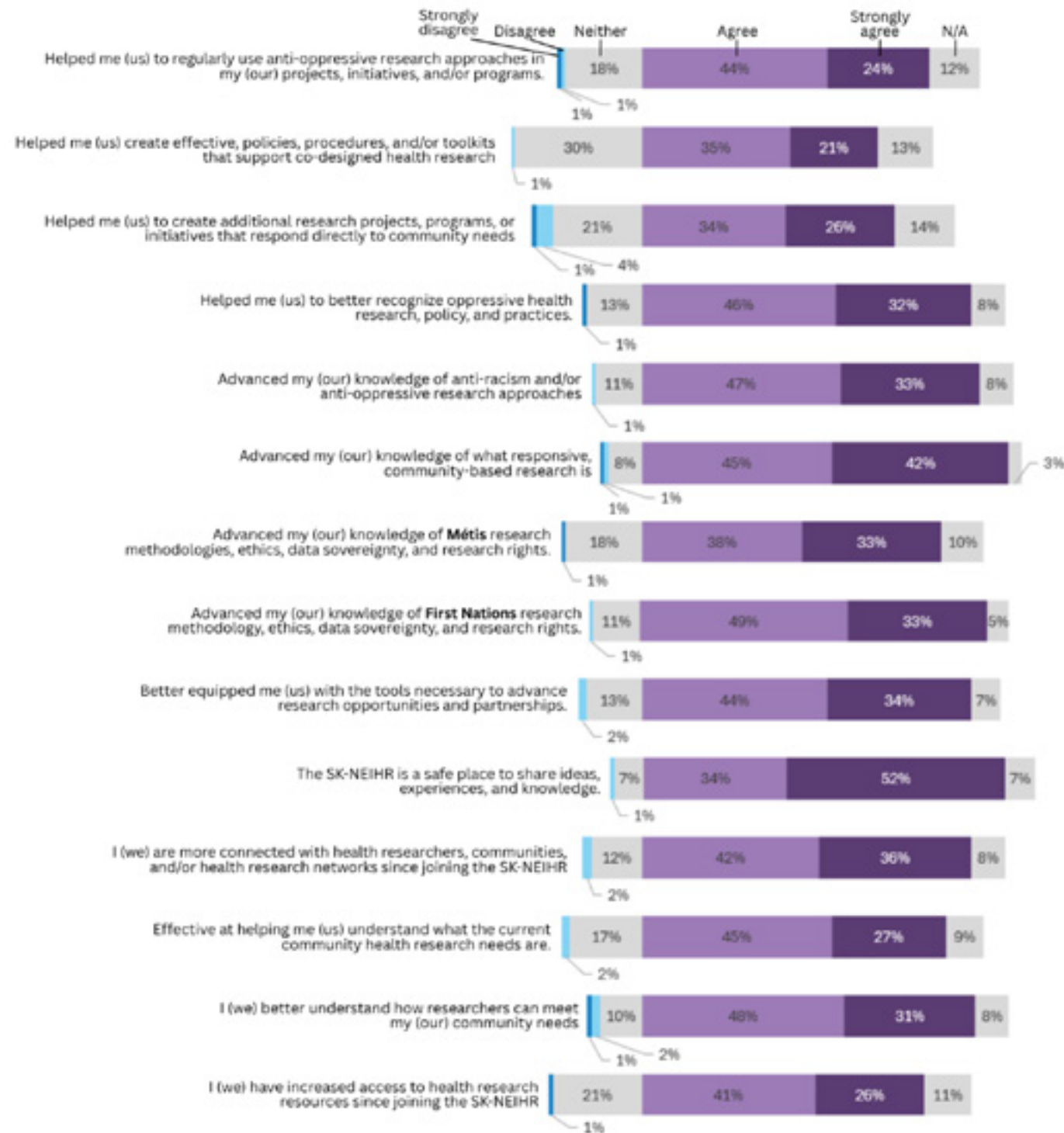
“The [SK-]NEIHR creates space to recognize and value Indigenous-driven and community-engaged research in ways that are not always possible in traditional academic spaces; relationships matter and create strength in moving knowledge and ideas forward. [It] provides a sense of relational accountability within and between the NEIHR leads and Indigenous community leads - thus strengthening the foundation of Indigenous health research in Saskatchewan.” – Survey Respondent

The importance of this SK-NEIHR design choice should not be understated, as we believe it is the core reason as to why respondents are experiencing the outcomes they are. For example, when taking a better look at the short-term outcome graph below, a few results immediately support this sentiment. A combined 80% of respondents either agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (33%) that the SK-NEIHR helped advance their knowledge of anti-racism or anti-oppressive research approaches. Consistent with this, 78% also either agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR also helped them to better recognise oppressive health research, policy, and practices and 87% agreed that their knowledge of what responsive, community-based is advanced because of the SK-NEIHR (45% agreed, 42% strongly agreed).

Adding to this, a combined 82% and 61% either agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR helped advance their knowledge of First Nations and Métis research methodologies, ethics, data sovereignty, and rights (respectively). This is a major goal of the SK-NEIHR and it is encouraging that the design of our events appears to be facilitating the progress of these key outcomes. These advancements are further supported by qualitative evidence, where respondents commented that the SK-NEIHR has significantly helped them understand First Nations or Métis research approaches, including a newfound ability to use or integrate them into existing skillsets. Many believed that this helped bring additional validity to their research and helped legitimize these knowledges in colonial spaces even further. They wrote:

“It gives me the strength to endure against colonial systems, and that as Indigenous researchers and academics that we have a right to be here and to do things in our own way that honours where we come from and our ways of being, knowing, and doing.” – Survey Respondent

The majority of respondents either **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that they experienced key **short-term SK-NEIHR outcomes** around **connections, policy change, and research needs/rights**.



“Being part of the SK-NEIHR has fundamentally shifted how I understand research relationships and responsibility. The most significant takeaway for me has been learning to center Indigenous ways of knowing not as an ‘add-on’ to research, but as foundational to how questions are framed, relationships are built, and accountability is practiced. Through SK-NEIHR, I have come to better appreciate the importance of relationality, humility, and community-defined priorities, and how these principles challenge conventional academic timelines and power structures. This experience has deepened my commitment to ethical, community-engaged research and has influenced how I approach my work across roles—as a researcher, administrator, and collaborator.” –Survey Respondent

“The most significant takeaway for me has been feeling more confident and supported in practicing Indigenous, community-led research in a way that aligns with my values and responsibilities as a Métis health professional. Being part of SK-NEIHR has shifted my understanding of research from something that can feel institutional or extractive to something that is relational, reciprocal, and grounded in community priorities. Through the network, I have strengthened both my methodological skills and my sense of belonging within a community of Indigenous researchers and partners who share similar commitments to anti-oppressive and culturally grounded approaches.” – Survey Respondent

Taken together, these results are evidence of the thoughtful groundwork that has been laid by the SK-NEIHR in events and programming. It also suggests that the SK-NEIHR is helping make advancements on issues affecting First Nations and Métis peoples in Saskatchewan such as racism, oppressiveness, and colonial approaches. Further supporting this is 79% of respondents agreeing (48%) or strongly agreeing (31%) that they better understand how researchers can meet community needs and that the Network has equipped them with the tools necessary to advance research opportunities and partnerships (78% agreed or strongly agreed). One such tool is an increased awareness of funding opportunities and First Nations / Métis research projects. Specifically, respondents frequently commented that they walked away from events and interactions with the Network knowing more about the opportunities and existing projects than they did before. When asked what the most significant change had been for them, these respondents wrote:

“Understanding the current scope of Indigenous-led research projects that are taking place.” – Survey Respondent

“The information I’ve obtained from SK-NEIHR events. Especially the Métis Principles of data control and ownership, understanding that a network of high caliber researchers making important changes in our province, and the availability of research opportunities available to me.” – Survey Respondent

“The research being done in First Nations communities.” – Survey Respondent

“My goal is to be a researcher specifically with an Indigenous community and attending this conference was extremely beneficial in seeing the research that has already been done, that is happening, and the potential for more research in the future.” – Survey Respondent

These results are also likely supported by the fact that many respondents agreed (34%) or strongly agreed (52%) that the SK-NEIHR is a safe place to share ideas, experiences, and knowledge. In other words, the Network is an open place where people can ask questions, come earnestly to learn about how to do things differently, and receive meaningful answers to their queries. This is bolstered by qualitative evidence from the annual survey, where respondents often commented on how genuine and accessible SK-NEIHR events and interactions have been. Specifically, they valued the ability of the Network to share research results back with communities and how unique it is that everything the SK-NEIHR does feels human-centered. The result of this for commenters was a feeling of being valued and often led to increased participation in the Network.

They wrote:

“I felt welcomed and included in ways that allowed me to deepen my understanding of the histories, responsibilities, and relational dynamics that shape Indigenous health. The openness and generosity of the SK-NEIHR community ensured that I could learn respectfully and meaningfully without feeling out of place, and this support strengthened my confidence and commitment to engaging with Indigenous research in an ethical and informed way.” – Survey Respondent

“The events always seem very human-centered. I know that when I show up, I will be taken care of. I treasure the connections I have made through [SK-]NEIHR and I am keen to make more. I really appreciate that the events make space for people to connect - it’s not just all presentations.”

– Survey Respondent

“I have especially valued the safe and welcoming spaces to share ideas, ask questions, and learn from others’ experiences with Indigenous methodologies, anti-oppressive approaches, and community-driven research.”

– Survey Respondent

“The SK-NEIHR team has done an impeccable job at fostering a sense of inclusivity and accessibility at their research events (including for non-Indigenous folks), in a way that still isn’t prioritized in many academic settings.” – Survey Respondent

“[The] NEIHR puts the people and the community at the centre of its opportunities, methods and research. They ensure they listen and put what they hear into action where community is the driver of it all.”

– Survey Respondent

This evidence again suggests that the relational nature of the SK-NEIHR is a critical factor to many of the positive outcomes we are reporting. When individuals feel comfortable, valued, and safe in a place that can be hostile (Western institutions), it goes a long way to growing and expanding networks. It also appears to be leading to significant advancements in research capacity, meaning the SK-NEIHR is helping to shift historically harmful systems that, if shifts continue, can bring benefit to First Nations and Métis peoples across the province. A similar positive pattern emerged in the longer-term outcomes. We will first explore some outcomes that flow naturally from the relational nature of the SK-NEIHR. Namely, the graph on the next page shows that many



agree (46%) or strongly agree (39%) that the SK-NEIHR has helped respondents create and maintain good relationships. This is a foundational piece of the Network’s purpose and is strengthened by many agreeing that being part of the SK-NEIHR has been an empowering experience (42% agreed, 47% strongly agreed). These results were also found in qualitative evidence, where respondents often talked about how well the SK-NEHR environment facilitated building relationships, connecting researchers to students, and communities. In other words, the SK-NEIHR helped bring a sense of belonging for some annual survey respondents:

“I have built relationships with First Nations communities through the application of knowledge from SK-NEIHR.” – Survey Respondent

“This was such an eye-opening experience to meet other graduate students like me and that also have a shared love of research.” – Survey Respondent

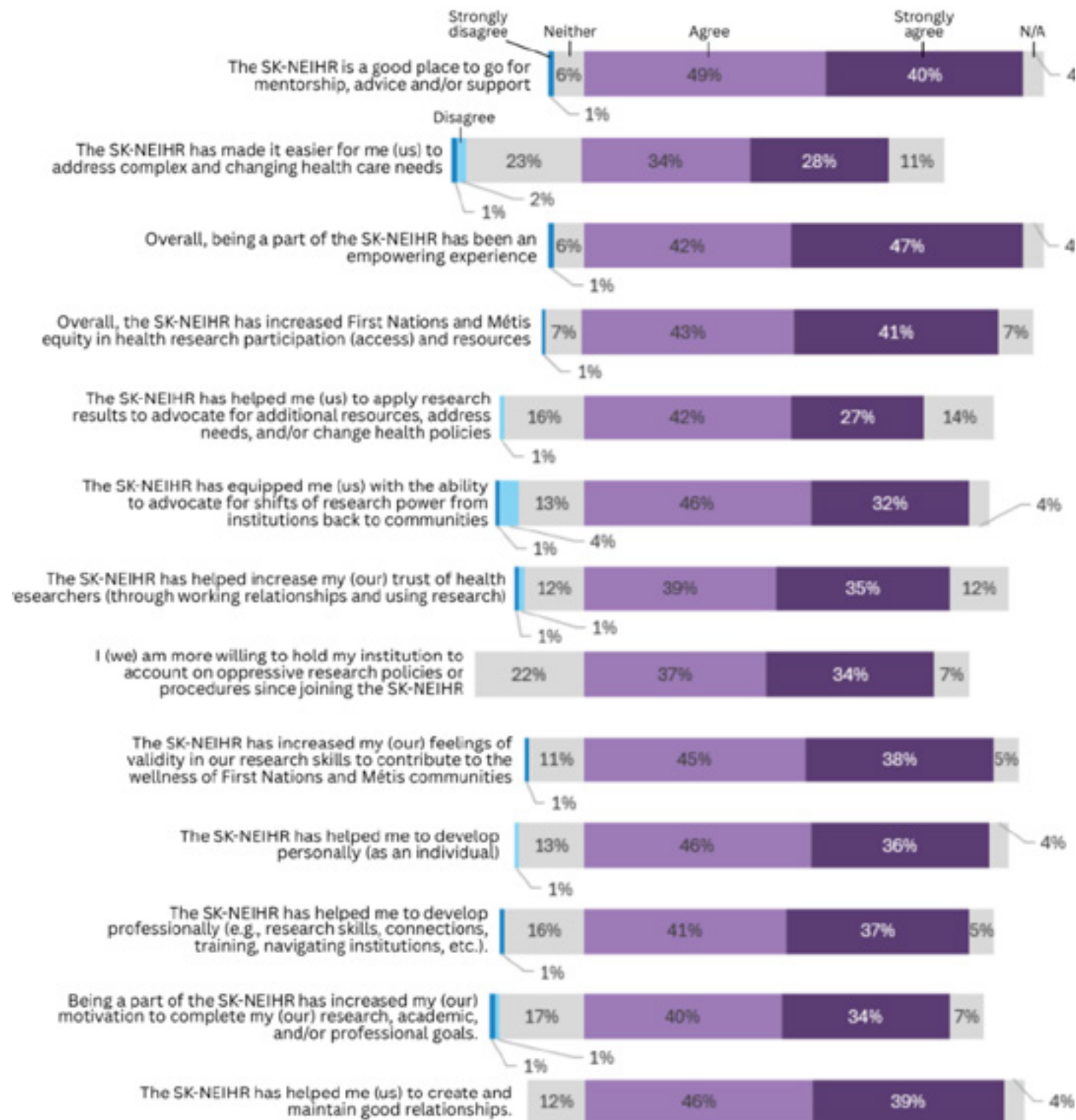
“[SK-NEIHR] makes it easier to connect, ask for advice, guidance, collaborate on various projects, discuss ideas.” – Survey Respondent

“The world is made of connections. And underestimating the power of that is detrimental to professional and personal growth. When I go to someone with a question, it is with the implicit meaning that I am, and will be, here for them if they have a question for me. Our research world doesn’t happen in a vacuum. We need others. We need communities. We need to have integrity in our work. So, we need to build relationships - put the work in to prove we can be trusted. I believe the SK-NEIHR gives us the opportunity to meet people and forge those relationships. It is up to us to bring value to those connections and that will bring meaning to our work.” – Survey Respondent

Many also agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR has helped them develop both personally (as an individual; a combined 82%) and professionally (research skills, connections, training, navigating institutions, etc.; a combined 78%). It is assumed that this is linked to other outcomes such as 83% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR increased feelings of validity in their ability and skills to contribute to the wellness of First Nations and Métis communities. Motivation to complete research, academic, or professional goals also appears to have been increased due to SK-NEIHR participation, as a combined 74% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Finally, 89% of respondents also either agreed (49%) or strongly agreed (40%) that the SK-NEIHR was a good place to go for mentorship, advice, and support. The development of individuals, relationships, and careers appear to be leading to significant benefits for the health research community in Saskatchewan.

These outcomes also appear to be preceding several longer-term and systemic changes. Specifically, many believed that the SK-NEIHR has increased First Nations and Métis equity in health research participation and resourcing (43% agreed, 41% strongly agreed). This is likely bolstered by well over half of respondents agreeing that the SK-NEIHR has helped them to apply research results to advocate for additional resources, address health needs, or change health policies (42% agreed, 27% strongly agreed). Additionally, a combined 78% believed that the SK-NEIHR has equipped them with the ability to advocate for shifts of research power from institutions back to communities (46% agreed, 32% strongly agreed). Finally, 62% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the SK-NEIHR has made it easier for them to address complex and changing health care needs.

The **majority** of respondents either **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that they experienced key **long-term SK-NEIHR outcomes** around equitable access, power, relationships, and development.



Many respondents provided comments that backed these quantitative results. Specifically, they wrote how the SK-NEIHR had helped bring greater awareness to systemic issues facing First Nations and Métis peoples in and out of the health system. They also described how they were now better at working within systems, an outcome matching high levels of agreement that the SK-NEIHR is providing valuable system navigation tools for members. Once again, respondents believed that this was because of the relational environment and increased validity for Indigenous approaches that the SK-NEIHR has helped create. They wrote:

“[SK-NEIHR] leadership provides excellent feedback and support for working within colonial academic and health systems in an effective manner. I can stay aligned with community-based priorities while navigating academic and health systems.” – Survey Respondent

“I’ve been thinking a lot about how we can advocate for a better ethics process that accommodates community needs early in the process.” – Survey Respondent

“I’m better equipped as a white settler to explain research practices that are valuable to my community partners within academic research-focused institutions.” – Survey Respondent

“It equips me for conversations and strengthens my certainty when speaking. I sit on an Indigenous engagement board through my workplace and sometimes the suggestions made by the director are well-intended toward reconciliation but often overstep/bypass more community-led or relational approaches.” – Survey Respondent

“The change matters because it has fundamentally reshaped how I think about substance use, health, and mental wellbeing in the context of communities affected by colonial histories and structural inequities... this shift is important because it pushes me to design research that is not only academically rigorous but also attentive to the emotional, cultural, social dimensions of substance use and mental wellbeing and social determinants of health.” – Survey Respondent

As hinted at in the previous quotes, these outcomes have helped some respondents approach research with First Nations and Métis communities in a more effective way. This means that respondents are using the information, knowledge, and awareness they gain from the SK-NEIHR and applying it within their fields. Not only is this a positive step for the health research sector, it’s also evidence that the SK-NEIHR is effective at creating conditions for positive change. To explain better, respondents wrote:

“As a PhD Student I think this experience matters since it helps to shape what types of research and approaches that I will invest my time and career in.” – Survey Respondent

“This change matters because it directly shapes how I design and deliver programs and research with Métis communities. Feeling supported and connected allows me to move more intentionally and ethically, ensuring that the work I do is not just academically sound but meaningful and beneficial to the people it is meant to serve. It has helped me bring stronger partnerships, resources, and opportunities back to my community and workplace, and has reinforced that research should build capacity, relationships, and wellness rather than simply produce outputs. Ultimately, this leads to work that feels more accountable, culturally safe, and responsive to community needs.” – Survey Respondent

To help provide additional validity to these results, we can turn to the combined event survey data, where many of the same outcomes are repeated.¹¹ To begin, most respondents agreed that SK-NEIHR events advanced their knowledge of how health research can be used to benefit Indigenous communities (48% agreed, 48% strongly agreed). Additionally, 97% of attendees believed that attending SK-NEIHR events helped validate Indigenous-held ways of doing research (47% agreed, 50% strongly agreed). Among the others that stand out were the

influence SK-NEIHR appears to have on the increased understanding of the roles researchers can play in both advancing Indigenous wellness and have in community-based research (a combined 97% and 96% agreed or strongly agreed, respectively). These are again encouraging results, as attendees at SK-NEIHR events appear to be receiving significant benefit. To a larger extent, we can use previous qualitative data to also assume that pockets of the health system are also receiving these benefits as attendees are actively using this knowledge to make things better.

Across all event surveys, respondents the majority of respondents either **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that they experienced positive outcomes.

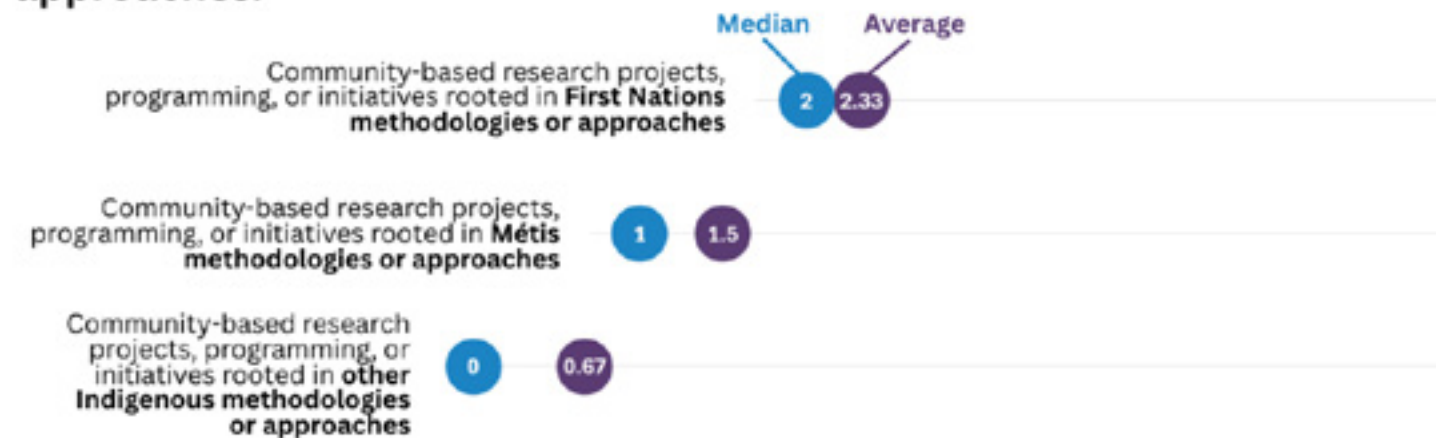


Researcher Specific Findings

As one of the primary audiences for the SK-NEIHR is researchers, we have a sub-set of questions within the annual survey to gauge the level of activity going into First Nations and Métis health research. We believe this not only provides another source to measure the success of our overall outcomes (e.g., systems change, increased understanding of First Nations and Métis approaches) but provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the SK-NEIHR in helping researchers work with communities.

If a respondent selected that they primarily identify as a researcher (19% of respondents), they were first asked how many community-based research projects, programs, or other initiatives they worked on that were rooted in a First Nations methodology or approach. On average, researchers were involved in 2.33 projects of this nature from April 2024 to September 2025 (the median project number was 2). When queried about Métis projects, programs, and initiatives, the average number was slightly lower at 1.5 (median number was 1). Together, however, this is an indication that both First Nations and Métis projects are being worked on by researchers in the SK-NEIHR network. To compare, they were also asked about projects, programs, or initiatives that have other Indigenous methodology or approaches featured in it (including international perspectives). The results showed that researchers worked on far less of these types of projects when compared to First Nations and Métis rooted ones (average number was 0.67, with the median being 0).

Research projects, programs, and initiatives were most often rooted in First Nations methodologies, followed by Métis and other Indigenous approaches.



Some respondents within the survey also commented on their increased ability to generate projects and seek funding because of the SK-NEIHR, providing more explanation of the level of research activity. Specifically, they appreciated SK-NEIHR's ability to connect them with other researchers or community partners that are helping make projects a reality. Others commented on how a legitimate body like the SK-NEIHR has helped bolster their chances of funding. For example, when asked about the most significant change they experienced some wrote:

“Support to leverage external research funding (e.g. support letters, linking and building relationships with key Indigenous knowledge experts/keepers).”

– Survey Respondent

“I appreciate the focus on equitable access to funding for communities and prioritizing community needs and community driven research.”

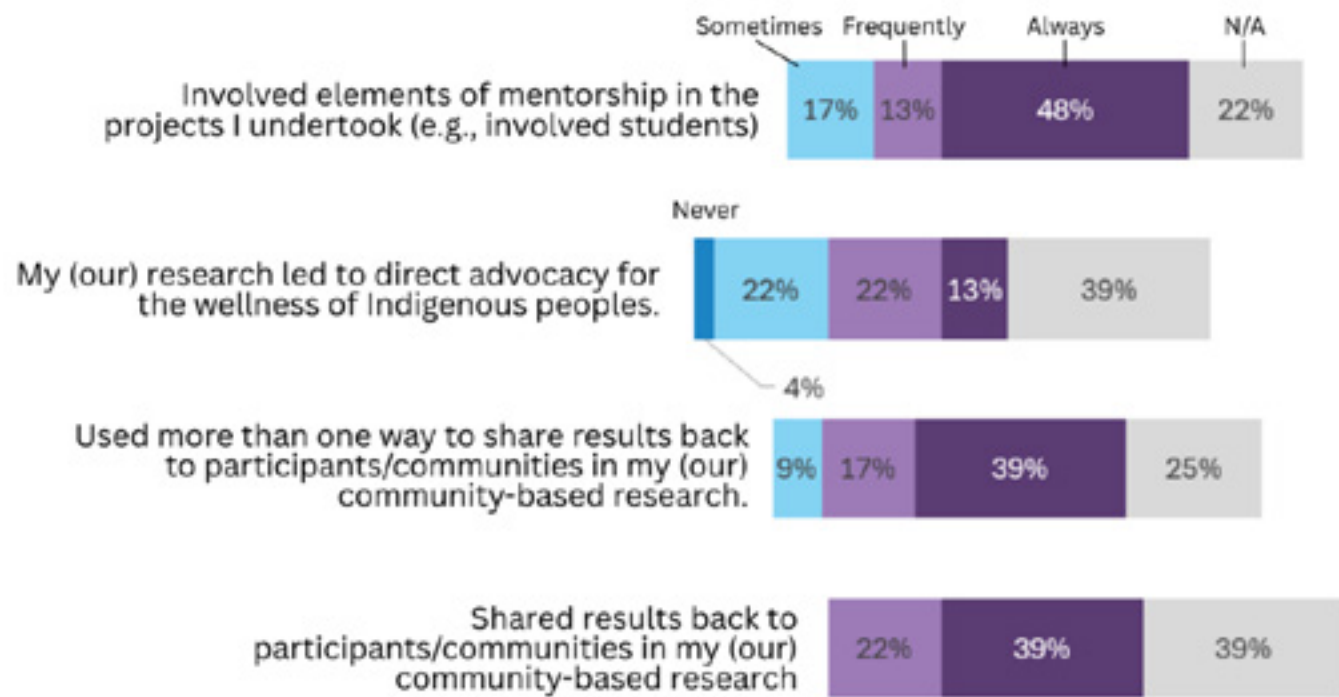
– Survey Respondent

“Encourages our work with building research capacity in the community.”

– Survey Respondent

We also asked researchers to report how frequently they engaged in best practices when working with communities. Among those we listed included sharing research results back (and in more than one way), ensuring mentorship was a part of their project, and if projects led to advocacy to improve the lives of the

In general, most researchers reported **frequently** or **always** involving **mentorship** in their projects and **sharing their results with community** (in multiple ways).



Interestingly, researchers reported lower frequencies when asked whether their projects led to direct advocacy for the wellness of Indigenous peoples, suggesting this may be an area for SK-NEIHR to strengthen (4% never, 22% sometimes, 22% frequently, 13% always, 39% N/A).

Qualitative results also show elements of mentorship present within both researcher projects and the wider SK-NEIHR ecosystem. Specifically, respondents once again brought up that the relational nature and networking opportunities afforded by the Network helped produce the right conditions for effective mentorship. While the SK-NEIHR encourages this and supports members to attend events that spur mentorship (e.g., the NEIHR National Gathering of Graduate Students), respondents also believed that it was happening naturally within the Network. They wrote:

“I appreciated the chance to learn from others, work with others, and share my insights in the data sovereignty training and health research event at Wanuskewin. As well, the chance to be funded for the Indigenous graduate conference in Banff offer some great learning and sharing opportunities.”

– Survey Respondent

“The constructive feedback provided by reviewers of my research grant application was a great learning experience for me. I also appreciated the strength-based approach taken to provide feedback and suggestions to strengthen my application. Also, I loved the mentorship opportunities offered to me.”

– Survey Respondent

“As an Indigenous person who is working with communities, my work is important and valued. I was privileged to attend NGGS 2025, and it really made me feel like I was needed and the work I’m doing is necessary... SK-NEIHR gave me the network and the peer and mentorship support and makes me feel like I really do belong in this space.”

– Survey Respondent

Grant Support

Being placed within an academic institution and working regularly with researchers means that the SK-NEIHR is also regularly involved in facilitating grant applications and funding for First Nations and Métis health research. The researchers who answered the annual survey indicated that they applied for an average of 1.16 grants that used support from the SK-NEIHR (e.g., support letters, connections, reviews) and an average of 0.88 of those grants were successful. This is a rough success rate of 76% for grants utilizing SK-NEIHR help.

To further explore this, we asked researchers how much influence the SK-NEIHR had on the overall success of their grants from April 2024 onwards. Just under half (48%) believed that the SK-NEIHR had a significant (26%) or large influence (22%) on the success of their grants. An additional 30% believed that the SK-NEIHR had “some” influence over the success rate, and 22% said that the SK-NEIHR had no influence on this metric.

Nearly half of researchers indicated that the SK-NEIHR had a significant or large influence on the success of their grants.



Conclusion:

As demonstrated throughout this report, despite the challenges posed in the first five years, the SK-NEIHR has made a significant impact to date, which we expect to continue to expand with our successful renewal to 2029. As evaluation demonstrated throughout this report, the groundwork we did in the first few years in establishing this network is really paying 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. In this 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 nāwawihowin and mamawiikikayaahk Research, Training and Mentorship Network (SK-NEIHR) to support our vision: for all First Nations and Métis Peoples in Saskatchewan to experience optimal health and wellbeing across their lifespans. At the heart of our vision is a shared understanding that the knowledge, wisdom, innovation, and resistance of Métis and First Nations Peoples are foundational to the wellbeing of families and communities and is key to research and interventions aimed at eliminating endemic health disparities and structural inequities that contribute to poor health and social outcomes. Through an Indigenous lens of futurism, we continue to support and honour the past, present, and future of all our relations. It is through the building of ethical relationships within safe spaces that addresses the structural inequality maintained within settler colonial structures that Indigenous futurism finds itself.



Endnotes

- 1 Canadian Institutes of Health Research website. Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research. Accessed April 20, 2025. <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/51161.html>
- 2 Dillon, G. L. (2012). *Walking the clouds: an anthology of Indigenous science fiction* (G. L. Dillon, Ed.). University of Arizona Press.
- 3 See for example: Iwama M, Marshall M, Marshall A, Bartlett C. (2009). Two-Eyed Seeing and the Language of Healing in Community-Based Research. *Canadian journal of native education*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.14288/cjne.v32i2.196493>
- 4 The Aboriginal Capacity and Developmental Research Environments (ACADREs) which were funded in 2000 transformed into the Network Environments for Aboriginal Health Research (NEAHRs) in 2007, funded until 2013. During 2017-22 CIHR funded the Indigenous Mentorship Networks, which later were incorporated into the NEIHRs.
- 5 Robert Henry, Chelsea Gabel, Caroline Tait, Kiera Kowalski, Alexandra Nychuk, Promoting self-determined Indigenous data governance in Canada: the Métis Health Research and Data Governance Principles, *Health Promotion International*, Volume 41, Issue 1, February 2026, daaf229, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf229>
- 6 See more on this Government of Canada website: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1667579335081/1667579367781>
- 7 Conferences at which we made SK-NEIHR presentations; at some we also had information booths: the Canadian Evaluation Society conference and Eval Indigenous Gathering in Fredericton in May 2024; the Canadian Association of Research Administrators' conference in Calgary May 2024; the Turtle Island Indigenous Science Conference in Regina May 2024; the North American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) 2024 conference in Bodo, Norway June 2024; the Back to Batoche Métis Gathering June 2024; the Pinehouse Elders' Gathering in July 2024; Research Impact Canada's AGM in Ottawa September 2024; Saskatchewan Epidemiology Association's 2024 Symposium in Regina October 2024; the Canadian Association of Research Administrators regional conference in Whitehorse November 2024; the Indigenous Evaluation Summit online in February 2025; the Canadian Public Health Association's annual conference in Winnipeg in April 2025; the Community-University Expo in Edmonton in May 2025; the Canadian Association of Research Administrators' 2025 conference in Fredericton 2025; the Canadian Evaluation Society conference online in May 2025; the Indigenous Primary Health Care Policy and Research Network's (Alberta NEIHR's) Annual Scientific Meeting in Calgary June 2025; the Back to Batoche Métis Gathering June 2025; the Pinehouse Elders' Gathering in July 2024; Research Impact Canada's AGM in Vancouver September 2025; and the Saskatchewan Epidemiology Association's 2025 Symposium in September 2025.
- 8 The SK-NEIHR measurement strategy was updated in 2025 to ensure it matches with the direction of the network. It uses the same roots as the previous strategy, but builds on it to include additional outcomes, revised values, and distinctions-based wording. Questions about the framework can be directed to fleur.macqueensmith@usask.ca.
- 9 Events over 2024-2025 included the First Nations and Métis Research Engagement Day, Métis Data Governance Training, SK-NEIHR Innovation Academy for graduate student training, and the Saskatchewan Research Facilitation Network Forum.
- 10 E.g., the SK-NEIHR helped me to regularly use anti-oppressive research approaches in my projects, initiatives, and programs – corresponding with our target outcome of increased use of anti-oppressive research approaches in all projects.
- 11 When asked, respondents in the annual survey attended an average of five SK-NEIHR events during the survey's timeframe (the median number was two).