

Honouring our Health

Did you know that people who live in Northwestern Ontario have higher risk factors for cancer than anywhere else in the province? This means that too many people in our region smoke, drink too much alcohol, are overweight and inactive, and are not eating enough vegetables and fruits.

There are people in our communities who work hard to encourage us to Honour Our Health by living healthier and talking to healthcare providers about cancer screening. The people below have been recognized by Regional Cancer Care – Northwest for their roles as leaders in health promotion in their communities.

Mae Katt

Mae is a Nurse Practitioner with the NorWest Community Health Centres in Thunder Bay. Through her work and several cancer research projects, Mae understands why many Aboriginal people are diagnosed with late-stage breast, cervical and colorectal cancer. These are cancers that can be successfully treated when found early. Unfortunately screening tests are not always easy to access, especially in remote communities, and not enough Aboriginal people in Northwestern Ontario are aware of risk factors and the importance of cancer screening.

This is why Mae is involved with Regional Cancer Care's Prevention and Screening Network – to help spread the message that having a screening test for breast, cervical or colorectal cancer can save your life. She also works to help remove barriers so people can access screening tests and live more healthy lifestyles to reduce their risk of cancer.

Mae's message is this: you have the most important role when it comes to your own health. Eat healthy foods, live a healthy, active lifestyle, and make annual appointments for cancer screening through your doctor or nurse. A simple test could save your life.

Aileen Malcolm

Aileen is a Youth Advisor with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit's Tobacco Control Program. She enjoys working with youth and feels it is important for cancer and diabetes prevention to start at a young age. Aileen believes that living a healthy life when you are young will lead to a healthy life when you are older – and she is right!

Before coming to the Health Unit, Aileen worked for Cancer Care Ontario's Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit as a regional coordinator where she developed teaching tools for cancer education. She sees that a lack of resources and understanding, along with unhealthy lifestyles and substance abuse are all barriers to good health in many Aboriginal communities. This motivates her to spread this message whenever she can: 'The Creator has given us the gift of life, and we should respect that gift. Don't smoke or use, honour your health and live life to the fullest!'

Angela Nodin

Angela is the Health Coordinator for Whitesand First Nation near Armstrong. She became actively involved in cancer prevention and screening when a family member was diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Angela arranged a community education session on the disease and since then has been encouraging Whitesand First Nation residents to go for regular breast and colorectal screening.

Angela is also involved in several programs that promote cancer prevention and healthy lifestyles, such as an Elders education program, a Community Kitchen and a Walking Club in partnership with Anishnabek Family Care.

Sarah Mandamin

Sarah has a long history of educating people about health promotion as a Community Health Representative (CHR) in Iskatewizaagegan (Shoal Lake) No. 39 Independent First Nation. When her husband passed away from cancer, she chose to speak out to her community about the disease and how to help prevent it.

Getting adults to have an annual check-up is one of the biggest challenges Sarah sees in her community. When working with patients, she shares her own experience to show the importance of early cancer detection. She also tells people to not be intimidated by healthcare providers, and to come to appointments with written questions to remember what to ask.

Sarah has also helped coordinate her community's Health Fair for the past 20 years.

Donna Hayes

Donna is a Registered Nurse with Gizhewaadiziwin Health Access Centre in Fort Frances. She has been interested in health promotion and cancer prevention since she started her career, and after working in a chemotherapy unit she became passionate about it. As a nurse and educator, Donna has the opportunity to educate people everyday about the importance of healthy living and cancer screening.

Donna sees the challenges that many people from remote communities face when trying to access healthcare services, including limited transportation to access specialized care. Because of this, she feels it is extremely important for people in those communities to honour their health and take care of their bodies, reducing their risk for cancer, diabetes, and other diseases. Donna was involved with starting the Community Clinic Program that has increased access for people living in remote areas and who may have limited mobility.