



WHAT THE DEHCHO DENE HAVE SAID ABOUT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, REPORTS AND
INFORMATION RELATED TO HEALTH AND
WELLNESS IN THE DEHCHO REGION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is part of a larger initiative of Dehcho First Nations to work towards a vision of Health and Wellness from Dehcho Dene perspectives. It is a result of compiling past information from 20 years of reports, meeting summaries, resolutions and more - honouring the past work and voices of Dehcho Dene.

This report will provide the region with information based on the voices and needs of Dehcho Dene. With the understanding that the Dehcho Dene embody Traditional Knowledge and knowledge gained from lived experiences, we look to the wisdom of the people to gain a better understanding of the health and wellness concepts, initiatives, and concerns in the region.

Health and wellness are inseparable from Dehcho Dene culture, Dene Zhatie, Dene Knowledge, and Dene Laws, Values, and Principles. Furthermore, the underlying relationship between these concepts can be explained by the philosophy of Dene Ahthít'e, which is the connection of the Dehcho Dene to the land and everything around them. Connection to the land is an indication of health and wellness, and it impacts all areas of life for the Dehcho Dene.

Dene Laws, Values, and Principles provide guidance and encourage the Dene Way of Being. The Dene Way of Being promotes unity and harmony between the Dene, the land, and each other. It offers guidance to living a healthy and sustainable life. There are teachings and protocols that guide the Dene in achieving this balanced lifestyle.

Past and present colonialism continue to impact the Dehcho Dene, forcing people to find a balance between the traditional and modern world. This comes with many challenges as the Dene struggle to live in accordance with Dene values and principles while being able to provide for their families and themselves in the mainstream economy. Additionally, there are many Dene who are struggling to find balance in an imposed Western system; the Dehcho region is working hard to provide supports and services to meet the needs of the communities.

It is clear from reviewing each community's wellness strategy that there are six interconnected priorities for DFN to achieve wellness and healing. Programs and services often target several of the following priorities together, to create healthy communities.

1. On-the-land activities
2. Traditional Knowledge and skills
3. Language revitalization
4. Mental health and wellness
5. Elders
6. Youth

This report gives an overview of what it means to be healthy from the Dehcho Dene and highlights some of the key values and principles that aid in achieving wellness including examples of past successful programs that have been implemented in the region.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Dehcho First Nations (DFN) are working towards self-governance through self-determination. As part of this future self-governance and to help guide current health and wellness related work, DFN has begun working with communities by hosting gatherings, and other events, to articulate the planning and vision for Dehcho health and wellness. This report has been prepared to support and inform DFN's health and wellness vision for the future.

The authors, researchers, and contributors for this research were a combination of Dehcho First Nations Members and Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) researchers. DFN members included Kristen Tanche as the Regional Health and Wellness Coordinator, Ramona Pearson as the Communications/Research Assistant, Kathy Tsetso as the Advisor, and Dawn Bell Isaiah as the Communications Assistant. WLU researchers included Melody Morton Ninomiya as an Assistant Professor and Nicole Burns as a Research Assistant.

In the spring of 2020, Kristen Tanche connected with Melody Morton Ninomiya about conducting research for and by Dehcho First Nations. The intent of this research was to learn from what members of DFN have already said in the past, without having to burden people with participating in another study and to honor what Dehcho members have already said.

It was agreed that this study could be accomplished with DFN funding to support Ramona Pearson's time and Melody Morton Ninomiya's pre-existing funding to support Nicole's time. Kristen, together with Kathy Tsetso and Ramona, offered insight on how to conceptually group information. Melody and Nicole offered research methodological insight to help guide the process. Ramona and Kristen were responsible for gathering all the included documents and part of the analysis; Nicole was heavily involved in setting up the research tools, analysis, and drafting this report. This study was completed through a research partnership that did not require additional research grant funding. The study was conceived, designed, and completed within 8 months and is entirely owned, controlled, and belongs to DFN.

Intentions Behind this Project

There are multiple intentions behind this project including:

- honouring and identifying what people have already shared about health and wellness (e.g., what it means to be healthy; successes, challenges, or concerns; important concepts of health and wellbeing, in local context).
- sharing an accessible and useful reference tool that is easy to use, understand, and engage with.
- helping to inform health and wellness planning and visioning for DFN

The results from this work may be used to:

1. inform policy
2. provide the direction of Dehcho health and wellness
3. inform future health and wellness planning
4. inform participants, communities, and other working groups of what has been historically discussed

Guiding Research Questions

The research questions that guided this project are: what have the people of DFN said about...

- a. health and wellness concepts?
- b. initiatives/activities that support and improve health and wellness?
- c. health and wellness concerns?



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following section will provide an overview of the methodology used to inform the development of this report.

Research Team

The research team comprised of DFN employees Kristen Tanche and Ramona Pearson, advisor Kathy Tsetso, and WLU researchers Melody Morton Ninomiya and Nicole Burns.

Information Gathering

To answer the research questions, the DFN research team gathered available documentation from Dehcho First Nations, online sources, and DFN membership regarding health and wellness. This included meeting minutes, annual reports, programming reports, agendas, leadership and annual assembly resolutions, newsletters, negotiations documents, videos, and tertiary research found online. All information was publicly available.

Words spoken or shared by Dehcho members were considered highest priority. Where direct quotes could not be collected, summaries were used (e.g. Mackenzie Gas Pipeline community impact hearings). The majority of documents were from January 2000

until June 2020. Organizational resolutions related directly to health and wellness were also included, even if they were older than twenty years, to have a more complete snapshot of health and wellness activity in the Dehcho.

There are some documents and data that were not included, either because they did not exist (e.g. specific programming reports), were duplicating information found in other documents (e.g. interviews that were already reported on), or contained sensitive subject matter (e.g. self-disclosed intergenerational trauma, residential school issues, addictions, or personal health matters).

Creating Themes & Sub-Themes for Organizing Ideas

The research team compiled all information gathered into a spreadsheet and went through to categorize the information into topic areas or themes. As a team, we used an iterative process that required reviewing materials to categorize, discuss, and revise categories multiple times to ensure that the information was organized in a way that would be useful for the purposes of this report.

A Closer Look at Data Categorization and Organization

Step 1: Quote Collection and Concept Mapping

Ramona, DFN research assistant, read through all documents and highlighted any quotes or information that related to the research questions. Using a spreadsheet, all highlighted quotes were recorded and each quote was labelled with a theme and sub-theme by several team members. This process initially produced around 90 themes and 66 sub-themes.

Concepts related to health and wellness are ingrained in Dehcho Dene culture, which makes analyzing Dehcho First Nations discussions and activities complex. For example, the Negotiations Department is related directly with health and wellness because

the *Agreement in Principle* aims to achieve self-government through jurisdiction over health services, family law, adoption, and education. Deciding if an issue is a government or a health matter was not always simple. Similarly, *Treaty 11* and Section 35 of the *Indian Act* directly impacts the self-expression of Dene people in Dehcho lands, lands, and resources – which links to Dene heritage, spirituality, sovereignty, and food security (an important part of Dehcho Dene health and wellness). Labelling information from each document with themes and sub-themes was necessary to organize information for answering the health and research questions.

Step 2: Organization

We then grouped the quotes by themes and sub-themes, according to each research question – related to Decho Dene health and wellness concepts, initiatives that support health and wellness, and concerns related to health and wellness. After comparing and grouping the themes and sub-themes around the research questions, we eventually arrived at 5 major themes (see Figure 1). The themes were finalized based on (a) how common each topic was as well as (b) the experiences of DFN employees and advisor, who are DFN members, live, work, and are familiar with DFN initiatives. Figure 1 below, details the organization of all final themes and sub-themes.

Major themes include:

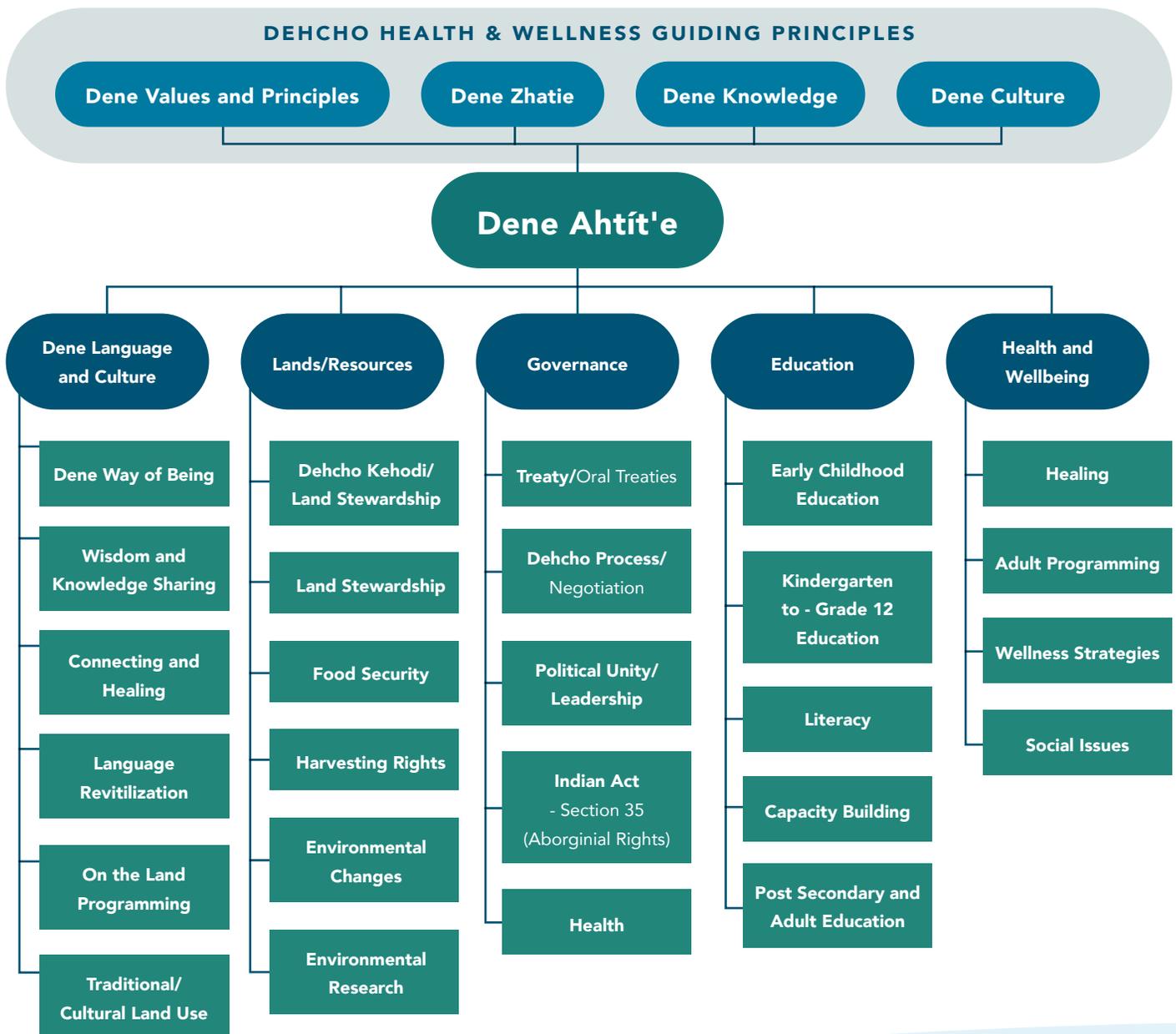
1. Dene Language and Culture / Dene Ahthit'e
2. Land/Resources
3. Governance
4. Education
5. Health & Wellbeing

Examples of subthemes within the major themes are: 'residential school', 'sacred sites', 'Dene philosophy', 'healing', 'Dehcho K'éhodi', and 'Treaty 11'.

We identified the following *four overarching guiding principles* to the health and wellness research.

1. Dene Values and Principles
2. Dene Zhatie, Dehcho Dene Language
3. Dene Knowledge
4. Dene Culture as represented as Dene Ahtít'e

Figure 1. Dehcho Health and Wellness Guiding Principles, Themes, and Sub-themes



Analysis

Highlighted excerpts from all documents were copied into 3 separate Word documents – one for each of the following research questions:

- a. What have people of DFN said about health and wellness concepts?
- b. What have people of DFN said about initiatives/activities that support/improve health and wellness?
- c. What have people of DFN said about health and wellness concerns?

Within each of the 3 documents, information was further organized by the themes and sub-themes listed in Figure 1. While the initial intent was to analyze and summarize results for each research question separately, it became clear that many of the concepts between each question were interconnected and overlapping. After team members read through the 3 documents several times, a draft

outline was created and discussed with the research team. The report outline reflected a combination of the themes and sub-themes for each research question and the interconnected nature between the findings for each question. Once a consensus was reached on a report outline, all of the information in the 3 Word documents were colour-coded in relation to our report outline.



FINDINGS

It is clear that health and wellness concepts are intimately embedded within Dene culture. For the Dehcho, everything is rooted in *Dene Ahthít'e*. **Dene Ahthít'e** includes health and wellness, Dene laws and values, and the Dene Way of Being.

This section will discuss these concepts in more depth. Major themes that emerged during the analysis will be discussed, including examples of successful initiatives that have been implemented by communities over the years - for future programming and services consideration.

Everything is Rooted in Dene Ahthít'e

"Dene Ahthít'e means the ongoing relationship between Dene and the land as expressed through the Dene way of life, including language, customs, traditions, historical experiences, spiritual practices, and laws."

Edézhíe Establishment Agreement (October 11, 2018)

Dene Ahthít'e refers to the relationship between Dene and the land. It is a Dene Way of Being that is intrinsically tied to and guided by the land and culture. It is the expression of the relationship with everything. In a sense, it is a philosophy that guides the Dehcho in a Way of Being and a way of living that they aim to achieve. Dene Ahthít'e promotes healthy behaviours and aids in cultural and spiritual awareness. It is informed by Dene values and principles, Dene Zhatie, Dene culture, and Dene knowledge. In the same way, Dene Ahthít'e also informs values and principles, culture, language, and knowledge. These concepts are equally important and inseparable.

Core to understanding this report is that for the Dehcho, everything is rooted in Dene Ahthít'e. This is depicted in Figure 1 when looking at the overarching themes and subthemes that emerged in this analysis.

Health & Wellness Concepts

What does it mean to be healthy for the Dehcho Dene? A lot of wisdom has been shared about what it means to be healthy and how to achieve wellness in a holistic way for the Dehcho.

"The method to achieve 'healthy' in the Dene culture encompasses interventions to return the mind, body, spirit and emotion to balance in the natural environment."

(Carriere & Lamothe, 2009).

“Maintaining holistic balance and its outcomes: healthy wellbeing, is achieved through living right according to Dene beliefs.”

(Carriere & Lamothe, 2009).

The following sections will explore what it means to be healthy and achieve wellness for the Dehcho Dene, or what it means to live in accordance with Dene beliefs. It will provide an overview of Dene laws and values, Dene Way of Being, traditional healing and medicine, and then it will connect community priorities to these concepts. Please note that these concepts are complex with a lot of depth, and this report is intended to provide a brief overview of the concepts.

Dene Laws and Values

In *Dene Laws & Stories - Nahe Náhodhe - Our Way of Life* (July 6, 2020), the Dene Laws are documented as:

1. Share what you have - Ełeghaets'edendih
2. Help each other - Ełets'áts'ęndi
3. Love each other as much as possible - Ełeghņnets'etq
4. Be respectful of elders & everything around you - Qhndah gots'edihchá & godhqa ashıı ı azhquchú
5. Pass on the teachings - T'ahsıı ots'edi' hshq gogháts'ıwáh
6. Be happy at all times - Łáııı t'áh gogha gonezı
7. Sleep at night and work during the day - Tedhe ts'ete and dzenę eghálats'ęnda
8. Be polite and don't argue with anyone - Dene ts'ę nahzı gots'ęh thá t'áh dene áhdahndı ilé
9. Young girls and boys should behave respectfully - Ts'eliq gots'ęh deneliı q ełegediı hchá

These laws have been embraced through Dene values, which include love, respect, and growth, as well as caring for each other, the water, the land, and all living things. According to Dene beliefs, maintaining health and wellbeing is achieved through living in accordance with Dene values (Carriere & Lamothe, 2009). Dene values are embodied in one's character in numerous ways, including participating in traditional activities such as harvesting, eating, and sharing foods from the land, hauling wood, tanning hides, playing games and dancing. A balanced lifestyle fulfills the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals, families, and communities.

Embodying Dene values also means showing emotions, respecting, and accepting one another, sharing stories and building trust; everyone should feel open and able to express their emotions, including grief. It is important to come together as a community and help one another whenever it is needed. It is also vital to connect to the land (Believe in Our Healing Journey, 2013).

Dene Way of Being

Dene Way of Being is a larger philosophy that is taught to promote health and safety as well as unity and harmony. It expresses Dene Zhatie, Dene laws, and Dene Ahthít'e. It enables traditional living and self-sustaining work as well as teaching patience, sitting calmly, and listening to Elders. The Dene Way of Being teaches many things, including balanced living based on Traditional Knowledge, which is the foundation for Dene language and culture.

Dene Zhatie is a living spirit. The language embodies the experiential learning of the self in relation to others and with the world; it carries memories of people and lessons, and values Dehcho Dene self-expression through communication. Dene Zhatie creates a psychology of living and the telling of living. It is important that the Dehcho Dene can communicate with one another in the same language, nurturing strong connections between generations, and ensuring wisdom and knowledge is passed on to

younger generations. *"Language is a spirit, and it's there. It's alive. What's important is knowing how to receive it—it's ingrained in you. You just need to learn how to energize it"* (Dehcho K'éhodi Community Inventory).

Access to the land and monitoring the Land's health shapes the Dehcho Dene's experiential connection with the world; it gives physical access to resources and traditional practice, provides opportunities for self-expression, and facilitates the growth of individuals through key life development stages. Land use can be traditional, recreational, spiritual, medicinal, sustainable, economical, and used as ritual. *"We have always been here since time immemorial. We have always been here, taking care of the land, taking care of each other according to the Dene Laws. All we need to do is to keep doing that"* (Dahti Tsetso).

Traditional Healing and Medicine

People who are struggling or are sick can turn to traditional healing methods, which work in connection with the Dene Way of Being. Many Dene have spoken about the healing power of the bush and how it is important for maintaining wellness. In the words of Joe Tambour (2014), "If you are really sick and you want a cure, healing, go in the bush for a couple days, sleep there."

Traditional medicines offer many health benefits and can aid in personal wellness and healing. Dene medicines make use of plants, animal parts, minerals, ceremony, prayer, spiritual intervention, and more. Traditional medicine plays a major role in prevention and can complement Western medicine. Traditional medicines can supplement a healthy lifestyle, and it is essential to use traditional medicine in connection with Dene values (Believe in Our Healing Journey, 2013).

Community Priorities

The communities within Dehcho First Nations have diverse local contexts, experiences, and needs. However, there are many commonalities that exist between communities. The commonalities are evident when looking at priorities for health and wellness that were written in the wellness strategies for each community. In examining health and wellness plans (from 2017-2020) for each community, several key areas emerge as priorities for programming and services. As shown in Figure 2, on-the-land

activities, Traditional Knowledge and skills, language revitalization, Elders, mental health, and youth featured prominently in all wellness strategies. Figure 2 is shown as an interconnected circle because these priorities overlap and are connected to each other. For instance, on-the-land activities often bring Elders and youth together to learn Traditional Knowledge and skills while practicing Dene Zhatie, helping to heal and support overall positive mental health.

There are many ways to work towards building healthy communities. In the words of one Sambaa K'e student, *"I think a healthy community is... No alcohol and drugs. There are things to do like skating, drumming, dancing, feasts, meetings, workshops, singing, colouring and playing at the Rec Center. It means going out on the land with community members and playing outside safely. In a healthy community we build houses, have lots of healthy food in the store and there are people talking together."*

Creating and sustaining healthy communities always goes back to Traditional Knowledge. "Healthy communities encourage and support community members to use traditional approaches and engage in traditional activities, for example:

- *Harvest and eat more food from the land, and share food from the land*
- *Engage in traditional activities including hauling wood, tanning hides, and games such as hand games, tea dances, and drum dances*
- *Teach people about traditional approaches to spirituality, sharing and caring*

Follow traditional self-care practices" (Believe in Our Healing Journey, 2013)

Figure 2: DFN Community Priorities for Health and Wellness.



Bridging Traditional and Modern Lifestyles

Many of the issues facing the Dehcho Dene today are a result of the need to bridge two worlds together – the traditional world and modern lifestyles. Michael McLeod (2018) describes:

“Many of the different tribes of the Northwest Territories are saying that our youth have a huge responsibility now... because not only are they expected to live in the world of their Indigenous ancestors, where they know the language and all the practices...and they’ve got to know that, because they are going to be the stewards of the land. But now...they are expected also to survive in the modern society. They have to get an education...and the Elders are saying that an education is our way forward. But you’ve got to know both. The Tlicho say, you got to be strong like two people. What that means is, we need to have more opportunities for people to be out on the land, knowing where their traditional sites are... knowing where the portages are...you know all that stuff.”

According to Dehcho Elders some characteristics of the ideal Dene are:

A good hunter; able to provide family and community with moose

A good speaker who is honest

A person who lives his/her words

A person chosen for a specific purpose by Creator

A good sense of humor, laughing with people, not at them

A joyful person

A person who is respectful towards all people

A person who has respect for all of creation's creatures

A person who uses the land (in a holistic way) renews self often

A person who seeks advice from other people

A person who is friendly to everyone" (Carriere & Lamothe, 2009)

Colonialism has created numerous historical barriers and resulted in many social issues that communities are continuing to solve today, including intergenerational effects from residential schools, effects of the wage economy and economic expanse on the region's self-governance and conservationism, and increased governmental bureaucracies which puts pressure on Dene communities to spend more energy adapting to the provisions of the Indian Act and concerning legislations. "The need for social and family programs arises from the stresses associated with a colonial history, changing lifestyles and expectations, poverty, and marginalization" (Dehcho Regional Investment Plan, 2009). Some of the past concerns facing communities include:

- communities isolated from services and professionals (such as police, nurses, dental, palliative care, community justice, mental health and programming)
- disparity between Traditional and Western capitalist thinking
- lack of infrastructure and lack of transportation
- not enough community-level programming
- inability to regulate non-Dene poachers
- non-Dene encroachment on lands and resources
- inability to protect from state and foreign government pressures
- too little control over education
- inability to stop GNWT pressures
- GNWT manages funding for education, health and housing
- inability to prevent industrialization
- poverty
- access to housing and homelessness
- addictions and alcohol abuse as a consequence of trauma leading to family breakdowns
- climate change and negative impacts on the land/water

Finding a balance between the traditional and modern worlds or lifestyles is the key to success. “We must make a paradigm shift, from the attitude that we can’t change the present situation and that there are too many factors outside of our control to make a difference”

(Rosemary Gill, 2019).

Successful Initiatives

Communities in the Dehcho region have been working hard over the years to provide a wide variety of supports and services that relate to health and wellness. Some of which have had a focus on initiatives and activities that support and improve health and wellness, including concepts such as: taking care of oneself, others, and family, Dene laws and values, traditional lifestyle, passing on teachings and lessons, active learning, healing, mentorship, community roles, gathering, hunting, celebration, sharing, participation, and unity.

An example of a successful initiative in the region is the Dehcho K'éhodi Guardian and Stewardship program. In the words of one community participant, *“Dehcho K'éhodi needs to be thought of in a holistic way, understanding how all the parts are connected to each other. Monitoring, on-the-land programming,*

language learning, relationship building, community wellness, self-government: these are all related.” Another community member said, *“Dehcho K'éhodi should be community-driven and inclusive, since that is the only way to ensure that the initiative is a genuine reflection of the values, needs and visions of the people”* (Latta & McLeod, 2017). Dehcho K'éhodi is one of many initiatives that uses Traditional Knowledge and skills in a way that addresses modern concerns.

While Table 1 is not exhaustive, we have included examples of successful initiatives in the region related to health and wellness. More information could be found by directly contacting the organizations who deliver the programs and services.



Program	Description	Benefits
<p>Guardian Programs, (Dehcho K'éhodi Guardian and Stewardship Programing and AAROM)</p> <p>Delivered by: Dehcho First Nations, Dehcho AAROM and numerous Dehcho Community Organizations.</p> <p>Timeline: 2014- Current</p>	<p>The Dehcho K'éhodi Guardian and Stewardship program began formalizing in 2014. The founding principles being: Youth and Elder mentorship, the Dene Zhatie language, and Dene laws and values. As part of this program, the already established Dehcho AAROM (Aboriginal Aquatics Resources and Oceans Management) served as the pilot for Dehcho Guardians.</p> <p>Since its inception there has been a regional training program, employed Dehcho members on the Enbridge Line 21 replacement, the Edhezhe establishment agreement, numerous on the land programs, partnerships with universities in research, and annual Dehcho K'éhodi Gatherings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More role models for young people • Less crime • Increased access to traditional foods • Increased capacity for self-determination • Better cultural asset management • Strengthened relationship to land and water • Conservation of culture and language • Greater awareness of activity on Land • Better health and wellbeing overall • Increased skills • Increased confidence • Increased income • Ability to find meaningful employment in the community • Increased pride and sense of self • This monitoring program provided "moccasins on the ground" and provided a mechanism to "observe, record, report" any issues with the project to Enbridge. • While not directly evaluated in the documents provided, programs like these can lead to increased capacity in environmental assessment and self-governance as well as planning for climate change adaptations.

Program	Description	Benefits
<p>Aquaponics Project</p> <p>Delivered by: Lois Philipp and Jason Collard</p> <p>Timeline: 2015-unclear</p>	<p>A project to grow food locally and throughout winter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased food security • Access to local and sustainable foods • Increased overall health • Decrease community reliance on costly imported market foods
<p>Wellness Program</p> <p>Delivered by: Fort Providence Métis Council</p> <p>Timeline: Unknown</p>	<p>Weeklong program with the adults in the community that includes exercise, socializing, positive choices, cultural activities, and laughter.</p> <p>Weeklong programming for children & adults including games, prizes and dances. Focusing on mental, emotional, physical and spiritual components of learning. Will look to target bullying and increasing confidence/self-esteem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages healthy eating/nutrition • Encourages positive choices • Promotes family outings • Increases community togetherness

Program	Description	Benefits
<p>“Need to get out of the House” Breakfast Program</p> <p>Delivered by: Fort Providence Métis Council</p> <p>Delivered in: 2018</p>	<p>10 Elders aged 50+ get complimentary breakfast coupons. They get out of the house during winter months and can bring along a friend or family member.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on health eating and nutrition • Incorporates physical activity • Focuses on changing behaviours • Increases socialization • Promotes healthy environments
<p>Traditional Foods Program</p> <p>Delivered by: Fort Providence Métis Council</p> <p>Delivered in: 2018</p>	<p>Supports Elders and membership by providing healthy fish fillets or whole fish to families. Fish is purchased from Métis fishermen in Hay River.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages healthy eating of traditional foods • Supports the livelihood of Métis fisherman
<p>Recognition of Being: A Woman’s Sacred Journey</p> <p>Delivered by: Dene Nahjo, partnered with Dehcho First Nations in Kakisa and Ka’a’gee Tu First Nation</p> <p>Delivered in: 2018</p>	<p>Land-based program where participants focused on cultural teaching. Children were allowed to participate as well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained tools to help maintain health and wellbeing • Shared cultural teachings with children and community • Deepened connection to culture • Deepened connection to the land • Development of regional teams • Intergenerational relationships formed

Program	Description	Benefits
<p>DFN Ecology Camps</p> <p>Delivered by: Dehcho First Nation and numerous community partners</p> <p>Delivered in: 5 + years, annual program</p>	<p>Encourage youth in environmental, scientific and traditional Dene activities. Each year is slightly different. Often blends Traditional Knowledge and science. Often includes youth learning from Elders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Traditional Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Moose hide making ◦ Dry fish/meat making ◦ Storytelling ◦ Sewing ◦ Beaver pelt fixing ◦ Preparing traditional foods ◦ Bead work ◦ Mitten making • Increased youth and Elder connection • Increased scientific knowledge • Increased use of Dene Zhatie



SUGGESTIONS FOR WAYS TO INCREASE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In addition to these initiatives, community members have suggested the following ways to increase health and well-being for DFN (this list is not exhaustive):

- Provide Narcan kits and training for communities
- Increase the number of workshops targeting the reduction of heavy drug use and long-term alcohol consumption
- Provide workshops for communities about diabetes (prevention and treatment)
- Provide workshops for community members dealing with death, grief, and loss (emotionally and logistically)
- Provide cultural sensitivity training for CFS, RCMP, and frontline workers in communities
- Work towards a long-term care facility in the Dehcho so community members do not have to go to Yellowknife for palliative care
- Work towards a woman's shelter in the region
- Increase awareness of the programs and services that are offered in the region
- Increase services for those returning after drug or alcohol treatment



CONCLUSION

There is a lot to learn from the voices of the Dehcho Dene, including what it means to be healthy and achieve wellness. Dene Values include sharing, loving each other, helping one another and respecting others as well as taking care of the land, water, and all living things. These Values are taught and expressed through many cultural activities such as harvesting, preparing and sharing foods, and participating in games, tanning hides, and dancing.

This report highlights how health and wellness are intimately tied to Dehcho Dene culture, Dene Zhatie, Dene Knowledge, and Dene Laws, Values, and Principles. The relationship between these concepts is understood through the philosophy of Dene Ahthít'e, which represents the connection of the Dehcho Dene to the land and all living things. The Dene Way of Being is a lifestyle that many Dene aim to achieve; it is a balanced lifestyle that is connected to everything that surrounds us.

Communities in the Dehcho region continue to recognize the importance of Dene Values as they plan and deliver programs and services that focus on wellness and healing. The majority of activities focus on community-identified priorities such as: on-

the-land activities, Traditional Knowledge and skills, language revitalization, mental health and wellness, Elders, and youth. Programs and services aim to bring balance to community members as they deal with the numerous challenges presented to them.

This report offers insight into what it means to live a healthy life, according to the Dehcho Dene. It focuses on the voices of the Dehcho and gives examples of successful initiatives from the past. The report also highlights the fact that communities continue to strive towards leading healthy lives and offering holistic programming and services. This report was prepared with the intention that it can aid in supporting and informing DFN's health and wellness vision for the future.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Ramona Pearson, Former Research Assistant, Dehcho First Nations

Health and wellness is an underlying motivational force for individuals and organizations to do good. We must be proud of cultivating health, heritage, and identity in whatever cultural capacity is available to us. These days, we empower Dene identity in many ways, from individual efforts to state-led campaigns. Certainly, colonizing powers like modernization and the wage economy have done much to erode and distract from our self-expression and cultural belonging and yet, contemporary means to reinvigorate health (“holistic programming”), lend themselves to bureaucratic processes that aid in the development of building cultural strength.

I learned a lot during this project. If we’re looking for health and wellness related information, it’s always right below the surface, being the foundational basis for community and organizational-led objectives, on-the-Land programming, and is present in almost all levels of governance. As a sovereign nation we can use bureaucratic tools to overcome modern barriers in our journey towards better health and wellness. I am proud when I see the talented individuals who can harness capital for their communities to provide opportunities to engage with the Land and each other without making large sacrifices between modernity and tradition. I believe our strength and adaptability to rise and build these opportunities from the ground up reflects in all that we do as Dehcho Dene, as we have historically maintained the balance between ourselves, the world, and our spirituality with squared shoulders. As Elder Elizabeth Hardisty told me: “We are an industrious people.” In preserving who we are by understanding where we come from, we demonstrate gathered strength with every generation. One does not need to be a doctor or professional to have a voice in this conversation because we all understand our own wellbeing and have access to the knowledge to learn the work it takes to maintain it.

Kristen Tanche, Regional Health and Wellness Coordinator, Dehcho First Nations

This project was a long time in the making, as I read through the combined words of my people my heart brimmed with pride and happiness. Our people have known and have been talking about this subject for years. Our culture is historically oral, however in a changing society we are adapting, so I think this document provides a snapshot of health and wellness in written form.

From my experience in taking part in Dehcho leadership meetings, but also as a community member who actively listens to people, I believe this document to be a partial reflection of what Dehcho people have been saying about Health and Wellness. I say partial because the concept of what Health and Wellness means from a Dehcho Dene Perspective can be complicated. In the sense that it is looked at holistically, involves many pieces, and is so intertwined with other things, like land, language, spirituality, culture, housing and so on.

In an era where we are still grappling with the ongoing colonization of our people, intergenerational trauma and other social issues, I think it is vital to remember what is important, and that is people. Along the journey we, as a society, can get so wrapped up in the policy that we lose sight of the words of the people, the experts in health and wellness, and the people who live it daily. So, I hope that we, as a nation, always remember that we need to listen to the people and to honor those of the past. One of the ways to do this is by bringing forward the past combined words of people on Dehcho Health and Wellness, which this document aimed to do.

Nicole Burns, Research Assistant, Wilfrid Laurier University

I am privileged and honoured to have been able to collaborate on this document. I have enjoyed learning from Kristen, Ramona, and Kathy while also gaining knowledge from the many voices of the Dehcho Dene through document analysis. I am inspired by the continuous work that is being done to promote wellness in the Dehcho region, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have shared in a part of this journey. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and stories with me.

Melody Morton Ninomiya, Assistant Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

It has been wonderful to work with Kristen, Ramona, Kathy, and Nicole on this project. Everyone on the team brought so much integrity and a unique set of skills, knowledge, and contributions to make this project possible. I have enormous respect for the past, present, and future health and wellness work in the Dehcho region. This whole project was done virtually, during the pandemic, so I look forward to the day that I can visit the region and be on the land with Kristen, Ramona, Kathy, and others. I am extremely grateful for being invited to be part of this project and to have met such wonderful people. May the richness of Dehcho Dene wisdom, knowledge, values, and lifestyles be present in all health and wellness supports and services in perpetuity (forever).

APPENDIX A

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WHAT THE DEHCHO DENE HAVE SAID ABOUT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, REPORTS AND
INFORMATION RELATED TO HEALTH AND
WELLNESS IN THE DEHCHO REGION

