

RESULTS AT A GLANCE – Horizontal Evaluation of Nutrition North Canada 2012-2013 to 2017-2018

Introduction

- The Nutrition North Canada (NNC) Program was introduced in 2011 as an initiative to reduce the cost of nutritious, perishable foods in isolated northern communities, and to better promote nutritious eating. Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) provides a subsidy directly to northern retailers, suppliers, and registered country food processors that apply, meet the program's requirements, and register with NNC by signing a funding agreement with CIRNAC.
- Given that there are a number of factors that influence healthy eating patterns other than food cost, nutrition education initiatives were introduced as part of NNC to complement the food subsidy program component. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and Public Health Agency of Canada provide funding and support to eligible communities for the delivery of retail and community-based nutrition education activities.
- High food prices in the North are due to factors such as the lack of competition, lack of economies of scale, reduced number of modes of transportation, and harsh climate.

Program Resources

- Total funding for the NNC program from 2012-13 to 2017-18 was approximately \$423 million from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) (now CIRNAC), and \$19.5 million from Health Canada.

Expected Results and Outcomes

- The expected result of NNC is that “residents in eligible communities have access to nutritious perishable food at a subsidized rate.” This is assessed by measuring the extent to which the subsidy is passed to consumers, retailers showing savings on till receipts, and the annual percentage variation in the quantity of subsidized items shipped by air. The ultimate outcome of the program is to “strengthen the nutritional choices and overall health of isolated northern communities through the food subsidy... and the targeted nutrition education initiatives...”

What the evaluation found

- There is a need to improve how the Government of Canada helps address the challenges of nutritious perishable food availability and affordability in the North. Northern communities face numerous barriers contributing to the high cost of healthy food. NNC-eligible communities also face a challenging economic environment compared to the rest of Canada, resulting in low purchasing power and high rates of food insecurity.
- The program is successful with giving residents in remote and northern communities more access to nutritious perishable food at a subsidized rate. In addition, the subsidy is associated with greater consumption of healthy foods.
- While the program reduces and controls the prices of a select number of goods, a typical household of four is able to afford less than half of the contents of the Revised Northern Food Basket. Lower level subsidies to foods considered staples and in high demand offer minimal savings. Additionally, the program has limited tangible impact on the processing and shipment of country traditionally hunted and harvested food due to low uptake.

- Communications efforts on the part of the Government of Canada have not resulted in higher awareness or understanding of NNC amongst the affected population.
- A key success for NNC are the education initiatives funded through ISC's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB). The growth in participation in community-based nutrition education initiatives demonstrates that more people are acquiring knowledge and skills to eat healthy. There is a higher demand for certain types of activities such as traditional food knowledge and skills and retail-based nutrition knowledge and awareness.

Recommendations and Responses

It is recommended that CIRNAC:

- 1. Work with communities and representatives of Indigenous peoples and governments to revise the eligible food list to be more relevant to local diets and needs.**

Response:

On January 1, 2019, NNC implemented a revised food list that was developed in consultation with Northerners. The Department continues to engage on this issue and meets regularly with the NNC Indigenous Working Group, the Inuit-Crown Food Security Working Group and the NNC Advisory Board to ensure that the list is still relevant and meets the cultural and dietary needs of Northerners.

- 2. Work with communities and representatives of Indigenous peoples and governments on strategies to further reduce the price of nutritious foods.**

Response:

NNC continues to engage with the Indigenous Working Group, the Inuit-Crown Food Security Working Group and the NNC Advisory Board in order to ensure that the program is more responsive and relevant to Northerners. The program is introducing a surface transportation subsidy for sealift and winter roads as these are a better reflection of how Northerners resupply their community staples. NNC will work with the groups identified above to close the gap with respect to data quality for remote communities.

- 3. Develop indicators for program impact that look beyond the Revised Northern Food Basket relative to the Consumer Price Index.**

Response:

The Department will work to develop indicators for program impact beyond the use of a comparison between Revised Northern Food Basket and the Consumer Price Index. As an example, the program will introduce the Northern Staple Goods List, which has been developed to monitor the price of eligible items subsidized when shipped by sealift or winter road.

- 4. Examine potential new approaches to further improve access to nutritious foods for Northerners, especially for low-income families.**

Response:

The Department is examining the impact of the latest enhancements to the program to help inform the criteria that will better measure and contribute to results leading to improved access to nutritious foods for Northerners. The program enhancements to be examined include: increasing the subsidy levels in all communities; revising the NNC subsidy to remove the shipped by air restriction and, including surface transportation; increasing air-lift subsidy rates in highest needs communities; and, introducing a new Harvesters Support Grant to off-set the cost of local traditional harvesting activities to better support access to country food.

- 5. Develop options to provide support to harvesters for supplies and tools to facilitate sharing of country food within communities,**

and pursue innovations for locally produced food.

Response:

NNC is implementing a harvesters support grant to help lower the high costs associated with traditional hunting and harvesting activities, and to increase efficiencies for the organizations delivering the grant.

In addition, as part of the Government of Canada's Food Policy, Budget 2019 provided the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency with \$15 million, over five years, starting in 2019–20, to establish a Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund. This fund will support community-led projects for local and Indigenous food production systems.

6. Establish better communications with residents of eligible communities about NNC and how it works, especially the personal orders portion of the program.

Response:

The program is developing a renewed and proactive Communications approach, in collaboration with CIRNAC's Communications Branch and Indigenous community partners, to inform residents of the latest changes to the program, and for their input on how to enhance program communications. In that vein, the program will also explore the possibility of retaining the services of a Communications Expert to develop a Strategy, and NNC will be conducting community outreach sessions to support this recommendation. NNC will also work closely with Privy Council Office's Impact and Innovation Unit to enhance its transparency measures.

It is recommended that ISC:

7. Work with communities to disseminate information to better support nutrition education about healthy eating choices including healthy alternatives to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Response:

ISC does not in all cases work directly with communities that are eligible for NNC in the delivery of NNC Nutrition Education Initiatives. Instead, ISC works with and provides funding to partners such as the territorial

governments or First Nations and Inuit organizations, who in turn provide NNC Nutrition Education Initiatives to communities. Thus, to be precise, ISC will work with communities and partners at the regional and territorial levels to support nutrition education about healthy eating choices including healthy alternatives to fresh fruits and vegetables. ISC intends to initiate action to implement the recommendation immediately.

Starting in December 2019, ISC-FNIHB will:

1. Engage with communities and partners about this recommendation through the NNC Nutrition Education Initiatives program leads, who support the nutrition education component at the regional and territorial levels.
2. Through the program leads, engage and develop a plan with communities and partners to identify and disseminate nutrition education information. Communities and partners to be engaged throughout the planning process. Program leads will share updates on discussions with ISC-FNIHB by March 2021.

Work with communities and partners to finalize and disseminate information by December 31, 2020.

About this evaluation

The evaluation examined the impacts and design of components related to NNC funded by the former INAC and the nutrition education initiatives funded by Health Canada from 2012-13 to 2017-18, and included 68 key-informant interviews, including 55 interviews with community administrators and retailers as part of site visits; an extensive literature review; a document and program file review; and analysis of data.