

Promising Practices for Strengthening Primary Care

Regional Nurse On-Call (RNOC)



The challenge

The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay delivers health and social services in nine communities within the Cree territory of Northern Quebec. **Since the pandemic, there has been an increased need for after-hours services. Combined with a critical shortage of nurses, this has led to nurse exhaustion and resignations, and decreased access to primary care for the community.**

The promising practice

Regional Nurse On-Call (RNOC) is a centralized virtual triage service staffed by a dedicated nurse, designed to improve patient access to care while alleviating after-hours workload for community nurses within Community Miyupimaatisiium Centres (CMCs). Calls for primary care services outside of 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. are transferred to a RNOC, who assesses the health of the patient and triages as appropriate.

- For non-urgent issues, health concerns are resolved over the phone.
- For semi-urgent issues, an appointment is set for the next day with a nurse at a CMC.
- For urgent issues, patients are directed to go to a CMC (via ambulance if required).

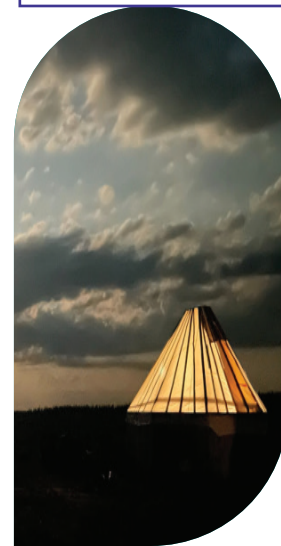
Example impacts

Since the launch of our Regional Nurse On-Call Service in January 2024:

- Seven Cree communities have access to the RNOC service: Eastmain, Nemaska, Ouje-Bougoumou, Waskaganish, Waswanipi, Wemindji, and Whapmagoostui.
- 6,290 calls have been triaged through the RNOC, and of those, 52 percent of health issues were successfully resolved over the phone, thereby reducing avoidable visits to CMCs for the patient and decreasing workload for nursing staff at the CMCs.
- The reduction in nurse workload at CMCs has enhanced nursing staff wellbeing, positively impacted retention, and may improve patient safety since nurses are better rested and have a more manageable workload.

With the Regional Nurse On-Call, my on-call nights are so much easier, I can sleep and be rested for urgent situations. Without it, I don't think I would still be working up North."

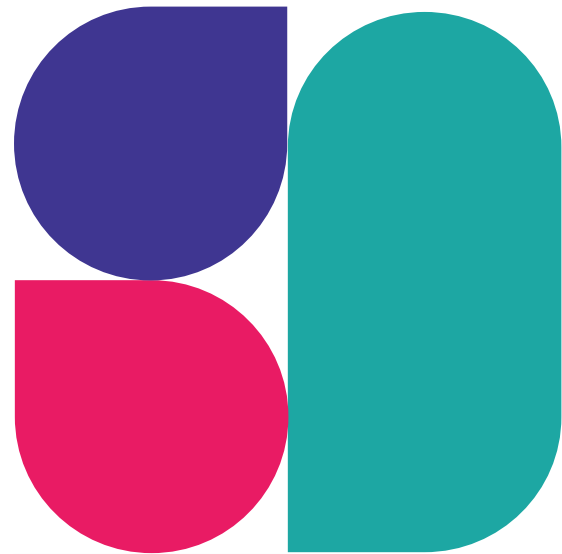
– Nurse from Whapmagoostui



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Keys to success

- **Technology:** Use of software based on validated triage protocols specific for phone triage.
- **Funding:** Investment of \$5,000 annually in licenses for phone triage software and to educate RNOC nurses to conduct phone assessment and telehealth.
- **Champions:** Nursing leadership's commitment to seeking out and implementing new strategies to enhance patient safety and promote nurse wellness.
- **Cultural safety:** Placing community needs, values, and opinions at the forefront of our program implementation. Phone triage services are delivered by nurses who are familiar with the community, embrace Cree values, and have received training in cultural safety.
- **Meaningful partnerships with communities:** pre-implementation community visits. Engaging with the community before our service launch facilitates direct communication between our team, community members, and leaders.



Lessons learned

- Being flexible while keeping an open mind to suggestions from the community and local nurses, who have offered us excellent solutions we did not foresee.
- Continued engagement with the community. Brief radio broadcasts and Facebook updates have successfully informed the community member about our services.

How can I learn more?

Contact the organization.

Frederic Lemieux Legendre, Assistant Director of Professional Service and Quality Assurance-Health,
Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay,
frederic.legendre@ssss.gouv.qc.ca



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Why was this summary created?

Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay participated in Healthcare Excellence Canada's (HEC) Strengthening Primary Care (SPC) program.

SPC brought together 20 primary care organizations from across Canada to advance practices to improve access to safe, including culturally safe, team-based primary care. This promising practice summary was co-produced with Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay to help others learn about their work and generate discussion about how similar approaches could be adapted and applied elsewhere.