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**PUBLIC
HEALTH
REPORT
CARD**



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca



MISSION ◊ VISION ◊ VALUES

OUR MISSION

Improve the quality and length of life in our communities: healthy lifestyles, longer lives, lived well.

OUR VISION

We are recognized as a valued and integral partner in health.

OUR VALUES

Respect

We treat all people with respect and dignity, and value diversity and inclusiveness.

Integrity

We act with honesty and adhere to the highest ethical principles as an organization and as public health professionals. We are accountable for our actions and embrace transparency to empower public scrutiny.

Equity

We recognize that some people or groups do not have the same opportunities as others for health and success because of systemic discrimination. We actively work to change these policies, practices and structures, internally and in society, to achieve equality of opportunity for all.

NWHU

An employee-recommended workplace



This past year, Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) was recognized with the **Employee Recommended Workplace Award**. The award recognizes excellence in achieving a healthy, engaged and productive workforce.

It is the only award of its kind that is based entirely on feedback from employees. This award helps to identify us as an employer of choice which in turn assists with recruitment. It is the second year in a row NWHU has won the award.

The national award program is sponsored by *The Globe and Mail* and *Morneau Shepell* and honours workplaces that are healthy and supportive with policies and programs which encourage employee wellness and work-life balance in a busy and productive environment.

NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO IS UNIQUE

So is our service delivery model

With a geographic catchment area of nearly 175,000 square kilometres, NWHU and its residents face many unique and challenging characteristics in the region. Geography is just one. Not only is the region large, the population is very dispersed. There are about 82,000 people in our area living in 19 municipalities, 39 First Nations and two unorganized territories. Approximately one-third of our population identifies as Indigenous.

Higher rates of unhealthy behaviours that result in illness and the social determinants of health that affect our region mean we have some of the worst health outcomes in the province. The issues are compounded by significant travel times between communities for goods, services and medical specialists.

NWHU supports those who live in the northwest by offering an effective public health model for the region – local service delivery, local staff and local offices. Offices in 13 communities across the region allow staff to better understand community assets and needs, build relationships and maximize local partnerships with municipalities, school boards, day cares, social services and health service providers.

Organizationally and locally, NWHU has strong partnerships with the Indigenous stakeholders both on- and off-reserve, to optimize public health services for Indigenous people in the region.

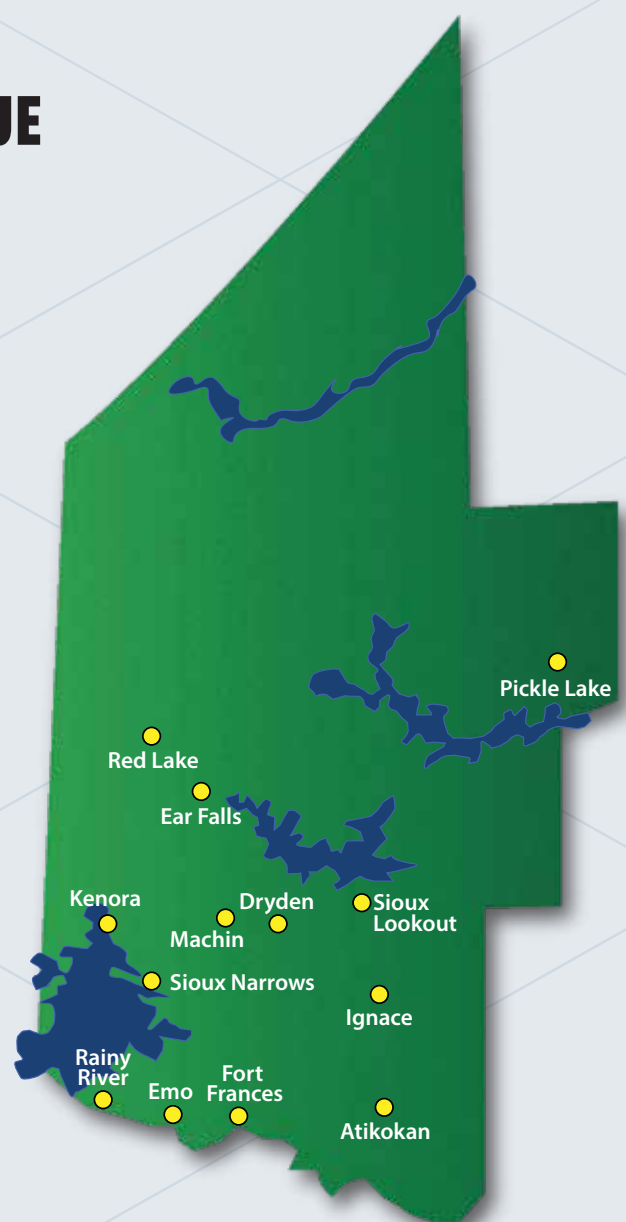
To ensure equitable and accessible services, public health supplements local offices with innovative service delivery models. For example, at NWHU we have mobile outreach services such as dental and harm reduction services that can reach the most vulnerable in our communities, and those who cannot or will not travel to an office for services. The health unit also provides public health services with or through community partners to leverage their resources, expertise and access to service users that might not choose to come to the health unit.

Strong partnerships, strong pandemic response

Over the years, our distributed service model has allowed us to build strong relationships with partners in each of our communities. These local relationships were relied on throughout our COVID-19 response. The existing trust, knowledge, and communication channels that our local staff had with partners provided opportunities for true collaboration. Without our existing partnerships with schools, municipalities, workplaces, health care providers, First Nations communities, and other organizations, our response would not have been nearly as efficient or effective.

In addition, NWHU staff were quick to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones in new ways. As many partners got involved in non-traditional roles, our staff formed strong connections with new people. We were able to broadly apply infection control measures throughout our communities by connecting with businesses, workplaces, and social service agencies in ways we hadn't before.

Thank you to all our local residents who played a role in the COVID-19 response.



BOARD OF HEALTH

The Board of Health for the Northwestern Health Unit is made up of 8 members from local municipal councils and up to 3 members appointed by the Province.

Municipal members are appointed for the duration of their term in public office, which is usually a 4-year term. Provincial members are appointed for a term, the length of which is decided by the Minister of Health. The positions of Chair and Vice-Chair rotate annually.

Board of Health 2020

Chair - **Doug Lawrance**

Municipal appointee for Sioux Lookout, Ignace, and Pickle Lake

Vice Chair - **Sharon Smith**

Municipal appointee for Kenora

Executive Member - **Shayne MacKinnon**

Municipal appointee for Dryden and Machin

Executive Member (alPHa rep) - **Trudy Sachowski**

Municipal appointee for Ear Falls, Red Lake

Jerry O'Leary

Municipal appointee for Kenora and Sioux Narrows - Nestor Falls

Wendy Brunetta

Municipal appointee for Fort Frances

Sally Burns

Municipal appointee for Atikokan

Jim Belluz

Municipal appointee for Alberton, Dawson, Chapple, Morley, La Vallee, Rainy River, Emo, and Lake of the Woods

Nicole Brown

Provincial Appointee as of January 17, 2020

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

We will remember 2020 as the year of COVID-19. It was the most significant event for Public Health in decades. As did many agencies, the NWHU Board of Health quickly transitioned to 'on-line' meetings. Although it was from a distance, we were able to witness our Staff as they adjusted programming to concentrate on the pandemic. While some Staff went into high gear on what they have been trained for, many Staff revised roles for this all-out effort. Long hours in different work situations were the norm. The Board is tremendously proud of all NWHU Staff, from leadership to front line, from those in the forefront to those in the back office. Thank you.

The Board also witnessed and were key players in NWHU communications with the Public. 2020 became the year of Public Health messaging related to so much that influenced all of our lives: shut-downs, hand-washing, masks, restrictions, gatherings, going shopping, essential, non-essential, flattening curves, percentages, variants, vaccines, clinics, stages, re-openings, and so much more. Communications were frequent, varied, and beneficial whether with the Public, Municipal Councils, businesses, primary health care, agencies of all types – with everyone.

The value of Board members and Staff in our local communities informing NWHU's response to the pandemic was clear. The value of the Northwestern Public Health Unit as a stand-alone agency has never been more apparent than in 2020.



Doug Lawrance
Chair, Board of Health



MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER and MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

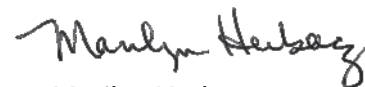
2020 was a year unprecedented and extraordinary. The year began with Ministry consultations regarding Public Health Modernization and NWHU presented justification for remaining a single entity within a multi-site, decentralized model rooted within our communities. As these discussions continued throughout the province, public health quickly shifted into the largest pandemic response in recent history and consultations stopped.

As COVID-19 spread throughout the world, we initiated our emergency response plan and 100% of staff were redeployed to this work. The way staff worked changed significantly as virtual platforms became the method of communication and new systems were implemented to respond to the pandemic. Our strong partnerships served us well and together as a region we faced the challenges COVID-19 presented. Our programming shifted quickly as we conducted large-scale case and contact management, ensured workplaces and businesses had resources and information to keep employees and patrons safe, and added a hotline and a website chat function to support the thousands of questions coming in from concerned citizens.

The year was challenging for everyone as we have all faced loss of normalcy, loss of control, and loss of certainty. Our staff were given tasks they had never done before, often with very little notice or room for error. We successfully recruited temporary staff, learned new technology to help us connect safely, and purchased necessary supplies such as personal protective equipment. Despite everything, our staff and communities showed tremendous resilience, responsibility, and resolve to support one another and to protect the people in our region. We have never been so proud to be a part of this work.

As we moved into 2021, it was with a new goal - to vaccinate as many people in our region as possible to end the waves of illness that COVID-19 brought. We are happy to say we are well on our way to achieving our goal.

Thank you to our Board of Health for your work and for supporting leadership and the work of the health unit. To our staff, partners, municipalities, and the public, thank you for your sacrifices, perseverance, and commitment in protecting our communities!



Marilyn Herbacz
Chief Executive Officer
Northwestern Health Unit

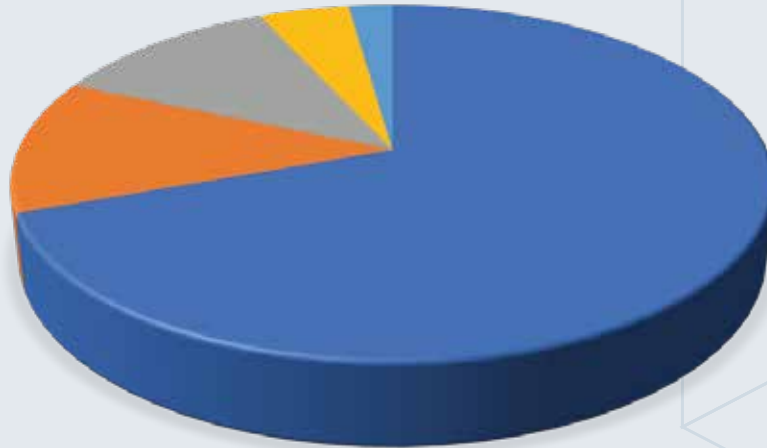


Kit Young Hoon
Medical Officer of Health
Northwestern Health Unit

NWHU FINANCIAL REPORT

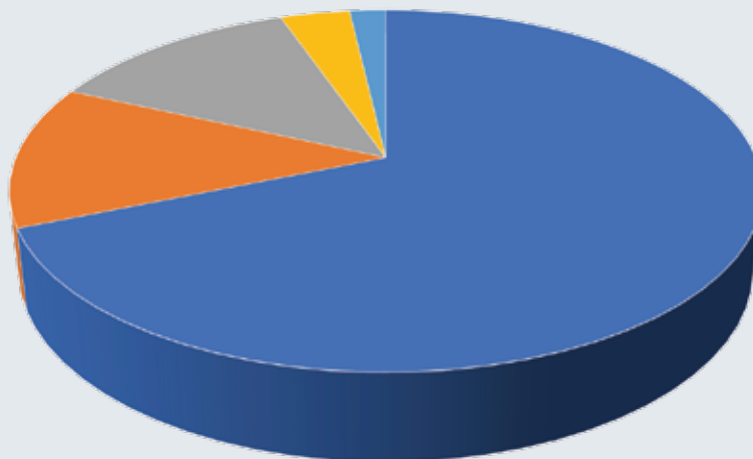
Total NWHU Revenue and Expenditures by Funder

REVENUE \$21,204,370



| | |
|---|---------------|
| ■ Ministry of Health and Long Term Care | \$ 14,716,765 |
| ■ Ministry of Children, Community/Social Services | \$ 2,583,819 |
| ■ Municipalities | \$ 2,462,435 |
| ■ Other Revenue and User Fees | \$ 969,195 |
| ■ Federal Grants | \$ 472,156 |

EXPENDITURES \$19,053,676



| | |
|---|---------------|
| ■ Ministry of Health and Long Term Care | \$ 13,119,076 |
| ■ Ministry of Children, Community/Social Services | \$ 2,438,918 |
| ■ Municipalities | \$ 2,462,435 |
| ■ Other Revenue and User Fees | \$ 679,211 |
| ■ Federal Grants | \$ 354,036 |

POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Early in 2020, the Fort Frances office of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the local O.P.P. detachment began developing a Mobile Crisis Response Team to provide coordinated services to those with mental health and addiction issues.

NWHU's local harm reduction staff were quickly invited to join the team of service providers.

"We knew right away we were all on the same team," said Christy Herr, Public Health Nurse for the Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Program. "We were often seeing the same clients so it made sense for us to be working together."

The newly formed team felt it was important to break an obvious cycle in the community. People were getting arrested, going to jail, getting out, then getting arrested again. With the help of police, mental health workers, and harm reduction staff reaching out in the community, they began to see evidence of the cycle being broken.



(L to R) Rebecca Martin, Public Health Nurse, Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Program, Christy Herr, Public Health Nurse, Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Program, Christie Cousineau, Canadian Mental Health Association, Melinda Mills, Ontario Provincial Police.

With the onset of COVID-19, the team increased the number of outreach patrols. NWHU staff had backpacks full of harm reduction supplies, Naloxone, and food items. "It was important to take down barriers," said Rebecca Martin, also a Public Health Nurse for the Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Program. "Meeting our clients where they were at helped build relationships and increased access to our services."

So far, the reaction to the team's work has been very positive. Clients and team members have become increasingly comfortable with each other and many clients have visited the NWHU office for the first time.

Due to the team's successes, other organizations in the community now want to take part in the work the Crisis Response Team is doing.

Team members see the program as an opportunity to see what's really going on, to fill gaps in traditional service models, and to truly help those who are in crisis.

“

We were often seeing the same clients so it made sense for us to be working together.

Christy Herr,
Public Health Nurse

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WHAT A YEAR FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

2020 was a year that no one will forget, and as COVID-19 spread around the world in a matter of months, NWHU quickly implemented an emergency response plan. This included reassigning staff and providing information and guidance to support partners, workplaces, and the public.

In the early weeks and months of the pandemic, information changed quickly as researchers learned more about the virus. Best practices were amended rapidly and frequently, and public health was required to adapt immediately as knowledge was gained.

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 presented, NWHU was one of few local agencies whose offices remained open to the public throughout 2020. We continued to provide essential services to clients, often delivered in a modified way to ensure the safety of staff and the public.

Looking back at the work that got completed in 2020, our staff truly worked together as a team, often covering others' program work while they were redeployed to the COVID-19 response. Staff were given new roles, difficult tasks, and fostered new relationships, all while remaining calm and ready for every challenge. It was a year no staff member will ever forget and one they should be proud of in their career!

Should I wear a cloth ma

- It will protect others from your germs
- When going out for groceries and essentials, the mask may offer some protection when you cannot keep 6 feet from others
- You can make your own mask with materials you already have

You may touch the mask, coat

You may security a

You may think it non-esse

Do not use medical masks needed by health care w



Safely putting on and taking off a cloth mask

- If you choose to wear a cloth mask, be sure to use it safely:
- PUTTING ON**
 - Wash your hands before
 - Place mask on your face so it covers your mouth and nose (no gaping)
 - Do not touch the mask or your face
 - TAKING OFF**
 - Change your mask as soon as it gets damp or dirty
 - Remove it without touching the side that faces outwards
 - Put the mask directly into the washing machine or a plastic bag for cleaning
 - Do not put the used mask in your pocket, put it directly into the washing machine or a plastic bag for cleaning

HOW to COUGH and SNEEZE PROPERLY!

When you cough or sneeze cover your nose and mouth with a tissue.

Throw your tissue in the garbage.

Cough or sneeze in your elbow and use hands if you don't have a tissue.

Wash your hands with warm water and soap or use hand sanitizer after coughing or sneezing. Fully sanitize the surface of tissues.



PROGRAM UPDATES

Outreach

At a time when mental health and addictions support are in great need, NWHU took steps to help. In 2020, we expanded our outreach programming by partnering with organizations across the region. Through these strong partnerships, we now have access to outreach vehicles in Sioux Lookout, Kenora, and Fort Frances which allows us and our local partners to bring services to our area's vulnerable populations.

Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program

The HBHC program provides a wide range of resources and supports to expecting mothers and new parents/caregivers including home visits. Typically, home visits by a staff person occur in the homes of consenting clients on the Blended Home Visit program.

With the onset of COVID-19, it was necessary for us to temporarily pause in-person visits and find new and innovative ways to connect with clients to help ensure that families continued to be supported while protecting staff and families from the virus. Our staff were innovative and adaptive by delivering HBHC services virtually, and through outdoor visits when restrictions allowed. In 2020, Public Health Nurses and Parenting Partners conducted **7136** interactions including home visits with families.



Speech and Language

2020 brought big changes to how NWHU delivered preschool speech and language services. During the pandemic, program staff quickly learned how to adapt to delivering therapy virtually! Clinicians learned to use new technology, how to use green screens, and were introduced to many new online resources. It was important to find new ways of connecting with families and our young clients. Our Speech Pathologists managed to engage preschoolers, share information and coach parents through an entirely new technology. Although staff missed seeing preschoolers in person, virtual service delivery has been safe and effective.

Tobacco Cessation

Quitting tobacco is one of the best things you can do for your health. Despite that fact, millions of Canadians continue to be addicted to cigarettes and other forms of tobacco.

Tobacco users in our region who wanted to quit joined the Ready to Quit Program which helps by providing twelve weeks of free nicotine replacement and support. The program was run by a unique mix of health unit nurses, dental, and chronic disease prevention staff in communities where partners did not offer the service, or where it was limited. Although the support was offered solely online due to COVID-19, it was still successful as clients in Sioux Lookout, Kenora, Rainy River, Emo and Fort Frances all benefitted from the program.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Supporting Schools through COVID-19

Northwestern Health Unit worked closely with local school boards and private schools to support a safe return to school in September. Upon receiving the school reopening guidance that directed boards to implement many new health and safety measures, NWHU and school boards quickly began planning for the safe reopening of schools in our area. Unique situations in our region that could increase risk were identified and addressed, such as shared bussing and school staff who work at multiple sites. Supports provided to school boards included policy and procedure development and review, communication materials for staff and parents, infection prevention and control inspections, and COVID-19 case and contact management.

Regular meetings with school boards were established to ensure that any new information was communicated and implemented quickly. The meetings also gave boards the opportunity to share early experiences with COVID-19 cases in schools, which helped to refine case and contact management. When school exposures did occur, minimal or no transmission resulted.

In June 2021, **Northwestern Health Unit was honored to receive the Rainy River District School Boards Community Partner of the Year Award for the 2020/21 school year.**



Sexual health services accessed **2,548** times

Although sexual health services were modified and staff were pulled to help with the COVID-19 response, our sexual health clinics continued to be offered in 2020. Clients requiring services were prioritized based on need and we were even able to offer virtual appointments in some cases. By keeping our doors open in 2020, sexual health clinical services were accessed **2,548** times, which included STI testing, birth control, PAP tests, and pregnancy testing.

Supported **9** isolation centres

Often health crises have the greatest impact on our most vulnerable groups, and COVID-19 was no different. Our staff worked to support this population by supporting isolation centres and pathways in **9** communities, using an outreach model to conduct case and contact management, and by providing harm reduction services as needed.

Safety barriers installed in **13** offices

New regulations and safety protocols meant that our local offices needed some quick renovations. Our **13** offices were outfitted with Plexiglas barriers in the fall of 2020. In addition, new cleaning protocols, PPE policies, and modified processes to enter our offices were all implemented. This took place while keeping our offices open and accessible to residents.



COVID-19 PROGRAM STATISTICS

2,420 survey participants

Late in the year, NWHU conducted a survey to gather information on how residents' experiences and life circumstances affect health. A total of 2,420 people participated in our survey, and their responses were used to help plan our programming and COVID-19 response.

2,600 Facebook posts over ten months

As the pandemic hit, the agency's communications quickly shifted to be nearly completely focused on COVID-19. NWHU became a trusted leader for up-to-date information on cases, regulations, and restrictions. This meant ensuring communities, workplaces, businesses, and partners had the resources they needed to ensure public safety. The team worked quickly to develop web pages, social media, posters, and resources that could be shared and/or printed for easy use.

Our social media channels saw many new followers as we shared reliable and current COVID-19 information regularly. The number of people following us on Facebook quadrupled in 2020, thanks in large part to the over **2,600** posts we made between March and December.

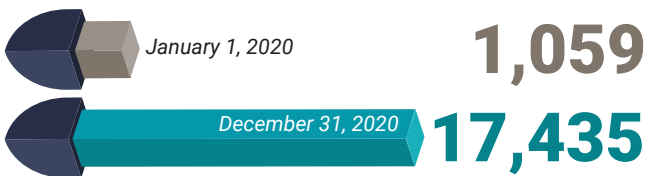
In addition, we offered **38** public Q&A sessions online and over **60** media briefings with our Medical Officer of Health to provide the public and media opportunities to have their COVID-19 questions answered.

100% of staff were redeployed

Our staff adapted quickly when COVID-19 hit, which meant new work, long hours, and ever-changing information. Throughout 2020, 100% of staff were redeployed to work on our COVID-19 response and NWHU staff worked tirelessly to ensure our communities' safety.

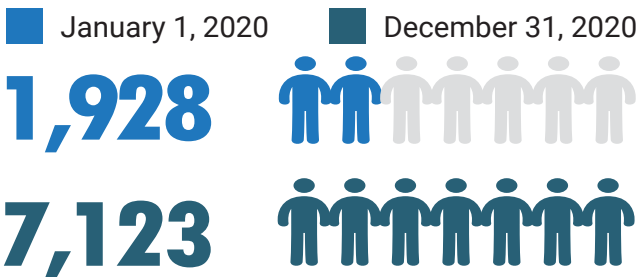
Audience numbers surge during COVID-19

INCREASE IN FACEBOOK POST REACH

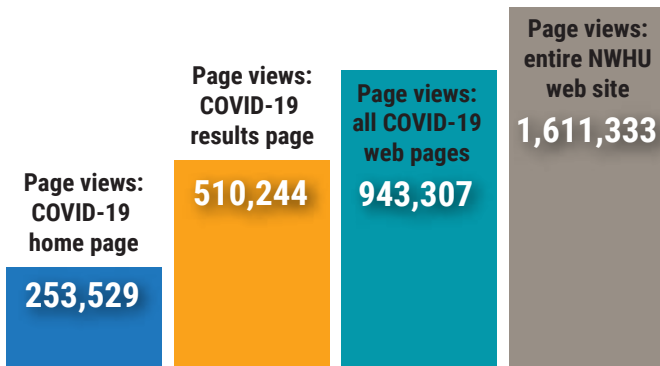


(Reach is the number of people who saw any content from our Page or about our Page)

INCREASE IN FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS



HUGE INCREASE: WEB SITE PAGE VIEWS



COVID-19 PROGRAM STATISTICS

Although schools were closed from March to June 2020, students' health needs continued to be addressed.

1,400 children were supported

When schools and many community organizations that support children and youth closed their doors to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the need for food remained. The closures heightened awareness among community members and NWHU of the need to work together to plan and implement emergency food supports for the most at risk, including low-income households with children and youth that rely on school-based meal and snack programs. NWHU diverted funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and Breakfast Clubs of Canada that is normally used in school-based programs to support emergency food initiatives. Staff in each of our communities worked with local partners to build and support the existing food programs. Between March and August, an average of 1,400 children and youth each month were supported with **\$184,000** of reallocated funding for food.

Delivered over 6,100 dental kits

Due to COVID-19, our dental staff were unable to provide screenings and preventive services in schools like usual, so we made sure everyone in Kindergarten to grade 8 had access to dental floss, toothpaste, and a toothbrush! **6,173** dental kits were delivered to schools across the region.

Only 2 ½ months of dental treatment services were able to be completed at our community clinics in 2020. At those clinics, **164** children and adults received a total of **763** procedures in total.

64 local seniors were seen for dental treatment and preventive services including dentures through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program. In total, these seniors received **339** procedures, and that makes us smile!



30% increase in flu shots

During the influenza season NWHU staff worked together to make sure our flu clinics were safe. About **30%** more people got flu shots than in previous years, and the number of cases of respiratory infectious diseases (other than COVID-19) was very low, likely because of the restrictions in place. Formal evaluation of the flu clinics took place and was used to plan for 2021's COVID-19 vaccine clinics.

1,382 wellness kits distributed

The onset of COVID-19 suddenly meant that some people were isolated and lonely due to their regular activities being halted.

To address this issue, our staff worked with partners to assemble 1382 wellness kits for local residents in need. The kits included a variety of items including activities, treats, games, and self-care items to help support recipients' wellbeing. Kits for both youth and older adults were distributed across the region, bringing everyone a dose of cheer.



Case and Contact Management

NWHU staff speak to every person with COVID-19 and their contacts to help prevent spread and learn where they might have acquired the virus. From March to December 2020, NWHU contacted over **150** positive cases within **24** hours to ensure they were self-isolating and collaborated with Indigenous health services on approximately **30** cases who lived on reserve to ensure they were self-isolating and that the communities could implement safe control measures. In addition to the total number of cases themselves, NWHU contacted **100%** of the **561** close contacts to self-isolate within the timelines required by the Ministry of Health.



Helping out while we could

NWHU staff helped **Peel Public Health** with case and contact management of cases for several weeks in the fall. Their region had a high number of cases and was looking for help for case and contact management from others. We volunteered which allowed our staff to stay up-to-date and familiar with the process required, while our case numbers were low.



COVID Hotline

As part of the response to COVID-19, NWHU established a hotline to address public questions and concerns. Throughout 2020, based on need and capacity, up to **35** staff were redeployed to the hotline.

The COVID hotline evolved in response to different needs at different stages of the pandemic and remains flexible in its response to public demand. It has proved to be a valuable resource for individuals, agencies, business owners, educators and health care providers across the region.

Between March 16th and December 30, 2020, the COVID hotline statistics show:

13,128

calls were answered

2,892

internal referrals were made to other NWHU staff

1,607

referrals were made to assessment centres

244

referrals to health care providers were made

972

flu calls were answered (Sept-Dec only)

The impact of the COVID hotline on the region has been significant. Operators answer phone calls, reply to emails and social media messages, as well as respond to questions over the instant chat feature on NWHU's website. It has proven to be a reliable and well-used source of information to the residents of NWHU catchment area.





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Health Unit

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