



Addressing Dementia in the Community of Île-à-la-Crosse: Evaluation Report

Sakitawak Elders Group Inc.
University of Saskatchewan
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Glossary

Term	Definition
Collaborating Organizations	Collaborating organizations are diverse stakeholders from different sectors and organizations who come together in a structured and coordinated way to collectively address complex social issues, pooling their resources and expertise to achieve common goals and create lasting positive change for their community.
Collective Impact	Collective impact is a structured approach to collaboration involving different stakeholders working together to address complex social issues.
Dementia	Dementia is a progressive and degenerative neurocognitive health issue characterized by a decline in cognitive functions, including memory, language, reasoning, and the ability to perform daily activities.

List of Acronyms

Term	Definition
DSRS	Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan
SPHERU	Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit
SEG	Sakitawak Elders Group

Executive Summary

Background

This report provides a summary of Addressing Dementia in the Community of Île à la Crosse, a project supported by the *Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan* (DSRS) initiative. DSRS is a five-year (2019-2024) Collective Impact initiative undertaken by the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU), University of Regina, and funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program. The *Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan* project seeks to improve public awareness of the stigma and social isolation experienced by people living with dementia (PLWD) and their care partners. Through DSRS, SPHERU supported eight collaborating organizations' projects, including addressing dementia in the community of Île à la Crosse led by the University of Saskatchewan and the Sakitawak Elders Group of Île à la Crosse. The project aimed to enhance the quality of life of Métis people aging with dementia and their care providers through social inclusion in the Métis community of Île à la Crosse.

The project team was composed of two academic leads, a research coordinator at the University of Saskatchewan, the Sakitawak Elders Group Inc. (SEG) and a community project coordinator who managed the intervention activities in Île à la Crosse. The project coordinator worked with the Elders' group to incorporate Métis ways of knowing and doing throughout the project. Activities completed during the project period from April 2023 to July 2024 focused on raising awareness and promoting intergenerational, cultural, and healing connections in the community. Data for this summary report was collected from regular meeting records and bi-annual and program completion reports.

The first objective of the project in Île à la Crosse was to educate, build awareness, and reduce stigma around dementia, while the second objective aimed to create community-driven, intergenerational pathways for engaging and supporting people aging with dementia in ways that align with the Métis community practices. In line with these objectives, the project team centred

project activities on Métis culture and traditions. Project activities created opportunities for intergenerational discussions on dementia, including risk, warning signs, caregiving and dementia prevention. Over 850 community members participated in approximately 45 formal and intergenerational activities organized from April 2023 to June 2024. Formal education sessions included the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan's ABCs of dementia presentations and weekly Zoom sessions where community members gathered to learn more about dementia prevention and warning signs of dementia.

Intergenerational activities included sharing circles, ribbon skirt making, community gardening, and cooking with younger generations. During these gatherings, community members, some living with dementia and others caregiving family members with dementia, shared experiences and aspirations for how to support people living with dementia in ways that are culturally meaningful and relevant. Beyond passing on traditions to younger generations and providing opportunities for individuals living with dementia to engage in social- and culture-based activities, additional intergenerational activities ranging from cooking, quilting, painting, and beading provided a forum to raise awareness, re-engage with cultural activities passed from previous generations and build a community of support for those living with dementia and caregivers. These activities honoured Métis self-determination, prioritizing community ownership and oversight, and highlighted Métis ways of fostering social inclusion in direct alignment with historical practices that nurture a culture of caring, reciprocity, and knowledge sharing. These practices are all vital for the inclusion of families dealing with diverse challenges, including dementia, while also maintaining a connection to Métis culture, language, practices, and the land. The SEG and the Île à la Crosse Community maintained full control and ownership of the project planning, implementation, and outputs, which was critical to the success of this project and moving Métis-driven priorities forward in the community. The project employed culturally appropriate means to enhance accessibility to dementia knowledge by translating resources from the Alzheimer's Society of Saskatchewan to Michif and Cree and producing a podcast on dementia awareness.

Centering project activities in Métis culture, language, and traditions is seen as vital for sustaining dementia-friendly Indigenous communities in ways that are relevant, respectful, and meaningful to Métis identity, self-determination, and principles of inclusion and caring. The project provided resources to facilitate the continuity of Métis driven dementia awareness-raising activities to be led by the Sakitawak Elders Group beyond the project timeline.

The major challenge for this project was the wildfire of summer 2023. Île à la Crosse was one of the communities affected, and many families were evacuated for an extended period. These circumstances delayed the start of project activities and shortened the timeline for project activities. Nevertheless, the project team successfully carried out planned activities within the project timeline. Lessons learned from the project demonstrate that implementing community-driven and community-based interventions requires flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, including environmental occurrences. Moreover, self-determination is essential for community-driven and community-based projects to be culturally relevant and sustainable. It is clear that interventions co-created, owned, guided, and informed with and by Métis community members, thought leaders, and decision-makers, directly support respect, reciprocity, relevance, and relationships, all of which are in alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the values of the Métis people living in Île à la Crosse. The collaborative relationship between the Sakitawak Elders Group, the University of Saskatchewan team and the Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan Management group of SPHERU at the University of Regina led to an agreement that supported the SEG leads to maintain control of funds to implement Métis driven dementia priorities. Implementing interventions that are grounded in reconciliation and decolonization requires respectful and active engagement with Métis community partners, ensuring that Métis knowledge and worldviews are integrated throughout the entire community, and thus must be considered when developing agreements within and between Indigenous communities, universities, and government institutions to ensure that all stakeholder requirements are achieved; this *Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan* project— Addressing Dementia in Île à la Crosse —can serve as a roadmap for similar initiatives.

Introduction

Saskatchewan has approximately 1.2 million residents, with about 33% living in rural areas. In 2020, the province also had approximately 17,500 individuals living with dementia with this projected to increase to 42,300 by 2050 (Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2022). It is projected that 62% of Canadians with dementia will be living in their own homes (Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2010).

Older adults residing in small cities and rural/remote areas often face unique barriers to accessing dementia care and services, including accessible facilities. The absence of culturally driven, accessible services supporting persons living with dementia (PLWD) in rural, remote, and northern Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan decreases social inclusion and impacts the well-being of Indigenous older adults with dementia and their care partners. The *Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan (DSRS)* is a five-year collective impact initiative undertaken by the Saskatchewan Population Health Evaluation and Research Unit (SPHERU) and funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program. The project focused on improving the public's awareness of the stigma and social isolation experienced by persons living with dementia and their care partners. SPHERU collaborated with provincial and local organizations to design and implement individual, community, and organizational level interventions that enhance the social inclusion of older adults with dementia living in small towns and rural communities in Saskatchewan.

The project aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To improve the feeling of social inclusion of older adults with dementia and their care partners residing in Yorkton and surrounding rural areas (individual programs)
2. To improve public awareness about dementia (community programs)
3. To reduce the level of public stigma about dementia (community programs)
4. To improve support for customers, clients, and employees who are living with dementia or their care partners residing in Yorkton and surrounding areas (organizational programs)

The DSRS has funded eight collaborating organizations' (COs) programs to address these objectives. Addressing Dementia in the Community of Île à la Crosse is one of the projects supported by the DSRS collective impact initiative. The project aimed to enhance the quality of life of Métis people aging with dementia and their care providers through social inclusion in the Métis community of Île à la Crosse. The project was implemented in collaboration with the Sakitawak Elders Group Inc. (SEG). The project objectives include:

- Educate, build awareness, and reduce stigma around dementia within the Métis community of Île-à-la-Crosse including signs to be aware of, how to act, what to do, and what to say to be helpful to individuals who are aging with dementia.
- Create community-driven, intergenerational pathways for engaging and supporting people aging with dementia that align with Métis community practices.
- Create an outline/plan that will inform the future development of a Métis-driven sustainability plan for dementia support in the community of Île-à-la-Crosse.

Project Activities

The project team was composed of two academic leads, a research coordinator at the University of Saskatchewan, the Sakitawak Elders Group, and the community project coordinator, who led the intervention activities in Île à la Crosse. The initial phases of the project involved setting up an Alzheimer's committee that included a physician, nurse, physical therapist, and community members. Other activities during this phase included a local community information and awareness session at the lodge and an Elders' meeting with the Alzheimer's committee. The project coordinator worked with the Elders' group to incorporate Métis ways of knowing and doing throughout the project. Activities carried out throughout the project period from April 2023 to July 2024 focused on raising awareness and promoting community intergenerational, cultural, and healing connections. The coordinator observed and recorded community members' feedback about project activities. The project partnered with other stakeholders, including the Alzheimer's Society of Saskatchewan and other DSRS-supported projects, including the Cognitive Kitchen and RaDAR Memory Clinic (University of Saskatchewan).

Evaluation

The SPHERU team is conducting two distinct types of evaluation during the collective impact initiative. The **process** evaluation examines the socio-cultural, organizational, and external factors that have shaped and influenced the design and implementation of the DSRS collective impact project in Yorkton and surrounding rural areas. The **outcome** evaluation examines the short-term, intermediate, and long-term impact of single CO projects. This report presents the findings of the outcome evaluation for the Addressing Dementia in the Community of Île-à-la-Crosse Project.

Methods

The data for this summary report was collected from regular meeting records, bi-annual reports, and program completion reports. We examined some¹ of the key performance indicators that reflected the achievement of short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. The subsequent sections present key findings from the evaluation related to progress made in achieving the project's objectives and outcomes.

Project Objectives

The project's first objective was to educate, build awareness, and reduce stigma around dementia. The second objective aimed to create community-driven, intergenerational pathways for engaging and supporting people aging with dementia that align with Métis community practices. These two objectives are interconnected because formal education sessions and intergenerational activities were used to raise awareness about dementia. Project activities created opportunities for intergenerational discussions on dementia, including risk, warning signs, caregiving and dementia prevention.

¹ Due to the short duration of the project due to unforeseen circumstances we were able to address only some of the indicators. There is, however, rich data that allows for an assessment of progress on meeting objectives.

The third objective of addressing dementia in the community of Île à la Crosse project was to create a plan that will inform the future development of a Métis-driven sustainability plan for dementia support in the community of Île-à-la-Crosse.

Project Outcomes

Activities were tailored to meet specific objectives throughout the project period. The information analyzed indicates that the Addressing Dementia in Île à la Crosse project achieved its primary objectives.

Short-Term Outcomes: Reach and Engagement

In the context of this project, reach and engagement relate to the target population that accessed the project's services and their level of interaction with the project activities.

Over 850 community members participated in approximately 45 formal and intergenerational activities organized from April 2023 to June 2024. Formal education sessions included the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan's ABCs of Dementia presentations, weekly Zoom sessions where community members gathered to learn more about dementia prevention and warning signs of dementia, and discussions with Elders to improve current supports for community long-term care. Three persons with dementia signed up for a "Minds in Motion" class provided by Alzheimer's Canada, which was broadcast on Zoom at the Elder's Lodge. A physiotherapist was also present at these sessions to assist with exercises that the persons living with dementia could repeat at home. Exercise pamphlets were also printed and made available for community members.

Intergenerational activities sessions included sharing circles, ribbon skirt making, making benches, community gardening, and cooking with younger generations. These enabled Elders to pass on traditional knowledge and skills to the younger generations while raising awareness about care for community members experiencing challenges, including people with dementia. The project supported the local garden where vegetables and ceremonial tobacco were grown. Several events took place within the context of community gardening. For instance, an arts and

mental health day was organized in the community garden where children and Elders worked together, tended chickens and worked on other crafts. A truth and reconciliation supper was organized with fresh produce from the garden. Community members also prepared and shared meals together; there were cooking sessions where Elders, including those living with dementia and their care providers, taught younger generations on making salsa and tomato sauce and pumpkin pie. Soups made from locally procured foods were shared with residents living with dementia in long-term care. The routine stimulated conversations and stirred comforting memories for residents and their families. It was observed that cooking and baking familiar foods and flavours is calming and connects older adults living with dementia and their care providers to their past and identity. The project team reported that community members were enthusiastic about gatherings to cook and share food harvested from the garden because it reinforced their ways of doing things and created connections with community members who experienced isolation, including those living with dementia.

The project also raised awareness about dementia through pamphlets translated into Cree and Michif and a podcast produced to raise awareness. It was observed that new participants in the dementia education programs heard about the project through word of mouth and radio.

Intermediate Outcomes: Effectiveness

In the context of this project, effectiveness addresses educating, building awareness, and reducing stigma around dementia through creating community-driven, intergenerational pathways for engaging and supporting people aging with dementia that align with Métis community practices.

Cultural events embedded Métis ways of knowing and doing in dementia awareness activities. The project supported the purchase of supplies for quilting, painting and beading. There were also healing events where community members discussed their experiences with dementia and the challenges of caregiving. During a women's sharing circle and intergenerational ribbon skirt workshop with a Metis artist, women shared intergenerational struggles of being care providers in their community. Another healing event involved bench building, where men who had lost

their spouses from dementia jointly built benches for the memorial site at the residential school. Additional cultural events included the celebration of the spring solstice, tobacco harvesting for community Elders, full moon ceremonies, and a community water walk to support the lake's healing in the Île à la Crosse community. These activities highlighted Métis ways of fostering social inclusion because community members have historically engaged in activities, on and off the sakitawak lands, that support a culture of caring and connection, which is vital for the inclusion of people living with dementia and their care providers.

Long-Term Outcomes: Sustainability and Transferability

The key factors examined under sustainability and transferability relate to strategies adopted to continue to offer educational and awareness opportunities through community-driven intergenerational pathways for engaging and supporting people aging with dementia that align with Métis community practices.

The project team focused on securing resources to enable the Sakitawak Elders Group to sustain Métis-driven dementia awareness-raising activities beyond the project timeline. Some materials include 13 pole tipis that can accommodate approximately 40 people purchased for intergenerational community gatherings that will continue after the project ends. Gathering and sharing with one another in places and spaces that are linked to the land and teachings (such as tipi and trapper tent teachings) not only creates safe spaces for courageous conversations among Métis community members, but grounds discussions in Métis history, cultural practice, and worldview. This, in turn, further supports healing from the negative impacts of colonization and serves as a complementary health promotion intervention (secondary to the primary focus of dementia care). Equipment was also purchased to produce podcasts dedicated to raising awareness through a Métis lens. The project also supported the purchase of kitchen equipment to continue community-driven cooking in the Sakitawak Elders Group Lodge for individuals living with dementia. Through this project, the Agricultural unit of the University of Saskatchewan donated a greenhouse, which is essential for the continued development of the community garden.

Challenges

The major challenge for this project was the summer 2023 wildfires. Île à la Crosse was one of the communities affected, and many families were evacuated for an extended period. These circumstances were beyond the community's control, and they delayed the start of the project and shortened the project timeline for project activities. Nevertheless, the project team and the SEG successfully carried out planned activities within the project timeline.

A second challenge relates to the requirement for robust liability insurance to participate in this collective impact initiative. The SEG was not able to meet this requirement individually, so to ensure their participation, the project team was able to create a secure and respectful alternative in alignment with the contract requirements. Ultimately, project team leads from SEG, USask, and SPHERU worked collaboratively through the new territory to ensure that the SEG received the funds requested while the USask team held the required liability insurance on behalf of the SEG (who were not in a position to obtain/maintain such a high liability insurance amount); ultimately, this honoured the SEG request to hold the funds independently, thus prioritizing Métis self-determination and community ownership. As a result of navigating this new territory and shared commitment to this project, there were significant delays in transferring funds to the SEG. Project activities were still actively moved forward during this delay as the SEG pre-financed the initial project activities until full project funds became available. Throughout this process, we were able to maintain strong, respectful, and trusting relationships among all partners at the same time that the SEG successfully completed project priorities and objectives and all contract requirements were met. The success of this project rested on long-standing relationships and trust between SEG and USask partners, especially the SEG, who took on tremendous risks in financing activities prior to the contract being finalized.

Lessons Learned

Implementing community-driven and community-based interventions requires flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, including environmental occurrences. Wildfires delayed the start of this project, and the project team had a shorter timeline to complete it.

Building and maintaining collaborative relationships is essential for supporting dementia interventions that align with the Métis worldview. The project leads at the University of Saskatchewan and the Sakitawak Elders Group had long-standing relationships that enabled both parties to determine effective ways to manage funds for dementia-specific activities in ways that respected Métis leadership. Through this mutual effort, the Sakitawak Elders Group pre-financed the dementia project activities for the project's first phase when there was a delay in transferring New Horizon funds due to administrative procedures within the University of Saskatchewan.

Self-determination is essential for community-driven and community-based projects to be sustainable. Interventions should facilitate ownership of projects in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and decolonization practices. The Sakitawak Elders Group Inc (SEG) was keen on prioritizing community ownership from planning activities to managing funds. This led to their request to manage the New Horizon funds for the project being managed by the project team at the University of Saskatchewan. The management group of the SPHERU Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan Project at the University of Regina also supported this request, and the Sakitawak Elders Group received the funds requested, while the University of Saskatchewan provided the required liability insurance on behalf of the Sakitawak Elders Group.

Conclusion

The project aimed to raise dementia awareness and promote dementia-friendly community initiatives grounded in a Métis worldview. Therefore, project activities were tailored to provide opportunities for intergenerational discussions on dementia, including risk, warning signs, caregiving and dementia prevention. The range of activities, from water walks, medicine harvesting, gardening, ribbon skirt making, quilting, and painting, enhanced intergenerational relations and highlighted the importance of active minds and bodies for dementia prevention. Through these events, the Elders also passed on traditional knowledge and skills to the younger generations on Métis ways of promoting community care. The project employed culturally appropriate means to enhance accessibility to dementia knowledge by translating resources from the Alzheimer's Society of Saskatchewan to Michif and Cree and producing a podcast on dementia awareness. Centering project activities in Métis culture and traditions paves the path

for sustaining dementia awareness because Métis in Île à la Crosse have historically engaged in cultural practices that promote caring, connection, and inclusion. This project underscores the role of academic institutions in terms of accountable partnerships and prioritizing community control over resources. The Île à la Crosse case demonstrates that implementing interventions that are grounded in respect, trust, and relationships with Métis community partners can positively inform a practice and process of reconciliation and decolonization that honours Métis self-determination while concurrently satisfying the requirements of all stakeholders.

References

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Appendix A: Overview of Key Performance Indicators & Data Collection Methods

Measurement	Key Performance Indicators/Evaluation Questions	Data Collection Method
Reach: Number from the target population who participate in the program	1) # of participants interested in attending Dementia Awareness gatherings at the Elders lodge	sign-up sheets from in-person engagement sessions or recorded by the community research coordinator
	2) # of participants interested in Elders support that focuses on dementia awareness and prevention	Recorded by the community research coordinator
Engagement: Participation, acceptability, uptake	1) % of registered participants in attendance at activities	Fieldnotes (total in attendance and total expected)
	2) % of participants who have stopped coming to planned activities	Fieldnotes
	3) % of participants who attend 3+ sessions	Fieldnotes/individual attendance tracking
Effectiveness: Impact of the program on knowledge (e.g., enhancing public awareness, nutrition education), behaviour (e.g., reducing stigma, engaging in meal preparation), and practice (e.g., improving nutrition-related supports for care partners and PLWD)	1) Do participants demonstrate that they are expanding their knowledge of dementia and reducing the stigma of dementia?	Fieldnotes (e.g., discussion points), number of people participating
	2) Do participants in long-term care show behavioural changes when participating in activities? (ie. Talking about their childhood)	Digital journal entries, fieldnotes (e.g., discussion points)
	3) Is the content suitable for the knowledge needs of the target audience? (e.g., what kinds of questions are frequently coming up?)	Digital journal entries, fieldnotes
	4) Do participants report decreased loneliness and increased support following home visits or gatherings?	Cooking and Food Provisioning Action Scale (pre- and post-program)

		Post-program interviews
Sustainability: Degree to which the program is continuously used, normalised, and incorporated into public behaviour	1) # of participants who come to more than one gathering	Tracking
	2) # of participants who contact the community project coordinator for home visit support.	Tracking
	3) Do participants express plans to continue supporting dementia awareness and participating in dementia-preventative activities (busy hands, busy mind)	Recorded by the community research coordinator
	4) Do participants share goals related to continued engagement in health-promoting practices?	Recorded by the community research coordinator
Transferability: Extent to which the intervention/program could be effectively implemented in another setting/context	1) Can materials be developed for use without a project coordinator?	Trial materials were developed for care partners who are unable to attend the program. i.e. quilting, painting or beading box
	2) Is the program suitable for people living with dementia to attend?	Recorded by the community research coordinator