

THE MANITOBA FIRST NATIONS PATIENT WAIT TIME GUARANTEE FOR PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND CARE OF DIABETIC FOOT ULCERS: BUILDING A MANITOBA FIRST NATIONS FOOT CARE STRATEGY

The foundation of the Manitoba First Nations Patient Wait Time Guarantee (MFNPWTG) strategy for foot care lies in the rich information gathered from key stakeholders in diabetes foot care from multiple disciplines – nurses, traditional healers, physicians, allied health providers, administrators – and from multiple sectors – community, clinical, academic and government. The tapestry of stories, experiences and insights of the front line providers and key decision makers in First Nation health reveals: (1) expectations of best practice in foot care; (2) existing practice and models of foot care in First Nation communities in Manitoba; and (3) the political, economic and cultural context of diabetes foot complications in Manitoba First Nations.

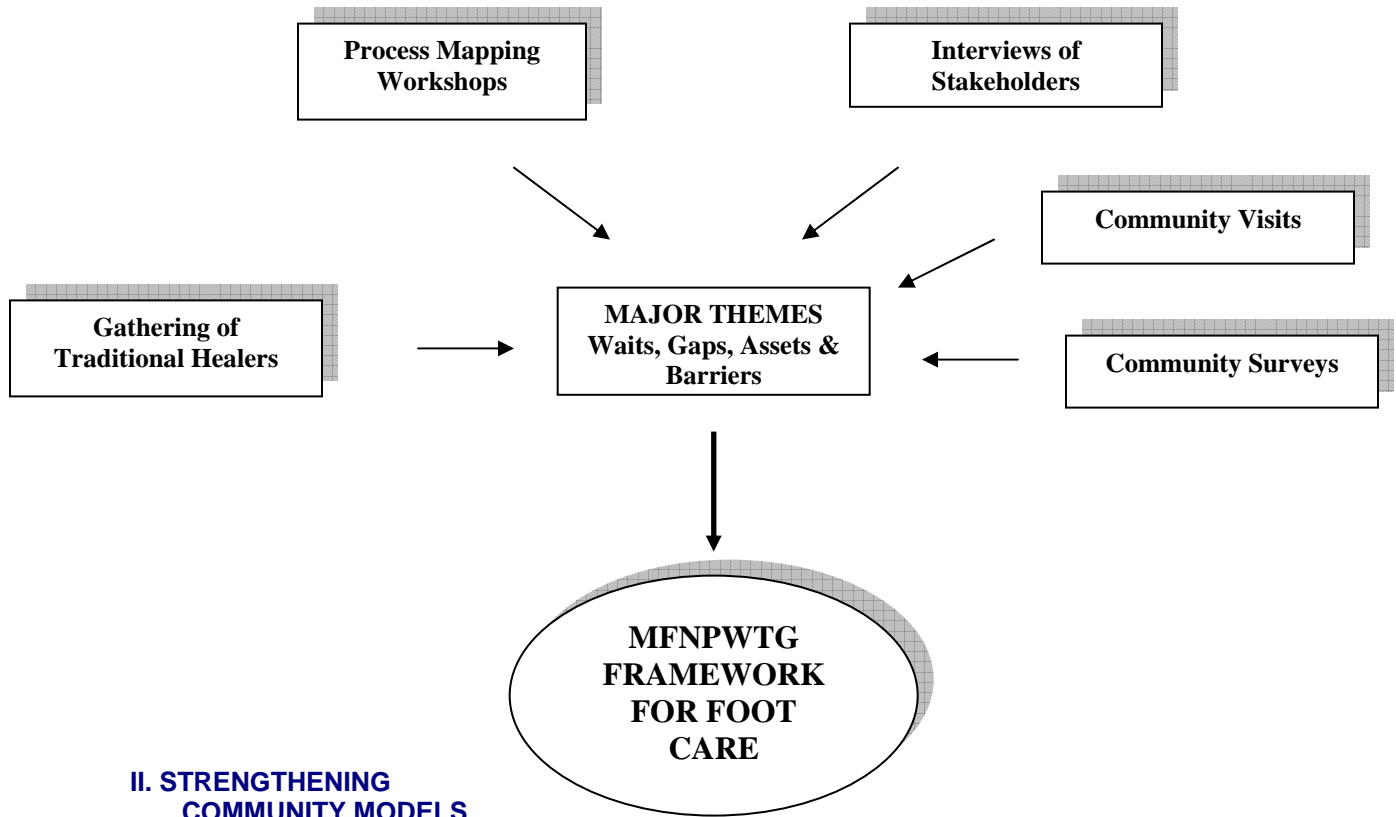
According to the evidence, First Nation community members living on reserve experience gaps and delays throughout the continuum of foot care from diagnosis in the community to surgery in the hospital system. Wait times are an important marker of access to foot care, but are not reliable or sufficient indicators about why timely care of foot ulcers does not occur. Exploration of the underlying reasons for waits reveals fundamental structural barriers to timely, quality foot care including: scarcity of resources, substandard care, inadequate funding levels, restrictive allocation of funds, and disconnection between systems. In addition to such challenges, examples of excellence in foot care were also evident in communities. Important components of healthy First Nation foot care systems identified included: integration of foot care programs, multidisciplinary care, links with external resources, and knowledge and understanding of local culture.

The evidence was synthesized to identify points of change and points of resilience within the foot care systems of the MFNPWTG eight pilot First Nation communities. The results support four strategies for the effective prevention, care and treatment of foot complications: (1) a partnership network; (2) information management; 3) the engagement of people; and (4) a review of health policy. The partnership network strategy involves linking stakeholders in the advancement of best practice in diabetes foot care. This strategy supports: (A) the exchange of knowledge by building capacity of community health providers and facilitating access to education resources and (B) collaborative and coordinated foot care delivery by facilitating community health planning and systems management. The information management strategy aims to centralize and link information systems in communities through the implementation of an information technology system, the Musti'muhw model. A strategy for the effective engagement of First Nations people in foot health promotes support, advocacy and autonomy. A review of health policy involves the synthesis of key issues in diabetes foot care for Manitoba First Nations to inform evidence-based policy change. This strategy promotes equity in the allocation of resources for foot care, and accountability of health systems towards the health and wellness of the people that systems serve.

Guided by a participatory approach that honors First Nation governance in health, the new framework for foot care was further refined in collaboration with our eight partner First Nation communities during the *Gathering of Manitoba First Nation Communities* in February, 2008. This event marked the beginning of a community network bringing together the health providers, administrators and leadership from our First Nation partner communities to share best models of care, debate the central issues surrounding First Nations foot care and put forward recommendations to inform the MFNPWTG strategic plan. A conference held on March 26 - 27, 2008, *Partnerships in First Nations Diabetes Foot Care: Seeds of Change*, brought together stakeholders in communities, traditional medicine, biomedicine and government to share in moving forward our strategic plan towards a collective vision of timely, integrated delivery of foot care in Manitoba. In these partnerships and relationships lie the seeds of change toward sustainable innovation in foot care for Manitoba First Nations.

EVIDENCE TO ACTION: A MANITOBA FIRST NATION FRAMEWORK FOR FOOT CARE

I. BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK



II. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY MODELS

