

Phase II Lung Health Program Dissemination Report

Project: *Addressing Barriers to Smoking Cessation Services and Promoting Early Detection of COPD in Yukon*

Lead Organization: Government of Yukon (YTG), Health Promotion Unit (HPU)

Partner(s):

- **Government of Yukon's Health and Social Services Department: Community Nursing and Chronic Conditions Support Program**
- **Yukon Lung Association (Funding contribution)**

Project Objective(s):

- To identify barriers to accessing smoking cessation support in Yukon (from both a health professional perspective and from smokers themselves)
- To increase and promote the early detection of COPD in Yukon

Project Methodology:

Addressing Barriers to Smoking Cessation: An equity assessment was performed on each aspect of the smoking cessation programming currently offered through the Health Promotion Unit (HPU), followed by key informant interviews with health professionals involved in delivering the program throughout rural Yukon. Smokers from rural communities were then consulted, through a variety of methods, (e.g. Community luncheons, booths at health fairs, group meetings, community lead events, one-on-one interviews, etc.) to collect their views on the barriers they have to accessing support in their communities. Results were then summarized and the HPU's smoking cessation team addressed as many as possible within their current capacity. (ie. Increased partnerships and information sessions with rural community health centers; increased knowledge and awareness of programming for First Nations departments; created a proposal for a new marketing campaign using ideas/concepts directly from community consultations, etc.)

In total 12 of 14 Community Health Centres, 9 of 14 First Nation Health Departments and the H&SS Director of the Council for Yukon First Nations were consulted. Approximately 50 smokers throughout rural Yukon were consulted regarding their personal barriers to accessing support.

Increasing early detection of COPD: A nurse lead was hired to coordinate various health professional training sessions for COPD education and management, Spirometry Testing and Interpretation, and the purchase of 3 sets of Spirometry equipment. This allowed us to build diagnostic capacity for COPD screening and expand COPD screening activities throughout Yukon. The nurse lead organized and completed a Spirometry testing tour throughout rural Yukon, offering COPD testing services to communities who otherwise do not have access.



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Ten of the communities visited received spirometry testing for the first time. There is now a policy and procedure guide for spirometry testing also being created for Community Nursing for the first time as a result of this project. Awareness of COPD and its management was increased for both health professionals and the general public throughout the process through advertising and partnerships between the HPU and Community Nursing/Chronic Conditions Program. In total, there were 57 health professionals (both urban and rural) registered in the various training opportunities and 74 rural clients seen during the spirometry testing tour.

Key Finding(s):

Barriers are very much imbedded into the social determinants of health. A comprehensive approach is required when addressing barriers and will need to involve partnering with a variety of departments and organizations as no one unit/department can address them all.

- Main barriers found: Smoking was seen by many participants as a “way of life” or a “part of their being”, and was often linked to social connection, community/family norms and stress and coping. There was also a desire for supportive messaging in order to decrease the “shame” surrounding smoking. Participants felt there needed to be more focus on the process and encouragement that “even just cutting back is a step”, and “it’s ok to slip.”
- There is an overwhelming interest in Health Professional education/training around COPD and best practices for offering smoking cessation support, as well as interest in quality, up to date spirometry equipment and policies around its use. Unfortunately, these interests also come with large barriers such as the difficulty with both logistics and expenses for rural health professionals to attend training. Most training is held in the capital city of Whitehorse and requires back filling positions while employees are away, as well as travel expense coverage. In addition, it can be a challenge to get training organizations to travel up to the Yukon which come at a high cost and with logistical/scheduling difficulties. Training opportunities within the Yukon are limited.

Project Outcome:

As a result of this initiative, Community Nursing is currently in the process of developing a new Spirometry policy. Also, for the first time, the Chronic Conditions Program is offering its COPD management/education course to rural communities via telehealth. We have increased the availability of Spirometry testing in Yukon from 7 locations (only 3 of which are in rural Yukon) to 17 locations, including 3 machines which will travel with Community Nurses on rural clinic visits. It was also found that only 2 Yukon locations had up to date equipment meeting standards, with only one site having official training. Due to this project, 3 new sets of equipment have been purchased and the majority of sites offering Spirometry now have a minimum of one staff newly trained in best practices.

In terms of barriers to smoking cessation, it was found that in order to truly address the struggles people face when trying to quit/cut back, the HPU will need to continue to partner with a variety of organizations/departments so that support can be offered in a timely, consistent manor. New relationships between First Nations Governments and the HPU were formed, and health center staff in rural communities seemed both receptive and grateful for the increase in access to information/support to run the cessation programs from their own communities. This approach is exactly what clients requested during the consultations.



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Area(s) for Further Development/Next Steps:

A sustainability plan has been created so that both COPD testing and Smoking Cessation programming can continue to be improved upon after the completion of the Lung Health Project. Some of these activities include: A mini “Success Stories” campaign to be launched later in the new fiscal year, highlighting members of the Quit Path program who are at various steps along the path to becoming smoke free. (An idea suggested by a few different members during the community consultations with smokers themselves) Community Nursing has also committed to having their staff travel to rural communities for Spirometry testing at least once every fiscal year, as well as having the Pulmonary Rehab program available via telehealth for rural communities which has previously not been available.

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