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***The Innu
Midwifery
Program:
A path towards
improved health
outcomes for
mothers and
infants***

International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health

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**Presented by
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With Samantha Andrew



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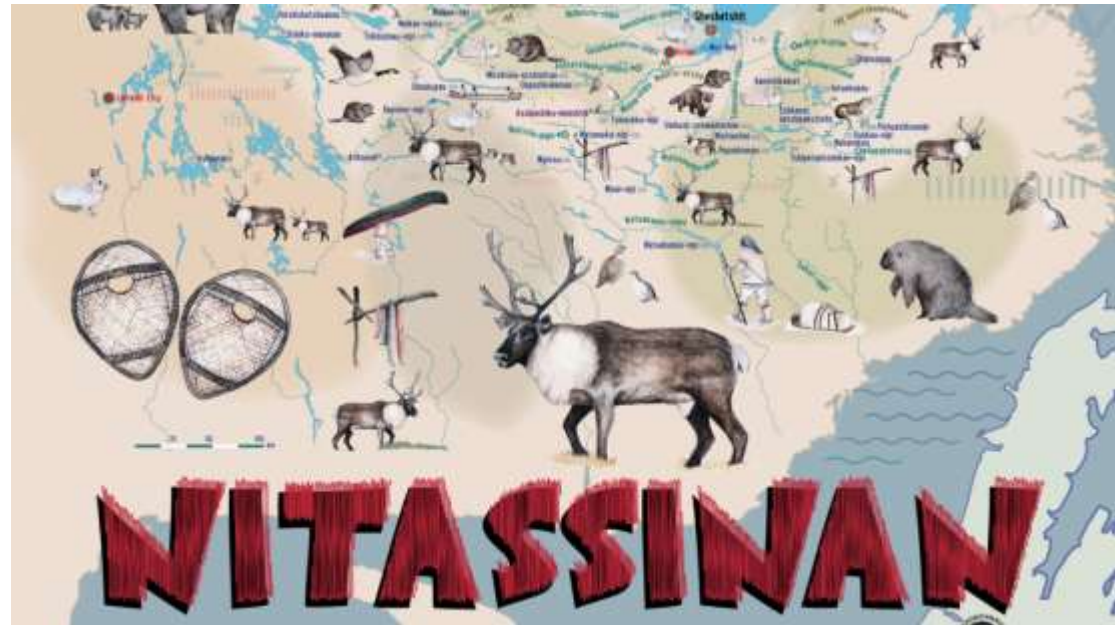
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Labrador and Nitassinan

Map of Labrador and Sheshatshiu and Natuashish



Detail of an illustrated map of Nitassinan, traditional homeland of the Innu, created as part of a project by Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education school board.



Innu Round Table Secretariat (IRT)

- The IRT is the implementation arm of the Round Table.
- Collective organization of the Mushuau Innu First Nation (MIFN), Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation (SIFN), and Innu Nation.
- Coordinated administration of common priorities for capacity development and managing the tripartite process with Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador.



Background on Innu Midwifery Program

- Work to return Innu Midwifery to Sheshatshiu and Natuashish began in 2018 and was spearheaded by Thea Penashue.
- Community engagement sessions with communities, Elders, high school students, and healthcare providers were held in 2018 and 2019 in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.
- In 2018, Innu visited Indigenous & Inuit Midwifery programs such as the Maternity in Inukjuak, Nunavik.
- IRT established the Innu Midwifery Program Steering Committee that continues to provide support and guidance to the program.
- IRT hired midwifery consultant(s) to support work on Innu midwifery.
- A 3-year work plan was developed in 2020 to prepare for the Innu Midwifery Program.
- IRT completed a video in 2020 on the Innu Midwifery Project that included the story of a traditional Innu tent birth:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSJDvgNHjt8>

Traditional Innu Midwives Project

Akat Piwas, Natuashish



Akat Piwas as a young woman

Rose Rich remembered:
My mother told me that when I was born, Akat Piwas was one of the midwives that helped when I was born. She and her late mother, and I think her sister. They were the ladies that were midwives when I was born.

Before her death in 2021 Akat Piwas was the only elder still singing in the Mushuau dialect of Innu-aimun.

Akat Piwas was also a positive force for those facing their darkest moments, said Christine Poker, the co-ordinator of the Mushuau Innu Healing Lodge in Natuashish, where Akat Piwas would regularly visit and speak with clients.



Naissa's mother was a traditional Innu midwife. As a young girl Naissa attended births with her mother on the land and in small communities before births were moved into healthcare facilities.

Until she passed away in 2019 Naissa remained a strong supporter and advocate for the return of Innu midwives and community birth to the Innu communities in Labrador.

Naissa Penashue Sheshatshiu



In 2018 during a midwifery focus group in Sheshatshiu, Naissa told the group a story where she had to assist with a manual removal of the placenta. Naissa was asked to complete the procedure under the guidance of her mother because of her small hands.

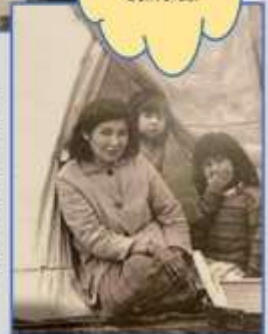


Annie Michel Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu



Annie delivered a baby at home in 1992 in Sheshatshiu and later cared for the child she delivered.

Annie Michel was born in 1935 on the land and passed away at the age of 80 in 2015 in Sheshatshiu. Annie was a traditional Innu Midwife who practiced midwifery and delivered babies when Innu were nomadic and continued later in Davis Inlet.



Giving birth in an Innu tent



Respected Innu Elder and Activist Tshaukuesh (Elizabeth) Penashue



Challenges with Current System...

- Innu women are leaving their communities to give birth which results in weakening family ties at a significant time in their lives.
- Women and families are facing cultural and language barriers when giving birth away from their home communities and support systems.
- Women experience loss of culturally appropriate prenatal care, birthing support and aftercare.

We are also seeing...

- Increasing child apprehension rates.
- Increasing mental health concerns of young women.
- Continued concerns of lack of equity and social justice.
- Experiences of continued discrimination and bias.

Benefits of Innu Midwifery



- Innu midwives provide midwifery care in *Innu-Aimun*.
- Trusting and relationship-based midwifery care.
- Maternity care provided closer to home.
- Strengthened family and community ties.
- Increased support for women, families and communities especially with mental health and child protection concerns.
- Less language and cultural barriers.
- Improved maternal and newborn outcomes.



The Innu Midwifery Program



*We want ...Innu babies being
born into Innu hands on Innu
lands, fostering a greater
connection to the land and
culture, continuation of cultural
practices and provision of
culturally safe care.*



Innu Midwifery Program Updates



Innu Midwifery Education

Indigenous
Midwifery
Skills

Clinical
Midwifery
Skills

Anatomy
and
Physiology

Canadian
Midwifery
Knowledge

- Classroom teaching continues, on different topics and subjects.
- Teaching uses a culturally specific and hands-on approach.
- Program uses an individually paced learning approach.

Field Work and Training

Presentations
at 2023 CAM
and 2024
NCIM
Conferences

Land based
learning with
NCIM in
2023 and
2024

Innu
History
Timeline
Workshop

Visits with
Innu Elders &
Communities





The Innu Midwifery Program took part in the Family Preservation Gathering with the Council of Yukon First Nations in Whitehorse, Yukon. The Innu Midwifery team with Indigenous Midwife Lesley Paulette.

Innu Midwifery Education: Year Two to Four



Maternal & Newborn
Pathology in
Midwifery Practice

Advanced Clinical
Midwifery Skills

Obstetrical
Emergency Skills

Inter-professional
Practice

Prescribing for
Midwives

Normal
Childbirth



Innu Student Midwives Kim, Sam and Emma practicing with birth simulator...



Completed and Planned Courses



Visit Natuashish in June 2023

Education and Program Approval



- Innu Midwives will become Registered Midwives in Newfoundland and Labrador (seeking program approval with the provincial midwifery college/regulator).
- IMP includes educational laddering where students graduate after their first year as Innu Birth Workers, then after two years with mid-program graduation and after three years as Graduate Midwives and then as Registered Midwives after 4 to 5 years.

First Year Graduation as Innu Birth Workers



At the end of April 2024, Samantha Andrew, Noreen Andrew, Emma White and Kim Bridle graduated as Innu Birth Workers.



With Elder Tshaukuesh (Elizabeth) Penashue



Partnerships

- National Council of Indigenous Midwives (Education & Advocacy).
- Family Physician in Eastern Health Zone and Central Health Zone Midwifery.
- Moon Time Connections is providing Innu communities with free menstrual products and facilitator training.
- Innu Midwifery Program Steering Committee meetings take place three to four times per year. (Provincial Government, Labrador Grenfell Zone, Indigenous Services Canada, NCIM, Toronto Metropolitan University and Innu organizations).
- MUN Nursing Faculty / Labrador Campus and Skills Lab.





Program Highlights

- The program has established a **partnership with the MUN Faculty of Nursing, Labrador Campus**, this includes the use of the simulation lab and joined teaching opportunities with nursing and midwifery students.
- The Innu Midwifery Program has received access to the **MUN Library and Resources**.
- The **Innu Midwifery Program Evaluation Working Group** has commenced its work to develop an Innu-led program evaluation plan to understand midwifery and maternal/child health care needs for Innu communities.
- A **Year One Report** of the program has been finalized and shared with partners.



Other Innu Midwifery Program Updates

- The Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism (AAIR) initiative, Indigenous Services Canada / FNIHB has allocated funding for the IMP for the next five years, starting 2024/2025.
- The Indigenous Health Equity Fund – Targeted Initiatives, Indigenous Services Canada / FNIHB has allocated funding for the IMP to host an Atlantic Indigenous midwifery gathering in Labrador in 2025, including the completion of a film project on the program and the gathering.
- In November 2024, the IMP added a full-time administrative program coordinator to increase program capacity.
- Work to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding with NL Health Services / LG Zone continues and is near completion (would provide IRT health professionals access to EMR, and other health information sharing systems).
- The IMP distributes baby bundles to pregnant people and new parents in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish (funding received from True North Aid).





*Work at the Simulation Lab,
Labrador Campus, Memorial University*



*Learning to
gown up in
Personal
Protective
Equipment*

Interprofessional Teaching with Nurses and Midwives





Putting on sterile gloves with Sim Lab Coordinator Marie Dore



Taking each other's vital signs

Blood draws and assessments





Having fun in the Sim Lab in Goose Bay



The Innu Midwifery Program is grateful to the Labrador Campus for all the learning opportunities.

Free Menstrual Products Distribution

- Moon Time Connections provide Innu communities with free menstrual products on an ongoing basis.
- The IMP has received menstruation facilitator training and teaching resources.

Innu Round Table Secretariat

Information about Period Products for Girls and Women

What is the issue?
Period poverty in Canada is a real problem that exists. Individuals who menstruate need to have access to free period products as a basic right. The stigma surrounding menstruation can have negative impacts on girls and women such as:

- ✓ Mental and physical health
- ✓ Reduced quality of life
- ✓ Discrimination
- ✓ Lack of education surrounding menstruation
- ✓ Absenteeism from school or work

What is Period Poverty?
Period Poverty refers to the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products or education.

Ways to normalize Menstruation...

- ✓ Talk about periods openly
- ✓ Educate people that menstruation is normal & natural
- ✓ Remove codenames of menstruation such as time of month Advocate for access to free menstruation products
- ✓ Fight against period shaming and discrimination

We need free period products across Canada!
Free period products in workplaces, schools, public spaces others to:

- ✓ Address systemic inequities (gender biases, discrimination, needs populations)
- ✓ Improve safety of physical and mental health
- ✓ Increase quality of life
- ✓ Help end period poverty

1 in 4 menstruating women in Canada have had to choose between paying for period products or other essentials such as food or rent - CTV News

Innu Midwifery Program

Baby Bundles Project

- The Innu Midwifery Program has received funding from True North Aid to distribute newborn/baby bundles (all baby essentials) to new parents in Natuashish and Sheshatshiu.
- The project wants to raise awareness in the communities about Innu midwifery services.



*Shy Innu women with baby
By Mary Ann Penashue*

Baby Bundles



The Innu Midwifery team, Thea Penashue
and Heidi Atter, CBC reporter



A baby bundle

Innu Midwifery Program Evaluation

- Developing evaluation plan to better understand:
 - Midwifery and maternal/child health care needs for Innu communities.
 - Our goals, where we are going and the impact of our work.
- Prioritizing an evaluation plan that is Innu-led, strengths-based, trauma informed and from a decolonizing lens.



Introduction to Indigenous Evaluation

- Indigenous evaluation is connected to decolonization and reconciliation.
- Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Guiding Principles

- Community and relationship building is key.
- Knowledge is collected, cared for and shared with community in mind.
- Based in storytelling and observation.



IMAGE: ASTRID MACNEILL

This photograph shares the interconnected nature of Indigenous values and principles related to the measurement and reflection on a learning journey.

Where we are so far...



- Foundation laid for an Innu Midwifery Evaluation plan.
- Initiation of the Evaluation Working Group is imminent.
- Finalized Year One report – emerging narratives.
 - Students' sense of pride.
 - Sense of responsibility to their community.
 - Sense of sisterhood with other students.
 - Changed perspectives on birth and way forward to provide support in community.
 - Growing confidence with program implementation.

What is next for the Innu Midwifery Program?



Next steps for clinical midwifery practice





Clinical Placement and Practice Opportunities for Innu Student Midwives

A supportive and culturally safe learning and practice environment is of paramount importance for the students' success and their desire to complete the midwifery education.



Innu Midwifery Practice

- Innu Student Midwives have started to offer doula support to childbearing populations (non-clinical labour, birth and postpartum support).
- Limited clinical midwifery care to be offered beginning summer 2025 (pre- and postnatal care), including outreach support for Natuashish.
- Plan for full scope Innu Midwifery practice including birthing services.



Challenges for the Innu Midwifery Program

There is no Midwifery Program in LG Zone

- Midwifery services in Goose Bay could facilitate partnership between IMP and LG Zone.

Community based education not well known

- Need to educate public & communities of community-based education.
- Information and education session needed.

Midwifery needs more champions!

- Advocacy for midwifery needed by other groups.
- Collaborative initiatives needed.
- IMP needs to be become part of existing health initiatives.

Midwifery is not well understood

- Sharing circles on midwifery and what midwives do.
- More information and education session needed.



Opportunity: Innu Midwifery



- To restore midwifery to the Innu communities.
- To draw on Innu Elders' knowledge of Innu birthing practices and midwifery.
- To educate Innu midwives using a culturally specific, hands-on, and individually paced learning approach.
- To invest in the long-term health of Innu communities in Labrador.
- To enhance capacity building of maternity and healthcare delivery in our communities.
- To improve maternal child health outcomes to Innu women, babies, and families.
- To contribute to healing of Innu from the traumas they have experienced in the past.

More midwifery education impressions



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Thank you!

