



# THE RED RIVER MÉTIS CANCER STRATEGY

Manitoba Métis Federation  
**Health & Wellness Department**  
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# A Message from the Minister of Health & Wellness

## FOREWORD FROM MINISTER FRANCES CHARTRAND



It is with immense gratitude and a deep sense of purpose that I address the resilient and vibrant Red River Métis Citizens, our esteemed staff, and our invaluable funders through these words. On behalf of the Manitoba Métis Federation Health & Wellness Department, I am pleased to present the Red River Métis Cancer Strategy.

The idea of distinctions-based healthcare is crucial to the Manitoba Métis Federation. It recognizes the history and culture of Indigenous peoples, including Red River Métis Citizens, and acknowledges systemic inequities.

The Manitoba Métis Federation is dedicated to providing culturally sensitive and respectful distinctions-based healthcare to Red River Métis Citizens. We aim to nurture a healthier and prosperous future for our Community and create relevant programs and support for our Citizens.

Consultations with our Citizens reveal that cancer has greatly impacted every family and community in the Red River Métis Homeland. Cancer has a profound affect not only on an individual receiving a diagnosis, but their caregivers, families, friends, and communities. All of those involved in a cancer journey, including cancer survivors, have a story to tell, deserve to have their voices heard and receive sufficient support throughout the entire journey and beyond, contributing to their overall well-being.

The Manitoba Métis Federation is committed to achieving the long-term goal of including Red River Métis culture and values in the cancer care system to offer a level of comfort to Red River Métis Citizens navigating this system with their families. To achieve this goal, the Health & Wellness Department has collaborated with healthcare system partners to develop the Red River Métis Cancer Strategy. Over the past three years, the department has reviewed programs, policies, and resources for education on cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment, and end of life care. The department has also conducted interviews with healthcare professionals in the cancer care continuum and held discussion groups with Red River Métis Citizens to identify gaps in the cancer care system and changes, supports and resources our Citizens would like to see.

Our Red River Métis Citizens have shown time and again their commitment to the betterment of our Community's health and well-being. Your voices, stories, experiences, and active participation in our research are the foundation upon which we build a future of improved health outcomes and holistic well-being.

To the remarkable staff from the Health & Wellness Department who facilitate research and program development for our Citizens I extend my deepest thanks. It is through your efforts that we have been able to gather meaningful data, provide a safe space for dialogue, and offer a platform for the voices of our Red River Métis Citizens to be heard.

No endeavor of this magnitude can be achieved without the support of those who believe in our vision. To our esteemed funders, your belief in our mission has enabled us to take strides toward implementing distinctions-based healthcare that not only acknowledges the unique needs of our Community but also paves the way for equitable and accessible services.

In closing, I want to reiterate my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you. Your participation, dedication, and support have transformed research from a mere endeavor into a beacon of hope and progress.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Minister Frances Chartrand

# Introduction

With the ongoing commitment by the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) Health & Wellness Department and its collaborating partners, this Strategy provides a road map to improve the cancer journey for Red River Métis in Manitoba. It reflects the voices of Red River Métis living with cancer, survivors and their families, and cultivates a distinctions-based and culturally safe pathway forward for Red River Métis.

Understanding Red River Métis knowledge of cancer prevention and their unique experience within the healthcare system should be considered by health legislators and policy makers in Manitoba. To improve the overall cancer journey and inadequate health system impacting Red River Métis, the Strategy also includes additional tools and resources as a guide for MMF partners, health authorities and policy makers for future policy change and program implementation.

The Red River Métis Cancer Strategy was developed by the MMF Health & Wellness Department with funding from Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.



# What We Heard

To gather Red River Métis' perspectives about their cancer journey, the MMF Health & Wellness Department held engagement sessions at its virtual 2021 Health Summit. The goal was to collect stories of Red River Métis living with cancer, survivors, their families and caregivers, to identify barriers and mechanisms to improve their cancer journey.

Healthcare professionals who provide services and supports related to cancer care were also interviewed on their perspectives of the healthcare system, cultural safety amongst care providers, available programs and services, and how to better support Red River Métis experiencing a cancer journey.

While each journey is unique, as are the perspectives of Red River Métis, many experienced similar challenges and health inequities including accessing, navigating, and utilizing the cancer care system. Through the consultation process, the MMF has identified the following priority areas for improving the Red River Métis cancer journey:

"When you're from a little town, it's really hard. We need more guidance"

"As part of our culture, Métis people respond to things as a family"

"What one person needs and wants isn't going to be necessarily the same as the next person even if they come from the same background"

## Partnerships

## Cultural Safety

Prevention

Accessibility

End of Life

Navigation

Screening

Knowledge Development & Translation

Financial Support

# Partnerships



## GOAL

To create culturally relevant and informed cancer care services that align with Red River Métis priorities through internal and external partnerships and collaboration.

## OBJECTIVES

Develop and maintain respectful relationships between CancerCare Manitoba (CCMB), the MMF, Red River Métis Citizens and all other healthcare system partners.

## ACTIONS

- Encourage and support implementation of the Red River Métis Cancer Strategy in all Manitoba Regional Health Authorities (RHAs).
- Dedicate a team at CCMB (with knowledge of Red River Métis history and culture) as a liaison with MMF for continuous understanding of the Cancer Strategy.
- Engage with primary care providers in all RHAs to promote the implementation of this Strategy and understanding of Red River Métis culture and priorities.

“What I would strongly recommend is there needs to be more partnerships with the health authorities.”

– Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit



# Prevention

In Manitoba, Red River Métis have an average lower intake of fruit and vegetables, higher consumption of alcohol, and higher rates of smoking\*, which are all risk factors for cancer and other chronic diseases. High rates of these risk factors are related to social determinants of health, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism. To reduce these risk factors among Red River Métis, a holistic approach must be taken to address health disparities and inequities.

## GOAL

To reduce the prevalence of new cancer diagnosis in Red River Métis through healthy living, wellness, and supportive environments.

## OBJECTIVES

- Support healthy spaces by reducing cancer-causing substances in environments where people live, work, and play.
- Promote the reduction of commercial tobacco use while respecting traditional tobacco use in ceremony and as medicine.

- Increase opportunities for individuals and communities to participate in physical activity and healthy eating.

## ACTIONS

- Create educational cancer prevention materials such as infographics and mail out information relating to priority prevention areas to reflect Red River Métis needs and cultural values.
- Develop initiatives, programs and campaigns on wellness and cancer prevention that reflect Red River Métis perspectives on health and wellness.
- Promote regular doctor checkups among Red River Métis for health maintenance.
- Promote and provide educational materials for at-home screening that are culturally appropriate for Red River Métis.

\*Martens, P. J., Bartlett, J., Burland, E., Prior, H., Burchill, C., Huq, S., Romphf, L., Sanguins, J., Carter, S., & Bailly, A. (2010). Profile of Métis health status and healthcare utilization in Manitoba: A population-based study. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Centre for Health Policy

"I think it would be really helpful to educate people on the basics of cancer."

- Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# Screening

Cancer screening is the first step in early detection before the onset of symptoms, and in some cases, may prevent disease progression. Through engagement with Red River Métis Citizens, we have learned about barriers they experience in accessing cancer screening. We will work to increase participation in programs among Red River Métis by promoting the awareness, accessibility, and cultural safety among current screening programs offered for colon, breast, and cervical cancers.

## GOAL

To implement early prevention and detection of cancer in Red River Métis by participation in culturally safe colon, breast and cervical cancer screening programs.

## OBJECTIVES

- Increase awareness of cancer screening programs.
- Increase accessibility to culturally safe cancer screening.

- Increase the number of Red River Métis participating in cancer screening.

## ACTIONS

- Organize screening opportunities with Red River Métis communities in locations that allow individuals to access screening in a safe space.
- Serve on advisory committees to advise organizations (CCMB) to provide at-home screening tests in Red River Métis languages such as Michif.
- Provide cancer diagnostic testing and at-home screening tests in existing MMF Mobile Clinics and MMF MEDOCare Pharmacy.
- Create processes that fast-track and prioritize high risk Red River Métis Citizens through the cancer diagnosis pathway.
- Expand access to cancer screening through policy change recommendations.

"Maybe there's something more I should be doing in screening. But unless, you know, it comes up to the doctor ... I'm not really thinking a lot about on the day-to-day."

– Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# Navigation

The existing cancer care system can be confusing and overwhelming. Navigating this system adds to the stress of a new diagnosis and the cancer journey for individuals and their families. Developing tools and resources to help Red River Métis navigate the cancer system throughout their entire cancer journey can alleviate some of this stress to support their overall well-being.

## GOAL

To increase the accessibility of adequate and culturally relevant navigation tools and resources for Red River Métis going through a cancer journey.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide culturally relevant educational resources for navigating the cancer care system.
- Provide human resources to assist in navigating each unique cancer journey.

- Increase supports to navigate the cancer care system in partnership with healthcare providers.

## ACTIONS

- Develop navigation guides for Red River Métis to use as they proceed through a cancer journey (ie. infographics, brochures).
- Create a centralized online navigation system to provide support to Citizens who are recently affected by cancer, either as a patient or care provider.
- Create and promote training for Manitoba Métis Federation Health & Wellness Department Community Navigators to act as liaisons for Citizens going through a cancer journey.



"It's an [un navigable] path, you just don't know where to turn and there's no information there for you."

- Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# Cultural Safety

Creating a culturally safe healthcare system involves taking actions and implementing change at all levels. This includes training healthcare providers to changes in health legislation and policy implementation. Colonization, racism, and discrimination continue throughout our healthcare system and that needs to change. Health authorities and policy makers need to review and revise current practices, structures, and policies to support and ensure cultural safety. For the Red River Métis, this includes acknowledging the differences between Indigenous groups and offering unique distinctions-based services with culturally appropriate spaces for Red River Métis.

## GOAL

To receive high quality and culturally safe cancer care support for Red River Métis people, families, and communities.

## OBJECTIVES

- Increase opportunities for healthcare providers to reflect on power imbalances inherent in health services and healthcare relationships.

- Increase the integration of Red River Métis traditional healing and wellness practices into cancer care services.

## ACTIONS

- Support the development of Red River Métis-specific cultural spaces at cancer care centres in the province, starting with CCMB.
- Establish policies to support the integration of traditional wellness and cultural practices when receiving care.
- Support recruitment and retention of Red River Métis healthcare providers, especially in rural and remote communities.
- Create Red River Métis-specific cultural competency trainings for healthcare providers to emphasize differences between Red River Métis and other Indigenous groups.

"I had an English doctor. He wasn't concerned at all about any of the health problems that Métis women- especially with arthritis. He was like 'I don't know about you people.'"

– Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# Financial Supports

The cancer journey involves unexpected financial costs that many families are not prepared for, including transportation, accommodations, childcare, medication and time taken off work. The financial burden of a cancer journey can serve as a barrier to care for many Red River Métis, especially those living far distances from healthcare services. Through engagement with our Citizens and conversations with Key Informants, we have learned that current supports are insufficient in alleviating the financial strain of a cancer journey.

## GOAL

To ensure sufficient financial support is available and alleviate the financial costs for all Red River Métis experiencing a cancer journey.

## OBJECTIVES

- Increase the number of programs providing financial support.
- Increase awareness of existing financial supports.

## ACTIONS

- Provide financial support for transportation costs (direct billing or reimbursement) to and from appointments (including accommodations, meals, parking, etc. as needed).
- Provide 100% financial coverage for prescription drugs.
- Secure continuous funding for MMF to provide i) programming that targets the stated actions; and ii) support for MMF Mobile Clinics to travel to remote communities and offer cancer screening services.

“The financial piece of it all definitely is a huge thing.”

– Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# Accessibility

Red River Métis have expressed facing significant challenges in accessing the cancer care system, including accessing information about available services, limited culturally appropriate care, financial and geographic barriers. There is a lack of health services and resources available for Red River Métis living in rural and remote areas. While some services are now available virtually or over the phone, technology is a barrier for those living remotely, with limited technology literacy, or without internet access. Addressing these barriers and increasing the accessibility of cancer care services is necessary to improve the cancer journey for Red River Métis.

## GOAL

To remove barriers and improve accessibility for equitable cancer care services for Red River Métis.

## OBJECTIVES

- Address barriers between healthcare jurisdictions.
- Improve accessibility and cultural safety of virtual healthcare services.
- Increase resources and services available in rural and remote communities.

## ACTIONS

- Obtain additional supports for highly specialized cancer therapy equipment in rural and remote areas.
- Develop evidence-based recommendations to advise healthcare professionals on delivering culturally appropriate virtual services.
- Advocate for increased support for at-home doctor's visits especially for remote communities.

"I think having health services more up north would help those folks and it would be more accessible for them."

– Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# Knowledge Development & Translation

Through engagement with Red River Métis Citizens, knowledge gaps were identified surrounding cancer signs and symptoms, services available throughout the cancer care system, navigating the healthcare system, and specific care plans. By providing culturally relevant education resources, Red River Métis will be more equipped to recognize cancer signs, understand their treatment plan, navigate the cancer care system and advocate for themselves throughout their cancer journey.

## GOAL

To increase knowledge and awareness among Red River Métis about cancer, cancer care services, and how to navigate the cancer journey.

## OBJECTIVES

Develop and share culturally relevant information to improve Red River Métis Citizens' understanding of cancer and accessibility to cancer care services.

## ACTIONS

- Provide cancer information in MMF Mobile Clinics, MMF MEDOCare Pharmacy and through MMF social media channels.
- Implement a 1-800 Cancer Support Line for health information and cancer support specific to Red River Métis.
- Promote the development of print materials with cancer information for healthcare providers to offer Red River Métis receiving a cancer diagnosis.
- Develop online resources such as virtual information sessions, email newsletters and online forums for Red River Métis to access culturally appropriate cancer information.



"We need more knowledge and awareness in our communities."

– Red River Métis Citizen, 2021 MMF Health Summit

# End of Life

Individuals may reach a stage in their journey when their cancer can no longer be controlled, nor can they tolerate the pain and emotional distress associated with the disease. Choices surrounding end of life care, including palliative care and medical assistance in dying, can be difficult for individuals and their families. By providing culturally safe, accessible resources, this transition can become more comfortable to support the overall well-being of Red River Métis.

## GOAL

To support the end of life journeys, perspectives and desires of Red River Métis Citizens as well as the wellness and dignity of their families and loved ones.

## OBJECTIVES

Increase culturally safe supports for Red River Métis with cancer and their families when facing end of life decisions.

## ACTIONS

- Develop culturally specific educational materials for healthcare providers to support the transition to end of life care for Red River Métis.
- Enable Red River Métis to exercise and advocate for their end of life perspectives and practices with continued consultation.
- Develop culturally safe tools, resources, and practices for Red River Métis cancer survivors and families to support advance care planning and end of life conversations.
- Create a Red River Métis advisory group to assist and guide healthcare authorities and ensure Elders perspectives are included at the planning stage to program implementation.

“Like one of our Métis Elders who died of cancer, OK. His entire family was fighting for him, but nobody listened, and the man didn’t even get palliative care until the last week of his life. You can’t possibly tell me that palliative care shouldn’t have been sooner.”

– Key Informant