Join the Indigenous Health Coalition

Advocate for Indigenous health in the Greater Rochester area and Upstate New York.

What is the vision for this health initiative?
Our vision for this Indigenous health initiative is rooted in one that
- Is circular, and seeks continuous thought partnership, feedback and direction from the community;
- Is inclusive of any Indigenous people in our region, regardless of Tribal affiliation, enrollment status, or if they reside on or off territory;
- Recognizes the value of qualitative data, data ownership, Indigenous methods of data collection, including those with lived experience; and
- Recognizes the tremendous value of Traditional methods of healing.

What will the role of the coalition be?
The coalition will engage in the following activities:
- Informing the direction of the coalition (including its charter and operations)
- Further developing and implementing our recommendations that came out of the listening tour interviews
- Advocating for Indigenous health
- Advising Common Ground Health in their efforts to ensure Indigenous health equity in their work

Learn more and apply to join at: commongroundhealth.org/ihc
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Below are some questions that community members have asked about the Indigenous Health Coalition and the planning process.

What will the time commitment be?
- To kick things off we plan to meet monthly (meetings will be 90 minutes), but expect that as we settle in to the work we will transition to less frequent meetings of the full coalition (i.e. bi-monthly within the first year, and eventually quarterly).
- We are also predicting that we will have smaller workgroups focused on specific projects, who may meet at varying cadences. It will be expected that coalition members participate in at least 1 workgroup.
- We expect that most meetings will be held virtually on Zoom, with one (1) annual in-person gathering.

Will stipends be provided?
- Members will participate on the coalition as volunteers and will not be provided stipends.
- For any in-person gatherings, food will be provided, as well as travel and/or on-site child care support for those who need it.

Do I have to live in the Rochester area to join?
- No, Indigenous people from across what is known as Upstate New York will be welcome to join. While some of our efforts will focus on the Greater Rochester area, there will also be work that spans a broader region.
- We recognize that Indigenous communities do not conform to land boundaries that have been imposed on them and that we can go further if more of us are working together.

Will non-Indigenous people be allowed to join?
- Members of the coalition must be Indigenous, and those who have not been previously interviewed will be asked to fill out an application.
- In the future, the coalition may decide to welcome non-Indigenous allies and will decide if, when, and how they can join the effort.

Common Ground Health is the Finger Lakes Region’s health planning organization. We bring focus to community health issues through data, convening and transforming policies, systems and environments in an effort to achieve health equity. We aim to be inclusive of the Indigenous community going forward in all of our efforts.

What will the role of the coalition be?
The coalition will engage in the following activities:
- Informing the direction of the coalition (including its charter and operations)
- Further developing and implementing our recommendations that came out of the listening tour interviews (see the attached flyer)
- Advocating for Indigenous health
- Advising Common Ground Health in their efforts to ensure Indigenous health equity in their work

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- Recognizes the tremendous value of Traditional methods of healing
In the spring of 2021, Common Ground Health worked to educate and engage residents of the Finger Lakes region on the COVID 19 pandemic. As part of this effort, we noticed the Indigenous population was significantly overlooked.

Not knowing where to go, or having an established relationship, we reached out to several local Indigenous advocates to collaborate.

For the last 6 months, Common Ground Health has been conducting focus interviews with Indigenous people to obtain their views on the most pressing health issues in their community. Here you will find a summary of what we’ve observed and our recommendations from what we’ve heard so far.

We recognize there will always be more to learn and we are actively seeking continued input to ensure this is a grounded, community-led effort.

The Listening Tour

*Who have we heard from so far?*

- 15 interviews conducted from spring to fall 2022
- Those interviewed have backgrounds in medicine, dentistry, mental health, women’s health, art therapy, counseling, health research, Indigenous language, Indigenous ceremonies, Traditional medicine, climate change, food/nutrition, Indigenous advocacy, public relations, community service, higher education, and social work.
- All have lived experience on and off territory, navigating through today’s Indigenous ways of life.

“People are still using Traditional medicines. Engaging in these practices results in mental, physical, and spiritual benefits. It is essential to incorporate this and not only focus on western medicine.”

What Are We Learning?

*Top priority health issues identified:*

- 100% of interviewees named mental health as a top priority, driven by the impacts of intergenerational trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
- 67% named chronic diseases as a top priority (diabetes, cancer, obesity)
- 53% named addiction/substance abuse as a top priority issue in part due to a lack of mental/behavioral health services

*Top barriers to addressing regional Indigenous health inequities:*

- Lack of collaboration across Indigenous communities to address the health needs of both those living on and off territory
- Lack of access to quality health care
- Lack of access to culturally competent health care
- Lack of data and invisibility

*Existing assets to support Indigenous health equity:*

- Traditional ways of life, knowledge, teachings, diets and medicines
- Established Native programs and initiatives in our region
Below are our recommendations, informed by what we have learned so far. This is not a final analysis but rather the starting point for the vital work that must be done—together.

1. Establish an Indigenous Health Coalition
Convene a group of Indigenous community members and advocates to identify ways to address Indigenous health equity for all in our region.

2. Develop Urban Indian Health Services
Research what it will take to build an Urban Indian Health Clinic. Look to build a 501(c)3 non-profit organization under which a health component could exist. Establish a future Urban Indian Organization that could provide services to the Indigenous community in Rochester and surrounding areas.

3. Improve Data Equity
Identify ways Common Ground Health can advocate for and mentor others on data equity and the decolonization of Indigenous data.

4. Address Mental Health & Well-being
Support new and existing programs and venues that can provide space for healing from intergenerational trauma, substance abuse/addiction and mental health challenges in the Indigenous community, while prioritizing Traditional methods of healing.

5. Host Annual Health Events
Host yearly events and/or a conference to celebrate Indigenous community good health and wellness.

"[There is] stigma around mental health: We don’t want to talk about it. In our own communities we’ve been conditioned to not recognize that what we’re experiencing are mental health issues. We don’t always have access to our own cultural practices that would help these issues and don’t have access to medical services."

Looking Ahead

Common Ground Health is the Finger Lakes Region’s health planning organization. We bring focus to community health issues through data, convening and transforming policies, systems and environments in an effort to achieve health equity. We aim to be inclusive of the Indigenous community going forward in all of our efforts.

Join our tour and learn more at commongroundhealth.org/indigenous