

Web Release  
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## **Healing Waters Project focus' on health needs of members and the importance of culture-based healing**

The Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation (QMFN) has recently launched a new initiative, Healing Waters. This research, consultation and assessment based project should result in a greater awareness of membership needs, and how to meet those needs, in the area of health and wellness.

Health is a priority for QMFN. In 2010, a Health Needs Assessment study of Off-Reserve Mi'kmaq people in Western and Central Newfoundland was completed. The study focused on communities with high concentrations of Mi'kmaq residents, and included a detailed survey on the health-related practices of Mi'kmaq individuals in those areas. It also delved into the existing health care services available and noted areas for service improvement.

As an extension of this study, QMFN will follow up on several areas identified as needing further research. The identified areas include: mental health, substance use and addiction, gender based violence and knowledge of traditional health practices and activities. The Healing Waters needs assessment will look into some of these areas, in particular, how traditional healers can be a part of health solutions.

Many of us will know of individuals who offer traditional Mi'kmaq healing in our communities. For example, individual's familiar with a variety of healing practices such as the use of traditional medicines, healing sweats and circles, and prayer. We might all benefit from blended healing practices where the traditional is blended with modern health.

Brenda Gillingham, one of two Aboriginal Wellness Researchers hired to administer the Healing Waters initiative, agrees. "Health encompasses all aspects of a person's life which of course includes the spirit, a belief acknowledged by traditional healers. By encouraging health and wellbeing through spirituality and culture awareness, we begin to holistically heal, not simply treat a disease or illness."

The program will include consultation with stakeholders, health service providers, community groups, government agencies and hopefully will lead to identification of individuals who are known for traditional healing practices.

Heather Mousseau and colleague Brenda Gillingham anticipate hosting a community gathering in their new role as Aboriginal Wellness Researchers. Ms. Mousseau notes "Members will be encouraged to join in a community conversation that fosters a cultural awareness of health that supports the holistic wellbeing of members and communities." The Qalipu.ca website will keep members up to date on the Healing Waters Project. Please stay tuned!