Final Report

Growth for Knowledge Project

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WHITEFISH RIVER FIRST NATION

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In 2018, the *Growth for Knowledge* project was implemented in Whitefish River First Nation (WRFN) in response to the federal legalization of cannabis in Canada. The purpose of the project was to educate WRFN community members about cannabis and cannabis-use. Three-pillars were used to guide the project to improve the health, safety, and social wellness of community members. As the project now comes to an end, this report seeks to provide insights into community opinions on cannabis and cannabis-use, programming and education needs on substances, specifically on cannabis, and to recommendations on policy development.

Over the past 4 years (2018-2022), the *Growth for Knowledge* project has provided many educational opportunities for the members of WRFN. This included:

1) A Cannabis conference at the Mantioulin Hotel and Conference Centre;

2) Traditional/cultural learning opportunities such as skirt making and setting fish nets; and

3) Hosting multiple educational cannabis workshops and seminars.

The project also implemented a community advisory group called the *Ayaan-gwaa-mizid-daa – Let’s be Careful*. The group aimed to provide community voices to the project. It consisted of five (5) community members, who varied in age, and the purpose of the group was to assist in providing insight into community needs, such as for substance-use programming and education, and project support.

Two surveys were implemented in the project. The first survey was completed in March of 2021 and a report was generated to get a general idea of cannabis knowledge and community members thoughts about substance-use programming. One hundred and five (105) surveys were collected.

A second survey, consisting of Key-Informant Interviews, was completed in March of 2022. A total of fifteen (15) interviews were conducted. These interviews were more in-depth, and provided insight into future policy, programming and educational needs on substance and substance-use, specifically on cannabis. Results of both surveys will be discussed in this report.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, direct in-person learning opportunities were suspended and remained as such until March 2022. This, among other factors, such as family grievances and multiple changes in project management, created an inconsistency in the delivery of
the projects goals and communications required to deliver key-information to community members. This resulted in delivering virtual workshops and paper based educational materials that did not support community member’s educational needs or learning styles. Despite this, the surveys had shown an improvement in knowledge regarding cannabis-use among community members.

Overall, the project was deemed successful in its original goals. As Whitefish River First Nation moves forward, cannabis education should continue, and it was suggested to use a harm-reduction approach towards cannabis, and a policy should be created to ensure the future health, safety, and social wellness of the community.

**Purpose**

The intended purpose of this final report is to:

- Provide insight into community members opinions on cannabis;
- Provide an overview of the project;
- Conduct surveys and complete a report; and
- Provide recommendations to WRFN on future cannabis policy, substance and substance-use programming and education, specifically on cannabis.

**March 2021 Cannabis Survey**

The intended purpose of this survey was to gain insight from Whitefish River First Nation community members on cannabis programming. Participants were asked about the project’s past programming and suggestions on the future direction of the programming. The survey was available in both print and web formats. A total of one hundred and five (105) surveys were completed by participants. The full summary report can be found in Appendix 1.

The previous survey was used as a baseline to determine if there was an increased knowledge of cannabis among participants (33% reported an increase in knowledge vs. 25% previous year). This report was to provide future programming and policy recommendations.

**2022 Key-Informant Interviews**

The Key-Informant Interviews (KII) had three main objectives to provide information on:

- Changes in knowledge/awareness on cannabis
- Community member experiences and thoughts around cannabis
- Community readiness for future change in regards to cannabis

The information gathered intended to provide recommendations for WRFN on future substance programming (specifically on cannabis), to assess
community readiness for change and assist in the development of cannabis policy.

Collection

The 2022 Key-Informant Interviews allowed respondents to share in-depth thoughts and opinions on cannabis and cannabis-use within WRFN. Fifteen (15) interviews were conducted. Respondents ranged from 16-65 years. There were 8-females and 7-males respectively. The breakdown of the ages of respondents was as follows: two (2) were within 60+ year range, seven (7) within the 30-60-year range, and five (5) were within the 16-30-year range. Twelve (12) respondents live on-reserve and three (3) live off-reserve. Respondents had been recruited through social media. A poster informed community member interested to contact the project coordinator. Interviews were conducted in-person or virtually; however, participants were informed responses were completely anonymous and confidential. This encouraged respondents to discuss and share their personal opinions. Interviews were recorded and destroyed once analyzed to ensure anonymity.

Raw Data

The results below show respondent’s overall knowledge of cannabis and if there was an increase in their knowledge on cannabis, and it also reflected the priorities associated with cannabis within WRFN. Other data was analyzed using XMind (Appendix 2).
Respondents ranked seven priorities from most important to least on a scale of 1-7. The 1st priority by the respondents suggested WFRN should focus on mitigating the effects of cannabis on youth. The 2nd priority was to continue education and awareness on cannabis and substance-use, and the 3rd priority for WRFN was to ensure there is no increase in cannabis-use. The 4th highest priority by the respondents was to enact a cannabis policy in WRFN prior to allowing cannabis retail businesses. The 5th priority was workplace safety followed by public cannabis use and community enforcement which had the lowest ranking priorities of the respondents.

**Discussion**

This section examines five (5) key themes and ideas brought up in the interviews.

1) **Cannabis within Whitefish River First Nation**

   These interviews allowed for in-depth thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences regarding cannabis use. Insights were provided on:

   a) levels and severity of cannabis use, and
   b) groups that have a higher cannabis use, and
   c) where cannabis is used and accessed.

   Interviews also provided information about changes in cannabis use in the community, specifically changes that may have occurred due to cannabis legalization.

   Overall, respondents indicate there is cannabis use within WFRN. Some respondents stated that “… 80% of households in Whitefish River have at least one person who uses cannabis” (202206). Most respondents state that overall levels of use are high. Despite higher levels of use, respondents stated individual levels are not problematic and it is believed that those individuals engaging in cannabis-use is not problematic in terms of behavior. Respondents believed individuals typically use in their own households and rarely in public spaces.

   Respondents thought that certain groups were more likely to engage in cannabis use, and why these certain age groups may use. Youth and young adults were seen as more likely to be participating in recreational cannabis use, and higher levels are being seen in youth since legalization (202215). In older adults (60+), respondents indicate a low overall usage, stating this group was more likely to engage in cannabis-use for medicinal and health benefits.
Before legalization, it is believed that users typically purchased their cannabis through local dealers. However, it is now thought that, cannabis-wise, most now purchase their products through local dispensaries. Exceptions to this idea are youth, who may be unable to purchase through dispensaries due to age-restrictions, and it was stated “they still may be purchasing from dealers” (202215).

The main reason for a change in purchasing at a dispensary is safety. Those respondents who use cannabis stated the convenience and safety as the main reason to purchase from dispensaries. Product purchased at dispensaries was viewed as safer and less likely to be contaminated with other illicit substances, and cannabis retail stores are likely to have a wider array of cannabis products.

In 2018, cannabis was federally legalized. Since then, some respondents stated they noticed more people engaging in cannabis-use (202204). Others concluded that the increase in cannabis-use may be due to reduced stigmatization associated with its use, so individuals who use are no longer hiding it. Although it is seen that there is a reduction in stigmatization regarding cannabis-use, interviewees state there is still a negative perspective about the person using. It is believed that a judgemental attitude may discourage users from seeking assistance for their substance-use or from participating in cannabis programming. Within WRFN, respondents also stated the moratorium on cannabis retail created a stigma against those who use. However, the majority of respondents stated they had a more positive view on people who use cannabis compared to those who use alcohol or other illicit substances. One respondent suggested that this was due the respondent’s own past experiences. Again, it was stated that individuals who use cannabis expressing fewer problematic behaviours and or actions compared to those using alcohol or other substances.

2) Past Programming – Successes and Barriers

One of the main objectives of the interviews was to examine the effectiveness of programming within the project. Participants were asked what they thought helped enable or prevent community members from learning about cannabis-use.

Respondents indicate that while workshops and information sessions were effective in helping them learn new cannabis knowledge, its only effective if it is in-person, opposed to being virtually. Additionally, workshops that incorporated other skills and activities (i.e. such as painting or learning how to make a film etc.) were seen as more engaging and attractive to participants, as opposed to learning from other educational methods, such as posters or infographics, etc..

Respondents also found when information was presented to them by a professional or expert, it was assumed to be more trustworthy and respondents
stated they learned more. For example, the previous 2020 Cannabis Conference provided presentations from cannabis-field experts and other public health officials were viewed as being more credible. Whereas when as other community members presented information on cannabis respondents stated it was viewed as less effective.

The current project was cited by respondents as one of the initiatives that helped the community learn more about cannabis-use; however, other sources were also identified. One respondent stated that they learned a lot from dispensaries from those who were employed at dispensaries, as well from their peers and discussing with persons who are cannabis-users. This promoted their own personal cannabis research.

Overall, respondents stated a harm-reduction approach to cannabis-use was preferred over an abstinence-based approach. Respondents stated a humanistic, person-centered approach would be more effective and should be considered. It was stated as ideal to considered all aspects for use and health, rather than only focusing on the addiction. Most respondents also state solely focusing on the potential harms of cannabis limited the scope of the project. It was stated that other information, such as medicinal benefits, uses, strains, growing etc., would be helpful and fit into a harm-reduction approach.

While majority of respondents acknowledge the success of the project, they also identified barriers that prevented them from learning and understanding cannabis knowledge. It was stated that the focus was on the education of harms of cannabis and that the project vaguely acknowledged the possible benefits of cannabis. This was seen as a stigma leading to a decrease in participation. Additionally, it was stated individuals who use cannabis may be reluctant to participate and share about their cannabis-use as it was feared that they would be judged by others.

Respondents also said that cultural customs and traditions may also prevent the community from learning about cannabis. Sobriety is seen as integral to a traditional lifestyle, so those who use cannabis may not feel comfortable participating in programming that does not align with traditions. It is also believed that community members practicing a traditional lifestyle would judge cannabis-user negatively.

Another barrier identified was the Covid-19 pandemic, it is believed that the pandemic changed the priorities within the community. The pandemic caused unforeseen circumstances leading to inconsistent programming and information being shared. Participants state that having consistent communication is necessary for learning.

Also, programming specifically for youth was seen as barrier. Some
respondents believed that programs that allow for discussing cannabis with the youth could cause them to feel uncomfortable with the material or even if they attended alone.

3) Future Programming – Key Considerations

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on future programming, and how it can effectively meet their needs. As stated in the previous section, there were many success and barriers in regards to education around cannabis. Future programming should focus on replicating these successes, while minimizing or eliminating barriers.

Many participants stated that learning about potential benefits and harms of cannabis would allow for more useful information being shared and reduce cannabis related stigmatization. Additionally, adopting a harm-reduction approach could allow program coordinators to address other aspects of health and cannabis use and the reasons for use. Program coordinators can educate on the factors that may influence use, and the possible health benefits of cannabis-use. Sharing this information could attract more participants in cannabis programming, such as non-users or those who feel there is a stigma associated with use.

It was also indicated that consistent communication and activities are essential for program success. It allows for the increased community participation, and it helps to instill trust in the program.

Although gaps in communication can result in certain age groups or populations from accessing programming and information, it is important to ensure that information reaches all possible community members to encourage participation. Additionally, this allows for those living off-reserve to have the option to participate, if they are interested.

Overall, respondents viewed their knowledge on cannabis as high, and others who had participated were views as being knowledgeable as well. This could be why some would like programming and information focusing on other illicit substances, and the connection of these substances to alcohol and cannabis.

Furthermore, expanding education and awareness may help reduce stigma regarding cannabis use and other addictions and substances, and the harms associated with use. Future education for the youth was seen as one of the most important priorities for the community. It is believed that programming aimed at youth can assist with increasing cannabis knowledge, as cannabis-use in the youth was viewed as high among the respondents. Respondents stated that education around cannabis (and other illicit substances in general) should begin earlier in life, and implemented through elementary school programs. Respondents believe there is a gap in youth programming in both elementary and post-
secondary education. Creating programming and providing relevant information could address harms among youth when they are away from the community.

Participants were also asked how future cannabis programming could be more culturally-relevant and about possible initiatives they would like to see. Respondents stated traditional Anishinaabe teachings and cannabis use don’t typically align and sobriety was essential to these teachings. However, it was also acknowledged that traditions can help with healing, and respondents were concerned with the exclusion of these individuals from seeking help from ceremonies. The focus on healing was a key theme from the respondents as they stated medicinal and health benefits can be associated with cannabis. It is idea that future programming should adopt cultural teachings into programming to also help address the four aspects of wellness: physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional.

4) Governance and Policy Considerations

Respondents shared opinions on how governance and policy can improve in supporting healthy cannabis use with Whitefish River First Nation. Overall, the majority of respondents felt Leadership holds the largest role on controlling cannabis within WFRN. It was stated that a moratorium was put in place, whereas it would have been affected to enact a bylaw. Although this did not directly affect cannabis-use within the community, respondents felt it created a stigma against cannabis-use and the moratorium a was a reaction and not a proactive approach.

Additionally, respondents suggested that policy-makers should also be educated on cannabis and the issues on cannabis-use. Therefore, it was recommended that leadership and management learn and participate in education initiatives as well. It was identified as important for leadership and managers to learn alongside other community members. This can instill trust for policy-makers who are creating relevant policy and programming (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009).

Additionally, respondents addressed the moratorium directly. When the moratorium was passed, they felt that it prevented a cannabis-retail business from opening in WRFN. The majority of respondents felt that the community has been educated and community members can make their own choices in regards to cannabis-use. Respondents state that they support the idea of a cannabis dispensary in WRFN. Many respondents state that some of their knowledge on cannabis was learned from cannabis retail businesses through those who are employed at these businesses. It was emphasized that this education needs to continue. Some respondents also state that older adults who use cannabis medicinally could access a supply safely through a retail store in the community and it would reduce travelling. It was also indicated that respondents who engage in cannabis-
use felt safer purchasing from dispensaries and it was less likely to be contaminated with other illicit substance, which is a concern if cannabis is purchased from unlicensed dealers. A few respondents expressed hesitancy with opening a store in WRFN stating policy and by-laws need to be enacted first to ensure safety of community members.

The respondents also felt that the scope of cannabis was limited in WRFN; many had ideas about other economic opportunities that could be utilized, in addition to a dispensary. Examples, such as a growing or processing facility or production and sale of hemp were brought up by respondents. One respondent stated “There are so many sectors, its about getting in the game before the opportunities pass” (202214).

Additionally, economical benefits could also be available to the community by having a dispensary, such as bringing in revenue to fund community initiatives and job creation. Respondents state potential options should be fully examined and all departments should collaborate and examine how cannabis can be fully utilized to benefit the community.

Others respondents addressed a lack of addiction services within WRFN. Currently, there are no mental health and addictions workers employed by WRFN. Some respondents were concern about being referred outside of the community and having to travel, and that some persons were receiving services through virtual methods. One respondent suggests that the WRFN should also have a community structural relapse program to help people with additions or other issues in life. There are programs that can promote self-esteem and resiliency, and increase personal responsibility, in addition to having counselling services. For example, there are several employees within the WRFN Health Department, there are trained in the addictions programming such as the “Red Path” program. Implementing such programs could assist persons with additions and be utilized by other department through referrals even if they are struggling in other aspects of their life, such as having financial difficulties or on lower income.

As stated in the previous section, respondents identified a lack in youth cannabis programs, and felt cannabis education should be integrated early in the youth. In addition, WRFN should support programming and education on cannabis and on illicit substances within the educational system. This prepares youth should they encounter substances, and allow them to make more informed choices earlier in life (Lubman, Hides, Yucel, & Tourmbourou, 2007).

Community Readiness for Future Change

Participants were also asked whether they felt the Whitefish River First Nation community was ready to implement these changes in regards to cannabis.
Thirteen (13) participants stated that they felt Whitefish River First Nation was ready to implement these changes. Two (2) participants felt the community as a whole was ready, but stated that policies and bylaws need to be enacted first to ensure the safety, health, and wellbeing of the community.

Other Considerations – Health and Wellness Indicators

Although this project focused primarily on cannabis-use and wellness, it is understood that many other factors evolve around cannabis-use, such as the social and physical environment. Participants were asked about other improvements, and how those can improve the overall health of Whitefish River.

Surprisingly, respondents stated having a caring community was essential to a healthy community. Many examples were given, such as community acknowledging cooperation and contributions (i.e. powwow committees, advisory groups), and that community members need to shift from being individualistic to a collective perspective.

Overall, respondents felt connected and care for their community, it made them feel healthier. Literature also supports this, it is cited that individuals who have a strong sense of community face less problems across all aspects of health (Kitchen, William, & Chowhan, 2012). These principles can also be viewed in a cultural context and align with the principles of the 7 Grandfather Teachings.

Respondents also stated that having opportunities and spaces for physical health could encourage health and wellness. Examples provided were walking paths, recreational sports leagues, and increasing programming that encourages physical activity. These activities can help with physical health, coping mechanisms and possibly decrease reliance in substances (Schulte & Hsar, 2017).

Community infrastructure was also mentioned among participants. It is important to have a clean environment, such as having well maintained roads, buildings, houses, and caring for our natural environment. Literature supports this as well, the evidence suggests that building a clean environment and a clean natural environment can affect our mental health (Clark, Myron, Stansfeld, & Candy, 2007). Specifically, to substance use, respondents suggested that there be public biohazard bins which could help eliminate potential hazards and offer a harm-reduction approach.

Finally, respondents stated that having good leadership was essential to health. Policy and program objectives are well-established in WRFN Leadership and Administration, and it is essential that they be communicated to the greater community (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillian, 2009). Overall, respondents stated communication between leadership and
the community needs to increase to build trust.

**Conclusion**

This project succeeded in its original goals for educating the community. Although cannabis-use is viewed as high within the community by respondents, it is not viewed as problematic. Rather, many respondents viewed cannabis as less harmful than other substances like alcohol or illegal drugs. It is possible the current project and past experiences with cannabis have reduced stigma of cannabis-use in the community.

The project identified a need for youth and education on cannabis, as cannabis-use is seen as problematic in the age group. Respondents had learned that cannabis impacts on brain development can cause long term effects (Scott et al 2019). Educational interventions should be implemented early, and education policy and an education plan can be implemented to improve wellness and create awareness on addictions among the youth. In younger groups, the focus of education policies is not to teach explicit substance facts, but rather improve self-esteem and coping skills to reduce substance-use later in life (Miovsky et al. 2015).

Future programming on cannabis should also be developed using a harm-reduction approach to reduce harms associated with cannabis use rather than asking individuals to abstain from cannabis. Participants stated that focusing on the harms of cannabis increases stigmas against cannabis-use. Therefore, future programming should also educate the medicinal uses and health benefits in using harm-reduction strategies. The surveys also asked how cannabis programming could be more culturally-relevant. Respondents recommended to focus on the healing aspects of cannabis which could be aligned with traditional knowledge.

Nearly all of respondents supported having a cannabis retail business in WRFN. It was stated that since the moratorium, the community is more knowledgeable on cannabis and cannabis-use, and respondents felt that the community was ready for this change. However, some respondents stated that policy should be implemented first. Policy on cannabis needs to reflect the unique needs of the community; therefore, there is a need for community consultations to identify the needs of WRFN.

It was also identified that other First Nations do have cannabis policies that forbids dispensaries from being within a certain distance of buildings and that some policies mandate cannabis retail business’s revenue should contribute financially to support community programs. Therefore, it is idea to determine feasibility and safety factors within policy before a cannabis retail business is established.
Although respondents supported a dispensary, other economic opportunities in the cannabis industry were discussed. Respondents also supported exploring other options, such as a growing or processing facility, as well as, focusing on hemp products. These other opportunities can be explored; however, it would require collaboration and consultation between leadership, administration and departments, and community members.

Most importantly, respondents identified limited resources were a factor within the community which results in minimal programming and reduced availability of services. Retaining and recruitment of WRFN employees are necessary to ensure community members are supported and are able to access help when needed. For example, there has been a lack of mental health and addictions programming and services that could lead to an increase in persons with addictions to other substances. Programs should address “the root of the problem rather than the symptoms (addiction)”. These programs and services are needed to build resiliency and coping skills to help community members handle problems more effectively, without substance misuse.

**Limitations**

In the survey, fifteen (15) participants is considered a small sample size; therefore, assumptions can be made that the overall report is unlikely to be representative of the community as a whole. This limitation should be taken into consideration and the overall report should be used as a guide, and communicated to policy-makers. Leadership and community members should also continue to identify change within such consultations and communications that can benefit community needs.

Another limitation identified is that respondents of the key-informant interviews may also have participated because they have personal experience and knowledge about cannabis. Therefore, it is reasonable to reassess whether or not non-users or those less educated about cannabis to voiced their opinions on the current findings. This gap can be addressed by continuing to assess the needs of community members and ensure those assessments align with the current report.

The project timeframe also resulted in many challenges. For the majority of the project, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a decrease of programs and services being offered. Also, the pandemic shifted project priorities through changes in restrictions resulting in challenges in planning and implementing programming. This led to the project relying on virtual programs, which community members identified as being non-effective or less interesting than in-person programs. Virtually programming was also perceived to have excluded community members, especially for those who do not have access to the internet.
Community and traditional protocols also played a role in program limitations. Community protocol and Covid-19 protocols requested all programming to be cancelled and or postponed when there were grievances in the community. This resulted in the project’s workshops and events to be continuously rescheduled in an unprecedented and often in a short timeframe.

Furthermore, staffing recruitment and retention created difficulties to maintain planned programming. Often new employees need additional training and time to gain confidence in their new roles in order to implement effective programs. This led to changes in program priorities, community needs, and the ability to deliver effective programs. Other limitations that were identified were survey reports and presentations to community members to be delayed due to scheduling of reports for Leadership’s approval. Presentation of the reports should be provided within a reasonable timeframe. Overall, the limitations may have limited the accuracy of the findings in the reports.

**Recommendations, Future Considerations, and Potential Opportunities**

The following recommendations are based on the information found in the “Discussion” section. All recommendations are the product of the March 2022 Key-informant Interviews which also align with current cannabis research and literature findings and or community needs.

**Recommendations**

- Future substance programming should focus on other illicit substances. Programming should also adopt a harm-reduction approach to reduce stigmatization around cannabis-use, as well as, there should be continued education around substance use (Swift, Copeland, & Simon, 2000).

- Increased programming and education opportunities should be made available to youth, including post-secondary students and off-reserve community members.

- An education initiative should be implemented early in life and be integrated through other initiatives within the local school settings to promote resiliency and healthy coping skills in youth for later in life (Scott et al 2019; Miovsky et al. 2015).

- Policies and bylaws need to be enacted prior to the opening a cannabis dispensary with WRFN. This will ensure the safety of the community (Gourdet, Gagnon, Moscetti, & Obradovic, 2021).

- Increase employment opportunities and positions that focus on
substances and addiction to be fully supported by WRFN.

• Communication between Administration, Leadership and community members is required to ensure the development of a cannabis policy that reflect community needs.

• Community should also create outdoor spaces and other opportunities for recreation that support physical health and well-being as it is a protective factor in reducing substance-use and substance misuse (Schulte & Hsar, 2017).

• Other potential opportunities in the cannabis sector should be explored, and there should be a collaboration between departments to create programs and services that support all areas of health promotion and community wellness.
References


Appendix 1 – 2021 Cannabis Summary Report:

Cannabis Programming Survey Summary Report - April 1, 2021

1.0 Introduction & Purpose of Survey
The intended purpose of this survey was to gain insight from Whitefish River First Nation community members on cannabis programming. Participants were asked about past programming and for suggestions on the future direction of the program. The survey was available both in print and web formats. A total of one hundred and five (105) surveys were returned. For more information on the demographics of the returned surveys see the Raw Data section below.

The survey participants received the following introduction:

“As the Growth for Knowledge project reaches its halfway mark, we would like to reflect on what we have done so far, and how we can improve in the future. Remember the aims of the project is to educate the community about personal cannabis use, using the three pillars as a guide: improving the health, safety, and social wellness of community members. We are looking for your honest thoughts and comments, as opposed to only a simple yes or no response. This is an anonymous survey, your comments, opinions, and concerns are completely confidential.

Please join us in helping to shape the future of personal cannabis use within Whitefish River First Nation.”

Overall, the results were positive towards current programming and provided insightful opportunities moving forward into the last year of the project. An in-depth review will be provided in the Discussion and Recommendations sections below.
2.0 How Results Were Collected
On February 16, 2021, paper surveys were distributed to community members by sending one survey to each post office box (PO Box). Additional printed surveys were available upon request, as was a link to the online version of the survey. Snowball sampling was encouraged by asking those with the survey link to share it with others they thought would be interested in providing feedback. The survey was originally scheduled to collect responses for two weeks, from February 16, 2021 - March 2, 2021. However, this had to be extended as the survey poster and link were not added to the Whitefish River First Nation Community Facebook page, despite multiple requests. The decision was made to extend the survey to March 16, 2021 in hopes that the poster and survey link would be posted to the Facebook page. As of March 17, 2021, the poster and survey link have not been posted and the survey has closed.

3.0 Raw Data
The results below are the charts and participation statistics generated by Survey Monkey.

Q1 What is your age range?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-39 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
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</table>
Although the project target age is 13 - 39 years old (45 responses), adults ages 40+ made up the majority of the survey respondents (60 respondents) with a total of 105 respondents. This trend shows that community members of all ages are looking to have their voices heard.

Respondents have asked for more opportunities to provide input into all matters affecting the community. We will incorporate this into our programming. It is suggested that additional community feedback methods be used by all programs and leaders to improve community wellness.

77 females, 27 males and 1 prefer not to say responded to the survey. The female voices of Whitefish River First Nation are strong and ready to be heard. Additional engagement for our young males is required.
70% responded that they agree or strongly agree, 24% responded had no change, and 6% responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that they have the knowledge to make an informed decision about personal cannabis use.
71% responded that they agree or strongly agree, 25% responded had no change, and 4% responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that they have the skills needed to make an informed decision about personal cannabis use.
71% responded that they agree or strongly agree, 23% responded had no change, and 6% responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that they have the social and physical support needed to make an informed decision about personal cannabis use.
Q6 I intend to use the knowledge and skills I've gained about personal cannabis use in the future.

- 65% responded that they agree or strongly agree,
- 30% responded had no change,
- 5% responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that they intend to use the knowledge and skills they have gained about personal cannabis use in the future.

Q7: Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about our past programming?

An open text box was provided for this question. 88 respondents chose to answer this question and 17 skipped it. These responses will be explored in the Discussion and Recommendations sections.
Workshops/Events were ranked most effective while land-based programming was ranked least effective. However, these results should be interpreted with caution. Many of the written responses received were incomplete or improperly done. It is unclear if this was also the case with the web format responses. In the future we will avoid questions in the numbered ranking format.
Q9 Do you have any other ideas for outreach, educational strategies, or future topics to help WRFN learn about personal cannabis use?

An open text box was provided for this question. 88 respondents chose to answer this question and 17 skipped it. These responses will be explored in the Discussion and Recommendations sections.

Social media and flyers in the mail were the top locations to access information. The Cannabis Advisory Group memo and in schools were the least preferred choices to access information. However, most respondents were not school age and it may be an effective strategy to reach our target audience.
Q 11 Do you have any other thoughts or comments for the Growth for Knowledge project, or the Ayaan-gwaa-mizid-daa – Let’s be Careful Community Cannabis Advisory Group?

An open text box was provided for this question. 79 respondents chose to answer this question and 26 skipped it. These responses will be explored in the Discussion and Recommendations sections.

4.0 Discussion

In this section we will discuss the key themes and requests that came from all of the open text box questions (Q7, 9, & 11). One of the first things we noticed is that community members tended to mistake the Advisory Group and its goals, with the Chief & Council Drug Strategy. For clarity, the Recommendation section below is divided in “Programming” and “Drug Strategy” to ensure all community responses are considered.

In-person Programming

One of the biggest themes throughout the survey was the preferences for in-person programming. Many community members responded that past programming was most effective and more fun when it occurred in-person through workshops and events, and that future programming should reflect this as well. Due to COVID-19, in-person programming has been suspended since March 2020 throughout WRFN. As of this report, community members have been about one year since in-person programming. However, as WRFN has begun holding vaccination clinics for in-community members, in-person programming has the potential to begin again within the coming months.

Real-life Experiences

Another theme that came up throughout the survey was the need for real-life experiences to be incorporated into programming. Community members suggested having individuals come in and talk about their experiences with cannabis and how it may have affected them throughout their lives. Storytelling has been shown to be an excellent tool to disseminate knowledge. Davidson (2004), showed that using real-world examples can improve information recollection and makes material seem more realistic. Similarly, community members also recommended having medical professionals present information about cannabis-use. The Cannabis Conference that was held at the Manitoulin Hotel and Conference Centre on April 1, 2019 had multiple experts in the cannabis field as presenters. Those in attendance had rated those presentations very highly. Future events and topics with medical professionals or individuals with lived experiences should be considered.

Evidence-Based Research

Although the results were mainly positive in regards to the program, those that were negative tended to be in regards to the abstinence based-approach to cannabis-use taken by the WRFN Leadership. Community members voiced that they were against abstinence-based programming, and were in support of a harm-reduction approach. Most comments stated that “...it’s a personal choice [to use cannabis]”, or “make sure that safe cannabis use is front and
centre [of the program]”. However, harm-reduction and abstinence-based approaches are not mutually exclusive. Rather, harm-reduction can actually include abstinence within its approach. Harm-reduction aims to reduce the harms associated with substance-use, so while abstinence is the best way to reduce harms, that is not the best way for everyone. Jenkins, Slemon, & Haines-Saah (2017) found that substance-use programming that is informed by evidence from harm reduction approaches is necessary to reach and resonate with youth. As this project aims to be evidence-based, it is necessary to support approaches like harm-reduction, which has shown to be successful within many different populations.

**Youth Programming**

Much of the feedback we received asked for more youth-focused programming. Especially within the last year due to COVID-19, there has been a lack of programming and activities targeting youth within the community. Although all of our programming is open for youth to attend, there is a lack of interest within this group. Having programming directly targeted at youth will be more beneficial. Within the next fiscal year, the project has planned to implement “Let’s Talk Cannabis”, a program created specifically for youth, and will be implemented within the local schools. Additionally, during the summer, land-based programming will hopefully be available and open for youth within the community.

**Land Based Learning**

Many community members responded that they would like more land-based learning to be offered for programming. Due to COVID-19, this may be difficult to provide at this point in time, however, our work plan for the next fiscal year has worked this in. After the recent success of the ribbon skirt making and five senses workshops, it is possible to offer programming that is not directly related to cannabis, while still providing cannabis-related information. Future land-based programming includes 4 elements workshop series, a canoe trip, and winter food preparation, pending COVID-19 restrictions.

**Improved Communication**

Communication was another theme brought up throughout the survey. Community members stated that they would like more frequent communication from the program, whether it is through social media or updating the website more often. Currently, the only way the program communicates with the community is using the WRFN Facebook page, and consistent updates can be difficult due to regulations on what is allowed to be posted. Community members suggest providing monthly updates on the program, having the meeting minutes and the annual plan publicly available. With new issues of the Rezound coming out, more consistent program updates can be brought to the community, and the WRFN site has a “Cannabis” section where meeting minutes and annual plans can be posted. Other communication issues can be addressed through more posts on the WRFN Facebook page, or allowing the Health Centre to have a Facebook page of their own, which would provide more outreach for those living off-reserve as well.
Anonymous Forums

Another theme from the survey was that community members would like a forum where they can ask anonymous questions or have one-on-one discussion with us. Although we try to make programming as inclusive and welcoming as possible, some community members still don’t feel comfortable asking their questions or voicing their concerns publicly. Currently, members are able to connect with us by: (1) Attending programming, or (2) Contacting us directly by telephone or email. Future considerations for the program should take these comments into account and explore the logistics of creating a forum in the future.

5.0 Recommendations for Programming

The top ten recommendations below are listed in alphabetical order:

1. **Cannabidiol (CBD) information**
   A recurring theme was to share information on both the potential benefits and harms with cannabis use. In April 2021, we will be attending the Cannabinoids in Clinical Practice conference. We intend to take what we will learn back to the community.

2. **Consult community**
   A large number of respondents requested more community consultation on all issues that affect them. A potential solution is to have monthly feedback meetings that incorporate all programs, not just our program, to reduce the number of surveys looking for similar information sent to the community.

3. **Fun activities with cannabis information provided**
   There was an overwhelming positive response to the skirt making and five senses workshops. We will continue to provide fun workshops that offer programming not directly related to cannabis, while still providing cannabis-related information during the session.

4. **Harm reduction approach**
   Many respondents prefer a harm reduction approach over an abstinence-based approach to addictions and mental wellness. We will ensure that we have well rounded dialogues with the most up to date scientific facts open to all community members.

5. **Increase off-reserve population engagement**
   Survey respondents felt that efforts to include off-reserve populations was not adequate. Increased communications through the WRFN community Facebook page, Rezound, or a potential monthly email list.

6. **Presentations from outside sources**
   The respondents appreciated our input however, suggested that we also include others such as those in the medical professionals, those in the dispensary field, and people with lived experiences with cannabis. We can make space for presentations by these groups.
7. **Re-introduce project and advisory group**
   There was confusion about the goals of the project and who is involved as shown through questions related to the Chief & Council Drug Strategy. A re-introduction process will occur to ensure project clarity and success.

8. **Unbiased and evidence-based information**
   The community requests that both the positive and negative scientific evidence be presented to them. Doing so will help increase autonomy and ideally support healthier choices.

9. **Update website and socials more often**
   There is currently a heavy focus on COVID-19 on the website and social media accounts. However, community members also request programming information be added to these sites as well. Communication issues can be addressed through more posts on the WRFN Facebook page, or allowing the Health Centre to have a Facebook page of their own, which would provide more outreach for those living off-reserve as well.

10. **Youth Focus**
    Much of the feedback we received asked for more youth-focused programming. Within the next fiscal year, the program has planned to implement “Let’s Talk Cannabis”, a program created specifically for youth, and will be implemented within the local schools. Additionally, during the summer, land-based programming will hopefully be available and open for youth community members.

### 6.0 Recommendations for Drug Strategy

As mentioned in the **Discussion** section above, the community associated this survey and the Advisory Group with the February 2021 Chief & Council Drug Strategy announcement. As such the community has provided recommendations to move the Drug Strategy forward in a good way.

The top five recommendations below are listed in alphabetical order:

1. **Community consultations**
   A large number of respondents requested more community consultation on all issues that affect them, including the proposed drug strategy.

2. **Harm reduction approach**
   Many respondents prefer a harm reduction approach over an abstinence-based approach to addictions and mental wellness.

3. **Increase off-reserve population engagement**
   Respondents asked for improved outreach to those living off reserve.
4. **Unbiased and evidence-based information**  
The community requests that both the positive and negative scientific facts be presented to them. Doing so will help increase autonomy and ideally support healthier choices.

5. **Update website and socials more often**  
There is currently a heavy focus on COVID-19 on the website and social media accounts. However, community members also request programming, engagement, and planning information be added to these sites as well.

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*Appendix 2: XMind Maps used for Analyzation*
Ayaan-gwaa-mizid-daa – Let’s Be Careful
Whitefish River First Nation Community Cannabis Advisory Group