

IT TAKES A NATION... TO END DIABETES

Maamuu Nakaahehtaau seeks to help communities develop diabetes action plans.

In Eevou Istchee, one out of every five adults, and a growing number of young adults and even children, have type 2 diabetes. At this rate, in 25 years 40% of all adults will be living with the disease. It's time to stop the diabetes epidemic.

The Maamuu Nakaahehtaau process, started by the Cree Health Board in 2010, has an ambitious goal of ending the diabetes epidemic that has touched the lives of 4 generations of Cree people. Maamuu Nakaahehtaau means "Together, let's prevent it."

Alarming trends

Since the 1980s, the percentage of the Cree population with diabetes has grown by about 1% per year, and there are other alarming trends: Cree people get diabetes about 20 years earlier, on average, than "down south," which means a 20-year head start on related health problems like heart disease, nerve damage and kidney failure.

In addition, diabetes affects Cree women more than men. Currently, there are 3 women with diabetes for every 2 men. "This is a huge concern because babies born to women with diabetes are themselves more likely to get the disease," says Dr. Richard Lessard, Director of Public Health with the CBHSSJB. "It means we need to do everything we can to help young women stay healthy."

A call to action

Maamuu Nakaahehtaau will combat diabetes by calling upon leaders to make it a central priority to support people in their efforts to live a healthy life. This includes making sure that in every community, it is easy and safe for people of all ages to walk, play and do sports, and that families have access to affordable, healthy food, including traditional food. "The problem can't be solved just by telling people to exercise and eat healthy," says Solomon Awashish, who has spent the last 10 years fighting diabetes in Eeyou Istchee. "It's going to take all of us working together - political leaders, churches, healers and healthcare workers, teachers, restaurant owners and parents - to tackle the challenge once and for all."

Walking the talk

On August 11, 2010 the General Assembly of the Grand Council/CRA passed Resolution 13, which endorses the Maamuu Nakaahehtaau approach. To kickstart the region-wide implementation of healthy public policies, the Public Health Department will organize health summits in every community – positive, action-oriented meetings that will identify things that are working well and build on them. The first community to host a Health Summit will be Eastmain, with the support of Chief Rusty Cheezo.

Honouring local heroes

The symbol of the Maamuu Nakaahehtaau campaign is a moosehide ribbon created by Mistissini artists Elizabeth Matoush Coon and Christine Mianscum. The women made 100 ribbons, which the Cree Health Board will give as recognition awards to people who are making a significant contribution to diabetes awareness, prevention and care. To see who has received the award so far, visit the campaign web page: http://www.creehealth.org/maamuu

Contacts:

Solomon Awashish sawashish@gmail.com Phone: (418) 923-3355 Katherine Morrow Katherine.morrow@ssss.gouv.qc.ca Phone: (418) 923-3355

