



# Policy Brief

## Supporting Indigenous Health Workforce Participation and Career Advancement

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### Executive Summary

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [Calls to Action](#) Articles 18-24 highlight the need to reform health services provided to Indigenous Peoples, which includes increasing Indigenous health professionals to build stable, sustainable, and equitable health care services and employment opportunities for Indigenous Peoples. The Educational Upgrade Program (EUP) is an innovative program designed to build a stronger, more self-reliant health system by fostering education and employment opportunities within the territory of Nunavut. The Government of Nunavut developed the [EUP](#) "to support an increase in the Inuit health workforce across Nunavut." By increasing the number of Inuit working in the health workforce ensures cultural competency and sustainability to better meet the needs of Inuit. There is an opportunity to expand the innovative EUP to other Indigenous communities.

### Scope of the Problem

The vast majority of health workers in Nunavut, including those in leadership positions, are occupied by out-of-territory, non-Indigenous people. This renders its health workforce unstable, unsustainable, and inequitable. The territory's dependence on out-of-territory non-Indigenous health workforce results in an over-reliance on medical travel from rural and remote Inuit communities and pose significant barriers to the continuity, acceptability, and cost-efficiency of care. Appropriate, culturally competent, and sustainable care for Inuit would require significant scale up of Inuit representation within the health workforce. The EUP introduces an opportunity to support the growth of an Inuit health workforce and curb reliance on medical travel and locum programs.

### Levers for Change

Expanding the EUP to other Indigenous communities requires careful consideration of the challenges and opportunities that can facilitate or hinder its uptake. These are examined across four key levers for change.

### Education & Training

**Opportunities:** The EUP program presents a strategy for improving educational attainment, representation, and leadership of Indigenous peoples within Indigenous communities. The three promising features of the EUP advance goals to build a stronger, sustainable, and culturally competent healthcare delivery systems for Indigenous Peoples, including: 1) a "by us-for us" design, 2) an educational laddering process, and 3) a focus on self-determination. **Challenges:** Identifying and aligning desired outcomes with career pathways to meet the unique values, needs, and priorities of each Indigenous community is a challenge when adopting a "by us-for-us" design. The educational laddering process also presents the risk of propagating inequities through existing hierarchical structures in health care, including remuneration that incentivizes non-Indigenous professional education programs. The mechanism for program delivery must also

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consider potential technical and physical challenges, such as internet connectivity and accessibility issues due to geography and extreme weather conditions.

### **Governance and Regulation**

**Challenges:** The complexity of overlapping governance with respect to health care for Indigenous peoples presents significant challenges when aligning health education and employment opportunities to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples and their communities. Profession-specific regulations for education, scope, and language of practice propagate colonial criteria that do not consider the needs, requirements, and unique contexts for appropriate health care for Indigenous Peoples. **Opportunities:** A strong governance structure is key to program sustainability. Mapping the roles of key governance stakeholders – such as community partners, health professionals, health managers, educational institutions, and policy makers – can foster a clear and common understanding of roles and responsibilities, thus influencing the program sustainability.

### **Funding, Financing & Remuneration**

**Challenges:** Achieving sustainable funding and fostering long-term implementation are key challenges of Nunavut's EUP program. An average cost of \$25,000-\$30,000 per student is currently being sourced from Nunavut's territorial budget and Health Canada's Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative until March 2021. Alternative funding sources and long-term funding strategies are being sought to support the sustainability of the EUP program in Nunavut. **Opportunities:** A strong business case demonstrating the value, performance, and impact of the program is instrumental in discussions to garner buy-in from key funding partners across governmental and NGOs, such as internet service providers. Diversification and inclusion of funding partners are key to mitigating the potential economic impact that could arise from political and economic changes within a single funding source.

### **Data & IT Infrastructure**

**Opportunities:** Data demonstrate the impact, value, reach, and counterfactuals of the EUP program, which are vital to its business case. A framework for organizing and linking desired outcomes, indicators, data sources and collection methods will be required for tracking and reporting on the performance of the program. Key stakeholders from the program's governance structure play an important role identifying metrics for inclusion in the evaluation framework, including those that demonstrate return on investment through economics analysis, participant testimonies/stories, retention rates, impact statements, and advocacy from local champions. **Challenges:** Currently, data to support the business case are not organized across sources across the country. Counterfactual cost data to demonstrate efficacy vis-à-vis the status quo are not currently available. Those who are directly affected by the program as well as key stakeholders and funding partners who are key to the sustainability of the program should also be consulted to the resulted data is representative of the program's outcomes. *A note of caution: while data is important to policy discussion, there are infinite ways of collecting data, so careful consideration with respect to data usage and storage must be clearly articulated.* IT infrastructure (laptops, internet connectivity, etc.) plays a strategic role in the success of the EUP. These "resources" constitute a critical set of factors to consider for program delivery and expansion to other Indigenous communities.

### **Agents of Change**

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To effectively expand the program to other jurisdictions, participation from a number of key stakeholders are needed, including: EUP graduates as ambassadors, community partners/champions, academic institutions, policy makers, data experts and custodians, regulatory authorities, and both public and private sector funding partners.

### **Recommended Action**

In consultation with Indigenous Peoples, establish a data-driven evaluation framework for tracking and reporting EUP performance indicators to inform the development of a strong business case that can be used as a platform for discussion with a range of potential stakeholders to garner buy-in for funding and expansion.

### **Key Messages**

- The EUP promotes educational, employment, and advancement opportunities for Indigenous Peoples.
- Equitable funding is a key barrier for the sustainability of the program.
- A data driven, evaluation framework can help establish the metrics needed to develop a strong business case for funding partners, including counterfactual data on a return to status quo.

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