

# Communicable Disease Management in First Nations Communities: Is an Advanced Practice Nursing Role Needed?



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## THE ISSUE

Recent reports indicate that communicable disease (CD) in First Nation communities such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) as well as other infectious diseases is increasing. Uncertainty exists about whether the education of nursing staff, existing nursing roles, and current health care activities can fully address the CD related needs of First Nations communities.

## THE PURPOSE

To examine the roles of existing nursing and medical personnel in CD management in First Nations communities in Canada and to determine if additional nursing resources such as advanced practice nurses (APN) including both clinical nurse specialists (CNS) and nurse practitioners (NP), are required.

### What did we do?

We conducted a study that consisted of two components: 1) Self-administered surveys distributed to nursing managers, Program Medical Officers (PMO), nurse specialists (registered nurses who work in specialty areas of CD) and charge nurses working in nursing stations and health centres in First Nations communities; and 2) Interviews with nursing managers who completed surveys in phase 1. Both the surveys and interviews gathered information regarding current practices, accessible health care resources and gaps in services for CD management.

### What did we find?

There is variation in the amount of support for APN roles across the regions. PMOs showed less support for APN roles than Regional Nursing Officers (RNO). RNOs identified several common priorities for an APN role:

- Providing nursing leadership
- Evaluating nursing skill sets
- Educating nurses in CD comprehensive assessments, prevention and management
- Setting standards for CD management
- Providing educational opportunities to nurses
- Conducting nursing research
- Writing and promoting publications

Due to low response rates, 65.3 % for surveys and 57.1% for interviews, results should be viewed cautiously.

### How will this research help?

The results give a preliminary description of how the APN role can be utilized to improve comprehensive CD management in First Nation communities. Several recommendations emerged about role definition and implementation for APNs. Variations in response across regions suggest that these recommendations may require adaptation depending on the region in which the APN is introduced.

### What's next?

To introduce the APN role for CD management in each region of the First Nation communities with active input from key stakeholders. Further research is needed to evaluate the APN role and to look at the community specific needs more fully.

## BOTTOM LINE?

APNs can play an important role in Communicable Disease (CD) management by helping to fill the gaps in CD services in First Nation communities.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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