

Media Release March 14

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From the **Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE)**

WOMEN IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS IMPROVING HEALTH CARE

From Mary's Harbour in Labrador to Inuvik in the Northwest Territories, women from across Canada will gather in Saskatoon March 17 to 19 to outline strategies for improving health care in their communities.

The event is one step in the **National Consultation on Rural and Remote Women's Health in Canada**. Since last April the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health have held focus groups in every region of the country. Major research findings will be presented on Monday evening March 17 at 6:30 in the Delta Bessborough Hotel.

Over the next two days participants will bring their expertise and experience to debate priorities for future research and action on government policies. They will address the question "What are the challenges and opportunities for ensuring the best state of women's health in your community?"

Inuit, First Nations and Métis women, Francophones from Québec and outside Québec, farmwomen, fisherwomen, and research experts on women's issues will present their concerns and solutions for improving women's health.

"We are lucky to have this unique gathering of talented and expert women here in Saskatoon," says Margaret Haworth-Brockman, Executive Director of the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, and Co-Director of the National Consultation. "The input of these women who actually live in rural and remote areas is vital to effectively changing our health care system."

The researchers found that women living in rural, remote and northern Canada have poorer health status and greater difficulty accessing appropriate health services.

Each community had its own specific health concerns. And participants emphasized that it is very important to consider the diversity among women for anyone working with community groups, conducting research or forming policies.

"Métis and First Nations women are isolated either by living in small communities or on reserves, or because of the poverty that affects many of the women living in cities," says Marielee Nault, Chair of Health for the Manitoba Métis Federation.

Inuit women spoke clearly about the unique health issues they face, including: higher rates for some health conditions, the need to travel for childbirth, limited service availability and limited educational and training resources.

Although there are differences in the lives of the women across Canada, the consultations revealed the many similarities in their circumstances.

Nault notes “Women in the southern rural areas and women in the North have to travel long distances to get health care – it affects all of us.”

In the consultations the women from across Canada identified many common service delivery issues. Key issues include:

- Improving the recruitment and retention of service providers, especially women health professionals
- Access to health services in French for Francophones across the country
- Increased access to nurse practitioner and midwifery services
- Increased access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Halting the privatization of essential services, including roads and other modes of transportation needed for emergency medical services.

“Women in fishing villages face the same concerns about getting to medical care in bad weather as do women in any remote community in Canada,” says Barbara Neis, Chair of Research for the study, and a professor at Memorial University in Newfoundland. “They also wonder, back in their homes, what is happening and will anything ever come out of research that’s been done on their behalf.”

Ways to ensure that the work done on research is not wasted and plans to bring the issues to the attention of community leaders and politicians will also be formulated during the sessions in Saskatoon. The consultation wraps up on Wednesday March 19th in the afternoon.

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The Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence funds community-based research on the social factors affecting women's health in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. To date the Centre has supported over 60 projects dealing with a wide range of issues, for women from many backgrounds. PWHCE's current research is focusing on Aboriginal women, women living in poverty and women living in rural and remote areas. PWHCE studies are available at: <http://www.pwhce.ca/>

There are four Centres of Excellence for Women's Health across Canada. The Centres provide opportunities for community-based women's health groups, service providers and academic researchers to conduct policy-focused research on women's health.

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In Saskatoon March 17-19

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