

# MERCK for Mothers (M4M)

Thanks to \$1 million in funding from Merck Canada Incorporated and the Merck for Mothers (M4M) program plus \$300,000 from Alberta Innovates, AHS and Merck Canada teamed up to give Alberta's Indigenous mothers and families better access to health services and improve quality of care.

## Goals & Objectives

The primary aim of the M4M initiative was to use community-based ways to enhance supports for pregnant Indigenous women and their families, and overcome barriers to perinatal care. The work involved three unique Alberta communities:

- Cree Nations of Maskwacis
- Inner city Edmonton
- Little Red River Cree Nation

Partnerships were anchored in existing community relationships and sought to address four main goals:

- Improve access to culturally safe perinatal care
- Enhance protective factors through cultural pride, sharing of traditions and cultural wisdom
- Deliver health services and supports close to home
- Address perinatal-related social determinants of health



## Timeline

Work began in 2017 and the final evaluation was completed in 2020. This relationships and progress forged from this initiative continue to inform and support ongoing work by the Maternal Newborn Child & Youth (MNCY) Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) and Indigenous Wellness Core.



## Community Initiatives

The **Cree Nations of Maskwacis** identified five goals for its community initiative:

1. Improve nutrition and knowledge related to traditional teachings, as well as celebrate pregnancy and living well during pregnancy.
2. Provide more easily accessible and culturally sensitive prenatal care.
3. Promote the more accurate picture of a thriving and rich traditional culture and sense of community in Maskwacis.
4. Tailor prenatal care approaches to further meet needs.
5. Confirm efforts are carried forward in a meaningful way.



The **Inner city Edmonton Pregnancy Pathways** project had two overarching goals:

1. Demonstrate that an integrated housing and support services model that is strength-based, culturally appropriate and follows harm reduction principles can result in healthier babies and more resilient women.
2. Confirm efforts are carried forward in a meaningful way.



Read [Marissa Nakoochee's story](#) and the difference Pregnancy Pathways made to her.

The **Little Red River Cree Nation** identified two overarching goals:

1. Demonstrate that a community-based support model would improve maternal health within a rural Cree community and confirm efforts are carried forward in a meaningful way. The work included movement towards sustainment of initiative strategies and/or development of new innovative approaches based on key learnings.



2. Enhance maternal health for women in Little Red River Cree Nation through access to pregnancy support workers with lived experience, with a focus on maternal health and wellness.

## Outcomes

The [final evaluation](#) highlights several benefits. For example:

- The M4M initiative resulted in increased knowledge and awareness of traditional cultural understanding and positive impacts of this knowledge in prenatal programming.
- Evaluation findings indicate increases in the number of prenatal women accessing health services as a result of improved cultural knowledge of health providers and of the participants who had not been given the opportunity to receive traditional teachings from Elders/Knowledge Holders.
- Partnerships and relationships were forged, strengthened and broadened with programs expanding.
- Remaining funds from the M4M initiative support ongoing work with the Indigenous Maternal Fetal Newborn Standing Committee (IMNCY) of the MNCY SCN and maintain community links.
- A Grandmother's Wisdom Network of Indigenous Elders from across the province was formed. These Elders provide consultation to IMNCY and are currently working to establish an Alberta Indigenous Maternal Health Declaration and supporting outputs.

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