

# Pan-Territorial Dietetic Internship

## *An Environmental Scan*

*July 2011*

## Executive Summary

Dietitians are particularly important members of the health care team in Canada's north. Dietitians are employed in a variety of work settings in each of the three northern territories. No post-secondary programs required to become a dietitian exist in the north and dietetic internship placements are few.

Enhancing training opportunities to meet dietetic workforce needs became the goal of a small group of dietetic profession stakeholders. During the summer of 2010 the feasibility of adding and/or expanding dietetic internship placements in the territories was assessed to gain a better understanding of each territory's dietetic workforce and services, and the capacity to offer additional practical training. The potential internship placement opportunities in the three areas of dietetic practice were compiled for each territory. The results are presented in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Summary of Potential Internship Placements*

<i>Dietetic Practice Area</i>	<i>Nunavut</i>	<i>Northwest Territories</i>	<i>Yukon</i>
<b>Administration/Food Services</b>	--	✓	✓
<b>Clinical Nutrition</b>			
<i>Introductory</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Advanced</i>	--	--	--
<b>Community Nutrition</b>	✓	✓	✓

While the survey findings demonstrate support and enthusiasm amongst the northern dietitian community to accommodate expanded dietetic internship placements throughout all three northern territories, significant challenges

were identified through the course of the survey administration. These challenges include the high cost of travel to and from the territories; the lack of suitable and affordable housing; the lack of funding available to defray high housing and other living expenses; and few qualified dietetic internship candidates from the north.

Upon conclusion of this project the working group recommend that the Northwest Territories and Nunavut establish collaborations with southern-based internships to provide primarily community placements but possibly also introductory clinical placements. Interns, local and southern, could be introduced in northern and remote settings.

# Background

**Registered dietitians are key members of the health system team** and play a significant role in promoting, educating and supporting the public about healthy eating and preventing chronic disease. Rates of food insecurity and obesity are higher in the north than the rest of the country. Yukon (YT), Northwest Territory (NT) and Nunavut (NU) have or are finalizing strategic documents to support the achievement of territorial health goals related to addressing priority public health and other issues, such as food security and the prevention of diet-related chronic disease to improve well-being and reduce health care costs. The Yukon Nutrition Framework (March, 2010); Northwest Territories Nutrition Strategy (in process); and Nutrition in Nunavut: A Framework for Action (October, 2007) identify programs and services such as public and population health, clinical nutrition, nutritional counseling and foodservice management as initiatives that require the services of dietitians.

Currently, dietitians are employed in a variety of work settings in each of the three northern territories however recent surveys indicate that workloads for existing positions are high and that additional positions would be required to address some of the priorities related to healthy families, school health, teaching basic cooking skills and fruit and vegetable consumption promotion. Northern dietitians cite a number of work-related obstacles that can potentially affect recruitment and retention. A 2008 workforce analysis of dietitians working in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut indicated that the majority of respondents experienced dietitian shortages, frequent turnover, and high workloads.

To become a dietitian in Canada, one must complete a baccalaureate degree in nutrition sciences or dietetics as well as complete an accredited dietetic internship. There are few training opportunities for aspiring dietitians to become familiar and competent with working in north of 60° and with northern nutrition issues. Currently, the Yukon First Nation Dietetic Internship Program (YFNDIP) is the only training program that is located in the Territories. YFNDIP focuses on the health and nutrition needs of northern and Aboriginal people, and provides learning experiences in rural and remote community settings. Since 1999, this internship has admitted two interns per year<sup>1</sup>, which has contributed greatly to the number of dietitians working in northern and/or Aboriginal settings.

It is important to look at ways of enhancing appropriate dietetic training opportunities in northern settings to address these issues. This report is the result of the identified need to increase the number of trained dietitians who are familiar with working in a northern and Aboriginal communities by assessing the feasibility of increasing dietetic internship opportunities in Canada's North.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to staffing and budgetary requirements, starting in 2011-2012 YFNDIP will reduce intern admission to one intern per year.

## Methodology

The overall goal of this project was to assess the feasibility of expanding internship placement opportunities in the three northern territories.

A working group of dietetic profession stakeholders including representatives from YK, NT and NU was established to explore the potential for internship placements in NT and NU, as well as for additional internship placements in YT. A 4-page questionnaire was developed to gain a better understanding each territory's dietitian workforce and services (i.e. total FTE's, location of dietitian services, type of dietitian services, employment opportunities), and their capacity and interest to provide intern placements. The questionnaire was disseminated to all respondents between April and July 2010.

The Territorial Nutritionists in NU and NT, and the YFNDIP Internship Coordinator completed the questionnaire (two completed electronically and one completed with the project contractor via telephone) on behalf of their jurisdiction. Upon suggestion of the NT Regional Nutritionist, five additional dietitians were contacted in NT (Inuvik and Yellowknife) via telephone to assess interest, capacity and willingness to participate in an internship program. Additional dietitians working in NU or YT were not contacted for additional information.

## Findings

Responses from each territory were compiled and reported in a similar format:

1. Overview of territorial dietitian workforce (during Summer 2010)
2. Description of nutrition activities and potential internship opportunities in the following three areas of dietetic practice.
  - a. Administration/food services
  - b. Clinical nutrition
  - c. Community nutrition

### **Nunavut**

1. Overview of Nunavut dietitian workforce

At the time this survey was conducted, there were 8 dietitian positions in Nunavut. Not all positions were filled at the time. The number of dietitian positions and funding are subject to change over time. Additionally changes in staffing of positions occur frequently.

Nunavut has not previously offered dietetic internship placements due in part to the still developing system of nutrition care in the territory and that a number of positions have been staffed more recently.

2. Description of nutrition activities and potential internship opportunities

a. Administration/Food services

Currently, the Qikiqtani General Hospital (QGH) is the only NU hospital; with 20 beds. There is no administrative/food services dietitian position in NU. The hospital currently contracts their food services to a local catering business that does not have therapeutic nutrition expertise. There is no dietitian providing service to the facility, although the facility is currently recruiting an inpatient dietitian who would have a role in monitoring the food services.

Nunavut is currently working to resource a territorial dietetics specialist position to implement and enforce standards for nutrition care and food service management for all Department of Health and Social Services health care and residential facilities.

Potential internship opportunities

Nunavut is unable to provide any sort of administration/food services rotation due to the lack of dietitian positions in this area.

b. Clinical Nutrition

There is one outpatient dietitian in Iqaluit. This position sees approximately 4 to 5 clients per day (in-person or by videoconference), 3 days per week. Counseling session topics may include diabetes prevention, care and management; and dyslipidemia and heart health. Group presentations on these topics are also delivered by the outpatient dietitian. This position may also provide some lower level acuity inpatient counseling and care at QGH.

Additionally, a business case has been developed to fund an additional 3 outpatient dietitian positions across Nunavut.

The inpatient dietitian position at QGH is currently vacant but it is anticipated to be staffed in the near future. Currently, all high acuity cases (i.e. parenteral nutrition, tube feeds) are medevac'ed to southern locations for care.

Potential internship opportunities

Depending on staffing levels in a given year, it would be possible to accommodate an outpatient clinical rotation, as well as an inpatient rotation once that new position is well established. Both rotations would be “generalist” in nature – similar to rural hospital or outpatient placements in other jurisdictions.

c. Community Nutrition

There are 3 Regional Nutritionists (one per health region) and one Territorial Nutritionist (located in Iqaluit). In addition, there is one Territorial CPNP Coordinator (administrative position) and one ADI Coordinator (administrative position, can be a nurse or dietitian).

The Regional Nutritionists in Nunavut do not participate in one-on-one client care (i.e. outpatient counseling). They have a region-wide role in supporting health promotion and other public health activities. They provide support through community visits or by distance over the phone. Likely interns would be located in one community (i.e. Pangnirtung, Rankin Inlet, Kugluktuk) and would be involved in community-based activities there, rather than travelling with the regional nutritionists on community visits, due to the high costs of travel.

Potential internship opportunities

Possible community experiences could include participation in the creation of training and/or support programs for community health workers, delivering presentations, reviewing proposals and/or draft policy documents and resource development.

There are opportunities for interns to obtain all required competencies associated with a community rotation in Nunavut.

## Northwest Territories

### 1. Overview of Northwest Territories dietitian workforce

At the time this survey was conducted, there were 10 dietitian positions in the Northwest Territories. Not all positions were filled. The number of dietitian positions and their funding are subject to change over time, as does the staffing status of positions.

The Northwest Territories has previously provided community internship placements in the territory. In most cases this was accomplished through cooperation with the University of Saskatchewan Dietetic Internship Program. Rotations lasted approximately 2 months and interns were placed in Yellowknife with the Territorial Nutritionist, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority or Hay River Health and Social Services Authority. Interns were also placed in Inuvik in administrative rotations with Aramark.

There are currently 4 dietitians in the territory in roles outside of the dietetic profession. It was identified that such situations - YT also has dietitians in positions outside the dietetic profession – could potentially provide dietetic intern placements opportunities in areas of health promotion and public health.

2. Description of nutrition activities and potential internship opportunities

a. Administration/Food Services

All NT hospital food services operate under contract with food service companies. There are no dietitians employed in administrative or food services in the territory.

**Potential internship opportunities:**

There may be placement opportunities available through agreements with contractors.

b. Clinical Nutrition

There is one clinical dietitian employed at Stanton Territorial Hospital in Yellowknife who is responsible for inpatient and outpatient nutrition care. This position is responsible for some higher acuity care such as providing nutrition support services (parenteral nutrition, enteral nutrition, renal/hemodialysis services).

Other dietitians working in clinical areas include a Diabetes Educator in Yellowknife, a Regional Nutritionist in Inuvik (mainly outpatient counseling with some low acuity inpatient care at the local 15 bed hospital), a community dietitian in Hay River (primarily outpatient counseling), and a home care dietitian in Yellowknife.

There are part-time contract (short term) dietitian positions in diabetes education in Bechoko and long-term care in Yellowknife.

**Potential internship opportunities:**

Internship opportunities are potentially available in a variety of inpatient and outpatient clinical settings in various locations in NT including Inuvik, Hay River and Yellowknife.

Attainment of advanced clinical competencies, required for successful completion of an internship, may require an additional rotation at higher acuity facilities.

c. Community Nutrition

Community nutrition programs and services in Hay River, Inuvik and Yellowknife include a Community Dietitian, Regional Nutritionist, and CPNP Nutritionists. Other possible internship opportunities may be available through nutrition-related associations and programs including Food First Association and school-based programs.

**Potential internship opportunities:**

Possible community experiences would be with regional health and social services authorities, the Territorial government or schools. The learning opportunities could include community-based nutrition

program planning and implementation such as developing and delivering education programs for schools, daycares, workplaces and prenatal programs. The placements could also include travel to smaller, remote communities.

There are opportunities for interns to experience a variety of community nutrition learning opportunities and to meet all expected competencies.

## Yukon

### 1. Overview of Yukon dietitian workforce

At the time this survey was conducted, there were 10 dietitian positions, approximately 8 FTE, in Yukon. Not all positions were filled. The number of dietitian positions and funding are subject to change over time. Additionally changes in staffing of positions occur over time, as does the staffing status of positions.

As discussed previously, the only dietetic training program in the North is located in Yukon. The Yukon First Nation Dietetic Internship Program (YFNDIP) focuses on the health and nutrition needs of northern Aboriginal people, and provides learning experiences in rural and remote community settings. This program has admitted two interns per year since 1999 and has contributed greatly to the number of dietitians working in northern and/or Aboriginal settings. Due to a variety of factors, YFNDIP will admit only one intern per year starting fall 2011.

All dietitians in YT are located in Whitehorse. There is currently 1 dietitian in the territory in a role outside of the dietetic profession. It was identified that such situations - NT also had dietitians in positions outside the dietetic profession - could potentially provide dietetic intern placements opportunities in areas of health promotion and public policy development and analysis.

### 2. Description of nutrition activities and potential internship opportunities

#### a. Administration/Food services:

The Whitehorse General Hospital (WGH) currently places 1 intern in a 10 week administrative/food service rotation.

The intern receives experiences in budgeting, staffing, food safety, audit procedures, menu planning, and food services supervision.

#### Additional placement opportunities:

WGH may be able to offer one additional 10 week administrative/food service placement per calendar year.

#### b. Clinical Nutrition

The clinical rotation at Whitehorse General Hospital includes 4 weeks of introductory clinical, and 2 weeks each of diabetes, continuing care, advanced clinical, and staff relief. It should be noted that interns locate to a larger affiliate site for an additional 10 to 12 weeks of advanced clinical rotations (i.e. medical, surgical, ICU, pediatrics, renal).

At WGH, inpatient dietitian services are offered on a daily basis including nutrition support services. No hemodialysis is offered in YT.

Outpatient dietitian services are offered 4 days per week. This includes one-on-one services, cholesterol and weight loss information sessions, and occasional public presentations.

**Additional placement opportunities:**

Additional clinical placements (including diabetes) may be accommodated on an ad hoc basis.

**c. Community Nutrition**

The community rotation is currently 13 weeks in duration. Learning experiences within this rotation include resource development (1 week) and research/proposal writing (3 weeks). Other community nutrition experiences include public nutrition presentations, grocery store tours, school nutrition education activities, development of training programs, and research projects.

Travel to smaller communities (1-4 days duration) occurs when opportunities arise.

**Additional placement opportunities:**

One additional 13-week placement may be accommodated, possibly involving more than one preceptor.

## Discussion

Based on the survey findings, support and enthusiasm exists among the northern dietitian community to accommodate expanded dietetic internship placements throughout all three northern territories. Opportunities were identified for potential interns to achieve a variety of competencies, primarily in community nutrition but also in basic clinical, and administrative/food service rotations.

A summary of the opportunities is presented in the table below.

*Figure 1. Summary of Potential Internship Placements*

<i>Position Type</i>	<i>Nunavut</i>	<i>Northwest Territories</i>	<i>Yukon</i>
<b>Administration/Food Services</b>	--	✓	✓
<b>Clinical Nutrition</b>			
<i>Introductory</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Advanced</i>	--	--	--
<b>Community Nutrition</b>	✓	✓	✓

Some significant challenges were identified through the course of the survey administration. These are explained below.

### **Travel costs**

One potential barrier for a northern internship program is the cost of travel to and from the territories. Affordable flights are available to Whitehorse and Yellowknife from Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver on a daily basis. However travel to Iqaluit is much more costly and less accessible (departures mainly offered from Ottawa) and would present significantly higher costs for potential interns.

If an internship placement would require interns to travel to one or more location possibly within or between territories, the associated travel costs could be prohibitive. This is especially true if travel were to occur between territories as this would require the interns to travel to a southern ‘hub’ location as no direct flights are offered between territories at this time.

In terms of placement related travel, community dietitians/regional nutritionists in NT and NU travel in their positions. There is no additional funding to have an intern accompany them unless the trip is by car and does not

require an overnight stay – which is rare. In these situations, an intern would need to remain behind and work on projects, etc.

### ***Housing***

The lack of suitable housing and the associated high costs were identified as significant barriers by all stakeholders. Some government housing may be available in NU but this is not guaranteed. Aurora College in Yellowknife has some student housing which may be available. Low cost staff and student housing is available at Whitehorse General Hospital but not guaranteed.

### ***Other Potential Costs***

Stakeholders from NT and NU were willing to provide intern work space but unable to commit to providing stipends, housing, or meal allowances. Government support and funding would need to be secured before such offers could be made.

There would also likely be additional costs associated with training and program support (i.e. program materials and preceptor training) for new preceptors in NT and NU.

### ***Potential Intern Candidates***

As new training opportunities in the North should serve the local population's employment needs in addition to providing new and needed services, each territorial representative was asked about the pool of potential local interns. No potential candidates were identified in NU or YT. There were three individuals identified in NT, two are currently employed in nutrition-related positions, the third is attending university.

One possible reason for this is that there are no post-graduate nutrition courses offered in the North. Thus, any aspiring dietitians must move to a southern location for their undergraduate degree and may not return after graduation.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Clearly, support and capacity exists for additional dietetic intern placements in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The survey also revealed some significant challenges – only some of which would be alleviated by funding for a northern dietetic internship program – should it become available in the future.

In the interim four options for addressing next steps toward offering additional internship placements in Canada's North are proposed.

### **Option 1**

Reciprocal placement agreements with southern internship programs may be an option since community rotation placements in the North have become increasingly desirable. Challenges of this option are the lack of funding for housing and stipends unless other funding can be accessed, such as through government student/career programs.

### **Option 2**

NT and NU become placement sites for southern-based internships (i.e. provide primarily community placements). Interns (local or southern) could be introduced to northern and remote regions without experiencing a full internship in the North. Strengths of this option would be that there would be less need to seek governmental support and funding to finance the administration of an ongoing internship program. Housing and travel costs continue to present challenges.

### **Option 3**

A potential partnership may be created between the YT internship program and nearby Inuvik due to more direct travel routes.

### **Option 4**

The NT and NU may want to examine the potential for a satellite internship program that is based on the YT program, in whole or in part, where the YT would provide expertise and materials, if the NT or NU were able to provide funding and placement opportunities.

Dietitians are important members of the health team in Canada's North. As the need for dietitians in the North expands it is becoming increasingly important to look at creative ways of enhancing appropriate training opportunities. This report assesses the feasibility of increasing dietetic internship opportunities in Canada's North as a means to increase the number of trained dietitians who are familiar with working in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The support and enthusiasm exhibited by the northern dietitian community to accommodate expanded

dietetic internship placements will not overcome some of the significant barriers identified. Increasing appropriate training opportunities will only be achieved through collaboration at all levels across the three territories.

## Appendices

Figures 2, 3 and 4 report the dietitian workforce in Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon as reported in Summer 2010. This information is presented as a snapshot of the dietitian workforce in the territories at the time this survey was conducted. Both positions and staffing of these positions change regularly.

*Figure 2. Nunavut Dietitian Workforce*

<i>Position Type</i>	<i>FTE</i>
<b>Qikiqtani Region</b>	
<i>Territorial Nutritionist</i>	1
<i>Canadian Pre-natal Nutrition Program (CNCP) Coordinator</i>	1
<i>Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) Coordinator (dietitian or nurse)<sup>a</sup></i>	1
<i>Inpatient Dietitian<sup>b</sup></i>	1
<i>Outpatient Dietitian</i>	1
<i>Regional Nutritionist (Pangnirtung)<sup>b</sup></i>	1
<b>Kitikmeot Region</b>	
<i>Regional Nutritionist (Kugluktuk)</i>	1
<b>Kivalliq Region</b>	
<i>Regional Nutritionist (Rankin Inlet)</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>

<sup>a</sup> Vacant at the time this report was written.

<sup>b</sup> Recruiting for this position at the time this report was written.

Figure 3. Northwest Territories Dietitian Workforce

<i>Position Type</i>	<i>FTE</i>
<b>Beaufort Delta Health Authority</b>	
<i>Regional Nutritionist</i>	1
<i>Regional Canadian Pre-natal Nutrition Program (CNCP) Nutritionist</i>	1
<b>Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority</b>	
<i>Diabetes Dietitian Educator</i>	1
<i>Regional Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) Nutritionist</i>	1
<i>Home and Community Care Dietitian</i>	1
<i>Community Dietitian</i>	1
<b>Stanton Territorial Hospital</b>	
<i>Clinical Dietitian</i>	1
<b>Hay River Health Authority</b>	
<i>Community Dietitian/Diabetes Educator</i>	1
<i>Community Dietitian</i>	1
<b>Department of Health and Social Services</b>	
<i>Territorial Nutritionist</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	10

Figure 4. Yukon Dietitian Workforce

<i>Position Type</i>	<i>FTE</i>
<b>Yukon Hospital Corporation</b>	
<i>Administrative/Internship Coordinator</i>	1
<i>Outpatient Dietitian</i>	.5
<i>Inpatient Dietitian</i>	.5
<i>Diabetes Educator Dietitian</i>	.5
<i>Community Clinical Dietitian/Traveling Dietitian</i>	.75
<i>Continuing Care Dietitian</i>	1
<i>Territorial Diet Coordinator Dietitian</i>	1
<b>Dept of Health &amp; Social Services</b>	
<i>Territorial Nutritionist</i>	.75
<b>Other</b>	
<i>Community/NGO Dietitian</i>	1
<i>Consulting Dietitian</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	8

## **Canadian Dietetic Internship Programs**

### *Fully Integrated*

- University of British Columbia, Dept. of Food, Nutrition and Health
- University of Saskatchewan, College of Pharmacy and Nutrition
- McGill University – Montréal, School of Dietetic and Human Nutrition
- Université de Montréal, Département de nutrition
- Université Laval – Quebec, Département des sciences de l'agriculture et de l'alimentation
- Université de Moncton, École des sciences des aliments, de nutrition et d'études familiales
- Université d'Ottawa / University of Ottawa, Baccalauréat Spécialisé en Sciences de la nutrition

### *Partially Integrated*

- University of Alberta, Dept. of Agricultural, Food & Nutritional Science - Nutrition and Food Science
- University of Prince Edward Island, Dept. of Family and Nutritional Science
- St. Francis Xavier University, Department of Human Nutrition
- Mount Saint Vincent University, Applied Human Nutrition Dept
- Acadia University, School of Nutrition and Dietetics

### *Not Integrated*

- University of Manitoba, Department of Human Nutritional Sciences
- Brescia University College affiliated with the University of Western Ontario, Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences
- University of Guelph, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition
- Ryerson University, School of Nutrition

### *Post Degree Internship*

- Yukon First Nations Dietetic Internship, Yukon Hospital Corporation - Whitehorse, Yukon
- Manitoba Partnership Dietetic Education Program - Winnipeg
- Grand River Hospital - Kitchener
- London Health Sciences Centre - London
- Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation - Hamilton
- Aramark Canada Ltd. - Toronto
- The Hospital for Sick Children - Toronto
- North York General Hospital - Toronto
- St. Michael's Hospital - Toronto
- Mount Sinai Hospital - Toronto
- Sunnybrook & Women's College Health Science Centre - Toronto
- University Health Network - Toronto
- Southeastern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program - Kingston
- Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship

- The Moncton Hospital - Moncton
- Capital Health - Halifax
- Eastern Health - St. John's

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