

# Placing STRENGTH, UNDERSTANDING, and KNOWLEDGE at the heart of community-based environment and health surveillance with Inuit in Canada

**Alexandra Sawatzky, PhD Student**

Dept. of Population Medicine, University of Guelph

Public Health 2016 Conference, Toronto, ON

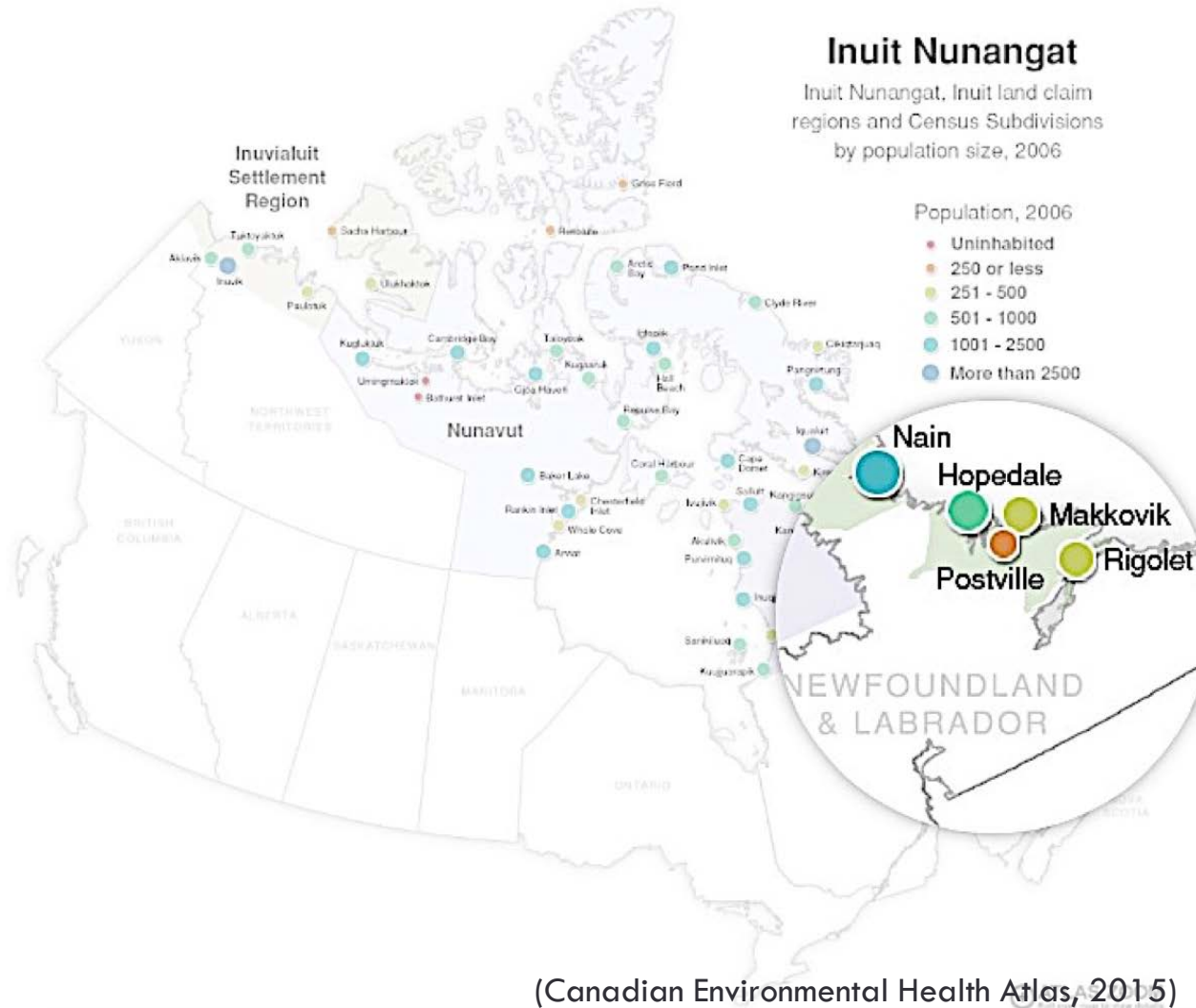
June 16, 2016

# Nunatsiavut

“Our beautiful land”

Inuit are experiencing dramatic and rapid changes in ways of life

Hold deep, intrinsic relationships with the land



# Past research with Nunatsiavut communities

## Climate change impacts on:

- Physical and mental wellbeing
- Food security
- Water quality
- Gastrointestinal illness
- Cultural practices and intergenerational knowledge transmission
- Resilience and adaptive capacity

## From documentation to response:

- Streamline existing research efforts
- Comprehensive, community-based environment and health surveillance

# Research goals and objectives

*Develop and implement a community-based monitoring system to track, analyze, and respond to cumulative health impacts of climate change, resource development, and resulting socio-cultural and socio-economic shifts in Rigolet*

Monitor environmental change impacts on health

Identify early-warning signs

Ongoing evaluation

Develop effective response plans

# Community-based, participatory research

- Meaningful engagement of communities throughout research process
- Expands and enhances local capacities
- Focuses on building lasting relationships and co-learning
- Premised on commitment and contribution to reconciliation

Strength.  
Understanding.  
Knowledge.



STRENGTH

A vertical banner image on the left side of the page. It features a vast, flat, white landscape, likely a salt flat or a frozen body of water, under a clear, bright blue sky. The horizon is low, and the ground is covered in white, textured material. The word "STRENGTH" is written vertically in white, uppercase letters on the left side of the image.



STRENGTH

UNDERSTANDING





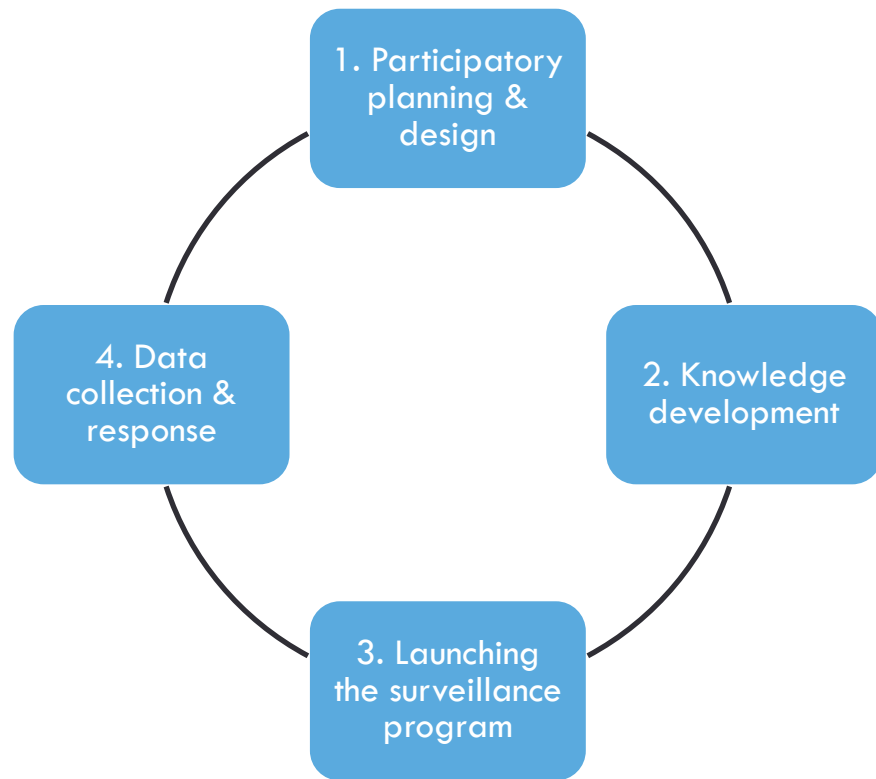
STRENGTH

UNDERSTANDING

KNOWLEDGE

# Establishing the framework

## Iterative research process





# Next Steps

- Begin active monitoring in August 2016
- Monthly community meetings to discuss data & findings
- Health programming responses
- Census survey design & development

# Significance

- Regional control over health information
- Community members, health professionals, and governments will be able to access information
- Facilitate locally-relevant public health concerns and messaging

**Project team:**

- Inez Shiwak<sup>1</sup> & Charlie Flowers<sup>1</sup> (Community Research Coordinators)
- Dr. Sherilee Harper<sup>2</sup> & Dr. Ashlee Cunsolo<sup>3</sup> (Principal Investigators)
- Anna Bunce<sup>4</sup> (Project Manager)
- Dr. Dan Gillis<sup>2</sup> & Oliver Cook<sup>2</sup> (Co-Investigators)

*<sup>1</sup>Rigolet, Nunatsiavut; <sup>2</sup>University of Guelph; <sup>3</sup>Cape Breton University; <sup>4</sup>McGill University*



# Acknowledgements

## Community partners

- Community of Rigolet
- Rigolet Inuit Community Government

## Regional partners

- Nunatsiavut Government: Dept. of Health & Social Development; Dept. of Lands & Natural Resources



Health  
Canada

Santé  
Canada



Canada Research  
Chairs

Chaires de recherche  
du Canada



# References

Canadian Environmental Health Atlas. (2015). Inuit Nunangat. Retrieved from: <http://www.ehatlas.ca/remote-communities/inuit-nunangat>

Charron, D. F. (2012). Ecohealth: Origins and Approach. In Charron D. F. (Ed), *Ecohealth Research in Practice* (1-32). Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.

Eyles, J., and Furgal, C. (2002). Indicators in environmental health: Identifying and selecting common sets. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 93(1):S62-S67.

Harper, S. L., Edge, V., Ford, J. D., Cunsolo Willox, A., Wood, M., McEwen, S. A. (2015). Climate-sensitive health priorities in Nunatsiavut, Canada. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1):1-18.

Sawatzky, A., Cunsolo Willox, A., Harper, S. L., Shiwak, I., Wood, M., the Inuit Mental Health and Adaptation to Climate Change team, and the Rigolet Inuit Community Government. (2016). "We have our own way:" Exploring pathways for wellbeing among Inuit in Nunatsiavut, Canada. In Fleming, C., Manning, M., and Miller, A. (eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous Wellbeing*. Australia: Routledge. *Invited chapter submitted and under review.*



“People don’t want to be a part of another program. This program needs to be designed so that it becomes a **part of our lives.**”

